

# Kogan blends a life of thought & art

By Sue Harrison

BANNER STAFF

Mix words from a 50-year-old diary with artwork refined over a lifetime and you get the small collage pieces by Jane Kogan on display at Robyn Watson Gallery, 232 Commercial St. Kogan's work is full of detail and intent that require the viewer to read the text and feel how the surrounding collage supports and expands that beginning. The show will hang through Oct. 24.

Kogan's work has been shifting in size and style over the past 35 years and this is just the latest step in that evolution. She has worked in large and small formats, in abstract, figurative, impressionist and realistic styles, and in collage. Each period of time spent with a particular genre or size leads her to the next plateau.

"I have that Protestant work ethic. I have to validate each day by doing artwork," Kogan says from a chair in the gallery.

After her first visit to Provincetown in 1958 where she saw two men holding hands and thought to herself that she needed to come back, she continued to visit. After returning from two years in Italy studying painting on a Fulbright, she and friends rented a house on the beach in '66 and in '68, the first year of existence for the Fine Arts Work Center, when she was selected as part of the initial group of fellows. After that, she never left. She took a job at the Provincetown Book Shop and she's still there.

"I've done the same thing all these years. The only change is the job has gone from 10 weeks to 20 weeks. ... Since '72 I've worked at the bookstore and my life has been exactly the same," she says, and one wonders what secrets she's hiding behind that even smile and steady gaze. Certainly her work reveals her to be full of insight even at the early age of 13.

Kogan gives a quick verbal tour through the stages that have brought her to where she is now.

Kogan first showed at the former Ellen Harris Gallery. Harris sold pipes and tobacco accessories and Kogan talked her into showing some etchings. From that, the tobacco shop turned into a gallery, and Kogan showed there until it closed several years ago.

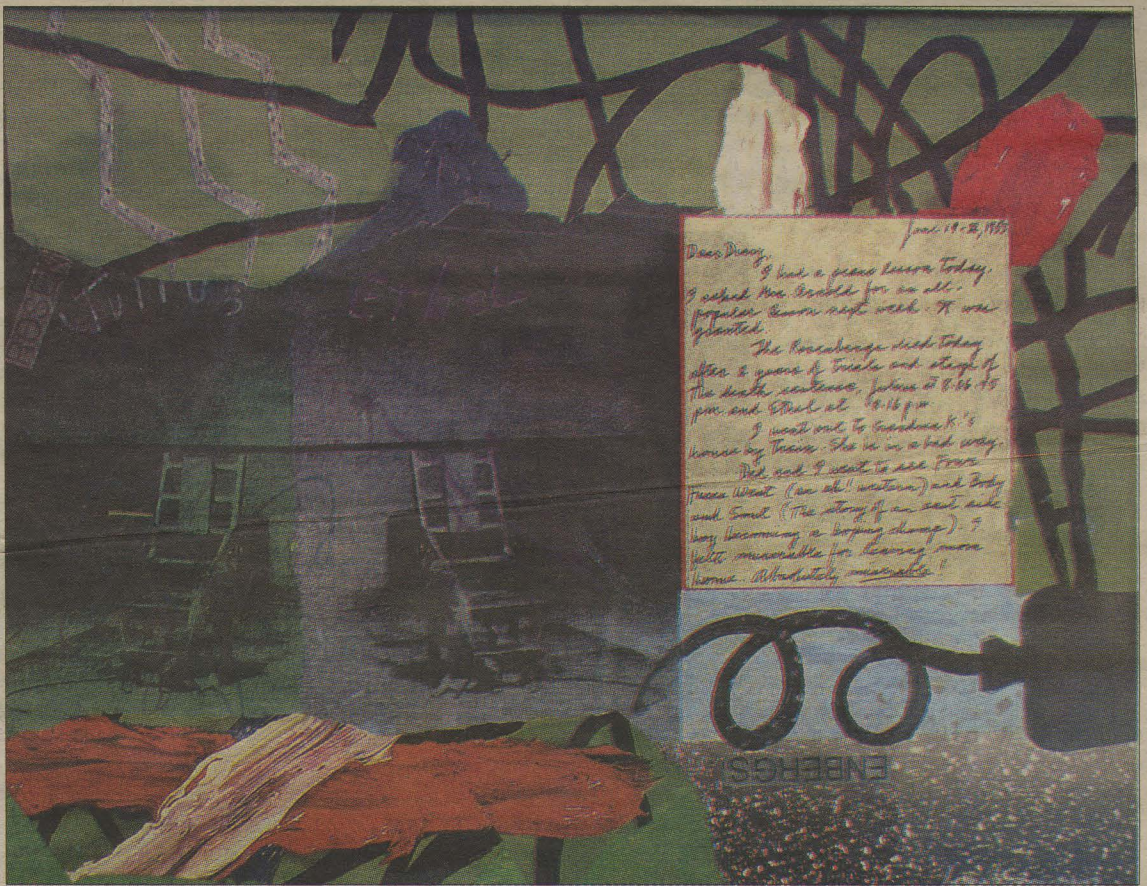
"I was doing Cezanne stuff, then Cubist," she says. "In the late '60s I did my Amazon series, life-sized women. Then '82-'84 I did tiny landscapes. They sold like hotcakes. They were extraordinarily detailed. If you have a big painting for \$1,000, how do you price these? I decided \$1 a square inch. Most were around \$50. They were all bought up. Then I realized I was making about \$10 an hour and that doesn't count the \$2 an hour I was spending on these sable brushes with three hairs in them."

