



# HOW MICHELLE JUNG FOUND HER VOICE

There is much to be said about the recent success of the painter Michelle Jung (b. 1964), but what has mattered most to her is finding her artistic “voice.” Now that she has it, she feels totally liberated and enthused about expressing it as fully as she can. This is driven by both discipline and dedication, evidenced — for example — by the fact Jung spends half of her time in Wellesley, Massachusetts, and the other half in California (Santa Cruz and Atherton). It is particularly interesting to learn how her bi-coastal living and working arrangements have affected how and what she paints.

Born and raised in Connecticut, Jung demonstrated artistic talent in both elementary and high schools. This led her to earn a B.A. in art history from Colorado State University and to complete an internship at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford. After graduation, she applied her new knowledge while working in various art galleries, but eventually strengthened her bottom line by co-founding a California insurance agency, from which she is now retired. She had two daughters through a first marriage before meeting her current husband, Mark Alexander Jung, who was born in Toronto, raised in Wellesley, and has had a successful career in technology. He also has two daughters from a previous marriage; all four girls have earned college degrees and three have gone on to graduate school, while the fourth is a merchandising manager in San Francisco.



*Agave*, 2017, oil on canvas, 30 x 30 in., available from the artist

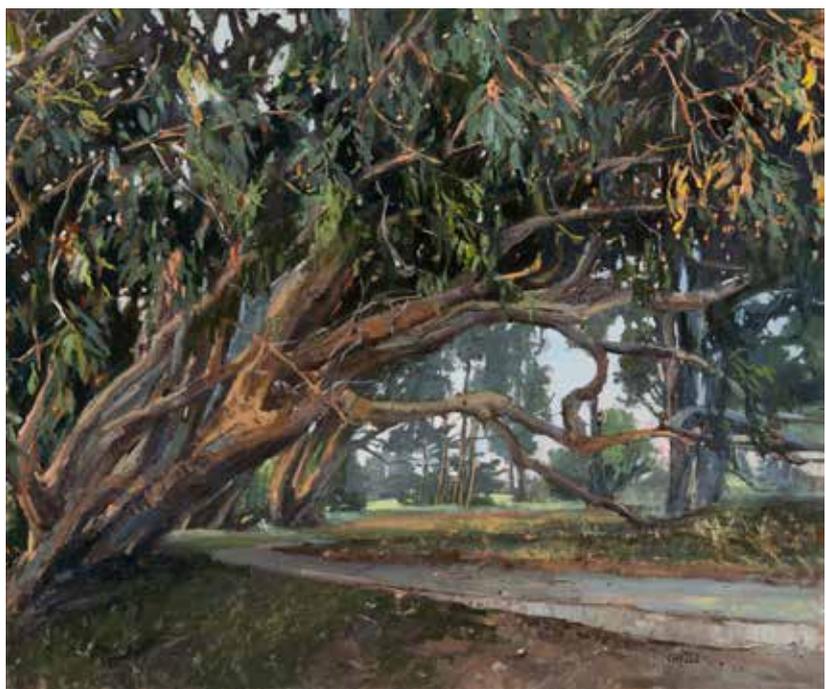


(ABOVE) *Cliffs at Davenport*, 2016, oil on panel, 8 x 10 in., collection of John Noia ■ (RIGHT) *Eucalyptus*, 2017, oil on canvas, 40 x 48 in., available from the Guild of Boston Artists

### A LATE START

Jung returned to art when she began painting, at age 40, in local classes and workshops. Her instructors encouraged her to go back to school and so she did, ultimately earning an M.F.A. from San Francisco's Academy of Art University. By the time she entered the arena of professional exhibiting, she was nearly 50: she needed to establish her name and reputation in short order, so she set goals and achieved them in a timely fashion by entering high-profile competitions and developing relationships with established organizations. In the process, she has won awards from coast to coast and has been elected to membership in the American Society of Marine Artists, California Art Club, Oil Painters of America, Guild of Boston Artists, and New York City's Salmagundi Club.

Launching into this arena came easily for Jung, whose father, police lieutenant Allan Frederick Freiheit, Jr., raised his four children in a physically competitive environment where discipline was expected. "I am a 'trophy chaser' and enjoy winning," Jung





(LEFT) *In the Night*, 2016, oil on canvas, 30 x 30 in., available from the artist ■ (RIGHT) *Lily*, 2017, oil on canvas, 40 x 40 in., available from the artist ■ (BOTTOM) *River Song*, 2017, oil on canvas, 24 x 48 in., collection of Ed and Sally Daihl

admits. “During high school, I was a 10-varsity-letter athlete competing in gymnastics, softball, and cross-country track, and I went on to earn a black belt in taekwondo. Every day I paint from 7:30 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon, with no lunch break, then clear my head by taking a five-mile run.” In California, that jog takes her along the Pacific Ocean, a mix of exercise and visual inspiration that doubly recharges her.

#### THE ARTISTIC BENEFITS OF A BI-COASTAL LIFE

Jung’s bi-coastal commute provides cherished time in the air, during which she continues her study of art by reading books and articles. She also values the “mirror effect” gained by leaving paintings in her studio on one coast and returning to those on the other. “Some artists use mirrors or turn their work upside down to gain a new perspective, but I get a fresh look after having been away for a couple of weeks,” Jung says. “I find this an important part of my creative experience, especially in light of the very different painting environments on the East and West Coasts. At first it was a huge adjustment: it gets dark very early in the east and the light is flatter, with fewer shadows. I had to adjust everything and stick to values. That made me think about color more. Yet the longer I observed the contrast between coasts, the more I could capture it. I believe my work is very distinctive because of that. The value scale is much tighter on the East





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(ABOVE) *Monterey Pine*, 2017, oil on canvas, 36 x 58 in., available from the artist ■ (BOTTOM) *Silent Watchers*, 2016, oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in., available from the artist

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(ABOVE) *Steamers Lane*, 2017, oil on canvas, 24 x 60 in., collection of Wittmann Hill ■ (BOTTOM) *The Pinnacle*, 2015, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 in., available from the artist

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Coast. The color is more muted, with less contrast. In California, the colors are more vibrant, much more saturated.” Jung’s gravitation to the coasts and to marine scenes generally is a natural outgrowth of having been around boats and water for much of her life.

