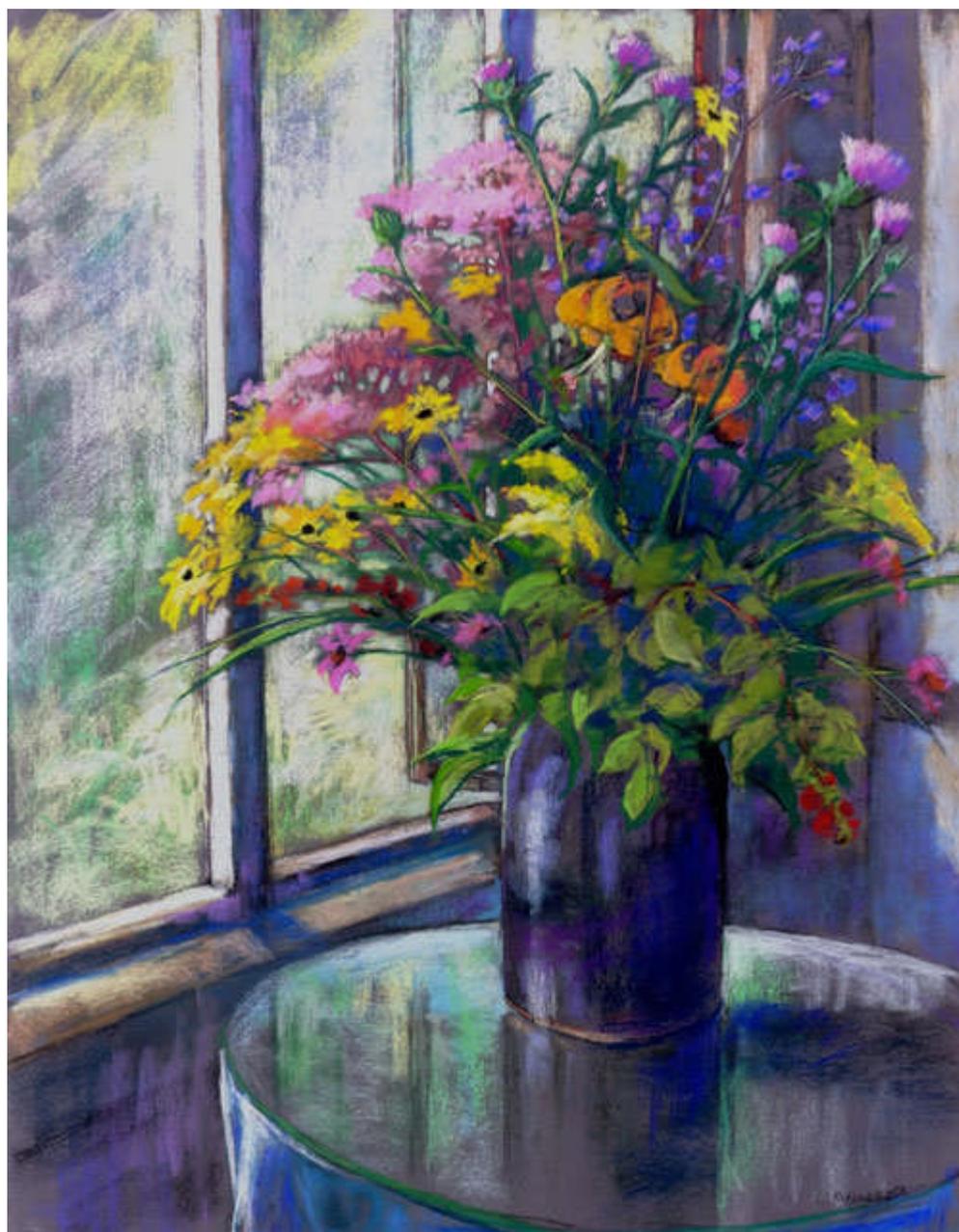


Create
Better
Paintings
.com



Art from Many Influences

Japanese-born artist Junko Ono Rothwell explains how an artist can create uniquely personal art by drawing upon cultural heritage as well as current interests.



