

ART REVIEW: Bob Paul Kane's Painted Paradise

June 27, 2019

by Franklin Hill Perrell

The exhibition of Bob Paul Kane's (1937-2013) paintings, watercolors and collages from the 1960s to the 2000s, is a gem of a show in a charming jewel box gallery set in the historic hamlet of Quogue, NY. A self-contained Hamptons sanctuary, removed from glitz and evanescent fashion, Quogue possesses a timeless aura embodied in Queen-Anne shingle-style mansions, serene field club lawns, and pristine beaches suffused with raking east-end light. This context is inescapable upon entering the Quogue Gallery where "Bob Paul Kane: A Dance with Color" can be found.

Kane, however, is not portraying the local surroundings: his venue of choice is the Riviera and his artistic attitude is French. But the mood of his work befits the Quogue ambience. Likewise, the unabashed elegance of his subjects, and his joyous manner of handling them, awash with pungent color, never afraid to be beautiful, distinguishes his art. A sensuous colorist with a predilection for aptly gestural paint handling, Kane's art is representational, yet at times nearly abstract, akin to the manner of painter [Robert De Niro, Sr.](#) In his choice of subject and [Fauve](#) color, however, Kane is closer to [Raoul Dufy](#).

Entering the gallery, visitors are immediately struck by Kane's palette: colors we can virtually taste, as if flavors from gelato or sorbet, like peppermint, lime, pineapple, raspberry, mandarin orange, and black cherry. Visually, they do indeed dance, hence the exhibition subtitle, "[A Dance with Color](#)." The subjects are all happy: ships at sea and cafe tables adorned with bottles of Cinzano and overflowing bouquets of tropical flowers.

The exhibition's centerpiece, *The Fleet*, n.d., shows three boats viewed from harbor side at a Côte d'Azur port like Golfe-Juan or Menton. The foreground table and chair, along with trees and ships, are treated in silhouette. The surrounding water is painted in deep ultramarine to the canvas edge, unifying the composition and enunciating the nautical theme with white and red accents. On the table, lavender and violet flowers are outlined in mint with touches of orange. Kane was clearly a happy artist, with a sunny view of life. Viewing *The Fleet*, it is easy to imagine how fine it would be to just sit there, at this outdoor cafe table and watch the boats go by.



“The Fleet” by Bob Paul Kane. Oil on linen, 42 x 56 inches. Courtesy Quogue Gallery.

In Kane’s work, the Riviera portrayed is that of “To Catch a Thief” or “The Red Shoes,” reflecting a glamour long since vanished. It is not surprising that Audrey Hepburn was one of his biggest collectors. Kane is no longer alive, but as his Quogue dealer, Chester Murray, told me, “If you had to be reborn as anyone else, you would do well to be Bob Kane.”

Kane portrayed the life he lived, in France and Italy, at such inspiring places as St. Tropez, Antibes, Cannes and Positano, made all the more pleasant by a happy marriage to Eva, his elegant and supportive French-speaking wife. Kane enjoyed a successful art career. Having studied at the Art Students League with George Grosz and Will Barnet, he exhibited internationally. He showed at such New York galleries as Bertha Schafer and Hollis Taggart; in Florida with Harmon Meek Gallery; and his work is held in the permanent collections of more than 30 museums. He was collected by the likes of Olga Hirshhorn and Edward Broida, and became a particular favorite of the Hollywood set.

Kane painted *alla prima*, which means at the first stroke. His attitude of directness, assessing subjects from his immediate perceptions, deciding colors and pictorial strategy at the outset, and often painting on the spot, enabled the forthright spontaneity of his oils and watercolors.

The large painting, *Untitled*, 1980s, exemplifies the verve and freedom of Kane’s approach. In this work, painterly brushstrokes, in hues of intense watermelon and cadmium yellow, define wide vertical borders to suggest curtains and trim. These frame the central motif of a window opening onto a sun-drenched Mediterranean vista of aquamarine water and white boats. In front, rounded

abstract shapes, expressively brushed in a geranium hued impasto, suggest flowers. Below, crossed diagonals, red over pink, evoke a patterned rug upon which sits a Louis XV chair, softly brushed in a wash of magenta. While the painting is nearly abstract, the viewer's imagination can easily conjure up such specifics. Lively paint handling, fusing descriptive line and color, gives the solid composition remarkable animation.



“Untitled” by Bob Paul Kane, 1980s. Oil on linen, 51 x 41 inches.
Courtesy Quogue Gallery.

Kane's watercolor, *Cafe Scene Positano*, n.d., features a line-up of well-tanned, bikini clad women, sketched in pencil loosely overlaid with watercolor. Pink arches and liquor bottles denote the bar, pronouncing a visual rhythm, alternating architectural elements with the figures.

The watercolor, *Cannes, Port*, n.d., shows vibrantly colored boats, rendered in opaque pigments,

enlivening a harbor scene. *Untitled 536*, n.d., depicting boats at sea, is Fauve in the mode of [André Derain](#) and [Maurice de Vlaminck](#). Pure color, doubling as line, a Kane hallmark, is evident throughout.



"No. 536" by Bob Paul Kane. Watercolor, 22 x 30 inches. Courtesy Quogue Gallery.

Three watercolors, *Flowers 548*, *550*, and *551*, all n.d., installed like a triptych, depict sumptuous blossoms in undulating loops of candy colored pigment. The watercolor, *Untitled 541*, portrays multiple vases filled with anemones in hues of watermelon pink, rich cobalt, cadmium red, and lemon yellow. Strong color is diffused by the artist's assertive use of white, often the ground itself, of paper or canvas.



"Untitled 541" by Bob Paul Kane. Watercolor, 22 x 30 inches. Courtesy Quogue Gallery.

The collage, *Night Creatures*, 1999, shows a cabaret scene with jazz combo of piano, bass, and guitar. Like Matisse, Kane used paper painted in bright Fauve colors as well as black, intricately cut into shapes, then composed and glued. The strong geometric configurations in another collage, *Untitled, 505*, n.d., reference the synthetic cubism of Picasso which similarly treated forms in colorful silhouette.



“Night Creatures” by Bob Paul Kane, 1999. Collage, 42.25 x 21.5 inches. Courtesy Quogue Gallery.



“Untitled 505” by Bob Paul Kane. Collage, 22.75 x 19.5 inches. Courtesy Quogue Gallery.

Untitled #2 (Strawberries and Anemones), n.d., is particularly Matissean, combining indoor and outdoor themes. A white table laden with an over-scaled bowl of giant anemones, some delicate strawberries, and a generous array of other fruits and flowers, creates a visual unit that contrasts with yellow walls and a potted palm. An arched window introduces another image to the composition, that of a boat scene in dark blue. Intense color, and forms fitted together like a jig saw puzzle, echo the patterns of Kane’s collages.



“Untitled #2 (Strawberries & Anemones)” by Bob Paul Kane. Oil on linen, 19.75 x 25.75 inches. Courtesy Quogue Gallery.

Kane’s paintings give unapologetic pleasure: an antidote to art that communicates rage or discontent. Kane has chosen to paint life as a continuously blissful vacation in an earthly paradise. There is nothing wrong with that. And if the world that humanity has created is fraught with a myriad of ills, why can’t an artist create a better one? Kane, in my view, has been entirely successful.

BASIC FACTS: “Bob Paul Kane: A Dance with Color” is on view June 22 to July 10, 2019 at Quogue Gallery, 44 Quogue St., Quogue, N.Y. 11959. An Opening Reception takes place on Saturday, June 22, 2019, from 5 to 7 p.m. www.quoguegallery.com.

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