

studio

palette

composition

canvas

## artist profile

inspiration

gallery

imagination

# Depicting Dualities in Nature

LISA ROGERS **writer**



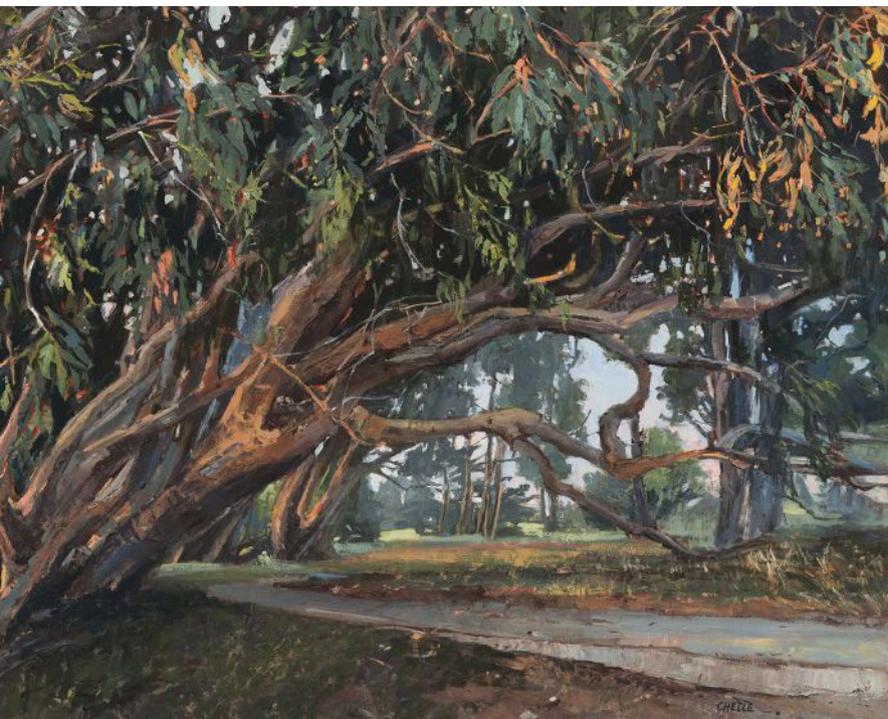
*Breakers*

**michelle jung's** artwork gives off an energy that makes her paintings come alive: waves colliding with each other, pounding on a rocky shore; a tangle of plants growing, straining upward, turning their leafy faces to the light.

It's a controlled kind of energy, it's cerebral, and it's intentional. Jung purposely seeks dualities in nature that bump up against each other. She doesn't intend for the viewer to feel discomfort: Her paintings are refined, meticulously prepared—and astonishingly beautiful.

The dynamism expressed in her work is what's most vital to her creative impulse. "I try to stick with the dualities in life because I think that's what it all comes down to: two opposing elements to create that drama or energy," she said. "Energy is what I experience from life. It's important that I observe from nature in person. When you take a photo and bring it into the studio, it's impossible to take all the energy you're experiencing and put it onto the canvas." Instead, with careful study on location, "you have the memory of the smells, what the day was like, how the sky looked. I'm recalling it and projecting off it."

artist profile “an endless occupation”



