



Pooja Chatterji holds her painting called "Kayaks in Reine, Norway" with many of her other paintings in view.



These two paintings, *Sunflowers a Study* (left) and *Oranges and a Cup*, are studies in still life from the Michele Urselli workshop.

The Colorful World of Pooja Chatterji

With a nod to painter Vincent van Gogh, South Barrington artist Pooja Chatterji creates oil paintings in vibrant color and with bold brushstrokes that reflect her adventurous travels around the world

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POOJA CHATTERJI always wanted to be an artist. One of her earliest school projects was recreating Vincent van Gogh's "Starry Night" painting using strands of colored rope. She did well in school, and by age 16, had to decide if she would attend art school, or not. "I had some trepidation about pursuing art school and an art career," Chatterji said. Many in her family are physicians, including her father, uncle, and brother, but medicine was not her goal as a teenager. She also didn't want to study engineering or science, so she chose economics with a focus on statistics and accounting. It would be decades later that her children and husband would give her the encouragement she needed to return to painting.

A MULTI-CULTURAL CHILDHOOD

Chatterji was born in Pune, India, a city in the western region of Maharashtra. As a child, pursuing higher education was expected for her future, as both of her parents were well-educated. Her father is a retired pediatric physician, and her mom, an educator. "My parents encouraged me to work towards becoming self-sufficient, independent," Chatterji said. "Getting married was not the primary goal for me at the time."

Her parents are Punjabi Hindu refugees from Pakistan, having fled their home country in 1947 during the violent Partition of India, whereby the British changed the political borders to create two dominions—India



Pooja Chatterji has taken painting lessons at the Main Street Gallery's Art School in Lake Zurich for many years. Here, she shares her oil paint palette and is seen with school mentor Susan Ploughe.

and Pakistan—and then departed from its rule. This partition caused large-scale loss of life, warring, and massive migrations.

“My parents, both teenagers at the time, left with their families,” Chatterji said. “They left behind everything, and only took what they could carry on their backs. They sewed small valuables into their clothing. This caused life to become a hand-to-mouth existence, one that took great luck and perseverance to survive. It was a horrifying experience that lives on in their psyches. They started over in western and central India, where they were educated, and after meeting through family friends, and got married and had two children.”

MOVING TO YORKSHIRE, ENGLAND

At age three, Chatterji's family moved to England, where she attended elementary school along with her brother. The move was prompted by her father's desire to pursue advanced medical training and specialization in pediatrics. Her mom taught at a state-run school.

A German couple taught at the private school that the children attended. Voracious reading and learning how to advocate for yourself were part of day-to-day life.

The family spent several years there until Chatterji's paternal grandfather fell ill, and her dad would need to take over his medical practice in their home country. At age 9, Chatterji was back in India. There, she did well in school and chose to forego her childhood interest in making art. At her high school, age 16 was the time to decide your future studies. She set out to study the field of commerce, focusing on accounting and statistics in her undergraduate years. She thought about becoming a banker or accountant.

EARNING HER PH.D.

It was Chatterji's brother who wanted to go abroad first and move from India to the United States for his undergraduate degree. This laid the seed for Chatterji to look into further studies in the United States. With encouragement from their parents, Chatterji decided to also make the move, but her studies were now at the graduate level, and she had earned a scholarship to attend the University of Cincinnati for economics; the financing made it possible for her to go. There, she earned her Ph.D. in Economics, specializing in “International Economics”, which would become the foundation for a job in teaching.

It was in Cincinnati that Chatterji met her husband, Raja, who was studying for his Medical degree. The two met by chance at a welcome party for international students. Their fate was quickly sealed, and in time, the two returned to India to be married. While her husband was in Residency in New Orleans, training to become a OB-GYN with a subspecialty in Urogynecology, Chatterji taught Intermediary Economics at Southeastern Louisiana University.

SWEET HOME CHICAGO

Pooja and Raja Chatterji enjoyed visiting Chicago several times and decided to move there, looking to the suburbs for a home. Having earned his Medical degree and specialization, Dr. Raja Chatterji started in Elgin at the then-St. Joseph Hospital. The couple had two sons, and while a busy mom, Chatterji also taught Executive MBA and International Economics classes at DePaul's various campus locations. They lived in Lake in the Hills at the time. Eventually, Chatterji left her teaching job to run the family medical practice for a few years.

