

BO BARTLETT

Via Mal Contenti, 2006
oil on linen, 82 x 56 in.



COURTESY THE ARTIST

ANTHONY DETRO

On the Wharf

*There is one spectacle grander than the sea,
that is the sky; there is one spectacle grander
than the sky, that is the interior of the soul.*

—Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

Sean Mckenna had a week off from his second-grade class over spring break, and his dad took him fishing nearly every day in the old Chevy truck to the spot they'd always gone to at the end of the Santa Cruz Wharf. A wharf that, in itself, should not be underestimated when it comes to history or unsavory odor. Granted, it might not be as popular or well-known as the Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, or the one in Monterey, yet the boy had still long ago claimed it as being HIS wharf.

As children it is only natural to love and embrace that which is familiar and warm, and to loathe everything else.

Therefore whenever Sean visited these other wharves, he sought out all of the things he disliked about them and did not allow himself to have much fun. And not because they weren't good wharves—for Sean knew that they were—but because he somehow felt it would be an act of betrayal towards his own beloved wharf if he did not emphasize the shortcomings and failures of these other wharves.

And so Sean was there, with his father, at the end of the wharf, which was indeed a good wharf because it was HIS.

The weather was perfect on that first day. It was one of those days when there was no fog and no clouds and hardly any swell and you could see clear across the bay to Monterey and to the smokestacks at Moss Landing.

Looking back to the Main Beach at the Boardwalk, you could see the rides going, and you could hear people scream every time the Giant Dipper took that first drop and came back up and around that sharp left turn, which nearly threw you out of your seat. And taking it all in from the wharf you knew what it smelled like down there on the Boardwalk, because you loved the Boardwalk like how you loved the wharf and the big orange-and-yellow dome of the Coconut Grove stuck there all alone in the sand and vibrant under the sun like a scoop of melting sherbet.

Sean and his dad had baited up and cast out and set the poles down against the railing and let them rest in the little notches that were carved into the wood. Sean's dad stroked his magnificent beard as they both leaned over the railing without speaking and listened to the seals bark like salty water dogs begging for bait scraps. They kept an eye out for bites at the tips of their poles and Sean's dad chased away a couple of seagulls who were trying to get at the bait. "Dirty bastards," he scolded as he shooed them away.