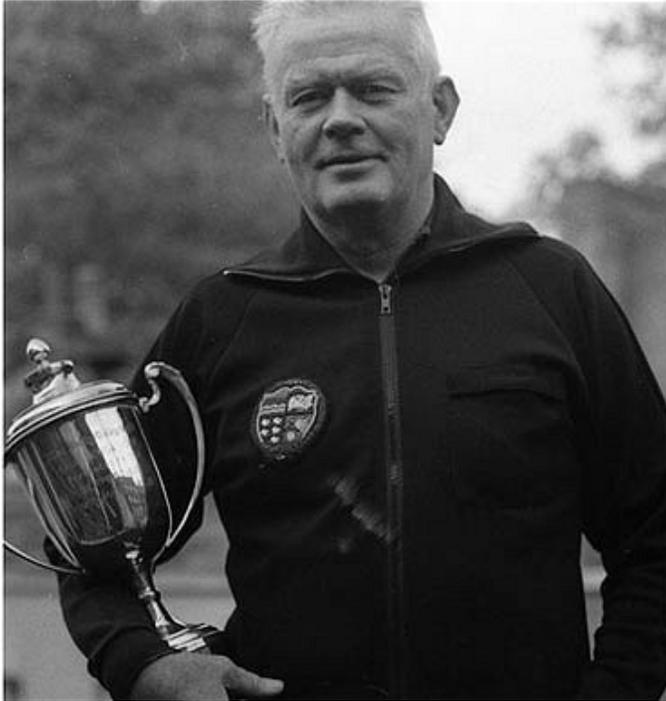


Francis Kelly

Francis Kelly, who has died aged 85, was an artist and author, and became the first American to be elected president of the Serpentine Swimming Club in Hyde Park.



Francis Kelly with The Daily Telegraph Cup

5:50PM GMT 12 Nov 2012

Kelly was known for his representational landscapes and seascapes, as well as for his paintings of the female form. He also specialised in etchings. His work was regularly shown at Editions Graphiques, Victor Arwas's gallery in Mayfair.

He lived in Britain from the 1950s, and became increasingly enchanted by rural England – particularly the area around East Budleigh and Budleigh Salterton in Devon, to which he frequently returned to paint and etch over the years.

Kelly lived off London's Bayswater Road, and came to regard Hyde Park as his garden and the Serpentine as his swimming pool. Having joined the Serpentine Swimming Club (SSC) in 1968, he swam there almost daily for the next 40 years — wearing, whatever the weather, his distinctive Hawaiian shorts.

The SSC, which has been going since at least 1864, is best known for its Christmas Day race for the Peter Pan Cup, but there are races every Saturday throughout the year. Most of these are handicaps, with the slowest swimmers going off first and the faster ones chasing after them at appropriate intervals. Among

the trophies on offer is The Daily Telegraph Cup, a series of four races over different distances held between February and October. Kelly won the Cup in the 1980s, and from 1983 to 1985 served as SSC president — the first American to hold the office.

Francis Robert Kelly (always known as Bob) was born in St Paul, Minnesota, on May 1 1927, the son of a barber and a waitress, and was brought up in Chicago until his teenage years, when the family moved to California. After high school in Pasadena, he enlisted in the US Navy in 1944, becoming a signalman and serving in the Pacific until 1948. In 1946 he took part in Operation Crossroads, the series of nuclear weapon tests carried out by the United States at Bikini Atoll.

In 1949, while working for the post office in Santa Monica, California, he married Gail Rochlen, and two years later the couple travelled to Paris, where Kelly took a diploma in Fine Art at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. He continued his studies at the University of Hawaii, Honolulu, before becoming laboratory assistant to the noted printmaker John Paul Jones at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). He also worked briefly as a commercial illustrator at Douglas Aircraft.

In 1955 Kelly was awarded a Fulbright grant to attend the graphics department of London County Council Central School of Arts & Crafts (now University of the Arts, London), where he earned a diploma in Etching — his etchings were first shown in London by the St George's Gallery. He became increasingly interested in the play of shadow and light on rural landscapes and byways. Later he became fascinated by the reflective qualities of the canals of Venice.

In 1966 he was appointed art organiser for the US embassy's Festival of Arts in Humanities, and his paintings were shown in the exhibition Five American Artists in Britain alongside those of Antanas Brazdys, Alfred Cohen, John Hubbard and RB Kitaj.

Kelly also studied painting conservation at the Courtauld Institute, and in 1967 was dispatched by the Italian Art and Archives Rescue Fund to Florence to restore flood-damaged paintings after the river Arno raged through many of the city's museums and libraries. This led to the publication, in 1971, of his book *Art Restoration*. His second book, *The Studio and The Artist*, was published in 1975.

Swimming was not Kelly's only athletic pastime: he also enjoyed bicycling and running, and competed in 34 triathlons — even representing Britain (as a veteran) in the World Triathlon Championships held in Orlando, Florida, in the 1980s.

Bob Kelly is survived by his wife and their three sons.

Francis Kelly, born May 1 1927, died October 25 2012