

The Paintings of

# BOB KANE

People and Places

Essay by Richard J. Boyle



RIZZOLI  
NEW YORK



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In the letters I received from Audrey Hepburn she often used the word happy, even closing a letter “with happy Thanks.” I feel she put a high value on happiness like Matisse and Renoir, who suffered physically but painted happy subjects. Her good friend Connie Wald once said to me, “I love flowers because they are beautiful, noble, innocent, and happy.” And like a flower herself, Audrey gave us these qualities in her life and films.

This book is dedicated to her with happy thanks.

## **BOB KANE**

### **Marincanto II**

Positano, Italy, 2001

60 x 50"

Harmon-Meek Gallery

## THE PAINTINGS OF BOB KANE: PEOPLE and PLACES

*In my work I try to catch that moment of high spirits, that exhilaration when one is wildly in love with life. . . . My goal as an artist is to add to those moments of Joy.*

—Bob Kane

In February of 2000, Bob Kane had his twelfth one-man exhibition at the Harmon-Meek Gallery in Naples, Florida. The show was titled *New Paintings of Italy* and included *Portofino Dawn*, done in 2000, a brilliant evocation in bright yellow, green, and pink of that hillside village and its romantic harbor. His fountain series, painted in 2000, was also featured, including *Piazza Navona*, *Fountain of the Four Rivers*, and *Tritone Fountain, Rome* in which he captures crowds of young people in tones of white, cerulean blue, yellow ochre, and a modified burnt sienna derived from the color of ancient Roman buildings. These paintings seem to capture and almost sum up the underlying themes of this book: Kane's sense of place, his feeling for people and his command of an expressive, poetic, and colorful palette by which his vivid images are conveyed, and which barely contain that sense of jubilation which is the benchmark of his painting.<sup>1</sup>

Bob Kane certainly gets plenty of paint on his canvases, as well as on his easel, his clothes, the floor, occasionally the furniture and sometimes even the cat. This is not because he is sloppy, but because he is enthusiastic, totally involved, and passionate about the art and act of painting. “Le Bonheur,” wrote the art critic of *Nice Matin* about Kane’s 1990 exhibition at the Musée de St. Paul de Vence, “c’est simple comme un coup de pinceau!”<sup>2</sup> However, it is more than *un coup de pinceau* that gives Kane’s painting its exuberance, its festivity: it is his color. For Kane, painting and color are synonymous—color is not only real, but palpable. Indeed, his palette is dominated by strong, intense, or bright pigments, from the sharp luminosity of the cadmium colors, the hues of reds, oranges, yellows, to the sonorous tones of ultramarine blue and the cobalts—blue, violet, green—and more recently, resonant earth tones, all of which convey his delight, his pleasure, and perhaps his need to paint in those joyous tones. However, this joy, and the seeming spontaneity with which it is achieved, is the result of many years of hard work and a serious concern for structure as well as color. His work has structure—even when not always apparent—and an abstract sense of form, the manipulation and intensity of which forcibly expresses an equal sense of emotion and passion.



Fig. 4 Opposite: Detail of paint palette in Kane's studio  
Fig. 5 Luigi: Bob and Eva's cat

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Kane attended children's art classes at the Cleveland Museum School where he received his initial exposure to drawing and painting, and where he remembers copying a reproduction of Gauguin's *White Horse* (now in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris), a painting that obviously had a lasting effect. Later he took classes at the Cleveland Institute of Art. After graduation from high school, he enrolled in Cornell University, but left after a year to study painting; from then on there was no turning back. His first influence was the sculptor Chaim Gross (1904–1991) whose expressive and robust carved forms, as well as his collection of African sculpture, left a deep and indelible impression on the artist. Kane met the celebrated sculptor through the latter's daughter, Mimi, with whom he became friendly in the summer of 1956 on a trip to Provincetown, Massachusetts. Like many members of the New York art and intellectual community, Gross had a summer house and studio there. Kane soon became a part of the family and the sculptor took an interest in his work. It was Kane's first trip to that town on the tip of Cape Cod, which would later become the first of the many "places" he would absorb and interpret; it is the place he associates with "the beginning of becoming a painter."<sup>3</sup>

Provincetown is a long sprawling town of white New England clapboard houses and, not unlike the artist colony at Rockport on Cape Ann, a cluster of fishing shacks. It is built around Commercial Street and surrounded by heathland and sand dunes that end in miles of extraordinary beaches, all of which are pervaded by a clear and brilliant light. As a result, Provincetown became immensely popular with artists and writers. In 1898 Charles Hawthorne (1872–1930) established his Cape Cod School of Art there and in the 1930s Hans Hofmann (1880–1966) taught a rising group of Abstract Expressionists in his Provincetown studio. In the 1920s it was the home of Eugene O'Neill and the Provincetown Players.



