



**Monstera Delisiosa**  
sumi ink and charcoal on  
Mylar on panel, 48x36



# GIVING NATURE HER DUE

**HEIDI JUNG**  
recasts the glory  
of the botanical  
world with  
a compelling,  
innovative use  
of sumi ink and  
charcoal on Mylar.

by Jenn Rein

**Rambling Rose**  
sumi ink and  
charcoal on Mylar on  
panel, 60x40

For those artists who feel driven to depict the splendor of the plant kingdom, the fractals of nature are an alluring and infinite source of inspiration. Colorado native Heidi Jung brings these patterns into her art with a method of her own devising. The results are a striking ode to botanicals.

Jung keeps nature close at hand on the property of her home in Denver. Warmer weather reveals her passion in the most demonstrable way—with a backyard garden that’s as surprising as it is lush. Small olive trees occupy the same space as hostas, and summer vegetables keep company with creeping Jenny and rare lilies.



RIGHT  
**Spike**  
sumi ink and charcoal  
on Mylar on panel,  
48x36

BELOW  
**Palo Verde**  
sumi ink, charcoal  
and pastel on Mylar  
on panel; 18x24



Wisteria hangs in graceful suspense on the outside of her small studio, which boasts a garage door with glass panels. Nature is always within Jung’s view.

The botanical models she uses are often dead and dried, far past what most people would consider their peak; however, the details of a plant are laid bare at the hands of this artist. The structure and form of her specimens tell a story of life that’s closer to declining than thriving, but within these organic relics, Jung finds the beauty that feeds her work.

#### **DRAWN FROM THE DARKROOM**

Commenting on her education at the Metropolitan State University of Denver, Jung says, “I started in photography, but then everything moved to digital. Instructors were talking about how you could plop the state capital into the background of a photo, even while sitting in your living room. It lacked authenticity, and I was heartbroken because I love the darkroom. I love the magic that happens in a darkroom when the image reveals itself.”

The digital age that permanently changed photography as a medium literally took Jung back to the drawing board. “I decided to go all the way back to the beginning,” she says. “One of my professors had said, ‘When you’re an artist, whether you’re a sculptor, a painter or a jewelry maker, you have to know how to draw.’”

She moved into creating a body of work on cotton rag, primarily in charcoal and ink, sticking to the black-and-white aesthetic of the photography she so loved. Her subject matter in those early days was not so far removed from her current choice. “My senior thesis show was a series of insect drawings,” says Jung, “so it was a natural progression to go into botanical imagery.”

A piece currently created by Jung might read as a large photographic negative to the viewer. The flat black-and-white presentation reflects a depth in shadow reminiscent of classic darkroom techniques. Conversely, one might wonder if the illustration itself is digitized by the artist, with the final work printed on Mylar and then mounted onto a panel. Neither of these guesses would be accurate.

