

Bob Doucette



Previous Page, Calliope, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 24"

Joys, Toys and Dreamscapes

written by Lorie Lee Steiner

In a dream, things are never really what they seem... and it is there, in that surreal realm where fantasy hovers on the cusp of reality, you'll find the incomparable Bob Doucette weaving extraordinary tales with paint. Vivid characters plucked from the artist's own joyful rendition of Toyland, coming alive in scenes peppered with imagination galore and begging you to join in the fun. Bob's own life is as storied as his paintings, a focused yet meandering journey of wanderlust-meets-opportunity with the most fabulous results.

Growing up in Maine in the midst of a "very arty community" gave Bob Doucette's inherent talent an early jump start. As a child, he loved to draw and paint, something his parents encouraged with art lessons. Bob recalls, "I was raised by hard-working working class parents with a very strong moral compass and I have always carried those values into my work. I believe you can achieve almost any goal if you work hard enough and have a passion for what you are doing."

Even as an eight-year-old, he was dabbling in oils but his mother decided he was too messy, so he switched to acrylics soon after and has been using them ever since. Bob's second love is sculpting – he began making dolls and puppets at age 12 and by junior high he had started a puppet troupe called the "Messypiece Theatre" with his friend Dexter Smith. They regularly performed to the great delight of attendees at the children's room of the local public library and at the Maine Blueberry festival. Many newspaper stories and an interview on public radio documented Bob's early puppetry career; he also enjoyed performing on stage in Junior High and High School musicals.

In his college days, Bob took on a side job working in the theater at Camp Manitou in Oakland, Maine, and met theater director Marc Jacobs who became a mentor, teacher and friend. After 10 summers making costumes, painting sets and directing plays with children, he finished his camp career. His Camp Manitou legacy is remarkable: designing over 50 plays, painting hundreds of posters, directing several videos and writing a handful of plays with Marc Jacobs. In fact, the two worked so well together that the director employed Bob numerous times through the years – designing costumes, masks, puppets and sets for operas and musical theater.



above, *Twelve Oaks*, acrylic on canvas, 36" x 24"

Following Page 1, *The Muse of Dance*, acrylic on canvas, 20" x 16"

Following Page 2, *The Unlikely Event*, acrylic on canvas, 36" x 24"

Following Page 3, *Choke Cherry*, acrylic on canvas, 21" x 12"

Following Page 4, *Madame Butterfly*, acrylic on canvas, 25" x 16"







above, *Lucy Westrena*, acrylic on canvas, 0" x 0"

above, *Red Dragons*, acrylic on canvas, 0" x 0"

To further explore and expand his penchant for visual expression, Bob enrolled at the Rhode Island School of Design (R.I.S.D), where he double majored in illustration and animation. His thesis film "Bessie and Erna" was featured in the Lucca Animation Festival in Italy, Annecy International Animation festival in France, Toronto International Animation Festival, Ann Arbor Film Festival, and was eventually purchased by a rental company for inclusion in their film catalogue.



above, *Pushing up Daisies*, acrylic on canvas, 10" x 5"



above, *Lucille*, acrylic on canvas, 0" x 0"

"Bessie and Erna" earned kudos for appearing to be a moving painting without the traditional outlines of classic animation. And Bob Doucette was definitely getting noticed in the industry.

After graduation, he moved to New York City and made another film "Jimmy's Home Movie," returning to Rhode Island to finish the project with help from his former R.I.S.D. faculty who generously let him use their cameras to film the movie.

Driven by the creative spirit, he then joined the unique Puppet Workshop of Providence, where he designed puppets and sets, wrote plays and performed in main stage shows under the guidance of the brilliant artistic director, Mark Kohler. The highpoint of his second puppetry career was meeting Jim Henson and joining in a great Muppet Workshop, learning how to visualize and make puppets with the amazing people who created all the Sesame Street Muppets.

Then off at last to California to continue his education at Cal Arts and earn a master's degree in animation. Bob's Cal Arts thesis film "The Pink Triangle" was the first animated film to deal with the plight of homosexuals under the Nazi regime and became a big presence in the gay film festival circuit around the world throughout the 1990s. It was shown at The Museum of Modern Art in New York and made part of the permanent collection of the New York Public Library. Bob's actual career in animation took hold in 1990. Over the years, he lent his skill to favorite shows like *Animaniacs* and *Tiny Toons Adventures* and in his role as an animation director has produced hundreds of hours of cartoons for TV and DVD, as well as producing his own shows.

In yet another notable creative outlet, Bob partnered with professional costumer Tom Slotten. Together they crafted over a hundred fine art dolls; Slotten made the costumes while Bob sculpted, painted and accessorized the dolls.



above, *When Joy Slips In*, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 12"

Following Page 1, *Kraken*, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 36"

Following Page 2, *Dark Night of the Soul*, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 36"

Following Page 3, *Leviosa*, acrylic on canvas, 20" x 16"





Their work has been collected and commissioned by art collectors around the world including, Demi Moore, who owns over a dozen of their pieces. Hillary Clinton commissioned them to make a doll for the White House Christmas tree in 1999 and their Ben Franklin doll is now in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian.