At the end of the summer of 1956, Kane followed the Gross family back to New York where, at Gross's urging, he began studying at the Art Students League. The League, founded in 1875, is one of the most famous studio art schools in the country and a celebrated training ground for generations of American artists. Kane enrolled at the League under George Grosz (1893–1959) and Will Barnet, and although he was fascinated by Grosz's biting linear and expressionist style, it was Barnet, a widely respected long-time artist-teacher there, who became the single most important influence in Kane's career. The enthusiasm was mutual. "The very first time I saw Bob Kane's work," Barnet wrote, "I recognized his unique talent. His painting had an energy and an explosive force. This combined with an underlined passion for nature in all its elements has dominated his work throughout his career."<sup>4</sup>

Will Barnet (b. 1911) is an artist of great strength, as well as surpassing elegance; an artist with an unmistakable personal style. And he was a charismatic and dedicated teacher who gave his students a sense that they were part of a great tradition; he brought to life the work of the masters old and new, East and West, abstract and figurative, as he explored the problems of form and its interpretation. Barnet is an artist who seeks harmony and balance, characteristics of the best of the classicism in which he so firmly believes. From him Kane learned structure and the control of space and depth while maintaining the integrity of the picture plane. This was difficult to master at first. Kane is spontaneous with a passion for a fast and furious style of painting with which Barnet's more disciplined approach was hard to reconcile, but it ultimately served him well. While absorbing those valuable structural lessons, he began to break away from the elegant severity of Barnet's style in order to follow a more personal path. Gradually, his innate feeling for color emerged and became a signature of his work, along with a more spontaneous execution and

freedom of manner. Kane's free gestural style merged perfectly with his response to places, especially certain kinds of places—"places in the sun"—where color and light seduce the senses. There is a watercolor of Provincetown in the author's collection that reveals this reconciliation of discipline with spontaneity and response to place. Its subject is a still life on a windowsill looking out to sea with sailboats on the horizon; it is painted in a saturated ultramarine blue contrasted with cadmium orange and yellow and the white of the paper, held in check by the structure of the composition and the placement of the forms. Yet it beautifully captures the feeling of open space and clarity of light that is so much a part of Cape Cod.



Fig. 9 **Snake Charmer, Dancer and Musician**  
Marrakesh, 1997  
11 x 14"



The watercolor is dated 1967; in that year and the one following, Kane spent a lot of concentrated time in Provincetown, where he was beginning to establish himself as a professional artist and where he met many of the theater people who would later collect his work, in particular the wonderful actor/writer Frederick Kimball. During this extended period in Provincetown, he began to use his watercolors as the basis for future oil paintings (indeed, the fluidity of many of his paintings in oil are probably a result of his use of watercolor first, a practice he continues to this day). It was a practice that enabled him to capture a feeling for place and would lead to pages of rapid sketches and drawings in ink as well, some of which, such as *Sail, Positano* and *Romans at Tritone Fountain* would become large oil paintings; some, such as *Kasbah* and *Sevilla, Flamenco Dancers*, would stand on their own. Provincetown was also the beginning of Kane's acute feeling for place—his sense of a locale—whether it is Provence or Positano, or his apartment/studio overlooking the Hudson River in New York City.



Fig. 10 **Romans by Tritone Fountain**  
Rome, Italy, 1990  
60 x 50"



Fig. 11. **Sail, Positano**  
Positano, Italy, 1990  
14 x 11"

To this artist who loves light and color—this latter-day Fauvist—place is very important, especially those places near the water. “I love daylight and natural light here by the river,” he said of his studio in New York, “and the way it plays on the texture of paint.” And for him the light “on flowers and landscape by the sea or a room by the sea, the most difficult of compositions . . . can for me evoke the happiness of nature. This excites me tremendously.”<sup>5</sup> The actual geographical area that excites him the most and the one he has returned to again and again for over thirty years is the Mediterranean. Kane’s Mediterranean—his visual universe—ranges from Paris and the south of France to Italy, Spain, Greece, and North Africa; from Nice and St. Paul de Vence to Positano and Naples; from Cannes to Rome; and from Venice to the Medina of Fez. His favorite places to paint are Nice and its environs and Positano and the area around Naples, areas that seem to call for his spontaneity of execution, lively brushwork and above all, variegated color, intense in hue and rich in tone. It is, he feels, the only way to capture that atmosphere, but above all, it allows him the freedom to pursue the sheer delight of paint and painting for its own sake. From Nice comes the inspiration for the artist’s exuberant flower still lifes. It is as if that city’s famous *Marché aux Fleurs* has been transported to the artist’s studio, as though the joyous profusion of form and color of these paintings had just been thrown together the morning he painted them! Nice is also the city of Matisse and Chagall; it is where there are museums devoted to their art, and where Matisse and Dufy are buried and, where, in the Museum of the City of Nice on the elegant *Promenade des Anglais*, Kane was given a special exhibition. In the catalogue for that exhibition, Jean Mouraille, the director of the museum writes, “This quality [of color] . . . permits him to express with happiness, not only nature, but also (and this touches us closely), images of the *Cote d’Azur*.”<sup>6</sup>