Next, she moved to abstracts, convincing Harris to add abstract work to her walls. Kogan put in four fairly large pieces, sold two and then had another shift.

"I was in New York in 1990 and decided to do colored pencils," she says of the step before her current work. "I went right down to Pearl Paint and got the wrong paper, thick, very glossy paper with no tooth at all. I've been using it ever since. Gray pencils, I couldn't find enough. Then I started to add buttons, and it became collage. Then bits of metal. They were all abstract."

"Three years ago, I decided it would be fun to cull from my diary begun when I was 13. I picked up a pad of fake parchment and decided to do it like a book (with text on one page and a drawing on the facing page)."

The idea didn't quite achieve what she had hoped for. The first 10 pieces were



"The Rosenbergs," collage by Jane Kogan, pairs details about the famous execution with memories of a western movie seen with her father that same day as recalled in her 50-year-old diary.

stand-alone but didn't feel right. Some connection was needed, she says, and a piece of old string trailing from the text to the adjacent collage was the first step. Then, in a move away from abstract drawings, Kogan included a rendering of a pair of blue suede boots her mother had given her and a more representational aspect stepped in.

The words, excerpts copied exactly from the original pages, come from her first diary, a small, green leather book with a lock and key. Delving into her diaries starting with book offers one an interesting look back at a child's unselfconscious perspective on the world. From the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg or a snowfall in the city to the excitement of taking a trip to Mexico, the young Jane wrote down her world and the older Jane arranges it for us.

"This series is finished for now," she says. "I'm always doing something different. Who knows what is next?" □



PHOTOS SUE HARRISON

Jane Kogan (left) and friends Ruth and Miriam Goodman at Kogan's recent opening at Robyn Watson Gallery.





"Lobster Pot," oil on wood,  
6 1/4" x 9 7/8".

JANE KOGAN

# A Study in Versatility

Anyone searching for some sort of recognizable style running throughout Jane Kogan's 30-plus years of creativity might as well skip it. For this self-described "little dynamo," the only constant is change.

Her house on Provincetown's Pearl Street is lined with books, de-

void of rugs, perfumed with turpentine, and home to the work of what appears to be at least five different artists — all of whom are, in fact, Jane Kogan.

The woman herself, short, fast-thinking and quick-talking, with a Bronx accent still firmly in place, has an educational background half-

a-mile long and ten stories high. A graduate of New York's High School of Music and Art and a magna cum laude graduate of Brandeis University, she received a merit scholarship to the Art Students' League, spent two years as a Fulbright Scholar studying painting and etching in Rome, and earned a Master



of Fine Arts degree in painting from Columbia University.

"My first year out of Brandeis," she says, doubling back in her mind, "a friend said to me, 'You have a little money in the bank. Why don't you spend it? Do your art now before going to work full time.' So I did. I went to the Art Students' League and never looked back!"

During those years, her style was "very traditional." She made etchings. Her paintings resembled those of Cezanne, portraits and still lifes. Then she shifted into cubism and pop cubism.

