

Ken Howard, OBE, RA (1932 - 2022)

Sennen Beach, Cornwall

Signed, lower right: Ken Howard

Oil on canvas

18 x 24 in - 45.7 x 61 cm

Frame size

23⅞ x 30 in - 60.6 x 76.2 cm

Artist description:

Ken Howard was one of the most distinguished figurative and landscape artists of 20th century British art, a painter who remained firmly committed to observation, light, and the human figure at a time when much of the art world was turning toward abstraction and conceptual practices.

Born in north-west London in 1932, Howard studied at Hornsey College of Art (1949-1953) and later at the Royal College of Art (1955-58), where his studies were interrupted by National Service with the Royal Marines (1953-5). Awarded a scholarship by the British Council in 1958 he continued his studies in Florence, a formative period in which he discovered the expressive possibilities of light and colour that would become central to his work.

Whether depicting a sunlit studio interior, a reclining nude, or Venetian street, Howard sought to capture the fleeting atmospheric effects by painting directly from life. His technique combined assured draughtsmanship with loose, painterly brushwork, resulting in compositions that felt both spontaneous and carefully composed.

His first solo exhibition was held at the Plymouth Art Centre in 1955, followed by exhibitions at the John Whibley Gallery in 1966 and 1968. Thereafter, he exhibited widely, both nationally and internationally, particularly with the New Grafton Gallery.

Recognition came steadily throughout his career. In 1972, he was given a retrospective at the Plymouth City Art Gallery in 1972. The following year he was appointed Official War Artist to Northern Ireland (1973, 1979) and also worked with the British army (1973-80) in Canada, Cyprus, Germany, Norway, Hong Kong, Nepal, Belize and Brunei, where he recorded aspects of military life. His standing within Britain's artistic institutions was firmly established through numerous elections and appointments. He became a member of the New English Art Club in 1962, later serving as President in 1998. He was elected a member of the Royal Institute of Oil Painters (1966), the Royal Society of Painters in Watercolours (1979), the Royal West of England Academy (1981) and in 1991 was elected Royal Academician. His appointment as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire further acknowledged his contribution to the arts.

In later years, he continued to paint with undiminished energy while also writing about his life and practice, including in his autobiography Light and Dark.

He died on 11 September 2022 at the age of 89, leaving behind a substantial body of work that continues to be exhibited and collected.

His works can be found in museums in: London, Royal Academy of Arts, The Imperial War Museum and The National Army Museum; Brighton; Plymouth and Ulster