Bouquet of Wildflowers, pastel, 25 x 19 in.



In many ways, some more apparent than others, Junko Ono Rothwell's cultural heritage speaks through her paintings. Sometimes it's quite obvious in the objects she chooses to include in her still lifes, but perhaps more subtly, there is often an Eastern quality to her use of space and shape. Her color palette, however, has been heavily influenced by her life in America and her exposure to the brighter hues found in Western art and contemporary culture. This special combination of interests has shaped Junko's art into distinctly personal statements about the person she is today.

Inheriting from Japanese Art

Although many of us might not be aware of it, Japanese art has had a heavy influence on us all. Especially in terms of composition, what was once unique to Japanese art, particularly woodblock artists, became popularized by the Impressionists, and

Playing Koto, pastel, 25 x 19 in.



Still Life with Quince, pastel,
25 x 20 in.



Morning Lesson, pastel, 25 x 19 in.

have since become quite familiar and common to artists around the world.

Yet Junko's experience with Japanese art is more direct and personal. "My background growing up in Japan is reflected in my composition, I feel," she says. "I have been influenced by the simplicity of house interiors there, and by old Japanese woodblock prints. My favorite artist is Hokusai, especially his series, 36 Views of Mount Fuji."

Creating Dynamic Designs

In particular, Junko admires and has learned from Hokusai's design sense, which she describes as consistently dynamic. "His compositions are often off center or from a bird's eye view. Like him, I like to focus on one point and crop in tightly, which makes the painting more fun. People's eyes always focus on one point, they do not see other details. Cameras show everything, but that is not how people see things. Japanese woodblock painters did the same thing naturally."

"I do not block each color, but try to flow colors over the entire paper to create the feeling of movement. Color brings each painting to life."

Negative space, also so important to Hokusai, is one of the tools Junko uses to make her paintings more dynamic as well.

"Negative space is the space outside of the main subject, such as the shapes within the background, which I think is equally important," she explains. "Sometimes I move objects or change the viewpoint or angle just to make the negative space more interesting."

Junko enjoys capturing the beauty of her everyday life, so it is the shapes and colors she sees each day that inspire her and populate her paintings. Her still lifes are often filled with objects from her homeland, such as fabrics or Japanese prints or Chinese calligraphy, as well as clay pots made by her sister-in-law, Nan Rothwell, and flowers she collects in her own garden or the nearby countryside. The figures in one of her more recent series of musicians are her daughters' friends and fellow orchestra members, and their fluid lines are echoed in the instruments they hold and play.



Still Life with Clematis, pastel,

Regardless of subject, Junko works hard to present them with a lot of energy and vitality. "The most fun and the hardest time is setting up subjects and deciding on the motif," she admits. "Sometimes I can set up in 10 minutes and the first setup works fine, but at other times, I spend the whole day and still cannot decide the composition. After I am finally ready, I feel that painting is easier than setting up!" Junko prefers to work from life as much as possible, or at least from sketches done from life.

Capturing the Vitality of Color

Unlike the delicate or more somber colors we sometimes associate with Asian art, Junko's color sense is definitely bright and radiant, whether she's working in oils or pastels, as featured in this article. "I love layers of colors, and the luminescence of pastel," she says. "When I was an art student in Japan, I used darker colors. But after I moved to the U.S., I often went to museums where I learned to use brighter colors." She adds that this shift is most noticeable to her when she participates in a painting competition in Japan each year.

While a value pattern is an essential part of her realistic work, Junko relies more heavily on color to bring energy, mood, and

excitement to her paintings. Sometimes she uses the contrast of complements, while other times she emphasizes the interplay of warm against cool. "I do not block each color, but try to flow colors over the entire paper to create the feeling of movement," she says. "Color brings each painting to life."

