

ART & DESIGN

Peter Saul: An Artist's Artist

The artist Peter Saul has always gone his own way, followers be damned. For years and years, he bypassed the art centers of New York, Los Angeles and Chicago for a studio in San Francisco where his storied dealer Allan Frumkin would stop by once a year to purchase a few things and thus, keep him going. Never part of a group, Saul didn't shy away from tackling social commentary, delivering it with a huge dose of bold, dark humor. His works revel in their lurid punch and manic glee. At 81, the curmudgeonly Saul still stretches his own canvases at his studio in upstate New York. Despite his solitary process, some of the brightest art stars of the moment to cite Saul as a major influence—and now this artist's artist is enjoying something of a moment. In the past year New York's Venus Over Manhattan exhibited his early work from the sixties—and Saul has made new paintings, too, for a show at Los Angeles's David Kordansky Gallery in April and for another at New York's Mary Boone Gallery, which opens this Saturday. On the eve of "Peter Saul: Six Classics, his show of new paintings based on such historical "classics" as Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* and Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus*, a few of his fellow painters, all of them ardent fans, to talk about how Saul has influenced their work.

by Diane Solway

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Jim Shaw

"My greatest memory of Peter's work was from the occasional glimpses I got as a teenager in the pages of art magazines in our hometown library. The Vietnam paintings were of such a convulsive beauty that they burned instantly into your subconscious, the most impolite art imaginable. After that brief exposure, I looked in vain to find more on him (this was way pre-Internet). Since he wasn't in any books on Pop art, I assumed he was a [Chicago-based] Hairy Who artist, due to their shared imagery and forms, but also that they also didn't get much press. The Hand Painted Pop show Paul Schimmel did at MOCA in 1992 ['Hand-Painted Pop: American Art in Transition, 1955-62'] was (I think) my first chance to see his earlier work, and to meet him in person. It's been an honor to show with him, and get to know him, as he is certainly one of my biggest inspirations."



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Aaron Curry

“I met Peter for the first time over 10 years ago as a graduate student, but have considered him a teacher ever since I first saw his work in a small Chicago gallery in the early 1990’s. Since then I’ve bought every monograph and catalog I could get my hands on, and studied those things till they fell apart. He has had a tremendous impact on me as an artist and continues to inspire me to this day. There’s a quality to Peter’s work that for me, feels something like a mash-up of Andrea Mantegna and a Pixar film. It’s the softness he achieves through his use of dry brush and unconventional layering of colors. For example, not many people highlight blue with bright pink.”

“Two Napoleons Crossing the Alps” by Peter Saul.



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Jonas Wood

"When David [Kordansky] said he was showing Peter Saul at his gallery I was ecstatic! I have admired Peter's paintings for years and was so excited to have the opportunity to buy one. It was a really tough choice, but in the end I got the yellow one with the planes. And I got to meet Peter. What really inspired me about the show was the he had made most of these paintings in the last two years at the age of 81 and they were all fantastic."

"Crowded Skies" (2015) by Peter Saul.



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KAWS

"I've always been inspired by Peter's fearless attitude towards painting. He has no filter between his thoughts and the work he puts into the world. I can't think of another artist who could paint a sexually charged abstract expressionist oyster floating in outer space with such confidence. I always look forward to seeing his new works."

"Birth of Venus" by Peter Saul.