

Peter Blake: Rock, Paper, Scissors

21 November to 15 December 2012

Private view: Tuesday 20 November, 6–8pm



'A Parade for Saul Steinberg', 2007–2012, 11 ¾ x 73 ¼ x 11 ¾ in / 30 x 186 x 30 cm, found objects

Waddington Custot Galleries presents *'Rock, Paper, Scissors'*, the first major retrospective exhibition devoted to Peter Blake in the UK since 2007. The show features almost 50 new and previously unseen works from the past six decades. The exhibition title takes the idea from the children's game, and provides a framework for the sections sculpture, works on paper and collage.

In his sculpture, Blake continues to assemble found objects, with surreal scenes and narratives. *'A Parade for Saul Steinberg'*, started in 2007, resembles a New York street parade, where famous cartoon characters and other fantasy figures march in recognition of the cartoonist Steinberg; one of Blake's artistic heroes. Popular characters from Blake's earlier works reappear; Snow White is seen showing-off her garden of underwater debris to René Magritte, whilst elsewhere 30 of her dwarf companions lead an invasion of a bagpiper's Swiss chalet.

In addition to using plastic, readymade characters, Blake constructs figures from natural materials including a miniature army made from bowling balls and stained wood, adorned with medals and badges to represent military achievements. Another sculpture built from wooden objects is a life-size family group posing beneath a driftwood tree and this two-metre-high sculpture will dominate one of the galleries. As a departure from his constructions of found objects, in a new group of works, Blake presents six found objects as works of art in their own right, reminding him as they do of sculptures by Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and other twentieth-century masters.

The early works on paper in the exhibition date back to 1948 and are shown alongside Blake's most recent watercolour, *'Portrait of Queen Elizabeth II'*, commissioned by the Radio Times for the cover of their Diamond Jubilee souvenir issue. Blake's ten new London collages form the 'scissors' component of the exhibition, creating fantastical scenes around London landmarks, such as a comic book convention at Piccadilly Circus (attended by the comic-book characters themselves), a gathering of escaped animals at Westminster Abbey and a parade in Abbey Road.

The most ambitious work in the exhibition will be a six-foot-wide canvas, started in 1963 and still a work in progress. Originally titled *'Drake, land wars in Ireland and Essex'*, the painting was created for a group exhibition about Shakespeare. Blake is painting over his initial composition, turning the rural scene into a fantasy narrative featuring children and storybook characters. The painting will be exhibited at Waddington Custot Galleries in its current state as Blake intends to continue reworking it indefinitely.

An illustrated catalogue with essay by Marco Livingstone and cover designed by Peter Blake will accompany the exhibition.

Biography

Born in 1932 in Dartford, Kent, Sir Peter Blake studied at Gravesend School of Art before being accepted into the Royal College of Art, London. He graduated in 1956, having completed his National Service, and received the Leverhulme Research Award to study popular art whilst travelling to Holland, Belgium, France, Italy and Spain. Following this, Blake taught for a number of years in various London art schools, including St. Martins School of Art and the Royal College of Art, all the while working and exhibiting.

Blake's first one-man exhibition was held in 1962 at the Portal Gallery; solo shows followed at the Robert Fraser Gallery (1965) and at Leslie Waddington Prints (1969). Since the early 1970s, his work has been exhibited regularly in one-man shows throughout the world, including the Nishimura Gallery, Tokyo (1988) and the Govinda Gallery, Washington DC (1992). A comprehensive exhibition of his work was held as early as 1969 at the City Art Gallery, Bristol.

Subsequent retrospectives were held in 1973 at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, touring to Hamburg and Brussels and at the Tate Gallery (1983). In 1994 he was made the third Associate Artist of the National Gallery, London. He was elected a member of the Royal Academy of Arts in 1981, and was knighted in 2002. In 2007 the Tate Liverpool held a major retrospective of Peter Blake's work which toured to Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao in 2008.

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Saturday: 10am - 1:30pm