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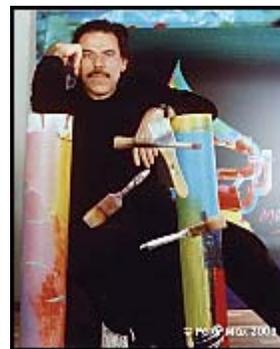
To the Max

Creator of splashy pop images of America opens one-man show

By Mary Voelz Chandler, Rocky Mountain News
October 13, 2005

Peter Max called from New York last week at an opportune time: just as a story was breaking about a second gift of work for the proposed Clyfford Still Museum in Denver.

Max picked up on the topic right away, in his own way: "There may be a couple of Peter Max museums," he said. "We haven't confirmed it yet, but mayors of two American cities have come to me and said, 'We want to build you a museum.' In the next few months, it may be firmed up."



Peter Max ©

Peter Max, known for churning out splashy images for pop culture as well as raising funds for charities, including the Larry King Cardiac Foundation, opens a one-artist show Friday at Gallery M.

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And there spans one great view of opposite ends of the art world: Clyfford Still, who locked away his work from display and himself from the fray of public acclaim, disparagement and commercialism, and Peter Max, who has ridden the tide of hanging with the stars, massive franchising (long ago), owning yoga studios (not many left),

ongoing exhibits. [Click here.](#)

and, now, creating work for numerous charitable organizations while serving as the "official" artist for various groups and individuals.

In the process, Max has made a name for himself by churning out unfathomable numbers of splashy images of pop culture heroes (real and cartoon), symbols of America (his adopted land), and, yes, drawings that show that the man can honorably list the Art Students League of New York and Pratt Institute on his bio as stops on his educational journey. For \$27,995, you can have a big portrait of Mick Jagger.

The man whose family moved to the United States when he was 16 is preparing to turn 68, "but I look 51," he said. "I'm in the best shape I've ever been. I walk up seven flights of steps to my studio, and quickly."

The reason for this conversation is that about 125 pieces by Max are on view at Gallery M in Cherry Creek North, with appearances by the artist set for Friday through Sunday.

It is the first time that gallery owner Myrna Hayutin has turned over the entire space to one artist, in this case paintings, drawings and limited-edition prints. She began to show work by Max in 1988, at the Art Boutique, and in the next decade at Circle Gallery. "He still has a connection, he is a painter of the people," she said of his appeal.

Circle Gallery is where we last caught up with Max, in 1995, when Hayutin was with that now-defunct space; she opened Gallery M the next year.

A decade ago, Max had a stable of 50 employees; now, he says, it is 107; 17 people alone toil archiving his work, he said.

He was speaking from his studio, where he starts painting every day in the afternoon, and well into the night. "A couple of assistants tend to my needs and wishes," - as in answering the phone, fetching paint and generally leaving him alone to create.

Max said that at least five charitable organizations a day - "1,200 a year" - contact him about donating a piece of work to sell as a fundraiser. How does he choose? "I don't want anybody who is raising money for anything that involves animal testing. Orphans in Tibet, orphans in India, orphans in America. Ecology groups everywhere, sustainability. It might be a \$250 poster or a \$25,000 painting. I give \$6 million, \$7 million away a year in art goods."

He says he raised more than \$800,000 for the Larry King Cardiac Foundation by painting portraits, and "I like helping yogis and swamis."

Most of the yoga studios he opened decades ago are gone, as is the concept of heavy licensing of Peter Max images. "I had a huge licensing spree, from 1967 to 1971. I did \$1.1 billion retail in three years. Seventy-two licensing deals. Then someone told me, 'Peter, if you're not careful, people will remember you for your cups and button holes and not your art.' That hit me like a dagger."

He still has a few such arrangements, but the man who basically put a poster in every college dorm room and created a graphic style - he calls it "Cosmic '60s" - that still speaks to the era now wants to be taken seriously for his artwork.

A few deals remain, but "if you compare me to other artists, I'm 99 percent steeped deep in canvas" who is proud that he has had more than 100 one-man museum shows. (Another one opens in February at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center.) He has perhaps 30 gallery

shows a year, he said.

After all, "we live in a media world. Picasso maybe got one or two write-ups in a Spanish newspaper. I've been on magazine covers. In a way, I love it, but I am a serious painter."

Those familiar with the bright colors and strong lines Max creates might be surprised to learn that he has a cache of more than 44,000 small abstract pieces that have never been shown.

"The images I'm bringing into the world are so important, not with quote marks around that, but I've done things I've never seen anyone else do," he said of the works. His plan is to turn them into etchings and paintings over the next 18 months. "I need to have a tremendous amount of diversity."

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, many artists worked in patriotic themes, which to some seemed as if they were trying to profit from a tragedy. And so did Max, though he's been incorporating the American flag and Statue of Liberty in his work for years. A giant Liberty painting hangs in the lobby of the gallery for this show. As a boy living in Shanghai, he said, he learned about America through comic books and movies.

"I created an homage to 9/11," he said, raising \$1.6 million for World Trade Center victims and more than \$700,000 for Pentagon survivors. "I'm a huge fan of American iconography. I like praising this country, I love this country and its sheer ability to create. It's because we're so free."

Colors of a Better World

- **What:** Work in various mediums by Peter Max
- **When and where:** Appearances by the artist from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 1 to 3 p.m. Sunday, show on view through Monday; Gallery M, 2830 E. 3rd Ave.
- **Information:** 303-331-8400; www.gallerym.com

The Max factor

- **Who:** Peter Max
- **Born:** Oct. 19, 1937
- **Where:** Germany, then his family moved to Shanghai; they moved to Israel, then to the United States in 1953
- **Education:** Art Students League of New York, Pratt Institute
- **Works of note:** Paintings of four former U.S. presidents and world leaders ranging from the Dalai Lama to Mikhail Gorbachev, a poster for Bill Clinton's inauguration and the Summit of the Americas, and named "official" artist of several Grammy Awards, World Fairs and Super Bowls

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