

A PRIVATE MAGAZINE FOR THE RESIDENTS OF ATHERTON, CALIFORNIA

ATHERTON *living*

APRIL 2019



Atherton
Fine Artist

*Michelle
Jung*

TULIP FESTIVAL
HALF MOON BAY
ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE
TRIPTYCH MAY BALLET
CLOTHING FOR HOPE

Painting
by the Sea:
*Michelle
Jung*
By Abbie Burgess



The Atherton arts community recently received a boon with new resident Michelle Jung. The fine artist is nationally recognized for her depictions of nature from landscapes to seascapes. She works out of two studios, one in Wellesley, MA and the other in Santa Cruz, CA. Soon, a home studio in Atherton will be added to the list. In these studios she creates large scale oil paintings based on earlier sketches painted en plein air.

Her art walks a path between impressionism and realism, she says. Her inspiration is simple: nature. “Whatever is out my door I’m inspired by.” From her West Cliff Drive view in Santa Cruz, that means water. “I do need to observe from life first,” she explains. “I can create a seascape in my mind but it’s only because I’ve spent thousands of hours studying the sea.”

Coastal Living

Her familiarity with the sea began while growing up on the east coast. “I don’t think people realize Connecticut is surrounded by the ocean,” she says. Boating and seaside living have always been part of her life. “My aunt had a beach cottage in Rhode Island and we spent our weekends and vacations at the coast. The water is relaxing to me; I equate it with vacation.”

You won’t find relaxing, placid waters depicted in her seascapes, however. Waves crashing on the rugged cliffs of Northern California is more like it. “My work is focused on the interaction of the aggressive energy of the cliffs and water,” she explains. “I try to elevate the viewer so they are above the water and engage them with the thrill of the action of the ocean.” The duality of two things meeting—the cliffs and

the sea—is a theme in her work. “I think that energy is why people are drawn to the ocean.”

While new to Atherton, Michelle and her husband Mark Jung are no strangers to California having lived previously in Los Gatos, Los Altos Hills, Menlo Park and Palo Alto. Mark and Michelle met after being set up by mutual friends. “They knew he was divorced, I was divorced. It went on for two or three years of them pestering. We finally said fine! We’ll meet.” It was soon apparent why their friends were so insistent. They each had two daughters around the same age and they liked to vacation in the same spots. They quickly bonded over hailing from the east coast—Michelle from Connecticut and Mark from Massachusetts. They even had the same circle of friends, and yet, amazingly, had somehow never met before. “The first party he took me to, I knew more people than he did,” she says. Perhaps most importantly, they both share a common interest in the arts. Mark, an accomplished pianist, was raised with an appreciation for art careers though he took a different path himself. Educated at Princeton University and Stanford Graduate School of Business, he founded two companies and took them public as a technology CEO. Early in their relationship, Michelle asked how he felt about her artistic aspirations. “I was in this mode of I’m going to be an artist, are you ok with that?” she remembers. “He was.” They were married in Deer Valley, Utah on New Year’s Day in 2013.

The Art Spirit

Michelle is fully dedicated to being an artist, but that wasn’t always the case. “In high school, the art teacher suggested to my parents that I should go to art school and they were like, ‘no, she is not going to

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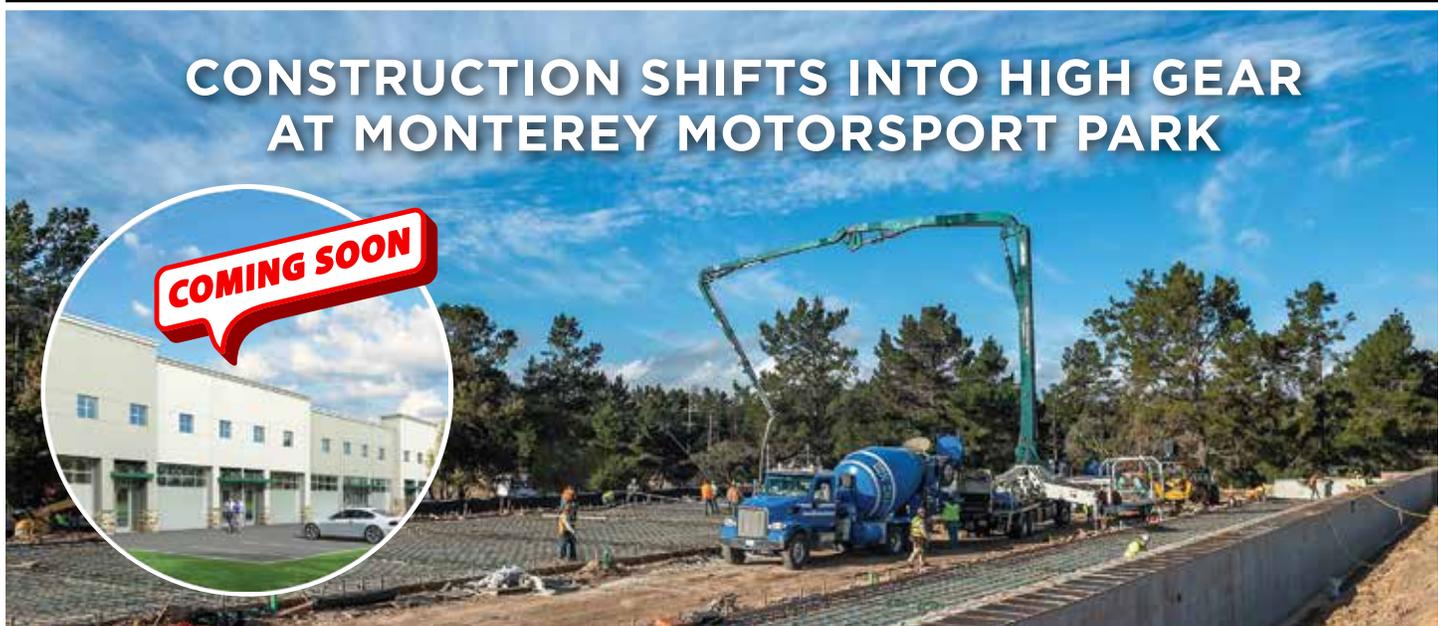
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art school.” So she looked at career options in related fields. Teaching didn’t appeal, but museum work and art history did. After graduating with her BA in Art History from Colorado State University in 1987, she found herself without funds to pay for graduate school. Instead, she learned to sell art while working at several galleries. She later left the art world altogether to start an insurance agency in California with her first husband. With the success of that venture, she was able to reflect on what she really wanted to do—her bucket list, as she calls it—and her heart led her back to art.