And he has made many friends in all of these places, friends who share the sheer exuberance of his painting and who make it possible for him to paint with that sense of joy. Although Kane does not paint portraits, people are as important to him as the places he so loves to paint (there is a human, as well as humanist presence that informs all of his work—whether landscape, still life or genre scene). His work is influenced not only by his collectors, but also by the people who populate the places he paints: the mayor of St. Paul de Vence, a *gondeliere* in Venice, a *bateau-mouche* operator in Paris, a restaurant owner in Cannes (Noël Olivero at Au Mal Assis).

And, of course, his work has been profoundly influenced by many great artists with whom he feels an affinity. Although Will Barnet was his official teacher, like all artists Kane gravitated to the work of a number of masters whose painting inspired him. These artists range from Titian to Delacroix and Turner (Kane's Venice is the Venice of Turner's amazing misty and ephemeral paintings); from Monet and Renoir to Matisse, Bonnard, and Dufy—especially Matisse—all of whom are very much associated with the Mediterranean.

For despite any distortions, or rather stylizations in his work, and despite his early fascination with George Grosz, Kane's is not a German Expressionist sensibility; there is no biting acerbic line, no angst. Rather, his is more of a life-enhancing Mediterranean sensibility—his kinship is with the pastoral tradition revived in sixteenth-century Venice in the work of Titian and Giorgione, popularized in the seventeenth century by Claude Lorrain and reinterpreted in the early twentieth century by Matisse. Kane's affinities lie less with Kirchner's *Die Strasse* (Museum of Modern Art, New York) and more with Matisse's *Joie de Vivre* (Barnes Collection, Merion, Pennsylvania). After Provincetown, the geographic area that meant the most to him was the south of France—Provence and the Cote d'Azur.

Encouraged and influenced by his wife Eva, who grew up in a French-speaking section of Brussels, Kane soon developed an extraordinary feeling for the area.<sup>7</sup> Provence and the Côte d'Azur are not only steeped in history, both French and Mediterranean, it is a region that has attracted artists and writers since at least the mid-nineteenth century. The Romans established major settlements there, the remains of which still stand: the incredible Pont du Gard, the great aqueduct that supplied water to the town of Nimes in the first century B.C., and in Nimes, the Maison Carrée which Thomas Jefferson used as a model for his state capitol at Richmond, Virginia. Not far from Aix-en-Provence stands the Pont Julian, a bridge still in use after two thousand years; Aix, which was Cézanne's hometown, was an important Roman spa. Today Cézanne's studio is preserved and his painting sites are indicated on a special tourist walk.

Monet, Braque, and Picasso also lived and worked in the area. These associations, like those with Delacroix's studio in Paris, are full of meaning for Kane. In many of



Fig. 17 Au Mal Assis Restaurant (1914)  
Cannes, France



his paintings he connects with those artists, historical and near contemporary, who have celebrated the same things: sensuous subject matter, exuberant technique, and a love of light and color. Provence and the Côte d'Azur seem to bring all that out—especially light and color. Even Henry James recognized the luminosity which characterized the region, an aspect he termed “pictorial effect.” As he wrote in 1883 on his way to the Pont du Gard: “I became more intimate with that Provençal charm . . . which glowed in the sweet sunshine and the white rocks and lurked in the smoke puffs of the little olives.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1968, the year of his first one-man show at the Bertha Schaeffer Gallery in New York, Kane made the first of many trips to the South of France. “We started visiting Provence before the Peage was developed between Aix-en-Provence and the coast. . . . In August of 1968 we first arrived at Nice airport. In those days the airport was small and surrounded by flowers and palm trees and it smelled of roses, olives, and *herbes de Provence*. We drove to Vence and stayed at the Hotel Regina with its garden full of orange and palm trees; roses and bougainvillea.” Like Dufy, it might be said of Kane that he “found himself” in the Riviera hill town of Vence, the town where Matisse completed his last great work—the little chapel he designed for the Dominican nuns. *Room over Garden, Vence* (fig. 18) was painted from his room in the hotel—it is a favorite theme (his “room by the sea”), one he used many times in Provincetown and elsewhere, influenced by such artists as Bonnard, Milton Avery, and Richard Diebenkorn, in addition to Matisse.

