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JEAN KENT

1920 – 1989

Brought up by her Main Line family to swim and sail, Vassar-educated Jean Kent trained at the Cambridge School of Design and at Boston's Museum School, then went adventuring, fetching up where she belonged, at the edge of the world. Even in eccentric Provincetown she made heads turn on Commercial Street—a bulky, five-foot figure in a lumberjack shirt, squinting into the afternoon sun as she ambled toward the Bayer Gallery.

Jean Kent was a legend in her lifetime: whenever she went out on the Dolphin boats, they invariably sighted whales, as if, recognizing her kinship, the giant mammals made a special effort to be present. They were her best subjects—caught for a mystical moment as they breached onto her drawing pad, they were, like Jean herself, both massive and graceful, worldly and playful, the quintessence of whaleness.

Jean's work, at first glance deceptively simple, was in fact the result of years of training. Her sculptures seemed enigmatic to some, blocks of marble barely chiseled on the surface. But the creatures she saw in them were there; you simply had to be as attentive as she, focusing on the natural patterns in the stone until the forms revealed themselves.

In her last years she painted wild animals in bold, colorful strokes against nature's unfinished background, where sea and sky and mountain met and her beloved whales danced to her inner music.

— Jacqueline Lapidus



WHALE KISSING THE EARTH

Glory to the Mother of all whales
for autumn when the ocean swells
and dips and the mist rolls
over the harbor; down
to the bottom far from sound
she plunges purposefully and
salutes soft sand with her enormous face:
the right whale in the right place.



jean kent

WHALE WITH CALF

Diving toward the ocean floor
mother's and baby's noses linked
in a quick cetacean kiss

the artist makes eternal: long
after science is proved wrong
concerning whale behavior

here's what reminds a daughter this
is the love we're longing for
when all others are extinct



WHALE BLISSING OUT

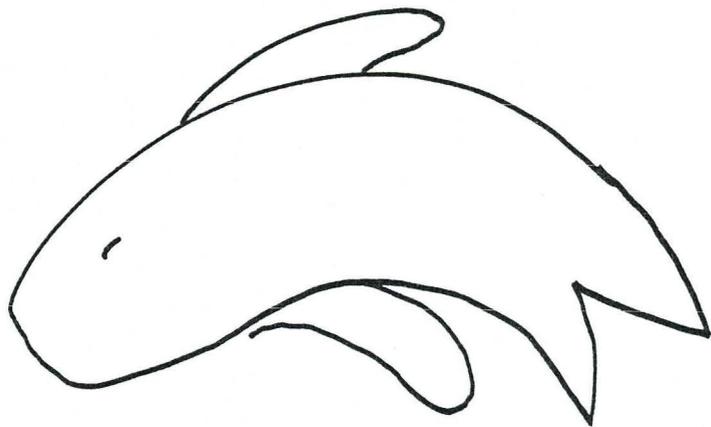
Breaching in ecstasy, supreme
moment of some cetaceous dream,
she hovers at the apogee
suspended between sun and sea

her massive body motionless
her eyelids closed in perfect bliss:
image of Jean whose inmost gaze
over vast horizons plays

Great whale, may you forever find
and share such joy with womankind!

Poems © Jacqueline Lapidus

"Whale Kissing the Earth" and "Whale with
Calf," felt pen on paper. Estate of Jean Kent.
"Whale Blissing Out," felt pen on paper, 1986.
Private collection, Provincetown.



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