

Fukuhara: Cultivating Talent in Watercolor

By ROBERT WINTERNITZ

Our North Fork artists are certainly a mixed bag. They come from all over and it is hard to find any two remotely alike. None is more of an individualist than Henry Fukuhara.

To start with, the man did not do any painting until after a long successful business career as a greengrocer, nurseryman, landscape architect and contractor. He did not even own any paints or brushes until he was recovering from a hernia operation about 10 years ago, when he decided to fuss around with water colors to fill the void. In a surprisingly short time his work appeared not only all over Long Island but in many different parts of the country.

It all adds up to quite a saga. Henry Fukuhara was born in Los Angeles in 1913 of parents who both came from Hiroshima. His father emigrated from Japan before the turn of the century. He was a farmer who turned nurseryman. On a trip back to his native land he married a girl from his home town. Henry was the first of their seven children.

The youngster did not speak a word of English until he went to kindergarten. Today, unlike most people born of immigrant parents, his English is perfect. He could pass for a college teacher anywhere, although he had no further schooling after graduating from high school in 1931. Having worked during off hours as a greengrocer in a vegetable market, it was a natural step to go to work in his father's wholesale nursery.

Conditions were desperate. The great

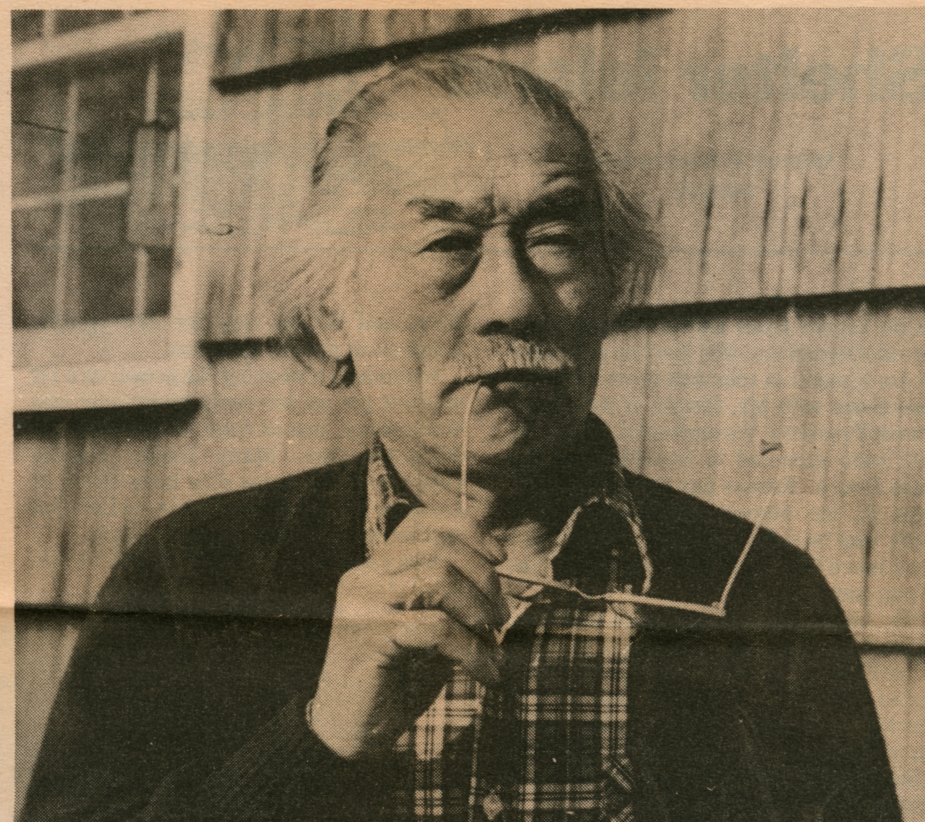
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depression was in full swing. His father was burdened by a huge inventory, but customers were simply not buying. So it was decided to open a retail nursery, which did not work either. Finally, young Henry had the idea of going out and looking for landscaping jobs to move the merchandise. Eventually it worked and the business became a solid success, with Henry running the retail end and one of his brothers the wholesale.

Intered by Government

In 1938 Henry Fukuhara married a Japanese girl from Hawaii. Little did they know there was trouble ahead and that the advent of World War II in 1941 would bring their happy world to an end—at least temporarily. All the Fukuharas were interned in the nearest "relocation camp," which was a pleasant euphemism for Concentration Camp. After about a year of internment, Henry Fukuhara was allowed to go out and work. He found a job on a sugar beet farm up in Idaho, where he worked from April to November 1943 going back to camp just in time for Thanksgiving.

The following January he was job hunting again but finding it hard to turn



HENRY FUKUHARA

up anything of interest. He tried Chicago without any luck; ditto in New York. The young man was at the end of his rope when the War Relocation Authority came up with a job that was positively made to order; namely, to run a green house in Farmingdale on the estate of Dr. Calderone, then Deputy Health Commissioner. He was joined by his father and one of his brothers.

In less than a year the Fukuharas bought a place in Deer Park and set up a nursery there, which Henry ran with two of his brothers. It became a highly profitable operation and is still going

strong. When Henry decided to retire a year and a half ago, his two brothers bought him out, but he is still giving them a day or two of his time every week.

When that hernia operation got Henry into water color painting back in 1972, the convalescent made a disturbing discovery; namely, that there is a big distinction between wanting to paint and knowing how. There was obviously only one solution: take lessons. This he proceeded to do under several distinguished painters. Before long the fledgling painter was on his own, first coming up with realistic renderings characteristic of representational art and then gradually slipping into an abstract style all his own.

An Artist-Teacher

The results speak for themselves, since Fukuhara water colors have been hung in dozens of galleries, museums and educational institutions from coast to coast and have won many awards and prizes. Mr. Fukuhara is equally original and effective as a teacher. He has developed his own techniques to demonstrate brushwork. For example, he shows ways of painting different shades of the same color by exhibiting a line drawing before his class and then adding overlays, each with a different degree and kind of shading. This procedure gets a lot better results than just talking.

Henry Fukuhara is still living with his wife in Deer Park, but their four children are all graduated from college and on their own. He continues to commute to the North Fork for his artistic activities and his water colors continue to win their way in the world of art.



Kaniji Dornoto