The Kanes soon discovered St. Paul de Vence. St. Paul, when Kane painted there, had “orchards of orange and lemon trees; cypress, palms, and purple oleander; ancient villas and mills [built] on a gradual slope towards the sea. And in the flowers, the landscape, the sea, along with people congregating in the cafes, I found a

magical world to express.” Part of that magic was the village *boule* court, which was a meeting place for the village. Much of the social life of St. Paul de Vence took place there, presided over by Marius Issert, the mayor, who was a champion *boule* player; when he and the actor/singer Yves Montand, who lived nearby, challenged each other it was a major event. Monsieur Marius, as he was called, was one of Kane’s “people” and in 1972 when he was given a one-man show in at the Musée de St. Paul. According to the artist, it was part of his introduction to French culture and his attraction to France and to St. Paul “had a lot to do with the *boule* court at St. Paul.”<sup>9</sup> Throughout the seventies and eighties, Kane and his wife continued to visit the south of France and St. Paul and his first exhibition at the museum there was a significant milestone in his career, particularly in reference to support for his work.

Although Kane has had work scholarships at the Art Students League and the Pratt Institute, and although he has taught painting and art history at the Hewitt School in New York and New York University (the former for three years and the latter for one year), he has been lucky in having strong interest and consistent support beginning around 1969. That year he had a one-man exhibition at the Ankrum Gallery in Los Angeles at which paintings were bought by Mrs. Jerry Wald (wife of the film producer), who became one of his staunchest supporters and a dear friend. Wald introduced his work to her many friends in the film world, including Audrey Hepburn, and helped to establish him in California.<sup>10</sup> His paintings were also bought by Edward Broida, the adventurous and independent-minded collector who has built an extraordinary collection of contemporary art. Broida, who likes to

Fig. 19 Les Boules  
Yves Montand, Georges G ret, Lino Ventura, and Marius Issert (Le Maire-St. Paul de Vence)  
St. Paul de Vence, France  
Phototh que Municipale de Saint Paul/Jacques Gomot



buy the work of young artists (“mountaintops” he calls them),<sup>11</sup> has maintained an interest in Kane’s work and has become one of his closest friends. Kane considers him a collector who is “totally independent with a passion for art, and one who could change the course of art history.” He bought Kane’s charming standing portrait of Eva and their cat, done in his linear style of that time and titled *Winter in New York* (fig. 22). Soon after, Paul Benedict began buying the many paintings he gave to his theater friends as wedding presents and gifts. In 1970 Kane had a one-man exhibition at the Galerie Marcel Bernheim in Paris, a gallery associated with some of the great names in French art. Also in that year, Joseph Hirshhorn bought paintings of Vence and St. Paul de Vence; as Mrs. Hirshhorn points out in her preface to this book, it was Joe Hirshhorn who introduced her to Kane’s work.

In 1972 at the opening of his first exhibition at the Musée de St. Paul de Vence, he received the following telegram: “if still available would like to buy pictures 4 5 7 11



Fig. 20 Mrs. Jerry Wald with Bob



Fig. 21 from right to left Edward J. Broida, Alexa Broida, Gisèle Galante with Bob

call collect Rome warmest admiration.” The telegram was from Audrey Hepburn Dotti, who bought the first of many of Kane’s paintings from this exhibition. “Her relationship with Bob Kane has been lifelong,” writes her son Sean Hepburn Ferrer in his foreword above. “She loved his art. She has a collection of probably fifteen to twenty of his paintings.” In a letter of January 30, 1973, not long after she acquired those paintings, Hepburn wrote, “I am permanently indebted to you for all the gaiety you have brought to our house.” And in another letter she wrote, “Dear Bob and Eva, Here are some not very good pix of your lovely sunny paintings in our home. The sitting room (white sofa), the dining room, and the new one in our entrance hall (with the brick floor).” And writing on March 5, 1988, she said “they really light up our house and our lives. . . . We send you a million thanks and *lots* of love. Audrey.” In that same letter she talked of having “been offered the opportunity to do something for children, exhausting but deeply rewarding.” It was the beginning of her work for UNICEF, and the real beginning of the Audrey Hepburn Children’s Fund.

