off the wall gallery

paintings · sculpture · original prints

PETER MAX
German- American | b. 1937 - d. 2026

A love of beauty, color, music, spirituality, and art marks their presence in Peter Max's consciousness. As one of America's most recognized living artists and pop art icons, his uplifting imagery and exhilarating colors have become part of American culture. Max inspired generations of artists and greatly influenced pop and digital art movements throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. From Tibetan monks to billboards in Times Square, Peter drew inspiration from the cultures and artifacts around him, taking themes, colors, and psychological mindsets from them that could be experienced through his oeuvre.

Max created paintings of Presidents Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush, as well as his 100 Clintons, a multiple portrait installation. Additionally, he was commissioned for a number of projects, from the "Preserve the Environment" postage stamp, in honor of the World's Fair in Spokane, WA, to border murals at the entry points in Canada and Mexico by the US General Services, fashion and interior design, and exhibitions in over forty museums and fifty galleries worldwide. His work often featured colorful images of celebrities, politicians, athletes, sporting events, and other pop culture subjects, in media ranging from pastels, acrylics, oils, ink, and collages.

Born in Berlin in 1937, a young Peter Max moved to Shanghai only a year later with his family, where he would live until he was 10 years old, then moving to Israel, South Africa, Italy, Paris, and eventually settling down in New York City, a place where he would marvel at the large automobiles, Broadway billboards, the Empire State Building, and the Statue of Liberty. As a young boy, Peter was introduced to his artistic vision through the people who were closest to him. His nanny in Shanghai often brought watercolor sets, calligraphy brushes, and charcoal to teach him to draw. His loving mother also nurtured his passion by giving him various art supplies and letting him make a big painterly mess around the house. While still a young boy in Shanghai, he developed a fascination for three peculiarly American things: movies, comic books, and jazz. Music held a strong presence in Peter's painting atmosphere, with almost

every work being created with the melodic sound of jazz or rock & roll blasting in the background. Although the American theme became increasingly present in his work later in life, young Peter felt its presence throughout his childhood.

In 1956, Max was enrolled in the distinguished Art Students League and studied realism under Frank Reilly and Norman Rockwell. Peter was previously introduced to the use of vibrant hues of color by a Viennese Expressionist teacher who would one day alter his student's canvas with the use of pinks, yellows, and bright tones - this became an eye-opener for the young student, who would then realize that there are colors everywhere, even where they appear not to be. Returning to his fascination with the colorful comic books that accompanied him in China, Peter became enchanted by the power color can hold on canvas, incorporating themes of Pop art, cartoonish images, dynamic hues, and line into his work.

He later opened an art studio in Manhattan, where he produced several posters that eventually earned him numerous awards for book covers and graphic design. The next stage of his work grew from Peter's childhood fascination with astronomy. Originally dreaming of becoming an astrophysicist and studying science, he kept his passion for the Universe and later explored the theme in countless works. The magnitude of distance, the abstraction of form, and natural mysticism captivated the artist during the peak of his 'cosmic period.' Fantasized astrological images of stars, nebulas, and planets engaged the world through Peter's canvas. Once Peter encountered America in his late teens, a new era of Pop culture references and images took hold in his mind, soaring from his consciousness onto a blank canvas. Psychedelic images of buildings and celebrities emerged in celebration of the color they held, inspired by an Indian swami who guided Peter through yoga and spirituality. After a break from painting, Peter Max explored new directions in art during the 70s, leaving behind the printing press and the silk-screen that had defined his earlier work. During this new era, he created some of his most famous works, such as the umbrella man.

Max became a bona fide superstar through his work, being a guest on the Ed Sullivan Show, The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson, appearing on the cover of Life Magazine; having his one-man exhibition at the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco and the Hermitage Museum in Russia, and even being invited to Ronald Raegan's Fourth of July celebration at the White House. He was also commissioned by People Magazine to design a cover, by the Woodstock festival to create the largest rock and roll stage, and by the Grammy Awards to create five Grammy posters, as well as designing planes and cruises for Continental Airlines and Norwegian Cruise Line. Through his universal, spontaneous creativity, Peter Max reaches an inner chord in our minds, implanting images of subjects familiar to all of us in impressive uses of color and

the fundamentals of painting that have touched lives across the globe. His art creates a straight line to dreams and fantasy, creating an alternative reality of what we feel so familiar with. “At first, I couldn’t comprehend space, but I thought about it all the time, dreaming, imagining, letting my mind soar.” - Peter Max

Peter Max died on September 14, 2026, from complications of underlying dementia.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS, COLLECTIONS AND MUSEUMS

MOMA - Museum of Modern Art, New York City, NY.
De Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco, CA.
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL.
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.
Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO.
General Motors Institute, Flint, Michigan.
Künstlerhaus, Vienna, Austria. Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, Italy.
Musée de l’Affiche et de la Publicité, Paris, France.
Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY.
Tennessee State Museum, Nashville, TN.
El Paso Museum of Art (EPMA), El Paso, TX.
Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn Harbor, NY.
State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.
Moscow Museum of Fine Art, Moscow, Russia.
The Freunde der Städtischen Kunsthallen, Berlin, Germany.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Parco Exhibition, Tokyo, Hokkaido, and Osaka, Japan.
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX.
National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
And more…