

# Where Life and Art Meet

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Jove Wang uses portraits, street scenes, and landscapes to share his passion for life | *By Molly Siple*



SHANGHAI STREET VIEW, OIL, 24 x 30.



FISHERMEN WORKING, OIL, 40 x 42.

**J**OVE WANG BELIEVES THAT WHERE AN artist was born and raised has a significant impact on his or her painting style. Indeed, only someone with an intimate knowledge of the Asian way of life could have painted SHANGHAI STREET VIEW, an image so alive you can almost hear the noise of the traffic.

Wang was born and raised in the town of Jilin in northeastern China, where the soil is called "black earth." He draws on memories of his hometown and its chilly climate when he paints a canvas that is dark and filled with cool, muted colors. "Personality is important, too," he says. "You can try to invent a style for your work, but true personal style and uniqueness comes from

within." As a young man, he spent much of his time in the company of adults rather than with friends his own age. Now, when he paints a portrait, Wang prefers a mature face, one with the mark of age, experience, values, and culture. One such portrait, OLD MAN, won an honorable mention award at this year's *Gold Medal Exhibition* sponsored by the California Art Club.

**W**ang's reputation as an artist is well established. In addition to portraits, he is equally adept at creating still lifes, landscapes, and street scenes. His style of painting combines precise rendering with a freedom of brushwork and inventive design more typical of abstract art. And he has clear ideas about which pictorial elements are most important for a successful painting. Thinking like an abstractionist, he puts composition at the top of the list. Next he concerns himself with color and value contrast as well as paint,

line, and mass. Finally, Wang focuses on subject matter and mood.

Of course, Wang's considerable artistic training also shapes his work. When he was very young, he studied with artist Gou Gang, who happened to work for his father. Gang told his student to draw everything that he could see, so Wang



JOVE WANG.



TWO FRENCH GIRLS PAINTING, OIL, 28 x 36.

would bring his tutor drawings of eggs, chickens, bowls, plates, and family members. "No good! No good!" was Gang's only response, Wang recalls with a smile.

In 1979, Wang went to the Jilin Academy, where he studied for three years. In 1984, he was accepted into the Jiang Academy of Fine Arts in Shanghai, one of only seven students admitted at the time and the only new student from northern China. While he majored in commercial design, he also elected to take drawing and painting classes. At the academy, students learned the techniques of traditional

Chinese art, but Western art was also part of the schooling. For decades, Chinese artists had traveled to Russia, where painting and sculpture were still being taught according to the classical curriculum of the French art academies of the 19th century. Armed with this knowledge, these men returned to teach in China's academies. Wang's teachers at Jiang had studied with the greats of Russian realism at the Repin Institute in St. Petersburg. To this day, Wang especially appreciates Russian painting for "its strength and its reliance on neutrals and grays."

He learned superb hand and brush control from studying calligraphy as a young man. The writing style requires that only the brush touch the paper, not the hand or the arm. Today Wang incorporates lyric, calligraphic brush strokes into his paintings. When teaching a class, Wang calls this brushwork music. The strokes are a means of adding varied rhythm to a composition, giving the painting subtle interest. For Wang, a harmonious composition is the equivalent of a resolved chord.

Since his career is primarily about producing art, he likes to underplay his role as an art

teacher. Yet Wang is a highly successful instructor with a large and loyal following. He shares his knowledge with great generosity and shows a refreshing sweetness in his concern for the success of his students. In such an atmosphere, creativity blossoms.

When he is not painting, Wang listens to music or watches basketball. A Lakers fan, he has decided that, just as rhythm is one of the keys to the success of his paintings, the Lakers win because they move with rhythm. "It's an artist's job to figure out why something is successful, whatever it is," he says. "You can always learn by observing."

His next goal in his development as an artist is to broaden and deepen his experience of life. To that end, Wang is making a conscious effort to learn about other cultures. For example, this interview was conducted over dinner at a Japanese restaurant, where the meal included giant clam and fish livers. "We eat this not for the taste, but the newness of the experience," he said. For Wang, it is essential to enjoy life. "This [enjoyment] comes through in your painting," he says.

After finishing his schooling, Wang worked for the Chinese government, designing exhibition pavilions for trade shows throughout Europe and South America. The job required travel, and soon Wang had a new goal—to be a fine artist who paints all over the world. He moved to California 12 years ago with only \$40 in his pocket and one contact, a



RURAL CONTENTMENT, OIL, 60 x 42.

friend who ran a modest hotel on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles. Wang moved in and applied for a job as a dishwasher at a nearby restaurant, but was turned down for lack of experience. In spite of the trials he faced, he kept going. "No matter how I was living, I kept my

sights high," he says. Wang made more friends and soon he was painting portraits, including one of Cardinal Roger Mahoney. He got involved in the Chinese-American art community, helping other artists as well. These days he finds time to lead painting trips to (CONTINUED ON PAGE 190)