Then there is Eva, the artist’s wife who is a talented textile designer, his first patron as well as his muse. He thinks of her as “my big break. . . . She is by far the greatest influence on me. When I first met her, her French feeling for gaiety impressed me and has become a major part of my work. She has inspired my best paintings.”<sup>12</sup>

From Nice to Positano or, indeed, to Naples is not a large jump, either stylistically or physically in regard to these paintings by the artist. The same joy is there, that of painting itself which permeates all of his work, and the enthusiasm, spontaneity, and exuberance as well, perhaps in even greater measure, reflecting the Italian atmosphere. “On our first visit several years ago,” he says, “I walked up into the





Fig. 23 left to right **Robbie Wald, Audrey Hepburn, and Andrew Wald**  
Cannes, France, 1986



Fig. 24 **Audrey Hepburn's Home** photographed by Kathleen Davis  
La Paisible, Switzerland



Fig. 25 **Audrey Hepburn's Living Room** with painting *Flowers by the Sea* photographed by Kathleen Davis  
La Paisible, Switzerland

hills behind the bay in the Santa Lucia section of Naples and found myself surrounded by laundry-like flags and flowers decorating the vertical stairs, among exotic houses and castles.” Since that first visit Kane has made many trips to Naples and much of his work has been inspired by those journeys. “Much of my work,” he recounts, “has been done in the vicinity of Naples, inspired by the light, color, and the abstract shapes of the towns near the sea, whose . . . architecture and wild color is uniquely Italian.” But, he continues, “the greatest inspiration is from the people, who are beautiful . . . and have a naturalness which makes for remarkably expressive gestures.” Indeed, in such paintings as *Napoli III* and *Pizza Napoli*, as with some of his Roman subjects, there is more use of figures as subject matter than in his earlier paintings. There is also more of a vertical and horizontal structure in these Italian paintings, as though reflecting the almost theatrical verticality of both Positano and Naples where the idea for these pictures originally came from. And Naples is the capital of the *bel canto*, the sometimes joyful, sometimes melancholy songs of the region, performed to the accompaniment of guitar or mandolin. Kane’s paintings are very much like the *bel canto*. However, they are joyful without the melancholy. His paintings of Naples are like Naples itself: they are a world apart, lively and fascinating; mysterious, but familiar and full of noise and activity.

As a feeling for place is such an important part of his work, travel is inextricably tied to it. Like the great Japanese haiku poet Matsuo Basho (1644–1694), Kane depicts scenes from his journeys. These are journeys in areas for which the artist feels a kinship and they are important; travel is important. For Basho it was Northern Japan, where he made his *oku no hosomichi*, his journey to the interior, both of the country and of his soul. Kane’s *oku no hosomichi* is the Mediterranean. *Positano* and *Undici, Positano*, painted in 1990 and 1991 respectively, are not just scenes, but signifiers that represent an artist who is now painting with great confidence and



assurance. They also reflect the search for new stimuli, new sites, and new people to offer a constant renewal of his art, as does *Portofino Down*, painted in 2000 and *Mykanos*, done in 1998. “The moon and the sun are eternal travelers,” wrote the great Japanese poet. “Even the years wander on. . . . Every day is a journey and the journey itself is home.”<sup>13</sup> In many ways those words could also apply to Kane.

Kane’s North African series from 1997—*Kasbah, Fez, Medina Fez*, and *Bird Drinking from Fountain: the Garden of Momounia*—reflects not only an artist seeking fresh sources of inspiration, but at the same time an artist seeing continuity and tradition. This tradition was begun by the great French masters from Delacroix to Matisse, all of whom journeyed to North Africa looking for the exotic and the unfamiliar and finding a light surpassing that of the south of France. These paintings also represent the introduction of a new technique for Kane: collage. He was inspired by Mogul miniatures (“a very big influence always,” he says) and to a certain extent by the paper cutouts Matisse did in his last years. Kane, who has always admired the delicate, yet strong and colorful Mogul painting, saw it as a means to express what he saw and loved in Morocco. Yet, wishing to maintain the spontaneity and intensity of his painting, and to achieve large, simple color planes and a certain linearity very quickly, he turned to the technique of paper cutouts to achieve his own Mogul-style imagery. As a result, his collages appear to be executed with the same enthusiasm and spontaneity as his sketches, watercolors, and oil paintings, though they are conceived with considerable care.

Kane’s paintings are a culmination of his sketches and watercolors on the spot, his response to the journey, the location, as well as his experiences there, his interaction with people he meets, all of which are transformed by his unerring and vivid color sense, his spirited brushwork and by his lifetime experience as a painter.