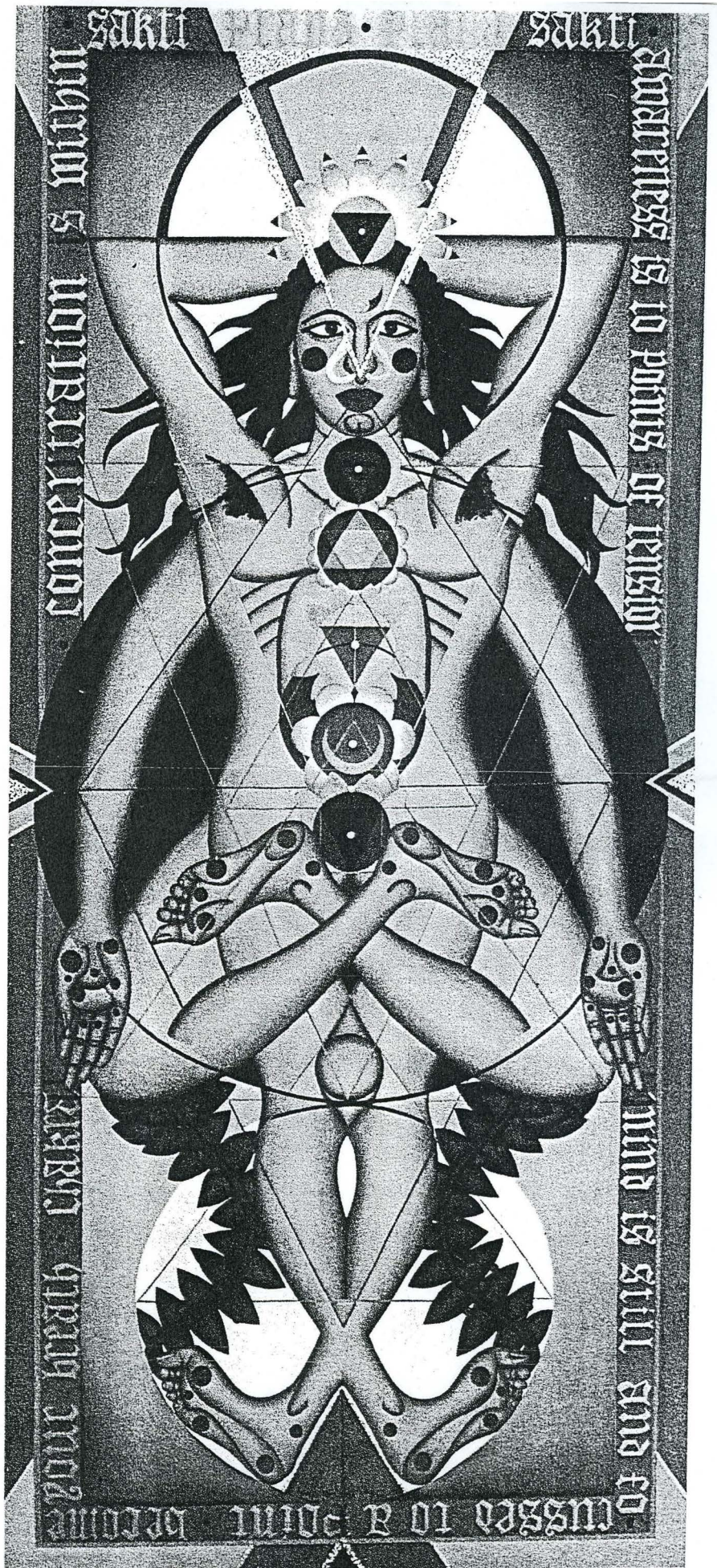
In the mid-'60s, Kogan began summering in Provincetown and applied to the newborn Fine Arts Work Center for a fellowship. "I didn't hear right away, but I decided to move here anyway, in the fall of '68." She came to town, received the fellowship, spent a year studying with Robert Motherwell, Jack Tworok, Myron Stout, Fritz Bultmann and Jim Forsberg, and, again, never looked back.

That has been the pattern — if there is a pattern — to Kogan's life. She works at the Provincetown Bookshop, paints and travels. "I went to England for five winters and ended up working for women's liberation, which is not why I went there," she says. "I went to get away from Provincetown. I went *there* because it wasn't too expensive, and they spoke my language. One of the reasons I travel is to *not* do artwork, but then I think, 'Why am I not working? I should be doing something.' It's that old Protestant Work Ethic, that guilt about not producing."

Just what is she "producing?" That depends on what year you're talking about, what mood she's in, and what style she's pulling out of herself.

After losing enthusiasm for cubism, Kogan dabbled, literally, with the semi-abstract. "That was the first time I could use drips and splashes. It was very hard for me to get away from painting exactly the object, because I *love* the object. Abstract art taught me a great deal about color. It left me free to do anything. You can kill yourself when you have a lot of freedom, but you can learn a lot, too."

In 1969, Kogan turned a corner and ran smack into a new phase. "I



"Yogi," oil, 84" x 36".