In 1999, the family moved to South Barrington as they both enjoy nature and the outdoors. The thriving, culturally diverse community in South Barrington was welcoming to the Chatterji family. The Barrington 220 School District also fostered a strong sense of community, especially through student sports and book clubs. Chatterji volunteered at Hough Street School and Rose Elementary School. She also was the president of the student-focused Barrington Council for the Gifted and Talented.

PICKING UP HER BRUSHES

In her early school years back in India, Chatterji won awards for her artwork on state exams. But her painting was left behind until only a few years ago, when a friend gave her some art supplies while she was pregnant with her first child. "I didn't even know where to buy art supplies," she said. Before picking up her brushes, Chatterji says she found joy by expressing her creativity through family events and decorating her home, yet she felt like she was missing something.

It was her husband and children who encouraged her to go back to art. She painted at home for a while, but happened upon an art school in Lake Zurich, where she found an art mentor and another teacher who taught technique. The Main Street Gallery Art School has been Chatterji's weekly go-to for several years. There she paints with fellow students and her skills continue to evolve. "They allow you to flourish in your own unique way, while still teaching you technique and experimentation." She recently attended a painting workshop in Seattle with renowned artist Michele Usibelli, who helped Chatterji improve on starting her paintings using a subject's focal point.



Dirty Laundry (9" x 12")

After taking this photo of drying laundry in Mexico City for painting, Chatterji learned the story behind this humble scene. The laundry belongs to people who were forcibly displaced from their homes. They set up their camps near government buildings in open protest to their treatment.

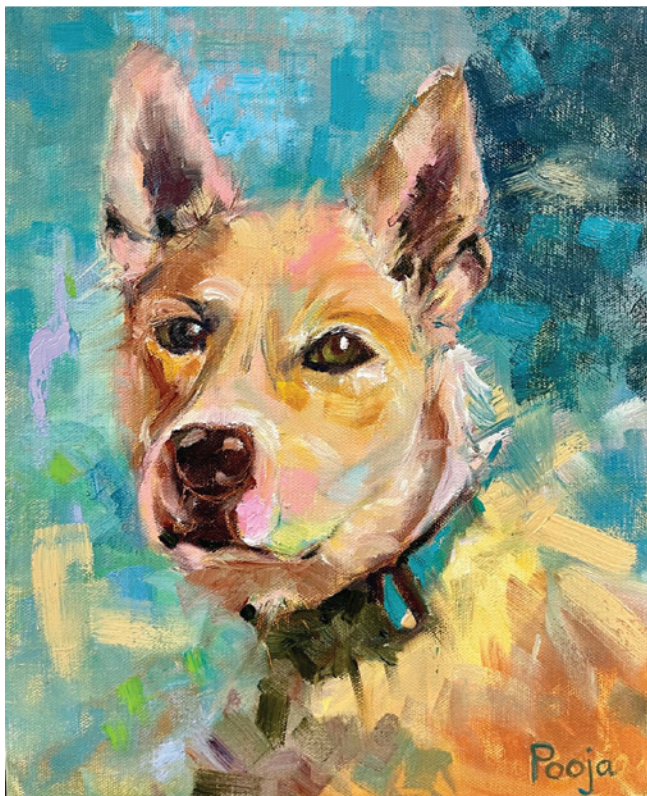


Barrel Racer (22" x 28")

"Painting horses is a challenge for me, and I haven't done many figures either," Chatterji said. Here, she chose three elements to paint—a barrel race with the horse, the rider, and the horse in motion.

Palm Trees (11" x 14")
A scene captured on camera by Chatterji is transformed into a painting. She took this photo while cruising the Nile River in Egypt where lush clumps of palm trees framed the riverbanks.





Puppy (12" x 16")

"This young puppy, Nemo, a rescue, belongs to my son. I start the painting with the eyes as my focal point, and then I seek to capture the pet's personality," Chatterji said.

Succulent Fantasy (20" x 20")

A close-up of agave and echeveria cactus are showcased in a cool palette. The artist used the *alla prima* painting style, which is a wet-on-wet approach whereby wet paint is applied to previous layers of still-wet paint, often in a single sitting. Over the years, the technique has been adopted and adapted by artists from Vincent van Gogh to Velázquez.



