

Sir Peter Blake a Profile

Peter Blake has been acclaimed as one of the leaders of British Pop Art. His images, born from a love affair with the icons and ephemera of popular culture and a brilliant naturalistic technique, have won him international fame.

Born in 1932 at Dartford, Kent, Blake entered Gravesend School of Art at seventeen and in 1950 was accepted by the Royal College of Art. After completion of his National Service in the RAF, he graduated from the RCA in 1956. The next year was spent travelling in Europe to study popular art, funded by a Leverhulme Research Award. His 'Postcards' series, about Latin lovers, derives from this experience. Following this, Blake taught for a number of years in various London art schools, from 1964 until 1976 at the RCA, all the while working and exhibiting.

In 1962 the artist was featured in Ken Russell's seminal BBC Monitor film, 'Pop Goes the Easel', and the next year had his first solo show at the Portal Gallery in London. The Sixties were rich in inspiration for Blake; many of his works are about being a fan - of The Beatles, Marilyn Monroe and other film and pop stars. Exotic fairground and circus people, wrestlers and pin-up girls also appear, as do the styles and forms of commercial folk art such as cigarette cards and toys. In 1969 the artist had his retrospective exhibition, at the City Art Gallery, Bristol. His second retrospective, in 1973-4, toured Amsterdam, Hamburg, Brussels and Arnhem.

Blake became a ruralist in 1969, leaving London for the countryside near Avon. The element of fantasy in his work was given free rein as the artist immersed himself in the themes of childhood, adolescence and literary subjects such as Alice in Wonderland and Shakespeare's dark fairies - Titania and her spirits. With his wife Jann Haworth and five other artists he became a founder member of the Brotherhood of Ruralists in 1975. They first exhibited together as a group in the Royal Academy Summer exhibition in 1976. In 1981 there was a major group exhibition at the Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, which toured the country, ending in London. Blake was also appointed R.A.

A one-man exhibition at Waddington and Tooth Galleries in 1977 preceded his return to London by two years. In 1983 he was given a retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London, which travelled to Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hanover. The Alphabet, a series of 26 screenprints he made in 1991, is an index of his ongoing artistic obsessions. Each letter is represented by an image, of Boxers, Clowns, Dwarfs, the Everly Brothers, all the way to Z.