From those sketches and watercolors to his finished oils, Kane is an *alla prima* painter, believing as Manet did, "There is only one way. Paint from the very beginning what you see. If you get it, you get it. If you don't, you start over. All the rest is just fooling around."<sup>14</sup> Not all of his paintings "work," but he tends not to look back, to "noodle" or change them; rather, he goes on to paint another. His technique begins with the journey and the studio he carries within himself and in his sketchbooks. He has had, however, some unusual "studios," particularly when he is near water. Starting a long time ago in Provincetown and continuing in his New York studio, Kane has done waterscapes in and around all of the cities he has painted. His studio in Cannes was a restaurant from which he could see the harbor, but he never painted the Seine until he established a "studio" on a small *bateau-mouche*, to the approval and good-natured amusement of the people who ran it. "After breakfast at the Deux Magots when it opened, I would cut through the Luxembourg Gardens, walk to the Seine, board the little boat and was whisked through the heart of Paris. The little boat was a small *bateau-mouche* which you could ride all day for about eleven dollars." "I have been lucky in my studios," he writes, "my one in Rome was a cafe across from the Pantheon and in Venice a *gondoliere* offered me his gondola when he was not using it, something I am very proud of."<sup>15</sup> The sketches and watercolors he did there are then worked up into large finished oils in his New York studio with the same freshness and spontaneity in which he first captured the idea or subject. The marvelous *Dish of Oranges in la Mammounia, Marrakesh* is no less spontaneous than the sketch, *Marrakesh, Six Oranges*. However, this spontaneity does not come at the expense of analytical thinking or the careful attention given to the craft of painting. When he studies the masters he most admires—Titian, Monet, Matisse—it is not only the surface effects in their work which interest him, but, more importantly, the artists' thinking. Like many good painters throughout history, to Kane the old masters are not just "masters" but colleagues. About Monet, he

says that “he flattened his famous waterlily series using only water, sky, and clouds. True to nature, yet getting more abstract in his eighties to his death in 1926 . . . he did what Matisse was doing in the south of France: increasing the excitement of the picture plane.” And, “in my garden series particularly,” he continues—referring to such pictures as *Big Red* and *Room by the Sea*, done in the eighties, and *Positano* and *Still Life*, from the nineties—“I have tried to eliminate a vase sitting on a table, but rather make the flowers surround you as in a garden yet maintaining the logic of the picture plane and structure, and this concept is with me in all my compositions. The problem for the figurative painter, I believe, is to capture the wildness of abstraction and use it to give life to the objects he loves.”<sup>16</sup> Not only is he sensitive to the structure of space and the uses of color, he is also very aware of the importance of craft to his technique. When he embarked on the use of collage, for example, he was very concerned about the kind of paper he should use and the type of glue he should employ. And he has his canvases specially hand-primed because he feels that the commercially prepared variety “does not take oil that well.” His choice of pigments is made as much for permanence as with an eye for aesthetics. All his colors have enduring properties as well as intensity, saturation, and brilliance. In addition, he likes to use sable brushes when he can and is fond of the special properties of the palette knife as a painting tool (a method first made popular for artists by Gustave Courbet in the nineteenth century). Yet Kane is not without his romantic side when it comes to the choice of pigments. He likes certain colors for their associations as well as their expressive properties. “I find the oil colors which have old histories most satisfying to me.” Favorites include what the French call Indian Yellow, for instance, because of an association with Antoine Watteau, and “Veronese Green . . . a special green I find I cannot substitute for.” Some colors have had a particular effect on his style: “Permelba White,” he claims, “with its luxurious thickness, has influenced my work. It is like large spoonfuls of *crème Chantilly*.”<sup>17</sup>



Bob Kane is a *jongleur*, a poet, and his painting is permanently enriched by a generous imagination. His drawing is often a charming arabesque that, like his color, sometimes lives its own life. In his exuberant gestures of line and color, he has created a pictorial language all his own with which he transcribes the passing world, the world of his travels. He paints that world with an unparalleled wealth of observation and fancy, full of humor, and passion for life. Yet, he sometimes despairs of getting it all. "One can only hope to grasp just a little of it," he once said about Paris. He quotes Stendahl, one of his favorite French writers: "I am always afraid of only having put down a sigh when I imagine myself to have recorded a truth."<sup>18</sup> However, Stendahl also said, "The beautiful is the promise of happiness."<sup>19</sup> And that is what Bob Kane's paintings are all about.

### Richard J. Boyle



Fig. 32

#### **Room by the Sea**

New York City, 1988  
60 x 50"