### ADD AND SUBTRACT

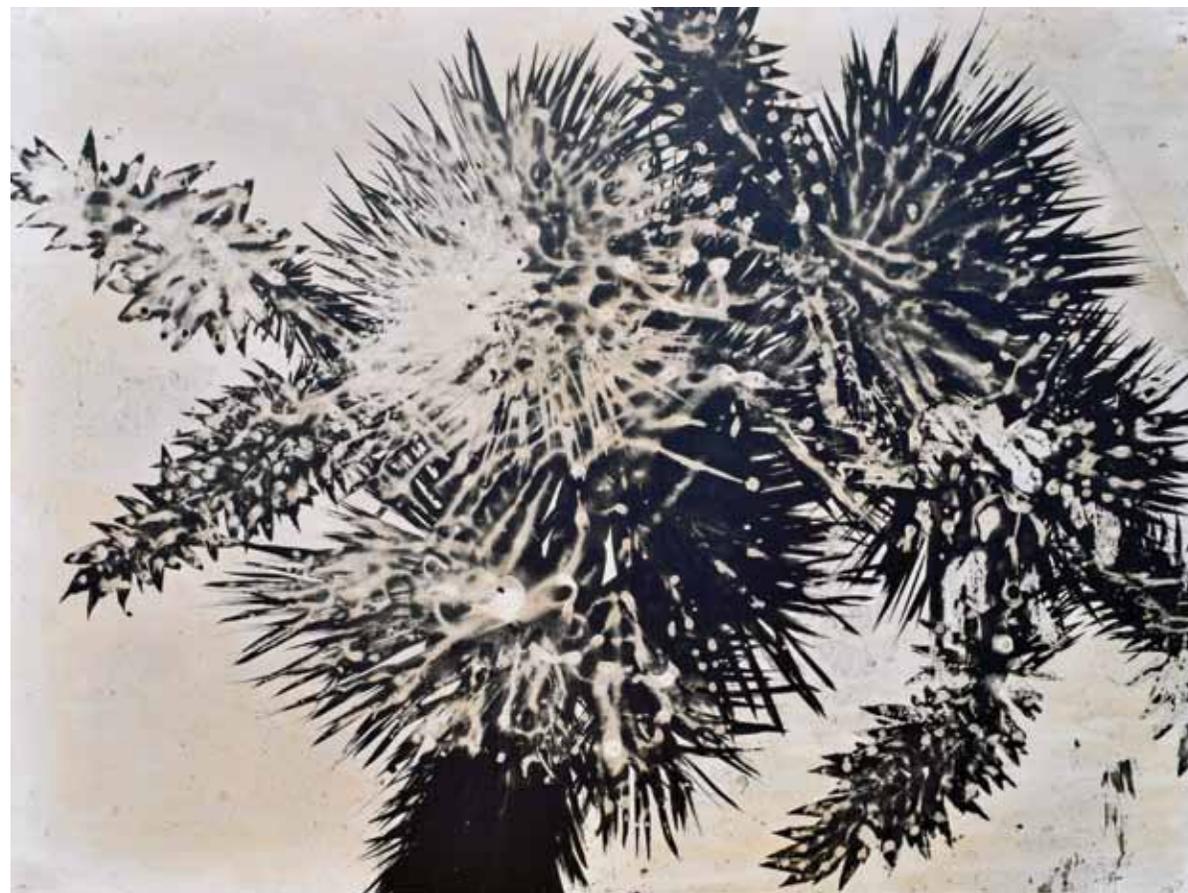
Using a Chinese calligraphy brush to apply sumi ink to a sheet of Mylar, Jung draws her subject in pure silhouette. What may seem to be a simple, routine beginning of the artist’s process is, in fact, the most arduous stage as she strives for a highly accurate depiction. “If a drawing doesn’t make the cut, it becomes a ‘carcass,’” she says, gesturing to the corner storage in her studio that boasts a stack of Mylar stained with sumi ink.

BELOW LEFT

**Beet**  
sumi ink, charcoal  
and pastel on Mylar  
on panel, 60x40

BELOW RIGHT

**Joshua**  
sumi ink, charcoal  
and pastel on Mylar  
on panel, 18x24



## NATURAL SETTING

Jung’s work speaks softly in muted tones, but the enlarged view of her organic subject matter carries a huge impact, as seen in this 2016 exhibition photo taken at the Denver Botanic Gardens. The ink and charcoal drawings seem fully at home among the natural foliage and, in fact, many of the artist’s works are based on photos taken in these gardens.

**Carrots**  
sumi ink and charcoal on  
Mylar on panel, 40x60

On the other hand, if a drawing sees completion, it’s laid flat, initiating a two-week drying process. During this period, Jung will eventually hang the nearly dried work in order to view where her next steps might lead—and these next steps are what contribute so heavily to Jung’s innovative approach.

Once a drawing has dried, the artist uses sandpaper to blend the ink into the Mylar and to distress the ink, creating what she calls a “halo effect” around the shape of the plant. Jung also starts applying charcoal at this stage, defining the form of the plant at a deeper level. Grattage—the removal or erasure of granulations—is another technique that comes into play, involving various tools or the use of water. The artist points out that her movements around the ink must be calculated, especially when they involve water, as it has an aggressive power to strip away pieces of the composition—but when the sweet spot is achieved, a finished work by Heidi Jung hangs in captivating repose. Presented in panel form, the raw organic image draws in the viewer through its sheer familiarity. Something as simple as a common beet presents an alluring design (see Beet, opposite).

### A QUIETLY STRIKING PRESENCE

Early on, Jung sought to marry attractive presentation with the best economical use of her medium. Artists seeking to gain a foothold and facing financial challenges may struggle with the expense of framing pieces they’ve



worked so hard to complete—and then there might also be shipping charges. “Framing and shipping can become really big problems,” says Jung, “between cost and breaking glass and all of that.”

