

Esteemed Artist's Oil Paintings are Colorful & Sentimental

By Lori Steindorf



Drawing inspiration from her antics and adventures, convivial artist Jill Pankey has a vibrant personality reflected in her familiar, colorful, and whimsical paintings.



"Loud and Proud"

“Red Rockers”



Pankey’s attention-grabbing art is sentimental and chronicles life’s events transpiring around her. It reveals the artist, self-described as “short but scrappy, creative, ageless and 30 on a good day.”

Her memorable masterpieces are featured in La Posada De Santa Fe Hotel Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico; the Russell Collection in Austin; Jane Hamilton Fine Art in Tucson, Arizona; the Emerald C Gallery in Coronado Island, California; the Acosta Strong Gallery in Oklahoma City; and the Just Imagine Gallery in Russell, New Zealand.

New Zealand? Yes, the well-traveled, scholarly artist’s wonderfully unique work has etched an indelible, far-flung impression on art enthusiasts everywhere.

“In 2009, my husband and I went to Russell, New Zealand for a month to paint

“And He Said I Wasn’t Good Enough”



for a gallery. I have never seen anything so magical or inspirational. I painted a group of the locals in a conga line and gave it to the local pub for them to thank them. It was all too much fun and a ridiculous amount of awesome to take in,” Pankey said.

Working chiefly in oils and noted for experimenting with the theme of the aging female, Pankey underscores humor, color, pattern and movement. She fosters an affinity for drawing in different mediums when her hectic schedule permits.

Pankey’s signature postcard-perfect murals interestingly grace the walls of restaurants, doctor’s offices, bars and buildings.

“I have been fortunate to have many commissions and many I have not yet completed. I recently traded a large painting for a two-month stay in an incredible home on a mountain in Santa Fe. Remember, I have four kids, so I trade when I can. I once traded paintings for three sets of braces in Corpus Christi, and the orthodontist, Dr. Roxanne Robertson, has become a great close friend. Special commissions come in a variety of packages,” she said.

Pankey is acclaimed for her Gal Pal series, inspired by her long-time friends and daughters whom she credits as her muses. There is nothing subdued or understated about her collections, and her magnetic creations, with their bright hues and intriguing brush strokes, are often autobiographical.

“I often paint my daughters and friends in precarious ways. I am always happy and surprised that they let me do it,” she said.

The series delves into the theme of women aging with passion and abandon and the realization that age is about what is in your head and celebrating milestones Pankey explains.

“Favorite subjects that inspire me include unique real women with confidence, humor, color and flaws. I have known my gal pals (and soul sisters) since our 20’s while raising kids, old marriages, deaths and careers. One of us is in her 70’s and rides horses, while the youngest is in her late 50’s. They give me great inspiration for paintings and don’t even realize it most of the time,” she said.

Pankey is also celebrated for her boot series. After her younger brother suddenly passed away, she began painting boots in homage to him and his legendary character. The series, coupled with her other work, has indeed opened doors for her in the art realm.

“I was given his boots and painted them for my mom and sister. I bet I have painted 400-plus boots since. Now, they have become personalities and important to some of my work. He had a great sense of humor and reminds me he is still here. Around 2010, I

was invited to Santa Fe, and my life changed significantly because other galleries noticed me and gave me invitations. It was all because of the death of my brother and those boots I painted in his honor,” Pankey said.

Growing up along the Mexican border of Del Rio, Texas, Pankey explored its terrain and culture to visually absorb the environment. Here, she tapped into her inner reserve of strength and determination to ignite her lifelong journey as an artist. Reflecting on her life, Pankey cannot recall a time when she did not want to express herself through art.

“I can still see that velvet Elvis painting when I was really young that I wanted my mom to buy in Mexico, hanging in Landos,” she said.

As early as age 4, she recollects an intrinsic desire to become an artist. Armed with a ballpoint pen, Pankey drew tattoos copied from the newspaper’s funny pages on her unfazed father’s arms and legs as he lazed on the couch, recuperating from Saturday night visits to the Elks Club with her mother.

“He liked me to draw Snuffy Smith, but Betty Boop was my favorite,” she said.

Relating to other artists, Pankey revealed that she is somewhat anxious at the genesis of a painting. The candid, ever-evolving artist also confesses that she relentlessly works to improve herself and embrace new challenges for growth.

“In my early years, I just wanted to become a better painter, and each painting led me to the next. Now that I show work in galleries, and this fun, crazy ride on an art monster has become my career, I feel I need to continue to rise to another level. I like to think I’m still learning and growing and pushing the boulder uphill, but not quite at the top,” she said.

Pankey hails from a family of quilters, though quilting, she said, is a talent she did not acquire. The daughter of accountants, Pankey initially acquiesced to their chosen career path for her. They encouraged her to refrain from becoming the proverbial “starving artist.”

“They both convinced me to get all my all-level teaching certificate when I attended SWT (now Texas State) in San Marcos so I could have a paycheck. I went to school for five years and only taught for a year. I thought I would starve to death with what Texas paid teachers in the late ‘70s,” she said.

Reminiscing about her upbringing along the Mexican border, Pankey donned a brave face, and with gusto, moved ahead to ultimately see her girlhood dream materialize.

“I can remember the smell of a new Crayola box with all those colors! The colors of Mexico was a reach away. Since we rarely had the money to travel, Mexico became our destination as young explorers. I have dreamed of making art all my life, but have often wondered why I became an artist when I was told that I could never make a career in art as an adult,” she said.

Reinventing herself, she used her talent to draw diagrams for the district attorney’s office, sketched to assist rape victims, served as the art director for the local television station and in the capacity of a courtroom artist.

Before the advent of computers, she worked as a graphic artist for various agencies, employing her capable hands to create illustrations, design work, logos and lettering. The vivacious artist earned two master’s degrees and taught art in the public school system before teaching at Texas State University in San Marcos. She retired from education in 2013.

A frequent visitor to New Mexico where she finds inspiration, Pankey is now exploring painting vineyards and landscapes dotted with oaks. She shares that she is presently working on a figurative series, dubbed “The Pitbull is After My Chihuauas”, debuting at Russell Collection in Austin during September.

“I find inspiration in different places. When I go to Santa Fe every summer, the environment is so different and a fabulous place for an artist. There are thousands of artists who show there, at all levels. It is an awesome place to get your game on and people watch. Because of such a creative environment, it reminds me that there are miles to go and always humbling,”
Pankey said.

In times of inevitable adversity or criticism, Pankey has shrugged off life’s some times harsh circumstances to prevail.

“I think one thing I have been taught is to be driven and keep getting back up when there are setbacks. I have had several hurdles along my journey in the art world and raising a family. I keep swinging at the curve balls, continue to grow and avoid crazy-makers,” she concluded.



“Still Waiting”



"Girls Night Out"



"Stacked Chihuawas"



"Garden Party"