



# ART ATTACK

With his historic Harlem '58 portrait of American jazz musicians and his conceptual depictions of THE WHO, JEFFERSON AIRPLANE, JIM MORRISON and JANIS JOPLIN, **ART KANE** became one of the most imitated photographers of the 20th century. **ANDREW MALE** speaks to Kane's son, Jonathan, about the vision and invention of a great American artist.

## JANIS JOPLIN

◀ **Jonathan Kane:** "Dad and Janis did not like each other. He purposely chose this image of her falling out of the frame because he saw her as an out of control person, on a collision course with herself. The photograph is harrowing, powerful and tragically insightful."



## JIM MORRISON

◀ **Jonathan Kane:** "Art appreciated Jim Morrison's love for literature. They liked each other and chatted like schoolboys during the shoot. He thought of the TV as an X-ray screen into Morrison's soul as a cultural icon and commentator. He had Jim flipping through the channels and got several interesting outtakes, but this buries them all. It was shot in dad's hotel room at LA's Chateau Marmont where Morrison also kept a room."

## BOB DYLAN

▶ **Jonathan Kane:** "Bob Dylan didn't want to look at the camera. He wasn't used to photographers telling him what to do. This was taken in the spring of 1966 while Dylan was on a break from that infamous first electric tour, where audiences in Europe were booing him. He was in no mood for a bossy photographer. Dad loved Dylan's music and had enormous respect for him. Nonetheless, he literally stalked him into a corner and demanded eye contact. The outtakes are fine, even great, they show the process, but this is pure Art Kane. Dylan is seething, but finally cooperating."



**A**S A KID GROWING UP IN THE 1960s, LIFE was pretty cool for Jonathan Kane. "Every day," explains the 58-year-old musician, "dad would come home with trophies from the day job. I'd get autographs and souvenirs from The Rolling Stones, Sonny And Cher, The Who, TV's Batman [Adam West] and Man From U.N.C.L.E. sidekick Illya Kuryakin [David McCallum]." But if the '60s were pretty cool for Jonathan Kane, they were spectacular for his father, Art Kane.

Born Arthur Kanofsky in New York in 1925, for much of his life Art Kane seemed like a man touched by a spectral magic. After serving in the US army in the Second World War with the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops — a Tactical Deception Unit dubbed 'The Ghost Army' — Kane became an editorial designer for Esquire and, at Seventeen magazine, the youngest art director in the US, 26 years old and overseeing esteemed '50s photographers like Richard Avedon and Bert Stern. In 1958 Kane became a photographer himself. His first assignment, Harlem '58, for Esquire, is now recognised as one of the most significant images of

the 20th century. "He had a huge idea," says Jonathan Kane, "and he made it happen. It launched his career into the stratosphere."

In the '60s and '70s Art pioneered a style of conceptual portraiture that made him one of the most important photographers working in the US. "He freed photography from the bonds of literal interpretation and turned it into illustration," says Jonathan. "He could see things from the inside out, and seize that universal truth."

Art Kane relentlessly studied every subject he photographed. Single shots could have two-week preparations. On-stage shots just wasted time. When Rod Stewart refused to be photographed in Art's studio, Kane sent for a promotional record-store Rod cut-out. He cut it in half and shot it in a taxi. It never ran.

Kane disrespected conventional rules and boundaries. The 1980s US magazine industry couldn't accommodate him. "Despite an enormous ego he was also capable of great compassion and tenderness," insists his son. "If you met him now, he'd be nearly 90 years old, which is hard for me to imagine. Growing old was not on his agenda."

Art Kane took his own life on February 3, 1995. His work is his legacy.

"His pictures speak to the ages," says Jonathan Kane. "They are timeless."



Art Kane, also happy on the other side of a camera.

Art Kane (2), Jonathan Kane



## CREAM

◀ **Jonathan Kane:** "Incredible. The second image [far left] would be a masterpiece of composition even if it didn't have Cream in their prime playing unplugged in the middle of it, Ginger Baker flailing away with sticks made on the spot from branches broken off the nearby trees. And that sun, setting just at the apex of the tracks. Please. WTF."



