

## Mad about the earth: the exuberant art of Joëlle Kem Lika

French artist Joëlle Kem Lika uses her art to celebrate nature and encourage us all to value the planet we live on. She held a successful exhibition in London before Christmas and interest in her work is growing this side of the Channel



*Pictured above: Luminescences, 110x200cms, acrylic on canvas. Joëlle Kem Lika loves vibrant colour and says her paintings are a celebration of the natural world. She has three galleries in France: in Paris, Burgundy and Aquitaine. [www.la-lila.com](http://www.la-lila.com). Prices from 800 to 5,000 euros.*

Joelle Kem Lika is an artist whose work is life affirming, and that's in no small part down to her love of vibrant colour. And what drives her, she says, is her wish to encourage people to prize the natural world.

'I draw my inspiration entirely from nature,' she says, 'and I want to defend our planet by means of my paintings. I try to capture the strength of life - the force of the sea, the vibrancy of life in the ocean, the delight to be had from flowers, skies, sunsets.'

And she says her technique is to paint from a close angle 'because that puts us in touch with the great painters - such as Manet, or French impressionist painter Berthe Morisot, and Raoul Dufy, whose work I've always loved for its intensity and the joy he took in colour.'





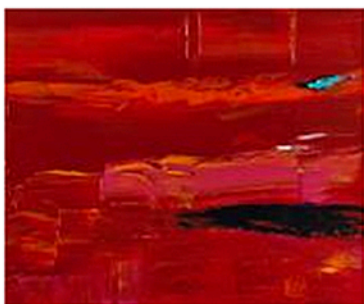
Kem Lika hopes she is not derivative but says to see references in her work to other painters is something she's comfortable with, because she has been immersed in art and has been inspired by many great painters.

'Turner, for the light in his watercolours...American painter Joan Mitchell for the audacity of her abstracts and Georgia O'Keeffe for her flowers and her abstracts, which are masterly,' she says.

Kem Lika sells widely in France, the US and Germany, and is delighted that people like her work and are willing to pay for it. 'But I don't paint for an audience, I paint for myself. It's a kind of meditation, it's positive and appealing.'

The artist, who has three galleries in France, studied at art school for a couple of years in her 20s but went on to train as a **psychotherapist** and did not return to art school until she was 41. 'But all the time art was a passion for me.'

She says although paintings can simply be things of beauty, she does try to communicate a point. 'For example I want to celebrate feminine energy and the 'My Surf Dreaming' paintings combine the modernity of the woman surfer embracing life and the ancestral aboriginal painting style - so what I'm getting at is that profound female energy that has always been a force for good in the world.'





And many fans say her paintings of flowers, which look as if they're utterly liberated and letting their hair down, transmit **ebullience** and **joy**; while Kem Lika says she is trying to communicate through her **sea paintings** our capacity to rise above fear. 'I don't paint a dangerous, hostile ocean, on the contrary I see the sea as warm, as a carrier of life... People feel this positive message I think.'

She says the emotion in her work comes from not standing back and looking on, but by painting from the perspective of being in a situation - so she's imagining what it would be like to be in a wave, or 'to be a ladybug inside the flower.'

'Over time my style has become more defined and I choose to centre my subjects very closely.'

**'The materials artists use does have an environmental impact..but paintings have a long life'**

Kem Lika uses **watercolours** on paper, Chinese and coloured inks on paper, and **acrylic paints** on canvas, wood or paper. She doesn't like oil paint because of its strong odours. 'And I like to mix egg yolk with pigments, that's the old way...'

And while artists' materials may not be the most eco-friendly, she feels the **longevity** of paintings makes art worthwhile. 'They have a long life. A painting crosses time and it goes on transmitting a positive energy to those who behold it. That's what remarkable about art.'