Synthesizing Experiences

Junko's paintings are a perfect blend of the East and the West, her past and her present. Looking at her paintings teaches us that any artist who is willing to remain open to all that she sees and experiences can bring these influences into her work, thereby creating something that is deeply personal, unlike any work that has come before or since.

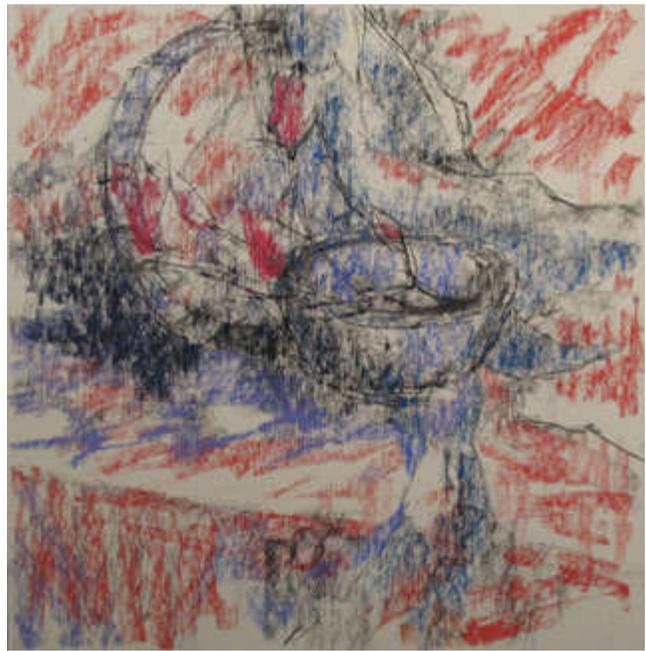
See her demo below!

Painting Demonstration



Step 1

To prepare her drawing surface, a True Grit neutral pH, 600 grade sanded paper, Junko taped the paper onto a wooden board and placed the board upright on an easel. She then started with a rough sketch, using compressed charcoal to establish the placement of the objects and the composition.



Step 2

Since this painting was more about color than value, Junko rapidly laid down some warm colors in the background and the foreground tablecloth and a cooler color in the shadows. She did not apply any color to the areas that were to remain light. Already you can see the movement emerging in the image.



Step 3

After placing the board on the floor, she used a big 2-inch brush to spread turpentine over the entire surface, leaving brushstrokes to suggest energy. This established an underpainting of color and value without filling up the tooth of the paper with a lot of pigment. She let it dry for four or five minutes before returning the board back to its vertical position on the easel. Junko doesn't mind if the turpentine drips and the colors run as it adds a nice texture, and she can take advantage of the effect.



Step 4

Returning to the charcoal, Junko re-established the flowers and bowl before switching to a blue pastel to define the darkest places in the image.



Step 5

Next, Junko went to the other end of the value



Step 6 (detail)

Once she had established the flow of light and



Junko Ono Rothwell received her art degree from Okayama University in Japan. She is a Master Pastelist of the Pastel Society of America, a Fellow of the American Artist Professional League, New York, and a member of the Pastel Society of Japan. Her works have been purchased by the State of Georgia and many corporations, including the George Washington University Hospital, Washington D.C.; Southern Company, Kaiser Permanente, Prime Bank, Georgia; and the Northwest Memorial Hospital in Chicago. Her work has appeared in five books, including *Pure Color* (North Light Books, 2006), as well as *The Artist's Magazine* and *The Pastel Journal*. She is represented by: Anderson Fine Art Gallery, Georgia; Brazier Fine Art, Virginia; Frameworks Gallery, Georgia; Lagerquist Gallery, Georgia; Portfolio Art Gallery, South Carolina; and Spruce Creek Gallery, Virginia. Her website is junkoonorothwell.com.



Autumn Flowers in Basket, pastel, 13 x 20 in.

[Return to Home Page](#)

PASSION • INFORMATION • IDEAS • EMOTION • COMMUNITY

All images © 2008 the artist; text © 2008 Jennifer King.