For her 40th birthday she gifted herself an art class. Building her confidence through local classes including those at The Pacific Art League in Palo Alto, the dream of becoming a fine artist became a possibility. With the encouragement of two of her instructors, she enrolled in a graduate program and received her MFA in Painting from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. Art was always part of her life, she says, but she continually put it on the back burner. “I’m a good example of it’s not too late!” the 55-year-old says. “Going into graduate school with young people was challenging but if you’re determined you can make it happen. Especially in the art field, where people can paint into their nineties.”

Michelle is a member of prestigious art clubs and guilds around the country. She most recently exhibited at California Art Club’s 108th Annual Gold Medal Exhibition in Pasadena. In upcoming career news, the Santa Paula Art Museum is giving her a solo exhibition of her seascapes that runs May to September 2021—an accomplishment almost unheard of for an artist just six years out of graduate school. She attributes her success in part to pursuing art later in life. “I’m not wasting any time, which I think comes with maturity.” Her dedication to her craft can’t be

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ignored, either. “I do treat this as a full time thing. It’s most of the day, every day.”

Michelle says she likes to inspire others to live in what she calls the “art spirit,” which she defines as dedicating oneself to the goal of being an artist. “You have to own it,” she explains, admitting that it’s hard to admit to being an artist when meeting new people. Not everyone understands—or takes seriously—what being a fine artist entails. Michelle strives to show by example the attainability of an art career. “I try to do as much as I can in the community, talking to people young and old and committing to organizations to show people that it is possible. You can be a successful, professional artist.”

Returning to the Bay Area

When they decided to return to the Bay Area to be closer to their grown daughters, they found their home in Atherton where they were immediately welcomed by their neighbors with a party invitation to get to know each other. “It is a charming, friendly neighborhood close to all the things important to us: our children, friends, culture, business, shopping, major city, airports and the ocean,” Michelle explains. “And of course,” she adds like a true east coast native, “the incredible weather!”

The Jung family is still working on renovations including building a natural light-filled art studio on the site of a former tennis court in the yard. The two story space is built within the square footage constraints

of heritage trees on the property and will have a main level and a basement.

“With multiple houses, it feels like we never live in any of our homes, but we want this to be our base.” Though they still visit their elderly parents on the east coast monthly, the Jung family recently began spending the majority of their time in Atherton.

Michelle and Mark’s four grown daughters all live in California. Elizabeth, 27, is graduating this May from Haas School of Business-Berkeley; Caroline, 26, is Senior Merchandise Manager, Art at Minted in San Francisco; Stephanie, 25, is graduating this May from Golden Gate University School of Law-San Francisco; and Natalie, 23, is graduating this May from Argyros School of Business-Chapman University.

Not surprisingly, Michelle and Mark’s hobbies include art collecting and traveling internationally each fall with an art collecting group. They are also loyal to Boston sports. “We are season ticket holders of the Boston Celtics and the Boston Symphony,” she says. Mark serves on multiple nonprofit boards including the San Francisco Symphony and the League of American Orchestras. For her part, Michelle makes anonymous donations to art related causes including education and building renovations.

The Atherton studio will be open by appointment. Michelle’s current exhibitions are listed on her website michellejungstudios.com.