Although she is bi-coastal, Jung confides, “Neither side of the U.S. has a monopoly on my heart. I was born and raised in Connecticut, so I will always be a New Englander. I will always be nostalgic about the East Coast. But on the West Coast, the sunset on the water is so different from the sunrise. That drama is what I’m drawn to. It’s a matter of nostalgia and mood versus drama and color. And I love them both.”

#### HER VOICE: FINDING IT

As Jung became more competent in the basics of painting, her confidence in producing a finished work grew. She took workshops and saw the different approaches and styles her instructors offered. As part of her self-education, she has also studied artworks in museums here and abroad. Metaphorically speaking, she knew she could “sing,” but needed to find her voice first. One day she did.

Every autumn the Jungs try to join Peter Trippi and Eric Rhoads (editor-in-chief and publisher of *Fine Art Connoisseur*) when they lead a group of readers to Europe, so over the years Peter and Michelle have developed a professional relationship. During one trip, Jung told Trippi she could paint competently, yet wanted more — to use her own voice: “I can paint scenes of the California

*Swell*, 2016, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in., collection of Jessica Braun

coast or the Hudson River Valley, but where do I belong?" Surely she knew the answer, but had not realized it until Trippi replied simply, "Paint for yourself!" Jung recalls, "It set me free! I found my own voice. I could focus on what I wanted to say. No longer did I care about 'what they would say.' I could now express my opinion about what I was seeing and experiencing even though I am often pushing the boundaries of what is expected, even tolerated, by the viewer or exhibiting organization."

Today Jung gets her ideas for paintings from the dualistic qualities fundamental to human life: "Some examples are life/death, earth/water, love/hate, chaos/order, etc. I use these opposing principles to create energy, and to guide my train of thought through a series of paintings. For instance, my recently completed *Northern California Seascape* series is based on the relationship between earth and water. My new *Flora* series is based on chaos and order."

She continues, "Once I know the direction of thought (dualism) I want to explore, I go out into nature and observe. Observation, in my opinion, is the most important step. Before I started the seascape series, I spent every day for an entire year painting *en plein air* at the same location. Although the view never changed (sky, rock, water, sand), I began to observe the subtle changes that occur between solid masses. These connections were where the truth — the purity — was happening in front of me. That is where the true energy in my paintings lies. Nature provides the elements, but my observation through all my senses directs my art making."

Jung then returns indoors: "After a long period observing and painting those small studies, I move to the studio to execute the compositional elements of the final painting. This phase is all about design. How do I translate the experience onto a two-dimensional surface? I think I enjoy this process most because I must be very clever in the execution or 'delivery' of my intention. I am aware of the many compositional rules, so it's fun to push those boundaries — which I think creates drama. I have mastered many techniques that 'trick the eye,' and I no longer need to think about color, value, and temperature. These have become second nature. I finally have the freedom to paint truthfully. I've now gotten to a point comparable to when, in learning to play the piano, you suddenly don't need to look at the keys or sheet music. I've learned that each color has its own personality, so I manipulate mood and emotion through the distinctive interrelationships of my colors." After Jung has covered the canvas, she can see if the painting will be successful. "I then decide how much softening of edges and blending I will do. Do I want to push it toward realism and, if so, how far? Or do I want to keep it abstract and fresh? The painting itself usually reveals the answer."

Jung is on the faculty of the Plein Air Convention & Expo (PACE), the annual gathering launched by Eric Rhoads in 2012. As a field instructor at last year's edition in San Diego, Jung shared her voice with many attendees. In one recording, she can be heard saying, "Plein air painting is not really about color and composition; it's about what is happening at that moment. The task is to figure out what you are experiencing and what you are feeling. It's not just painting what you see." She added, "You can't always expect to complete a painting in two hours, but you can get



down on canvas 'what it is to be in San Diego.' When you are in a new locale painting, you need to figure out what in that environment is different. Lighting? Color? Shapes? Texture? Pick one or two things and get that down in the painting."

Asked to advise younger artists, Jung urges them to "get the best education affordable." She says, "Seek out art groups for support. Learn to draw well. Accept criticism and advice with an open mind. Master your tools and learn color theory. Read everything you can about past masters, and go see their paintings in person. As you advance, seek out a mentor you admire, and don't be afraid to change mentors as you develop. Embrace failure, build endurance, and work hard. And finally, find your own voice. This is the most important. Finding your own voice is the culmination of foundation mastery, technical mastery, deep intellectual thought, and purpose. Using the artistic process is the selective path that can bring order and peace to life's chaos. Most importantly, that path of beauty is achievable if it is done with intention."

#### MORE TO COME

Jung says she is now "working on a new series that, by eliminating a point of perspective, requires me to use other techniques to create gravity in the painting." She next plans to show paintings in the Guild of Boston Artists' Annual Members Juried Exhibition (May 5–31), followed by the California Art Club's 107th Annual Gold Medal Exhibition (June 10 – July 1). She will return to the Guild for a solo show running October 6–31. No doubt this energetic artist will schedule other showings as the year unfolds. ●

**Information:** On April 12, Jung will offer an oil painting demo co-presented by the Wellesley Society of Artists and Needham Art Association. For details, visit [wellesleysocietyofartists.org](http://wellesleysocietyofartists.org).

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