## SONNY AND CHER

▲ **Jonathan Kane:** "Can we say, *Nevermind*? Here is where many of Art Kane's passions all come together: music, celebrity, fashion, humour. And chance. Dad wore a scuba tank and was weighted to stay put at the bottom of their pool in Beverly Hills. The outtakes are all wrong, hair across their faces, air bubbles obscuring things, silly or awkward expressions and body angles as they dove into the water for him again and again. But that one... that one click that grabbed a slice of perfection. That's Art Kane."

## MOTHERS OF INVENTION

▶ **Jonathan Kane:** "This is possibly my favourite of all the images from LIFE Magazine's 'The New Rock' essay, it's so full of life, love and humour. I was there, at age 11, arriving just after the shooting wrapped. Frank Zappa met me at the door of dad's studio with a hug and said, 'Hey man, you should have been here an hour ago, the babies were pissing all over us, we got soaked man!' Twenty-five years later I was playing on a bill with Mothers Of Invention drummer Jimmy Carl Black. At the soundcheck I told Jimmy how Zappa and the band were all so nice to me as a young kid. He replied: 'Why do you think they called us The Mothers, man?'"

Art Kane (4)





## THE WHO

◀ **Jonathan Kane:** "It's an homage to Henri Cartier-Bresson's image of a tramp asleep at Trafalgar Square. Dad shot it first in his studio, on white seamless, but decided the results were too sterile, so he took the band out to a location in NYC near Columbia University and did it again. At some point, two neighbourhood kids came along, and dad had them get in the picture, just like Harlem 1958, where the kids on the curb just showed up and dad saw the magic in their presence. I was told by a photographer who shot The Who in the 1980s that Pete Townshend references Art Kane's Who shoot as exemplary of how photographers should direct their subjects. I think this may be true, as it's not a stretch to say that it's probably the most significant photograph of The Who."



## HARLEM '58

◀ **Jonathan Kane:** "That was the centrepiece of his first major photographic assignment: a gathering of 57 giants of jazz in front of a brownstone in Harlem. They made a documentary about that picture, A Great Day In Harlem. It has been recreated so many times it's practically become a global franchise. I find homages all the time. Someone told me they've seen a life-size photo realist pencil drawing of it and I hear it's been done as a stained glass window. It was also the hook and ultimate plot point of Steven Spielberg's film The Terminal."



## NUDIE

◀ **Jonathan Kane:** "Art could relate to Nudie Cohen, who, like Art Kane, was a nice Jewish boy from the Bronx who utterly reinvented himself. For some reason, Nudie had that legless plastic horse in his shop in LA, but dad decided to take it out into the street."



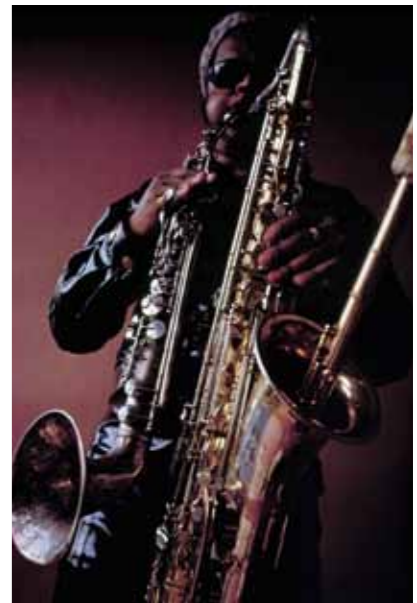
## JEFFERSON AIRPLANE

▲ **Jonathan Kane:** "This was the cover of LIFE Magazine. It was actually shot in Queens, NYC, just south of the 59th Street Bridge across the river from midtown Manhattan, at a gypsum factory. The Plexiglass cubes were designed by my dad to create the illusion of the Airplane 'flying', and also to reference acid rock with the visual metaphor of sugarcubes of acid. The cubes cost several thousand dollars to make, a fortune in those days for an editorial shoot, but Art Kane was able to get away with it."

Art Kane (5)

## RAHSAAN ROLAND KIRK

▼ **Jonathan Kane:** "I don't really know much about this image. Not even sure they were ever used as I've never seen them published. Rahsaan Roland Kirk is wearing what looks like a vinyl or rubber suit, and seems to also have a flute stuck inside the bell of his tenor saxophone. Amazing."



Art Kane's works are being exhibited at Snap Galleries in London, [www.snapgalleries.com](http://www.snapgalleries.com) until February 15, 2015.

Art Kane is available at [reelartpress.com](http://reelartpress.com) and [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)