In 2008, the urge to paint full time took hold and the artist wholeheartedly gave in. Since 2013, Bob has been selling his paintings in galleries and loving every minute of it. He shares, "My artwork has two distinctive flavors, one is comic and the other is more surreal. When I'm commenting on life and being observant, I use my cartooning skills to tell my stories but when I want to explore my spiritual side, I use surreal dreamlike imagery to illustrate my feelings. My work plays off the feelings of joy you carry from childhood into your adult life, so my studio is filled with toys. I try to capture that feeling of a child's anticipation of Christmas, the promise of sweets in a candy shop, or the toys I fantasized about owning as a child."

Bob always aspired to having a studio like the iconic places where NC Wyeth and Norman Rockwell worked their magic and now he's finally achieved that place in his life with a truly great place to work. "I'm in my studio seven days a week," says Bob, "and I am thankful every day! I also collect other artists' art but I'm careful not to be staring directly at it when I work, or I find myself copying it! I love art that surprises me with its style and dazzles me with technique. Several amazing Maine artists influenced my development as an artist. And, currently, I'm obsessed with Greg Crayola Simkins, Jennybird Alcantara, Lori Earley and Mark Ryden to name a few."

For newcomers to the craft, Bob advises, "Give yourself time, explore everything, learn all the rules and then reject any that don't suit you. But most of all, try and find out who you are, the only original thing left in this world is your perspective. For me, today, the hardest part is having the time and energy to get things done, my hands can't keep up with my mind and unfortunately the older I get the less energy I have to accomplish everything I aspire to do."

As far as technique, Bob is comfortable using both acrylic and oil paint, on wood panels and on stretched canvas. His still is somewhat old school, preferring to work things up in a monochromatic palette and then slowly add color once the form and composition are working. He admits, "The longer I work in solitude I have found that the meditative quality of "paint time" allows you to calm your monkey brain and let the "god voice" in. Your ego is loud and obnoxious and always worried and negative, but if you calm yourself you will find that there is a very quiet, positive voice giving you fantastic advice. I call it the "god-voice" because I know it's not from me but from outside me.

Some people think of it as the muse or the voices of all the great creators who came before you. One day I was getting neurotic about what I would paint next and then I suddenly heard this quiet voice that said: "It doesn't matter what you paint, it's how you paint it that matters." I realized that I needed to just paint the things that interested me and not try to impress others.



above left, *Toyland*, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 12"
above right, *Violet*, acrylic on canvas, 14" x 11"

Previous page, top left, *Horrible Horace Rides Again 2*, acrylic on canvas, 14" x 11"
bottom left, *Pete*, acrylic on canvas, 14" x 11"
top right, *Mitzi and the Magic 8 Ball*, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18"
bottom right, *Gone Bats*, acrylic on canvas, 14" x 11"

"If you have a child-like wonder for something, that passion will see you through the painting. Love is the most important ingredient, technique without love is shallow."



above left, *Aurora*, doll
above right, *Super Bee*, bust

Previous Page, *The Gift of Honey*, acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20"

Sometimes commissions align beautifully with what Bob wishes to paint – for those he is exceedingly grateful. As an artist, making money is always a concern, so having a guaranteed sale tends to calm the worry. “I do feel like you need to paint from your heart first and foremost,” says Bob. “If you do it well, people will commission you to do the things you like. If you are uncomfortable with a commission, you need to just say no because no one will be happy in the end.”



above left, **Bad Habit**, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 12"
above right, **Despair**, acrylic on canvas, 10" x 5"

Previous Page, **Queen of the Night**, doll

Following Page 1, **My Blue Heart**, acrylic on canvas, 14" x 11"
Following Page 2, **Royally Yours**, acrylic on canvas, 14" x 11"





above left, *Killing Time*, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 12"
above right, *A Punto De*, acrylic on canvas, 10" x 5"

Following Page 1, *Papillion*, acrylic on canvas, 20" x 16"
Following Page 2 (last page), *Sundae Best*, acrylic on canvas, 21" x 14"

The year Bob first began showing in galleries, he started out by creating a vision board of the things he wished to accomplish for the year. At that time, he drew a very simple stick figure of himself in the lotus position and an infinity symbol showing love (hearts) going out of him through his art and then passed on to his clients, who then returned the love to him. Bob reflects, "It was an infinite circle of love unbroken. I hung it up in my studio in January and never thought about it again.

One day, while appearing live at a gallery in San Diego, this woman saw my paintings in the window and came in to ask me about them. She cornered me and asked for an explanation of one of my paintings, saying that she had just gone through a very difficult divorce from an abusive, controlling husband and she was celebrating by traveling around the world and San Diego was her first stop. I went on to explain the feelings that went into my painting, when she stopped me and said, "It's as though you poured all your love into your paintings when you made them and then I felt it when I saw them. And now I have to return that love to you." My heart leapt."

Learn more about the enchanting and playful works of artist Bob Doucette at his website: www.bobdoucette.com.

Fine galleries that represent Bob Doucette's work include:

Lewis Galleries
Simi Valley, CA - USA
www.cartoondopot.com

The Dark Art Emporium
Long Beach, CA - USA
shop.darkartemporium.com

Curly Tale Fine Art
Chicago, IL – USA
www.curlytafineart.com

Exhibit A
Peoria, IL - USA
www.exhibitagallery.net

The Art Collective Gallery
Rogers, AK - USA
www.artcollectivegallery.com

