

James Lai
Artist Q&A:

Introduction

How would you describe what you do to someone who hasn't seen your art?

For me, creating art is about giving the viewer a platform to evoke an emotional response and to allow them to imagine when viewing the various suggestive elements within the artwork.

In my landscape paintings, I focused on the process of abstraction of the subject to reveal suggestions to the viewer of key elements in the scene. I love the fact that abstraction allows the viewer to exercise a degree of imaginative play in their mind. However, I still like to maintain a level of figurative representation in my abstract pieces to help guide the mind towards understanding the landscape scene being presented.

About James

Where are you based & why?

Sydney. I am originally from Singapore but completed my final high school years and tertiary studies in Australia. My Asian roots, together with my western education and perspectives, are key influences to my artistic vision and the way I approach creating art.

How long have you been practicing as an artist?

I've been painting for about 12 years, but became more consistent and productive in the last three years.

When and how did you first fall in love with art?

My first influence into art is my dad. When I was going through secondary school, my dad completed a fine art course and painted a lot (mainly in oils, charcoal and pastels). He was really into the impressionists' style of painting. I remember watching him paint every weekend and that stuck with me. Years later, I developed a passion for art and picked up painting.

Did you attend art school or are you self-taught?

I am a self-taught artist and have learnt to paint in most mediums, including oils, acrylic, watercolour, charcoal and soft pastels, but currently, I am working mainly with acrylics.

In your studio

When do you feel your most creative?

I feel most creative when I am immersed in art, like visiting the art museum, galleries, art fairs or just spending an afternoon in a bookstore soaking up pictures of paintings from art books.

I do a fair amount of meditation on my art, for instance, on the pieces that I'm working on at the time. I think deeply about what the final painting could look like, the possible variations I could explore, the different colour palette, markings, etc. I also put myself in the shoes of the viewer and ask myself "What do I see and feel I am looking at this artwork?"

About your work

What materials do you use & why?

Currently, I mainly paint with acrylics on canvas. Acrylic paint enables me to work quickly and produce artworks at a greater speed. I am in a productive phase at the moment, and acrylics just work very well for me.

What is your process?

I always start with extensive research into the subject, determining the colour palette, the size of the canvas, working out the structure of the painting, the composition and the techniques to apply. Once I start painting, it almost always takes a life of its own. While I try to follow the plan, I also make it a point to be totally open, go with the flow and be in the moment when I create art. In my artworks, I always aim to strike a balance between technical and emotion.

What have you been working on recently?

Recently, I have been working on a series of abstract landscape paintings, depicting the Australian landscape.

What do you aim to achieve through your art?

My objectives in creating art is to share it with people, to let it convey its message, evoke emotions and to allow people the space to imagine.

Where can people view your work?

People can view my artworks on my website www.jameslaiart.com

ARTIST BIO

A self-taught artist, James Lai creates contemporary and abstract art using his distinctive style. He is influenced by the masters of modern art (Pablo Picasso, Andre Derain, Henri Matisse and Vincent Van Gogh), the American abstract expressionism movement of the 1940s-50s (New York School era) and a handful of inspiring Australian abstract landscape painters.

His abstract paintings are created with a strong focus on vision, the process of abstraction (of the subject), techniques in the application of paint, colour palette and striking a fine balance between technical and emotion.

He employs a loose painting style and uses bold brush strokes to depict his subject matter. He believes in utilising the simplicity of shape, form and colours to bring out complex, beautiful stories and emotions from the subjects.