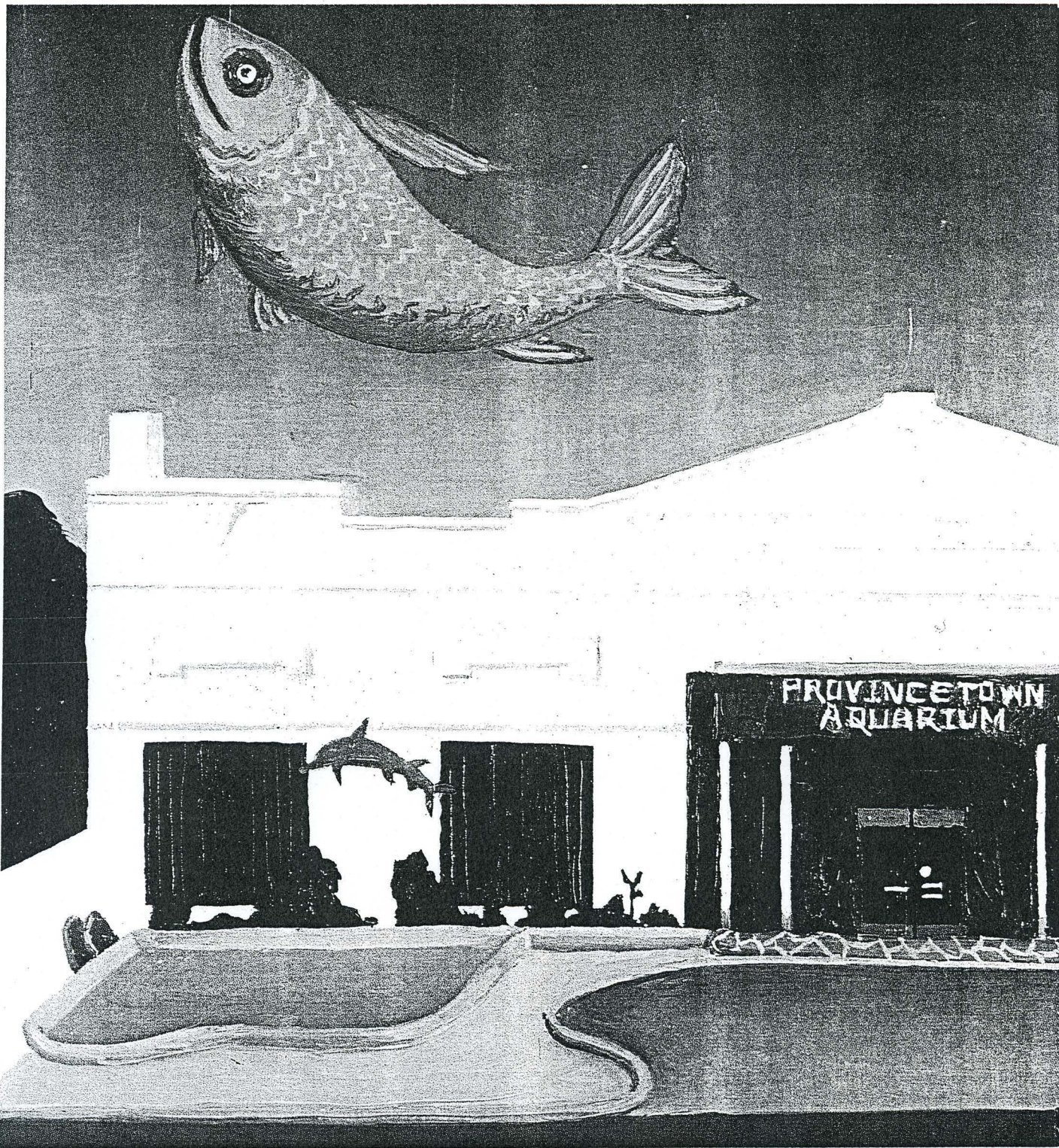
did a big painting — about seven feet by four feet, vertical — a semi-nude self-portrait. During the next 10 years, I did 13 seven-foot paintings of amazon women. That's what people called them; it's not what I intended. It took me about six

months to get the concept for each one."

The self-portrait that launched this series was chosen for a show called *Women Choose Women* at the New York Cultural Center. The *New York Times* called Kogan's painting,

"a combination of primitivism and surrealism . . . a ravishing and powerful feminist work."

The series is a startling commentary, strongly feminist, wildly colorful, filled with spiritualism, animals, exotic succulents, earth, moon, sun,



NED MANTER

"Aquarium," oil on wood panel, 6 3/8" x 9 1/4". From the collection of Reginald W. Cabral.



blood, the dark and light of life. Each painting is more measured, more exact, more controlled.

Kogan points to *Yogi*, the most symmetrical of all. "If I can take long enough designing something, I'll love it forever," she says. "This

one is that way. Everything works. I got out a perfect painting. Nothing in it bothers me." *Yogi* is the final work in the series, because with its completion came both deep satisfaction — and boredom.

A few years later, while visiting a

friend in New Hampshire, Kogan turned another corner. "I was lying in bed in the guest room and saw something on the wall — a little collage. I thought I'd like to do one of those with my house in it. I tried it using a photograph, and it didn't look right, so I painted it. That was the beginning of what turned out to be my one-and-only, truly saleable, better mousetrap series," she says, grinning.