UNMISTAKABLE STYLE

Once you see some of Pooja Chatterji's oil paintings, with their vibrant colors, textured paint applications, and engaging subjects, you'll recognize her work anywhere. You'll get to know her palette. Each painting is completely unique, as she will not repeat her subjects. On a recent trip to Arles, a city on the Rhône River in the Provence region of Southern France, she saw the world as Vincent van Gogh did. "He always fascinated me," she said of van Gogh. "You can see his brushstrokes, feel his colors. I call him an expressionist, as he used his style of color and technique to express an emotional experience."

LIVING IN COLOR

Chatterji travels the world with her husband and takes photos that will later become the subjects of her paintings. She enjoys capturing and sharing her adventures through her oil paintings, and believes the effort opens the soul and helps bring the world closer together. She also believes in the healing power of being an artist.

"I feel very happy when painting with color," Chatterji says. "If I am feeling stressed, just lifting my arm to a canvas will calm me."

As Chatterji looks to the future, her artistic goals include doing more art shows and competitions where she can meet other artists. "I'd like honest critiques of my work, and to be part of a larger art community," she said.

In her official artist's statement at a recent show, Chatterji shares her passion. "I literally dream in color—one brush stroke at a time. My passion for travel has given me endless references for my paintings. Even on the dreariest of days, I feel surrounded by vibrant colors. I hope you enjoy a sample of my artwork, as much as I have relished my time at the easel."

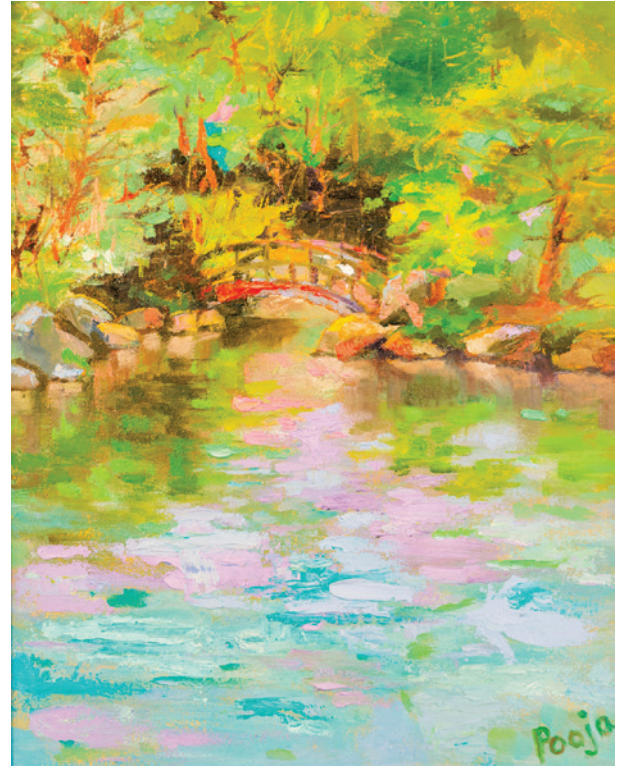
Pooja Chatterji is an Associate Member of OPA (Oil Painters of America) and the Barrington Area Artists Association. Follow her on Instagram @poojaspaintbrush, and on Facebook at Pooja's Paintbrush. Visit [Etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com) and search for Pooja Chatterji's paintings which are for sale on the site.



Rishi and Shreya Chatterji, Pooja and Raja Chatterji, and Sahil Chatterji.



Kayaks in Reine, Norway (22" x 28")
Chatterji likes painting boats. Her daughter-in-law took the photo in Reine, Norway, a local fishing village. *Reine* is located on the island of Moskenesøya on northern Norway's Lofoten archipelago.



Japanese Bridge in Chicago Botanical Gardens (12" x 16")
The Japanese garden is a symbol of a bridge between the sometimes-arduous path of life to a calmer, more serene place.



Desert Cactus (12" x 16")
The striking organ pipe and saguaro cactus offered Chatterji an opportunity to mix cool and warm palettes together. The arms of the cactus and thorniness of the blades invited a variety of changing color values for the artist. This painting was submitted in an Instagram Artist Challenge.



Coneflowers (12" x 16")
Chatterji took this image of echinacea in Longmeadow Garden in Minneapolis. Sunflowers are her favorite flowers to paint, and these have a very similar structure. In this painting of her photograph, she pushed the boundaries of color saturation.