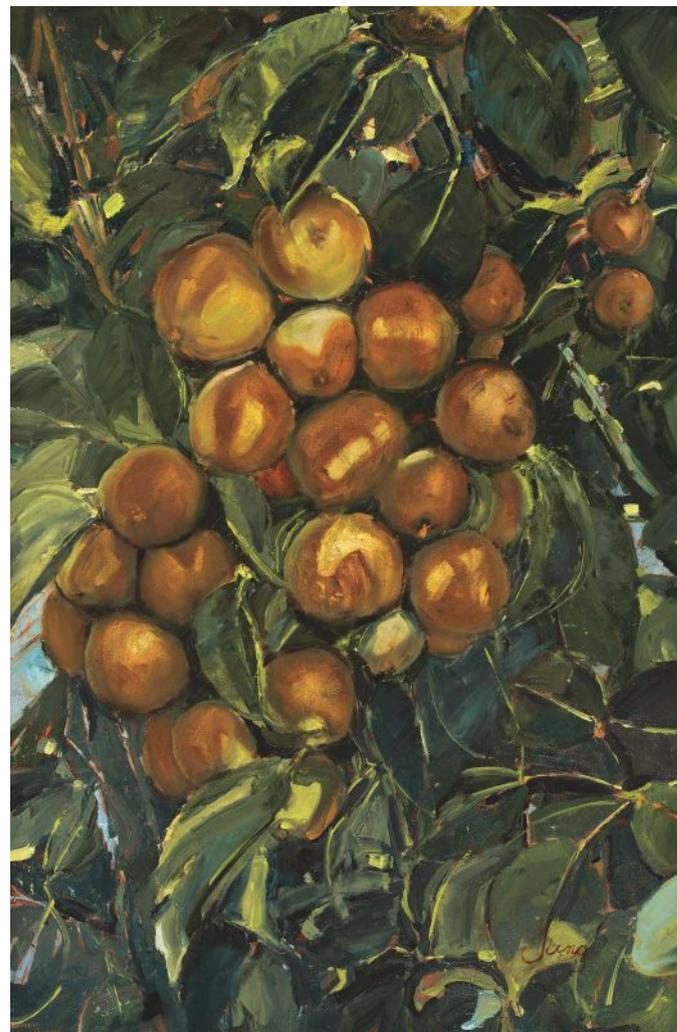
In her short time painting, Jung has accomplished a great deal: entrée into esteemed art clubs across the country, showers of medals and honors, and being sought after by collectors who seek out her paintings before they’re even dry.

Still, the work is what drives this Wellesley- and California-based painter onward, constantly moving toward new challenges. She doesn’t take the easy way.

“I grew up an athlete. I can’t do things halfway, and, unfortunately for me and my whole family, art is endless. I can do it forever,” she said. With each painting, each problem to solve, each puzzle to work through, she continues to grow and learn.

“When I feel that I’ve completed something or accomplished something, that’s when I’m at the bottom again. It’s an endless occupation.”

Jung began drawing as a child—she recalls sketching cartoons from television, and accurately transferring images to paper without looking at her hand—and majored in art history. Because paints were expensive, she stuck to drawing classes, but studying painting long had been on her bucket list.



left: *California Eucalyptus*; right: *Quince*

With her children becoming more independent, she began painting seriously at age 40, giving herself a birthday gift of a painting workshop. That teacher suggested she pursue a master’s degree in fine arts. When a second instructor made the same suggestion, Jung heeded that advice. In her characteristic way, she made a full-on commitment to do whatever she could to become the best that she could be.

For painting, that approach meant starting from the beginning: reading, trying every medium, researching techniques, and painting constantly. For her thesis, she went every day, for a year, to the same coastal California location to paint the same scene. Her commitment



### Michelle Jung Exhibit

Page Waterman will host an exhibit of Jung's work June 1-8 at their gallery, located at 592A Washington Street in Wellesley. There will be a reception on Saturday, June 1 from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. and a painting demonstration on Saturday, June 8 from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. For more information, please visit [www.pagewaterman.com](http://www.pagewaterman.com) or call 781.235.0430.

top: *Ocean's Fury*; bottom: *Rose Garden*

### artist profile “an abstraction of a realistic scene”

has not wavered. When she is not traveling between the coasts, she paints every day, from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., without a break, to take advantage of natural light.

Before she brushes paint onto canvas, Jung carefully considers what she will paint and why she will paint it. She doesn't want to create a photographic representation, but instead an abstraction of a realistic scene. Most important is that she understands her goal for each work.