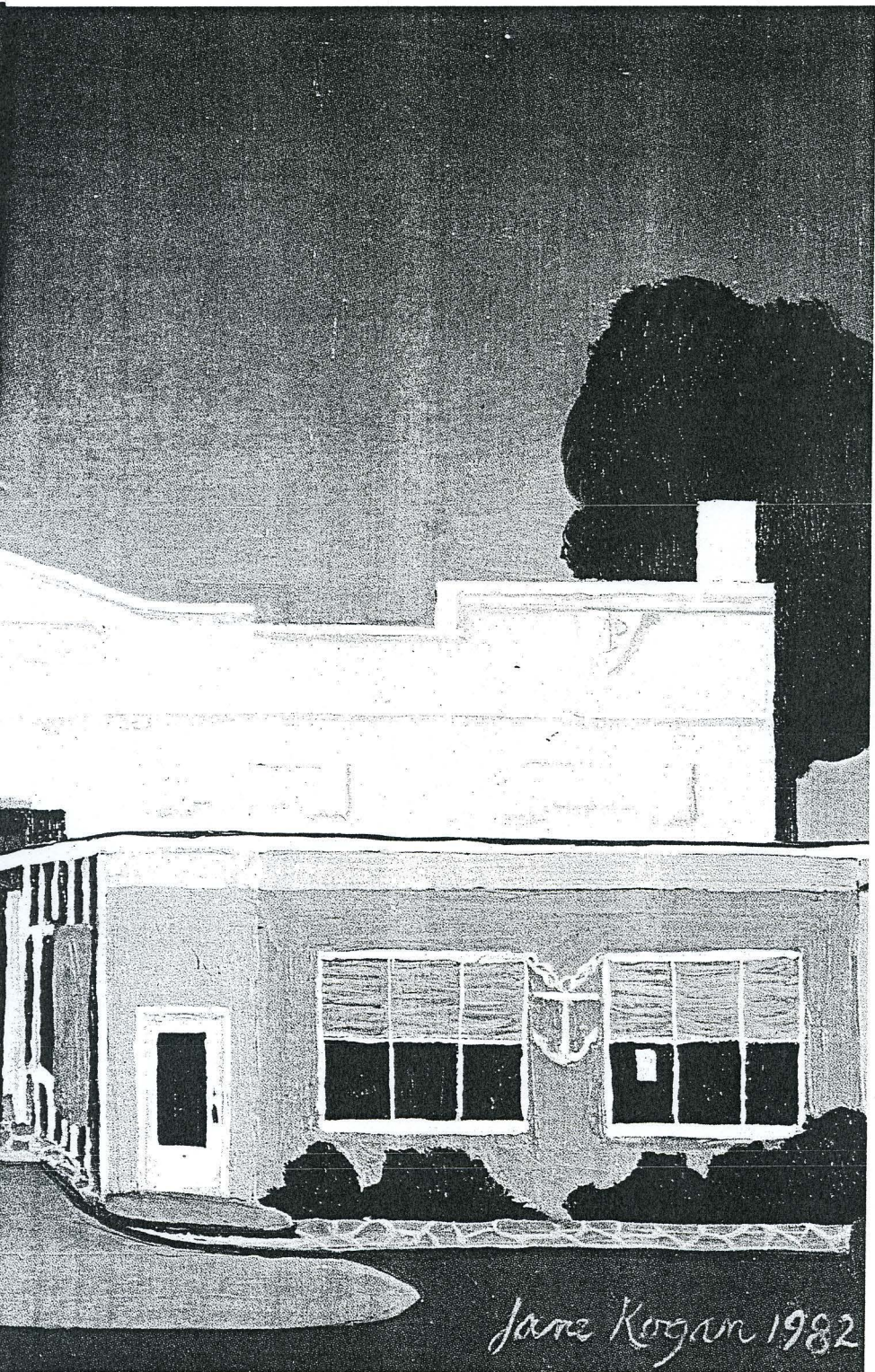
These paintings, all about seven inches by nine inches, are delicately rendered, capturing forever some aspect of Provincetown, from Town Hall to the Mobil station. "I could have painted those for 50 years and sold every one," says Kogan. "They got more and more tight and realistic. They became extremely detailed. I couldn't get brushes small enough.

"I'm urban in my mind. I'd always done buildings, people, interiors. Now I learned to do bushes, trees, piers, little puddles. I painted a friend's house, and she wanted to know why I included the electrical wires. I put them in because they were there. I liked them!" That realistic series had a life span of 34 paintings, and Kogan says she still sees buildings she would like to paint.

Kogan, who is represented by the Ellen Harris Gallery in Provincetown, is currently engrossed in a new series, painted in abstract style. "I hadn't done much painting since 1985," Kogan says, "then I tried this. I've never done anything abstract! I'm astonished, but I'm totally into it. I'm anxious to see some of these up at Ellen's."

