

A Japanese Journey - Julie Podstolski

Presentation notes from 22 May 2009 floor talk at Preston Street Art Space

Part One - Subject matter

I am a realist artist with an obsessive interest in contemporary Japan.

I first travelled to Japan in 2003 where, quite by chance, I came across my first sighting of a maiko (apprentice geisha). That glance – followed by clumsy fumbling for camera and two swift photos (which became drawings) was the beginning of a passion which hasn't left me yet.

Since 2003 I have made nine trips to Japan and I am thinking that I have enough curiosity and fascination for the place to last me the rest of my life. I plan to keep going over...

The focus of my interest is the world of geisha. (Actually the Kyoto word for geisha is geiko). The journey, which ends with a drawing, begins with me hanging out on Kyoto streets in the various hanamachi (geisha districts – or 'flower towns') camera ready, waiting for geisha and maiko to pass by. (It is important to be polite and unobtrusive as rude tourists with cameras are a curse of these women's lives!) I also attend dances when possible to witness the beauty of Nihon buyo (Japanese dance). I walk the streets looking for interesting juxtapositions and stand on corners. It requires great patience and endurance!

I try to show in my drawings the contrast between the exquisite costume and demeanour of the maiko or geisha and the often bland or even brutal urban environment she inhabits. Inside the tea houses all may be tatami, paper and wood but outside it is concrete and glass.



"Kotomi on stage" - copyright Julie Podstolski

I hope the tradition of the flower and willow world will continue however less and less women choose this life. I may be capturing and drawing members of a unique society with a limited future.



"Intersection" - copyright Julie Podstolski

Part two - Technique

My photo is my starting point. It is not perfect. Not being a technical person I do not make changes to it on the computer. I make the changes on the actual drawing.



Photograph of two maiko on Ponto-cho



"A Brief Stop" - copyright Julie Podstolski

People often say to me "Oh it looks just like a photograph" but to me it is totally different. Compare the above images of my pencil drawing on the right to the original photograph on the left. Note for instance that I have removed the black umbrella on the drawing. My drawing has much more colour in it than the photo...and richness.

In essence I am going through the photograph to find myself back in the original experience.

I am trying to achieve luminosity and a sense of drama. I want my drawing to sing. This is made possible by knowing colour relationships and how to mix colours. I am constantly thinking about complementary colours and what the dominant complementaries are in each drawing.



“Crossing” - copyright Julie Podstolski

The maiko in “Crossing” comes forward in the drawing because I have increased emphasis on her reds by adding green to her surrounding colours.