

For the Love of Marshes

By Junko Ono Rothwell

I painted this canvas (*Sunset on Creighton Island*, oil, 8 x 10 in.) just before sundown on Creighton Island, Georgia. I was standing on the causeway trying to capture the shifting colors of the sky and outlying marsh. The most dramatic time in a marsh is the “golden hour,” which is just before sundown. The salt marsh turns very bright.

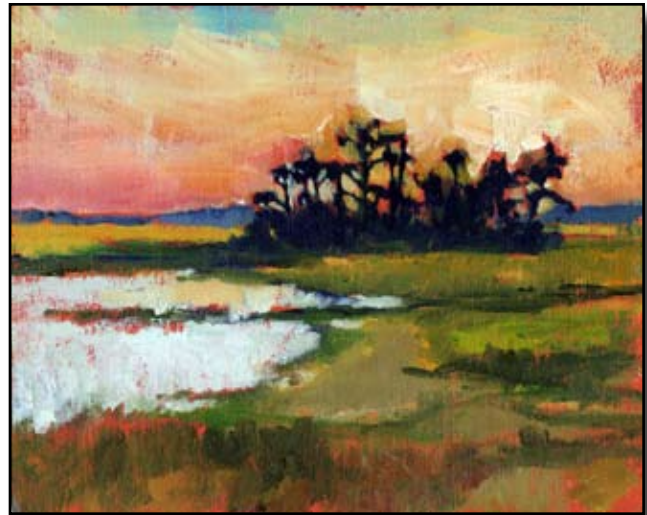
I’m always impressed at how the sun lights up the marsh and changes its colors and moods at different times of day and during different seasons of the year. Weather patterns also dramatically change the look of a marsh. In summer, I always love to paint big white clouds floating over the distant marsh. And in November, the marsh glows with a lovely yellow-orange cast.

You might think there is no light and shadow in this flat environment, but when the sun goes down behind the trees on the shore, one can see the long shadows of the trees. As the shadows grow longer they cover the marsh. These strong contrasts of light and shadow, and the rising water level at high tide, make for interesting and ever-changing compositions to paint *en plein air*.

The coastal marsh is my favorite subject. I grew up on the Inland Sea in Japan, where there are thousands of small islands, but no marshes. Still, the ocean breeze of the salt marsh reminds me of home.

Creighton Island is small, around two miles long and one mile wide, and is surrounded by salt marsh. It lies between the larger barrier islands and the mainland. I have painted there for one week in November for the last two years.

The island can only be reached by a barge.



You can imagine our all-women group lugging painting gear, a one-week supply of food and sleeping bags on the barge! We have to wait for high tide to cross over—the barge can only pass through the narrow channels at high tide, and we cannot carry our gear through the mud.

The island is uninhabited except for some resident cows, deer and wild boars. As we hike around under the ancient live oaks with our painting gear, I realize how lucky we are to have the whole place to ourselves. I could not be happier than to paint marshes every day.