

Saul is a vital and polarizing figure in post-war American art, a rare history painter whose ambivalent politics and lurid imagery make him difficult to categorize. He remains outside the canon yet continues to exert profound influence on younger generations of artists.

Peter Saul was born in San Francisco in 1934. Following his studies at both the California School of Fine Arts and Washington University, St. Louis, Saul settled in Paris for six years. It was there, in the late 1950s, that his influences and obsessions - Mad magazine, 19th century academic French painting, Paul Cadmus and Rosa Bonheur - coupled with his total disbelief in the Existentialist artspeak of the time crystallized into a unique style. Saul's paintings of common household objects, rendered with an intense palette and a gesture reminiscent of Abstract Expressionism, clearly anticipated Pop Art, a movement that would not emerge as such until 1962. His work rapidly progressed from quasi-abstract pictures of iceboxes and so-called 'pop' imagery to a caustic and unflinching take on contemporary history painting. Embracing humor, irony and the grotesque at a time when painting was supposed to be deadly serious, Saul's work did not fit anywhere easily. In 1967, Saul said, "Not to be shocking means to agree to be furniture", and it is with this attitude that he continues to satirize the political, social and cultural events of his time.

Neptune and the Octopus Painter features new large-scale works on canvas and a selection of recent works on paper, a body of work created during the past two years. Drawing as much on the imagery of Walt Disney as on traditions of classical painting, Saul's recent works again look to genres of history and self-portraiture, dissecting to humorous, gruesome and deliberately offensive effect, a range of subjects and attitudes.

Peter Saul presented his debut solo exhibition in Chicago in 1961 and has exhibited his work internationally since that time. His most recent solo museum exhibition was presented last year at Fondation Salomon, Alex, France. His works are found in numerous museum collections worldwide, including Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Peter Saul lives and works in New York.

Peter Saul: Neptune and the Octopus Painter opens on Friday 26 April from 18:00 to 21:00. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 11AM to 6PM. Please call the gallery or visit vwberlin.com for more information.

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