

WADDINGTON CUSTOT

Press Release

Peter Blake

A Life in Drawings and Watercolours

5 July–8 September 2018

Private View: Wednesday 4 July, 6–8pm



Waddington Custot is pleased to present a retrospective survey of drawings by Peter Blake. The exhibition will include work made while a student at the Royal College of Art, London, in the 1940s to watercolours painted in 2018. All works are from the artist's own private collection and will be exhibited for the first time. Although rarely shown, Blake's drawings have been and continue to be central to his creative output and offer a window into his life from an informal and intimate viewpoint.

The drawings vary widely in subject; from portraits of Chrissy, his wife, to the Alexander Calder sculpture at La Colombe d'Or, to simple sketched line drawings, made at quiet moments to pass the time or to document events such as a 'Dr Death' wrestling match on Edgware Road or The Who in concert. Often drawings were made on whatever was closest to hand, a diary page or hotel notepaper. Most include a caption, inscribed in Blake's familiar handwriting, providing context and often adding humour, such as – 'First morning in LA at David Hockey's house – hungover – the pen is drawing by itself. Howard and David at the bank'.

The earliest drawings in the exhibition are those that have survived from Blake's time as a student at Gravesend School of Art. 'The Chapel on the Walls, Wareham' (c.1945) is a copy of a photograph, in pen and ink, tentative concentration is evident in the careful line. Works from the 1940s and 1950s reveal an artist finding and developing his distinctive artistic language. From the 1950s, Blake's signature graphic style is emerging.

His sketchbook accompanied him when Blake was given a Leverhulme Research Award (1956–7) and travelled in Spain, France, Belgium, The Netherlands and Italy. During this time, he would often make informal drawings, not of traditional tourist vistas but of common place objects, coffee cups or ashtrays, particularly noting distinct typography. This habit of documenting his trips continued on future trips to Paris, Tokyo and Los Angeles.

In his drawings from the 1960s, colour begins to permeate, especially those drawings from his American visit. Works such as 'Ted Haworth's Oscar' (1963) and 'Bronze figures of women on a bench, L.A.' (1963) accentuate stylised figures with expressive use of bright, acid colours.

Some works have been made specially for this exhibition, Blake terms these his Party Watercolours, an array of colour and celebration depicting imaginary parties with guests dancing and laughing alongside a mass of balloons, vying for attention in a collage of chaos. Portraits of party guests are infused with the same celebratory atmosphere, the picture plane broken with falling, colourful confetti.

This exhibition is a joyful look at the career of one of Britain's best loved artists through his own personal collection of works on paper, accumulated throughout his career.

PRESS CONTACT

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Sir Peter Blake (b. 1932, Dartford, Kent) is a British painter, sculptor, draughtsman and printmaker. He is known as one of the leading figures of British Pop art. Peter Blake studied at Gravesend School of Art before being accepted into the Royal College of Art, London, where he studied alongside other key British Pop artists, David Hockney, R.B. Kitaj, Joe Tilson, Allen Jones, Peter Phillips and Derek Boshier. After graduating from the Royal College of Art in 1956, Blake began to appropriate pop culture icons and advertising imagery to create homages to the likes of Marilyn Monroe, Brigitte Bardot, Elvis Presley and professional wrestlers. His iconic 1961 'Self-portrait with Badges', in the Tate Collection, shows Blake holding an Elvis album, dressed in American jeans, Converse trainers, and baseball badges; here is the artist as a genuine fan. In other works, he composes assemblages of found objects with humorous allusions to art history and childhood fantasies. In 1967 he designed the iconic album cover for The Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band in his distinctive style of collage. Blake continues to be associated with the music world by designing album covers. In 1975 Blake co-founded the *Brotherhood of Ruralists*, a group of artists who moved to Somerset to build an artistic community outside of the city.

After completing his National Service with the RAF, he received the Leverhulme Research Award to study popular art and travelled through Europe 1956–7. Blake's first solo exhibition was held in 1962 at Portal Gallery, London; solo shows followed at Robert Fraser Gallery, London (1965) and at Leslie Waddington Prints, London (1969). His first retrospective exhibition was held in 1969 at the City Art Gallery, Bristol. Subsequent retrospectives were held in 1973 at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, touring to Hamburg and Brussels and the Tate Gallery in 1983. In 1994 he was made the Third Associate Artist of the National Gallery, London. Peter Blake was elected a member of the Royal Academy in 1981, and was knighted in 2002. In 2007 the Tate Liverpool held a major retrospective of Peter Blake's work which toured to the Museo de Bellas Artes, Bilbao, Spain in 2008. In 2010, Lund Humphries published *Peter Blake: One Man Show*, a comprehensive monograph by Marco Livingstone.

Title: *Peter Blake: A Life in Darwings and Watercolours*
Address: Waddington Custot, 11 Cork Street, London W1S 3LT
Dates: 5 July–8 September 2018
Private View: Wednesday 4 July, 6–8pm
Opening Hours: Monday to Friday, 10am to 6pm
Saturday: 10am to 4pm
Admission: Free
Travel: Piccadilly, Green Park or Bond Street Tube Station

IMAGE
Peter Blake, Bronze figures of women on a bench, L.A., 1963, Pen, coloured pencil and watercolour on paper, 10 x 12 1/2 in / 25.4 x 31.8 cm

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