And so the woman paints, although not compulsively. Working at the bookshop, writing poetry and short stories, and traveling occupy big places in her mind and life. "It's thrilling to wake up in the morning and want to paint as soon as the light is good," she says. "My friends see that I'm happy when I'm working, but I'm very happy lots of times when I'm *not* painting. It's part of my life, but not the be-all and end-all. I just go along, a steady putt-putt-putt." TR

— Marcia J. Monbleau





# THE REVENGE OF ROGER SKILLINGS

BY DONALD CANTIN

A woman in her early 50s strode purposefully up the center aisle of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, head down, her close-cropped brown hair bobbing gently at every step. When she reached the podium, the auctioneer handed her the microphone. She turned and looked at the audience, scanning every face, blinking nervously but with a determined expression.

"My name is Jane Kogan," she said, clearing her throat. "I've been living and working in Provincetown for over 20 years. Anyone involved in the art community here in the '60s knows that Walter Chrysler was famous for acquiring works of art and not paying for them. And it happened to me. He saw my work in a gallery and asked that I bring two paintings to his museum because he was interested in adding them to his collection. I was thrilled. Time went by but he never got around to paying me for them. The paintings went into storage and weren't readily available to me. Nor was Walter. I realized that I had no receipt. In the spring I insisted on getting my paintings back or being paid. Chrysler offered to give me a reception and hang the paintings. And he did, after I repaired a hole in one canvas and a scratch in another.

"True to his word, there was a wine and cheese reception and the paintings were hung in the museum. For one day. Not long after that the Chrysler Museum left Provincetown and was moved to Norfolk, Virginia. To my knowledge my paintings were in storage for 20 years and never shown." Her voice broke and again she cleared her throat.

"My story is not unique, or even uncommon. Many, many artists, some of them dead

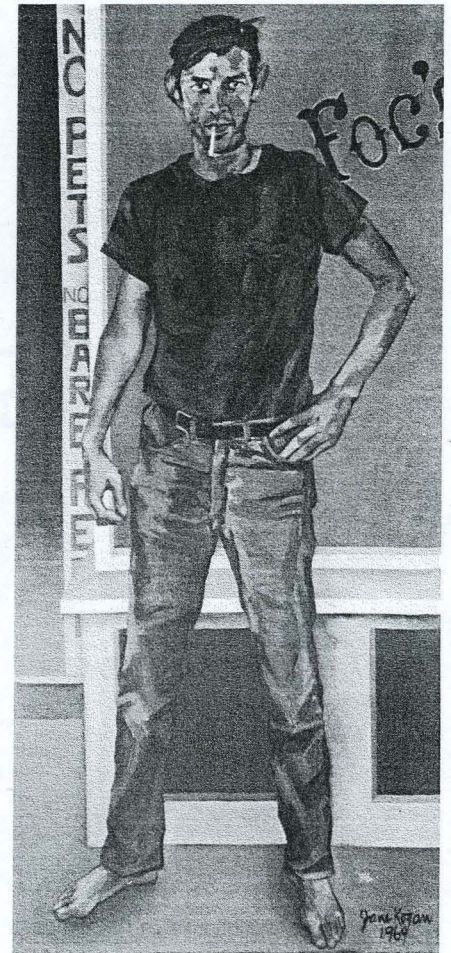
now, were ripped off by Walter Chrysler. Tonight, I will be bidding 25 dollars to reacquire my own work. And I am asking you not to bid against me. If I sell them, hopefully to someone who will donate them to our own museum here, I will give the Art Association the same 20 percent of the sale price. The only difference is that finally some profit may go to the artist who painted the pictures instead of to the Chrysler Museum that acquired them without paying for them, damaged them, shipped them out of town and warehoused them for 20 years.

"Thank you for your consideration."

Everyone in the room sat perfectly still. Those who had been fanning themselves with their auction catalogues were made motionless. Some were stunned, then forced to suspend their disbelief at the interruption. Two of the auctioneer's assistants carried out a full length, life-size oil portrait of Roger Skillings, a local author who had written extensively about Provincetown. He had posed for Kogan in front of the Fo'c'sle, a popular bar on Commercial Street, in his usual tee shirt and jeans, a lit cigarette hanging from the side of his mouth. The painting was nearly seven feet in height and it was held up high in the air—a major work, masterfully executed by an accomplished artist. The eyes of the author looked out on the audience, eerily, from 20 years ago. His deliberate stance, defiant and alive, seemed assumed for this moment in time.

Then, in a soft voice, the auctioneer asked, "What am I bid?"

"Twenty-five dollars," Jane Kogan said, her voice choked with emotion.



Jane Kogan, *Portrait of Roger Skillings*, 1969

There was silence, thick with expectation, eyes frozen on the painting that commanded the room. The auctioneer called for bids three or five times, but there were no other bids. Some 30 feet above in the great room, audible for the first time, the fans squeaked.