She experimented with presentations that eliminated the need for framing. First she tried wrapping drawing paper around a canvas. “The canvas gave the piece stability,” says Jung, “but the paper was still free-floating on a stretcher. That proved to be rather delicate, so I abandoned the idea.” The lightning strike she needed was her discovery of sumi ink applied to Mylar, which she could adhere with adhesive to a panel.

In a gallery or exhibition setting, Jung’s large, unframed black-and-white panels featuring plant-based shapes quietly command attention (See *Natural Setting*, page 55). The undergrowth of leaves, stems, petals, thorns, seed pods, reeds and pieces of organic matter that form the surface of our natural environment are familiar and welcoming.

Michael Warren Contemporary, in Denver, has been displaying this artist’s work for six years. Gallery owner Mike McClung understands why his clientele connect to Jung’s aesthetic. “People relate to the botanical imagery and

connect her artwork with their own experiences in nature,” he says. Another element of her work is its approachability, “In the same way black-and-white photography is used to focus attention on a subject, Heidi uses a reduced palette of sumi ink and charcoal to calm the viewer’s senses,” McClung says.

### VIEWER INPUT

Jung professes that she more than likely will “forget the bloom,” focusing not on a flower but rather the structure that surrounds it. That doesn’t mean, however, that she shuns floral themes. “If someone wants a commissioned piece and tells me that hydrangeas are their favorite flower, I’m going to do my best to give them what they want,” she says. “I’m not so caught up in my aesthetic that I can’t collaborate.”

In the same manner, Jung is not so enamored of the simple elegance of black and white that she shuns color. On some pieces she applies pastel, adding an aura or “essence,” as she calls it, to the drawing. “It’s just a suggestion of what the subject’s life may have contributed to its surrounding world,” she says.



ABOVE  
**Meadow**  
sumi ink and charcoal  
on Mylar on two  
panels, 48x120

LEFT  
**Redirection**  
sumi ink, charcoal  
and pastel on Mylar  
on two panels; 48x84

More recently, a couple deeply admired her large-format piece *Meadow* (pages 56–57), at the time on display at Michael Warren Contemporary (currently hanging at Bryant Street Gallery, in Palo Alto, Calif.). They wondered whether Jung could take the theme—a meadow of botanicals, chosen more or less at the artist’s whim—and create a commissioned variation using plants native to Boulder, Colo., where the work would hang. “I loved that challenge,” says Jung, “because I knew it would be so personal—that I’d be able to reflect the clients’ own love of the earth so that they could relate to the work on a deeper level.”

**Ponderosa**

sumi ink and charcoal on Mylar on panel, 36x24



**FROM EARTH TO INSPIRATION**

Those who know Jung know she’s prone to pulling unusual weeds from public places—the shoulder of a road, for example—if only to transplant them onto her own property. She does it to witness a growth cycle, which allows her to see more stages of the plant. Her attention to detail, focused on botanicals for so long, carries into her art seamlessly.

Jung nurtures this love in her urban environment not just through her own gardening but by making frequent visits to the 23-acre Denver Botanic Gardens. She’ll often take photos on the property to serve as studies. She admits she’s drawn to the exotic plants of the tropics, their leaves somehow seeming a little prehistoric—a suggestion of how life on this planet has grown but also diminished.

Through vocational research enhanced by a lifelong passion for flora, Jung is only too aware of the fragile nature of her subjects. By celebrating the organic shapes and textures this earth has to offer, Jung seeks to educate viewers on what they might be overlooking and to take that awareness into the world so that they may see it better. “The earth is dying,” she says, “we lose pieces of it every day.” With the help of her drawings, however, the pieces are preserved and cherished. ♡

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PHOTO BY ELLA DASCALOS

**MEET THE ARTIST**

Heidi Jung began her college-level arts education with an emphasis on photography before switching to drawing. She holds a BFA degree from Metropolitan State University of Denver. Her drawings are widely exhibited in the Southwestern U.S. Michael Warren Contemporary, in Denver, and Bryant Street Gallery, in Palo Alto, Calif., represent her work.

▶ **LEARN MORE ABOUT JUNG AND VIEW VIDEOS OF THE ARTIST AT WORK AT [HEIDIJUNG.COM](http://HEIDIJUNG.COM).**