



KATHY COE

Cups of Connection

Figures, portraits, still lifes...artist Kathy Coe is a talented painter of them all, but an upcoming show at George Billis Gallery will showcase her small-scale teacup paintings, a subject that has been part of her repertoire for roughly 20 years.

She was surprised to find that her teacup paintings also had the story element that had drawn her to portraiture early on. They also allowed her to paint solely from life, which she prefers. People responded to the small works, sharing their own stories about their favorite cups and loaning them to her to paint. She even received commissions.

One of the most significant commissions of her career came from the late, media

personality Joan Rivers. *People Magazine* had enlisted Coe to paint a portrait of one of Rivers' (many) dogs, Spike, as a gift. Rivers liked it so much, she went on to commission Coe directly to paint tiny renderings of the rest of her beloved pets, at least a half dozen. Each Christmas, Rivers would receive a unique cup designed specifically for the Royal Family from Prince Charles, with whom she had a close relationship.

"She thought it would be fun to give one back to him in a painting," recounts Coe, adding that the cup she was to paint for Prince Charles arrived at her house in a limousine.

"I miss Joan and am grateful to have gotten to know her...She was such a sweet

and kind person and so generous and hilarious...I was invited to her memorial where Howard Stern was the first to speak. A string of comedians followed in the same manner, it was so funny, and they also said the most heartfelt things about Joan. I was so honored to have been invited."

(Another of Coe's most meaningful projects was painting portraits of Gilda Radner for one of the late comedian's first cancer wellness centers in New York City. She worked closely with Gene Wilder to create a mural of Radner's *Saturday Night Live* characters that greet visitors at the entrance.)

In her new series of diminutive demitasses, she has paired them with books that relate to the cup in some way. In *Under the Tuscan Sun*, a ceramic cup with a distinctly Italian design sits atop the romantic memoir by Frances Mayes. In this piece, she's added a window that looks out into the bucolic countryside.

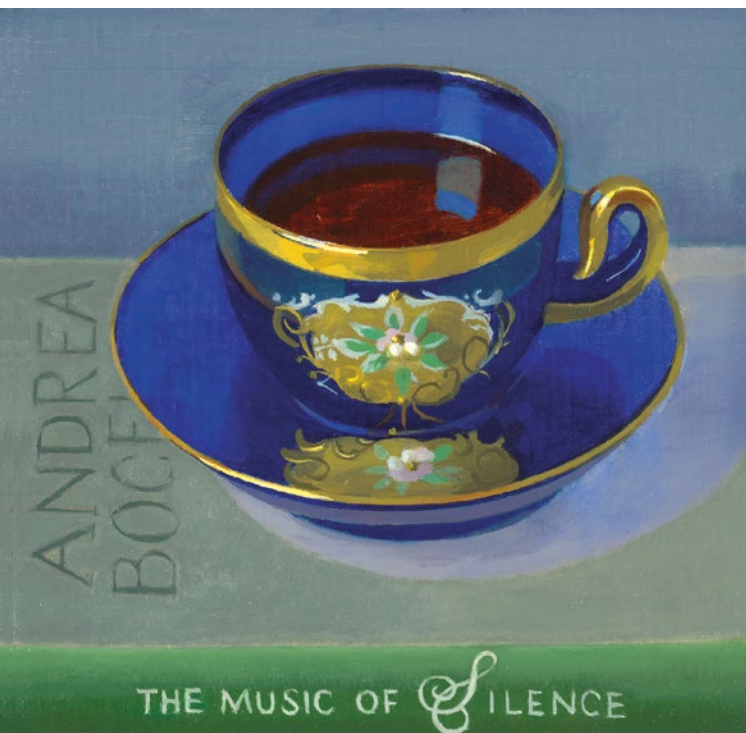
"Sometimes I'll put a window in to allow the imagination to go out the window," she says. "I liked the idea of being able to look out the window into the Italian countryside, to imagine going out there and walking around, to make you feel like you're actually in a little village in Italy."

