



ARTIST JILL BRABANT

Of Time and Place

GOOD COMPOSITION CREATES INTEREST | BY BARBARA MACKAY



Jill Brabant

Manassas artist Jill Brabant calls herself a “floral still-life artist,” but is quick to note that she doesn’t paint only flowers. “It’s important to paint other things,” Jill says, “because painting other genres—such as portraits and landscapes—makes you a better artist. But, she admits “I’m known for my florals.”

A native of upstate New York, Jill attended the Rochester Institute of Technology, got her Bachelors’ degree in graphic design and worked as a graphic designer for more than 25 years. “After I had my son, I got interested in working with kids,” Jill says. “This is my fifth year working as a full-time art teacher at

an elementary school, where I teach the fundamentals of art to children from kindergarten to fifth grade.”

Jill feels that there are two sides to her painting, which correspond to the seasons and the time of day when she is painting. “I paint daily,” she says. “Of course, when I’m teaching, my free time is at night. So I can’t do *plein air* work year-round. In the summer I like to do little sketches, because what you see from life—especially color—is so much better than working from a photograph. Setting up something in the studio can work, but it’s never as good as what you get outdoors.”

Because of those two sides of her paintings, admirers



"I may spend more time arranging something than I spend painting it. If I'm not excited about a painting, I don't think the viewer will be excited about it, either."

—Jill Brabant

of Jill's work have described her as an "impressionistic-realistic" painter.

"When I paint *plein-air*, I'm usually a lot freer," she says. "I paint really quickly on a small surface. I use a palette knife, which has a really different feel from studio work. That's one side of me.

"When I work in the studio, I'm a little tighter and I have more control. It's maybe a more 'polished' look than I get with the palette knife. But I still like to incorporate thick and thin passages—regardless of what I'm painting," she says. "The biggest thing I like to focus on is edges, on having portions of a painting that are softer and blurrier and then drawing the viewer's attention to an area by using a sharper edge."

Before she begins a painting, Jill explains, she begins by "simplifying" what she sees. "Maybe I don't want one flower to look as important as another, so I won't give it as many details," she says. "I'll give it a softer look with the brushstrokes. And then in other areas, I'll give different flowers more detail, they'll have crisper brushstrokes, and in that way they will draw the viewer's eye.

"I'll spend a lot of time composing something in the studio. I don't just arrange flowers and then paint

them. I may spend more time arranging something than I spend painting it. If I'm not excited about a painting, I don't think the viewer will be excited about it, either. For me, good composition creates interest."

Jill started painting in watercolors, but about 20 years ago she moved to oil, which is now primarily all she uses. She paints on linen, canvas applied to a board, or gesso board. And she believes that her contrast of thin layers of paint with thick layers of impasto is one reason the public has been drawn to her paintings.

"Impasto is when you use really thick paint," Jill says. "If I want to get a lot of detail or form to the center of a rose, I put really thick paint there, maybe with a palette knife. In other areas I might want to have my paint really super thin. I might thin the paint or use a glaze over my color. I don't like to have just one layer of thickness."

Jill adores teaching children. "The kids get so excited, and teaching them the fundamentals is so amazing. I definitely get joy back from them. I feel kind of like a rock star when I teach them things, even though as an artist you get better and better, so usually those fundamentals are second-nature to you, kids reinforce the fact that you can do



Page 14: "Summer Trellis," 11" x 14"

Page 15: "Spring Serenade," 16" x 20"

Opposite: "Summer Symphony," 16" x 20"

Above: "Be Mine," 11" x 16"; and
"Hollyhocks in June," 16" x 20"
All are oils.



extraordinary things," she says.

Jill exhibits at local shows and certain galleries and has been a member of New York's exclusive Salmagundi Club since 2016.

Asked about her preference for flowers, Jill remembers, "When I started out, I just wanted something beautiful to paint. Now my choice of what I paint often has to do with memories. I think visual connections really stick with you. My mom had a huge rock garden on a hill, which was a big thing growing up. My grandmother survived the Great Depression because of her vegetable garden. These are memories.

"A lot of the flowers I have now are from family and friends. It's just a place of comfort every time I go out [in my garden]. Even weeding isn't a chore. And flowers also reflect the fleeting nature of life to me," she says. "The different stages flowers go through are interesting. When they first open, they look one way. Then their colors change along with their shapes as they grow. I'm hoping people will connect with a time and place when they view my paintings."

Jill Brabant | www.jillbrabant.com