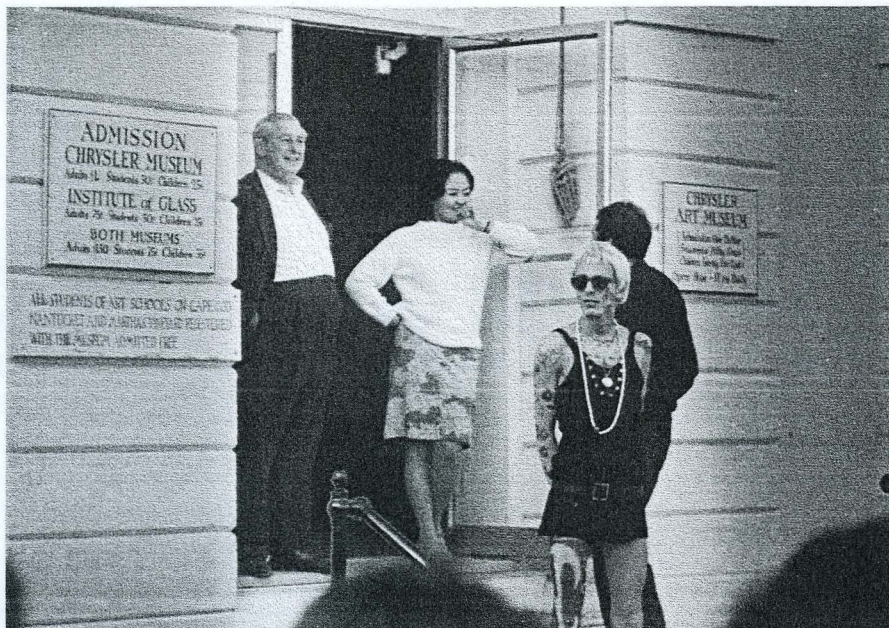
"Sold for 25 dollars," said the auctioneer with a crack of his gavel.

The audience instantly broke into loud and furious applause. People turned to one another, grinning, clapping their hands. Men and women wiped tears from their eyes. They came to their feet, many moving forward to shake Jane Kogan's hand, to hug and kiss her as a glowing smile spread across her face. And behind her, the painting was raised still higher by the auctioneer's assistants. ■

Donald Cantin recently completed a novel, *Land's End*, from which this story is excerpted.

Walter Chrysler in Provincetown, 1967

Photo by Vincent Guadagno





# Kogan blends a life of thought & art

By Sue Harrison

BANNER STAFF

Mix words from a 50-year-old diary with artwork refined over a lifetime and you get the small collage pieces by Jane Kogan on display at Robyn Watson Gallery, 232 Commercial St. Kogan's work is full of detail and intent that require the viewer to read the text and feel how the surrounding collage supports and expands that beginning. The show will hang through Oct. 24.

Kogan's work has been shifting in size and style over the past 35 years and this is just the latest step in that evolution. She has worked in large and small formats, in abstract, figurative, impressionist and realistic styles, and in collage. Each period of time spent with a particular genre or size leads her to the next plateau.

"I have that Protestant work ethic. I have to validate each day by doing artwork," Kogan says from a chair in the gallery.

After her first visit to Provincetown in 1958 where she saw two men holding hands and thought to herself that she needed to come back, she continued to visit. After returning from two years in Italy studying painting on a Fulbright, she and friends rented a house on the beach in '66 and in '68, the first year of existence for the Fine Arts Work Center, when she was selected as part of the initial group of fellows. After that, she never left. She took a job at the Provincetown Book Shop and she's still there.

"I've done the same thing all these years. The only change is the job has gone from 10 weeks to 20 weeks. ... Since '72 I've worked at the bookstore and my life has been exactly the same," she says, and one wonders what secrets she's hiding behind that even smile and steady gaze. Certainly her work reveals her to be full of insight even at the early age of 13.

Kogan gives a quick verbal tour through the stages that have brought her to where she is now.

Kogan first showed at the former Ellen Harris Gallery. Harris sold pipes and tobacco accessories and Kogan talked her into showing some etchings. From that, the tobacco shop turned into a gallery, and Kogan showed there until it closed several years ago.

