



Some questions for Peter Saul

Acid in both color and content, Peter Saul's cartoonish political commentaries are still outlandish and relevant 60 years on. By *Howard Halle*

Why did you become an artist?

I didn't want to work in an office. I knew that by the time I turned 15.

From the late 1950s to the mid-'60s, you lived in Paris and Rome. How did you manage to start a career over there?

I didn't know what to do, and no one else knew, either. I heard of five or six American artists in Paris, but I didn't actually know their work because I'd skipped art history: My teacher told me that if I didn't show up, he'd give me a B. Eventually, I managed to show my drawings to a dealer with galleries in Chicago and New York. He asked me how much I wanted for them. I said \$15; he said, "I can do \$25."

You were lucky.

I've been lucky all my life, but I hope I'm not going to pay for it with some huge disease, if you know what I mean.

The work you did then has been described as a precursor to Pop Art. Do you agree?

No. I didn't know about Pop Art, and I was pretty upset when I read about it because I thought it was my idea.

How did you come by it, since the action was in New York and you were in Europe?

I never paid any attention to New York because, first of all, I had a fear of flying due to the fact that I had just missed getting on a plane that crashed in a midair collision. But I wanted to get away from Abstract Expressionism. I got this idea from *Mad* magazine that you could tell a story with pictures, which no one was doing at the time. So I'd sit in a café, smoke Gauloises and come up with ideas, most of which were from memory.

Speaking of *Mad*, you've said that, even though you're in your eighties, you paint like a 15-year-old.

Well, yeah. I don't want to express maturity in my art.

Is that to keep your work edgy, radical and interesting?

Well, being interesting is one of my goals. It's a big one.

Do you see yourself as a rebel?

Hopefully, yes.

With a cause?

Other than my own well-being, no.

→ Peter Saul's "Crime and Punishment" is on view at the New Museum from Tue 11 to May 31.

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"Jordan Casteel: Within Reach"

The figurative painter's first solo museum exhibition in New York City showcases the indelible sense of presence that she imbues to subjects who are often overlooked in life. → New Museum. Feb 19-May 24.