“When I was getting my master's degree, we were taught to take things step-by-step and really focus on developing a painting at every single stage,” Jung said. “I'm classically trained. I go out to a life location, I observe it, do *plein air* studies, make drawings, and take photos. I take all that information back into the studio and lay it out, and figure out what I was experiencing that I want to make into a painting.” That's the key to a painting that stands out from a flat representation: “Where you bring the emotion in.”

Last spring, during a demonstration at the Wellesley Free Library sponsored by the Wellesley Society of Artists and the Needham Art Association, Jung spent two hours sharing what she's learned. Before a



## artist profile “the edge between order and chaos”

group of about 75 intensely-interested artists, Jung explained not only her process, but also her choices of paints (Vasari oils), tools (synthetic Rosemary brushes from England; walnut oil medium to add to the paints and to clean her brushes) and choice of canvas (Masterpiece linen), its size, and even what types of frames she uses (custom, engraved with a signature motif).

After deciding on a composition and completing small studies to test values and colors, Jung creates swatches for all of the colors in her planned painting. Each painting begins with an underpainting (a first layer of paint) in a color that will help make her finished work vibrate.

For a seascape, she'll start with transparent red oxide, laying out large areas of shadow and leaving white space to delineate the horizontal lines of the ocean. For reference, she'll use a photograph and might work from a printout or keep a computer nearby to view the image. At the demonstration, she likened the seascape to a piece of music, folding

a sheet accordion-style to evoke the back and forth of the sea.

“It’s like a puzzle that I’m working out,” she said. “All I see is an abstraction of nature. I’m not trying to create a photograph.”

After the underpainting, Jung begins laying on color—layer after layer. Oil’s slow drying time gives her another opportunity to consider what’s happening in the painting at each step. She works on about 30 paintings at a time, spending up to a year to complete each one to her high standards. Even then, when Jung later looks at the work, she often sees something she would change. It’s not that there’s something amiss with the work; it’s that she’s grown as a painter.

Jung plans her work in series format, focusing on particular dualities for each one, to keep her focused and also to connect the works. Two past series, *The Sea*, where she focused on the relationship between land and sea, and *Flora*, in which she teased out the edge between order and chaos in nature, have been featured in museum shows around the country.

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*Coastal Landscapes: East, West & the Tropics* was featured in her first solo exhibition, held in October at The Guild of Boston Artists' Newbury Street gallery. Again, Jung offered a free demonstration, part of an effort she's making to contribute to her community.

The inspiration for her new series partly came from her move back to New England—she grew up in rural Connecticut, and her husband, Mark, grew up in Wellesley—and a return to the landscape of her childhood.

"We decided we would move back to be nearer to parents and siblings, and I became nostalgic about all the nature around me," she said. "Everything on the East coast—the flowers and the trees—was so overwhelming to me. You don't see the horizon line like you do in California.

"In the chaos of all these leaves, trees, branches, and flowers, I create some kind of order. If I take the abstraction of what I'm seeing, I create a pattern of darks and lights, and create a kind of rhythm, like music notes on a page."

Order rules in her serene Wellesley studio. A small test painting perches on a massive easel, against which leans a magnificent work depicting the elegant angel trumpet tree, destined for an upcoming gallery exhibition. A few clean brushes are lined up on a glass palette. A volume of Mary Oliver's poetry rests on a nearby table.

Wellesley hasn't yet made it onto Jung's canvases, but it will. For now, the feeling and the experience of Wellesley is imprinting itself in her mind. She regularly runs the town's Fuller Brook Path and explores the town's other natural areas, including Elm Bank's gardens and Wellesley College's picturesque acreage. Even the train cutting its way through town seems a marvel.

"Wellesley is so beautiful, and it's been so inspiring to me," she said. "It's unbelievable that the rest of the country can't see what's happening in this little tiny area. I'm absorbing it. I'm actively concentrating on that because I want to leave behind the experience—kind of like what I grew up with—of how this beautiful area is affecting my work." **WW**

FOR MORE INFORMATION, visit [www.michellejungart.com](http://www.michellejungart.com).

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