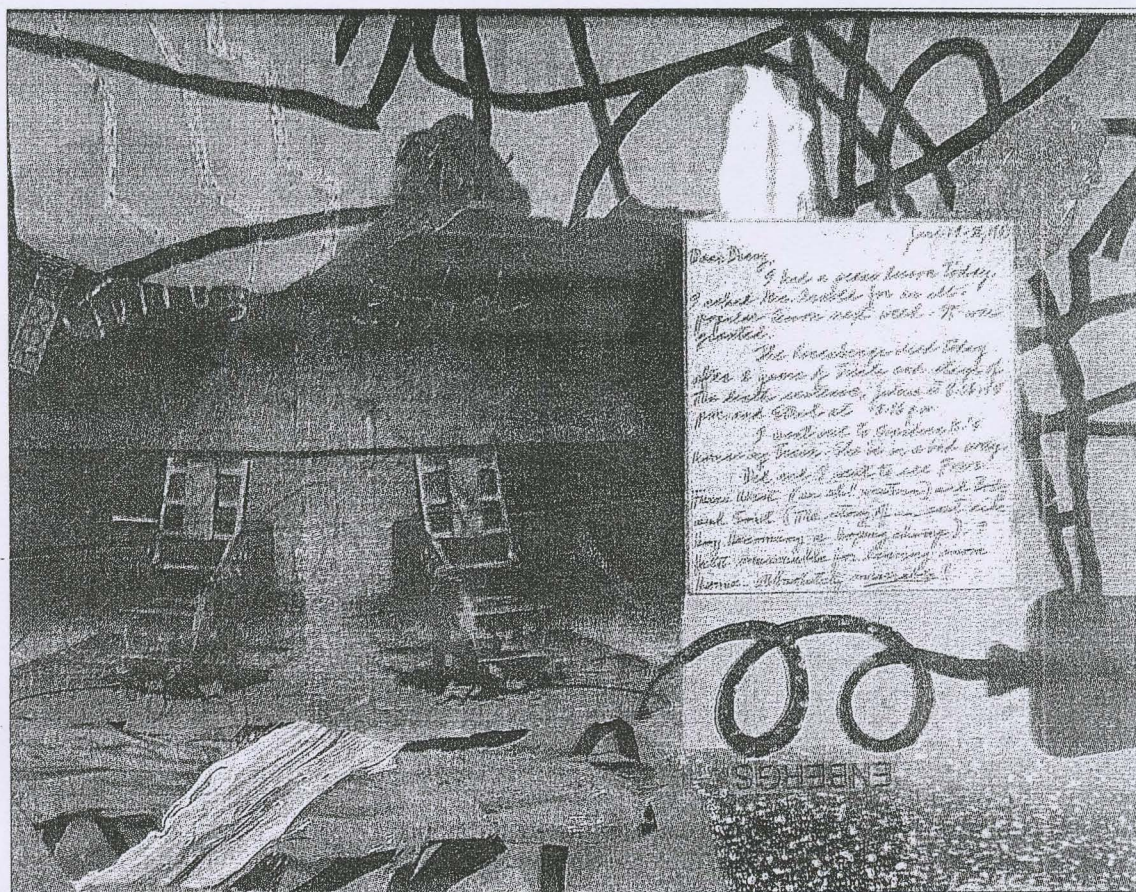
"I was doing Cezanne stuff, then Cubist," she says. "In the late '60s I did my Amazon series, life-sized women. Then '82-'84 I did tiny landscapes. They sold like hotcakes. They were extraordinarily detailed. If you have a big painting for \$1,000, how do you price these? I decided \$1 a square inch. Most were around \$50. They were all bought up. Then I realized I was making about \$10 an hour and that doesn't count the \$2 an hour I was spending on these sable brushes with three hairs in them."

Next, she moved to abstracts, convincing Harris to add abstract work to her walls. Kogan put in four fairly large pieces, sold two and then had another shift.

"I was in New York in 1990 and decided to do colored pencils," she says of the step before her current work. "I went right down to Pearl Paint and got the wrong paper, thick, very glossy paper with no tooth at all. I've been using it ever since. Gray pencils, I couldn't find enough. Then I started to add buttons, and it became collage. Then bits of metal. They were all abstract."

"Three years ago, I decided it would be fun to cull from my diary begun when I was 13. I picked up a pad of fake parchment and decided to do it like a book (with text on one page and a drawing on the facing page)."

The idea didn't quite achieve what she had hoped for. The first 10 pieces were



"The Rosenbergs," collage by Jane Kogan, pairs details about the famous execution with memories of a western movie seen with her father that same day as recalled in her 50-year-old diary.

stand-alone but didn't feel right. Some connection was needed, she says, and a piece of old string trailing from the text to the adjacent collage was the first step. Then, in a move away from abstract drawings, Kogan included a rendering of a pair of blue suede boots her mother had given her and a more representational aspect stepped in.

The words, excerpts copied exactly from the original pages, come from her first diary, a small, green leather book with a lock and key. Delving into her diaries starting with book offers one an interesting look back at a child's unselfconscious perspective on the world. From the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg or a snowfall in the city to the excitement of taking a trip to Mexico, the young Jane wrote down her world and the older Jane arranges it for us.

"This series is finished for now," she says. "I'm always doing something different. Who knows what is next?" □



PHOTOS SUE HARRISON

Jane Kogan (left) and friends Ruth and Miriam Goodman at Kogan's recent opening at Robyn Watson Gallery.