Collection of Patrizia Spadafora and Paolo Berloffia  
Bolzano, Italy

## NOTES

1. I have known Bob Kane for over forty years. We were students together in Will Barnet's classes at the Art Students League in New York beginning in 1959; quotes from the artist come from many conversations over many years, but especially from a lengthy written statement to the author sent on February 25, 2001.
2. Quoted from review of Kane's work, translated as, "Happiness is as simple as a brushstroke." *Nice Matin*, July 15, 1990, p. 71.
3. Artist's statement, February 25, 2001.
4. Will Barnet, "The Art of Bob Kane," in *Bob Kane*, exh. cat. (New York: Gallery B.A.I., December 1998), unpaginated.
5. Richard J. Boyle, "The *Gaiété de la Peinture* of Bob Kane," in *An Essay About Bob Kane* (Naples, Florida: Harmon-Meek Gallery, June 1988), unpaginated.
6. Quoted in Boyle, "The *Gaiété de la Peinture* of Bob Kane."
7. Eva Honigman was a fellow student in the Barnet class at the Art Students League whom he met in 1961; they were married in 1964.
8. Henry James, *A Little Tour in France* (Stuttgart, Germany: Tauchnitz, 1954 [1884]), 188, 168, and 200.
9. Statement, 2001.
10. For example, among others were the director, Jean Negulesco; producer, Frederick de Cordova; and the actor, Christopher Plummer and his wife, Jean Renoir.
11. "Having educated himself as a collector, Broida now describes his goal as 'buying mountaintops'—finding the very best of an artist's work while the artist is young and the work still affordable." Phillip E. Bishop, "A Celebration of Contemporary Art," *Orlando Sentinel*, Sunday, March 15, 1998, sec. F., p. 10.
12. Audrey Hepburn letters, collection of Mr. and Mrs. Bob Kane. Kane's work seems to have a special appeal for theater and film artists including such other actors as Jill Clayburgh, Al Pacino, Frederick Kimball, Lisa Richards and later Brian Cox, Irina Brook, Steve Collins, Faye Grant and Paul Benedict, many of whom he met early on in his career; it is as though this enormous family had adopted both Bob and Eva Kane. Statement, 2001.
13. Matsuo Basho, *Narrow Road to the Interior*, trans. Sam Hamill (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1991), 1.
14. Quoted from a room label in the Manet section of the exhibition *Impression: Painting Quickly in France, 1860–1890*, Williamstown, Massachusetts, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, June 16–September 9, 2001. The catalogue was authored by Richard R. Brettel for Yale University Press.
15. Statement, 2001.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Stendahl, *De l'Amour*.
19. Stendahl, quoted in Matthew Josephson, *Stendahl* (New York: Doubleday, 1946), 278.



## CHRONOLOGY

- 1937** Born, Cleveland, Ohio.
- 1942** Attended children's art classes at the Cleveland Museum School; copied a reproduction of Gauguin's *White Horse (Quai d'Orsay)* and always drew and painted from then on.
- 1953–54** Classes at the Cleveland Institute of Art.
- 1955** Graduated Shaker Heights High School.
- 1955–56** Attended Cornell University, but left after first year in order to study painting.
- 1956** *Summer* Invited to Provincetown, Mass. by a Cornell classmate. Dates Mimi Gross, daughter of the sculptor Chaim Gross. Spent considerable time with the Gross family and was deeply impressed by the sculptor's work, his house, studio, and his collection of African sculpture. Also at Gross's studio he met Milton Avery, whose work he also admired.
- 1956** *Winter* Followed Chaim Gross to New York. Gross took an interest in Kane's work and suggested that he study at the Art Students League.
- 1956–57** Studied with Will Barnet and George Grosz.
- 1957** *Winter* Switched to full-time study with Will Barnet and began a life-long friendship with Will and Elena Barnet.
- 1957** *Summer* Provincetown again; close friendship with the Barnet's and the Gross family.
- 1958** Four-year work scholarship at the League as Will Barnet's class monitor; also had a one-year work scholarship at the Pratt Institute.
- 1961** Met a fellow student, Eva Marie Honigman, whom he married in 1964.
- 1965–67** Taught painting and art history at the Hewitt School, New York City.
- 1967** Taught painting and art history at Montclair College and New York University.
- 1968** First one-man show at Bertha Schaefer Gallery, New York City; first trip to the south of France, to Vence and the Cote d'Azur. Influenced by Eva, who grew up in Belgium and has deep sense of French and European culture, Kane developed an extraordinary sense of kinship with the area.
- 1969** First one-man show at the Ankrum Gallery in Los Angeles. Works acquired by Dido Renoir, Constance Wald (wife of producer Jerry Wald), and Edward Broida, who became two of Kane's important patrons and friends. Later Mrs. Wald introduced his work to her friend Audrey Hepburn, who would also become one of Bob Kane's most significant patrons. At this time Kane met other actors, such as Jill Clayburgh, Al Pacino, Frederick Kimball, Lisa Richards and later Brian Cox, Irina Brook, Steve Collins, Faye Grant and Paul Benedict, who also acquired his work.
- 1970** One-man exhibition at Galerie Marcel Bernheim in Paris and at Bertha Schaeffer in New York; second trip to south of France and Vence and first trip to St. Paul de Vence; first series of paintings of the area; paintings of Vence and St. Paul de Vence bought by Joseph Hirshhorn.
- 1972** One-man exhibition at the Musée de St. Paul de Vence; Audrey Hepburn bought the first of several paintings.
- 1979** One-man exhibition at the Ankrum Gallery.