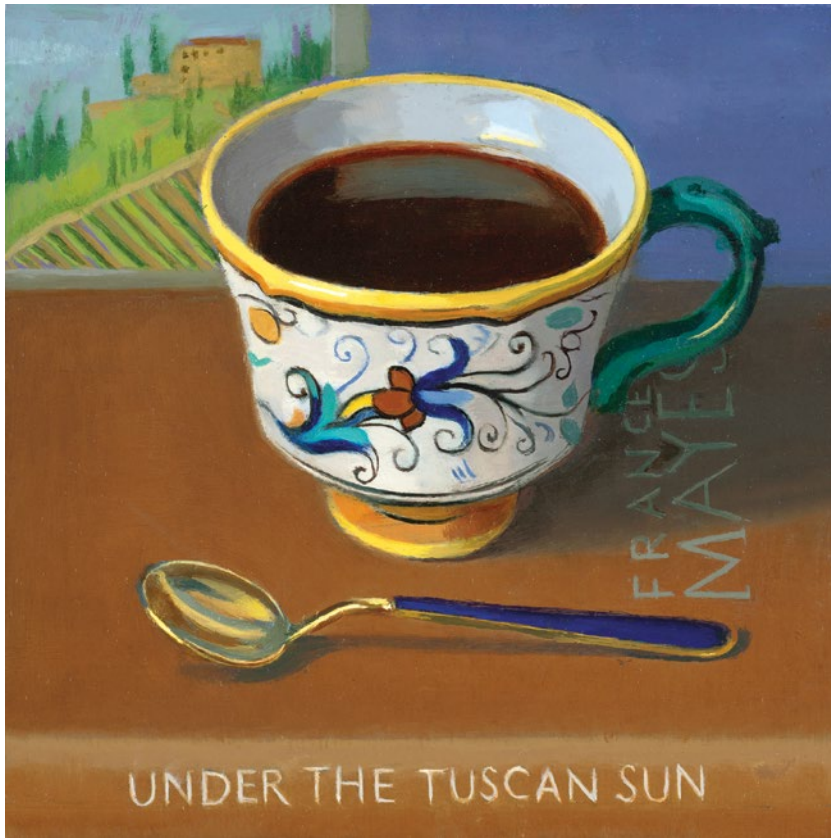
Another Italy-inspired pairing is *The Music of Silence*, where an impossibly cobalt and gold-accented cup made of Murano glass rests on a copy of singer Andrea Bocelli's autobiography. For the ornate Asian chinaware, she has chosen *The Poppy Blooms*, a book of Haiku poetry by Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai, best known for his woodblock print *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*. The book, which touches upon Hokusai's writing process, resonated with Coe and her painting process.

A most whimsical example is *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, in which a teacup with a dragonfly handle conjured up a connection to the beloved children's books of Beatrix Potter.

Find these works and many others at an exhibition in Fairfield, Connecticut, from February 13 through March 23. ●

George Billis Gallery 1700 Post Road • Fairfield, CT 06824 • (212) 645-2621 • www.georgebillis.com





UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN

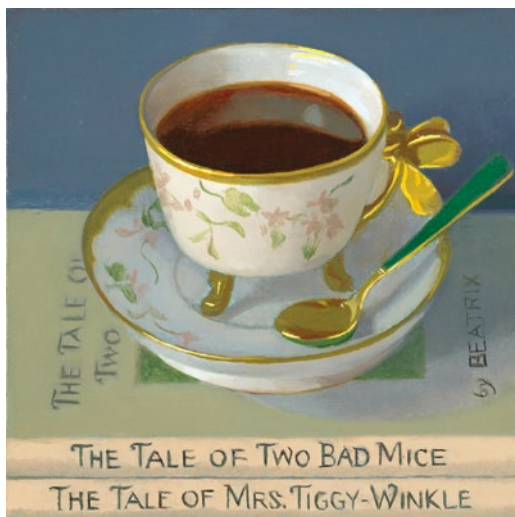
- 1
The Music of Silence,
oil on linen, 6 x 6"
- 2
Under the Tuscan Sun,
oil on linen, 6 x 6"
- 3
A Poppy Blooms, oil on
linen, 6 x 6"
- 4
*The Tale of Two Bad
Mice*, oil on linen,
6 x 6"

2



A Poppy Blooms.
-Katsushika Hokusai

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THE TALE OF TWO
BAD MICE
THE TALE OF MRS. TIGGY-WINKLE

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