

85-Year-Old Artist Still Seeks Own Style

By Carolyn Rice

A visit to Ron Bean's art studio in Carmel Valley gives you a quick tour of the peninsula—the Carmel hills, Carmel Beach, the Carmelite Monastery and 17 Mile Drive. Glance at a few more watercolors and you'll see San Juan Bautista, Bodega Bay, Sausalito, Tiburon, Mexico, Illinois or Colorado.

Wherever Bean has gone, he has recorded the scenes with an eye toward painting them. Sometimes he goes with art materials in hand to paint at the scene. Other times, he photographs something that catches his eye and paints it back in the studio.

He keeps files, and some times something may trigger a desire to paint a scene from, say, Mexico which he photographed in the 1940s, he said.

Diversity is the word that comes to mind when you look at Bean's work.

Besides the myriad of scenes stacked in the corners of his studio, the versatile watercolorist paints people, ranging from three Chinese girls whose faces look seriously from the paper to a pair of whimsical teenagers with funny hats, long skinny legs and big feet.

Another painting depicts the trees and people at an oceanside Pacific Grove park. The tree tops painted in a light-hearted manner are colored orange and purple.

Boats and horses are two other subjects Bean likes to tackle. The Brahma bulls which graze in a pasture near Carmel Valley Road east of the Village are on his "to do" list.

Bean is a regular at art shows in the area—at Sunset Center, at White Oak Plaza in Carmel Village and, of course, at a booth at the Fiesta.

At age 85, the white-haired artist said he hasn't settled on any one style of painting. He enjoys painting in a great variety of styles and trying new techniques.

"I do like bright colors," Bean said. He said sometimes it bothers him that he has never developed one distinct style of painting. "I guess one day I may hit my style."

Showing two pictures of the meadow and trees behind his home, he said he preferred the one which he painted with strong turquoises and dark browns to a more muted one in softer grays and blues. "This one is more realistic," he said of the muted rendering. "I like the one I took the artist's license with."

Bean moved to Carmel Valley in 1981 after a career as a graphic artist in Chicago. His wife, Ruth, came to



DEMONSTRATING HIS SKILL, watercolorist Ron Bean of Carmel Valley works on a landscape in his studio. *Sun photos by Carolyn Rice*

California in 1978 and had been driving up and down the coast looking for an area in which to live. Bean said he and his son, John, had come out for three weeks to look around. They went to a peninsula Realtor to rent an apartment for his wife but instead found out about a Robles del Rio house which was just coming on the market. They wrote out a down payment at first sight, Bean said, and have enjoyed the wild turkeys and deer in their meadow and the Carmel Valley sun ever since.

Bean was art director for the Leo Burnett advertising agency in Chicago for a number of years and then free-lanced for another agency which produced all the packaging and printed material used by MacDonald's. Other clients he designed for over the years included Sara Lee, Zenith and Wrigley's gum, to name a few, he said.

He has one ad framed in his studio for a 1949 Kaiser convertible. He was surprised the client liked it, he said, as the car was done in watercolors and had an impressionistic look to it rather than clearly showing the car's features.

Bean lived in Ladora, Iowa, during his younger years but moved to Grinnell, Iowa, where he attended high school and college. He majored in business administration and history. "There were no art courses then," he said. But he liked drawing as a youngster and his cartoons were used by the local

newspaper when he was in high school. He was art editor of the humor magazine, "The Malteaser" for three years in college.

During World War II, Bean was in an anti-aircraft division, where he worked as an artist creating training publications.

After the war, Bean said he went to work in Chicago and started taking night classes at the Chicago Art Institute. "I had a pretty good eye but no training," he said. He enjoyed going out into the countryside to paint with friends. At first he painted with oils but then switched to watercolors because "oils were too cumbersome." He

likes to use watercolors as they dry quickly and are easier to carry about, he said. "Watercolor is so great because you can do anything," he said. "Oil can't compete with the variations." He said he also likes to leave large areas of the white paper unpainted as "it gives nice contrast."

Because of cataracts, Bean has received two lens implants, and sees "beautifully with my right eye but not quite so sharply with my left." He said the biggest problem he has when painting is a loss of perspective which caused him not to know exactly when his brush touches the paper. But he gets around this by using a magnifying glass when he paints, he said.

"It's a good thing I wasn't a realistic painter," he said.

Recent changes in his style mainly come from his wanting to try new things rather than changes with his eyesight, he said.

Two of his children, Ron and Suzanne, also paint, and Bean said the three of them like to go out into the countryside and paint together. They've also taken watercolor classes together.

Bean enjoys exhibiting his work and said if he has one regret, it is that he wasn't able to paint fulltime until 1981. "I wish I could have retired 20 years earlier. I could have developed my painting more. I enjoyed designing and advertising, but this is much, much better. I can do anything I want. Nobody tells you what to do."

"I don't paint pictures to sell," Bean said, but to please himself. "Sometimes the ones I think will sell right away don't. I never know what will sell. Flowers have been good. I didn't used to do flowers," he said. But some tulips in his back yard and a native matilija inspired him.



A FOREST OF TWISTED live oak trunks creates a spooky feeling in this watercolor by Ron Bean.



A FREQUENT ENTRANT in local art shows, Ron Bean offers a variety of his works ranging from landscapes to studies of people and flowers.