- 1981 One-man exhibition at the Ankrum Gallery.
- 1983 First trip to Positano and Naples which deeply influenced his work; changes in color and gesture.
- 1986 Exhibition at Ankrum Gallery of Positano and Naples pictures.
- 1988–94 Paintings in American Embassy in Tokyo, Japan, and Berne, Switzerland.
- 1989 One-man exhibition at Harmon-Meek Gallery in Naples, Florida.
- 1990 Exhibitions at the Musée de St. Paul de Vence, Harmon-Meek Gallery and the George Meyers Gallery in Los Angeles; Jamie Lee Curtis and Christopher Guest buy paintings.
- 1991 Exhibition at Harmon-Meek.
- 1992 Spends time in Venice; captivated by water and light. Large exhibition of Venice paintings at Harmon Meek.
- 1993 Spends time in Rome, sketching late at night, particularly café life. Exhibition of Roman paintings at Harmon-Meek.
- 1997 Trips to North Africa, including Marrakesh and Fez; fascinated by quality of light. Exhibition of Moroccan paintings at Harmon-Meek.
- 1998 Trips to Seville, Spain.
- 1999 Exhibition at Harmon-Meek.
- 1982–2000 Numerous visits to Giverny; admiration for the late Monet *Waterlily* series, which had an influence on Kane's seascapes of Cannes in 1989 and 1990.



Dido Renoir at **Ankrum Gallery Opening** 1969  
 Painting: *Chiapas*  
 Collection of Jean and Dido Renoir



**Bob and Eva** at la Residence St. Paul 1969



## MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock  
Boca Raton Museum of Art, Florida  
The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio  
Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio  
Everhart Museum of Art, Scranton, Pennsylvania  
Joseph H. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.  
Palm Springs Desert Museum, California  
Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia  
Polk Museum of Art, Lakeland, Florida  
Musée de St. Paul de Vence, France  
Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art, Loretto, Pennsylvania  
Ohio University Museum of Art, Athens, Ohio  
Museum of Fine Art, St. Petersburg, Florida  
Charles MacNider Museum of Art, Mason City, Iowa  
Philharmonic Center for the Arts, Naples, Florida  
Bass Museum of Art, Miami, Florida

## ONE-MAN SHOWS

Bertha Schafer Gallery, New York 1968, 1970, 1972, 1974  
Ankrum Gallery, Los Angeles 1969, 1974, 1979, 1981, 1986  
Galerie Marcel Bernheim, Paris 1970  
J. Walter Thompson Gallery, New York 1970  
Musée de St. Paul de Vence, France 1974, 1990  
Circle Gallery, New Orleans 1976  
Barker Gallery, Palm Beach, Florida 1977  
Melvin Gallery, Florida Southern College, Lakeland 1988  
George Meyers Gallery, Los Angeles 1990  
Ann Howard Gallery, Washington D.C. 1992  
Butler Institute of American Art, Salem, Ohio 1995  
Gallery BA, New York 1998  
Harmon-Meek Gallery, Naples, Florida 1989–2002



## GROUP SHOWS

Lytton Museum, Los Angeles 1967  
Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska 1968  
Ringling Museum, Sarasota, Florida 1969  
Museum of Modern Art Lending Service, New York City 1970–72  
Oklahoma Art Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma 1970  
Fort Wayne Art Museum, Indiana 1971  
Biennale of the Painters of the Mediterranean, Nice, France 1973  
Biennale de Menton, France 1974  
Cincinnati Museum, Ohio 1974  
Albright Knox Museum, Buffalo, New York 1974  
Palm Springs Desert Museum, California 1978, 1980, 1983, 1988, 1990  
Musée de St. Paul de Vence, France 1978, 1981, 1983, 1989, 1991  
Ankrum Gallery, Los Angeles 1982, 1983  
American Embassy, Tokyo, Japan 1988–92  
American Embassy, Bern, Switzerland 1988–92  
Mairie de St. Paul de Vence, France 1991  
George Meyers Gallery, Los Angeles 1991  
Golden Gallery, Nice, France 1991–92  
Caroline Hill Gallery, New York 1994  
Katherine Rich Perlow Gallery, New York 1994  
Rochester Museum, New York 1968  
Westmoreland County Museum, Greensburg, Pennsylvania 1968  
Orlando Museum of Art, Florida 1998  
Sharjah Art Museum, UAE 1998  
Biennale Marbella, Spain 2000  
Harmon Meek Gallery, Naples, Florida 1988–2002

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Bob Kane is represented by  
Harmon-Meek Gallery  
601 Fifth Avenue South  
Naples, Florida 34102

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