

**POSTER**



**Past  
Exhibition**

**HOUSE**

# Peter Max

## Cosmic Advertising

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Oct 14–Mar 27, 2022

**Color, above all,...is  
a means of liberation.**

—Peter Max

Peter Max is the most commercially successful pop artist to emerge from the psychedelic period of the 1960s. His fantastical, colorful designs have emboldened everything from bed sheets to the body of a Boeing 777, with prestigious clients like the Grammy Awards, the Super Bowl, the NHL All-Star Game, World Cup USA, the New York City Marathon, and even the Manhattan Yellow Pages commissioning his particular brand of whimsy. And yet, Max's early posters have rarely been explored in depth. Whether advertising a quirky clothing store or inspiring young people to read, these images reveal a designer experimenting with a variety of styles and motifs while exploring concepts of space, time, and history in a range of promotional materials.

Born in Berlin in 1937, Max spent his childhood traveling the world, spending time in Shanghai, Israel, India, South Africa, and France before settling in New York City. This early exposure to such vastly different cultures had a profound impact on his work, imbuing it with elements of Chinese calligraphy, Fauvism, realism, and mid-century Swiss design through a rainbow of unexpected images and complex symbols; this is most clearly represented in his poster designs. After studying at the Art Students League and the School of Visual Arts in New York, Max founded a graphic design studio with Tom Daly in 1962. His work quickly captivated a public about to dive into the Summer of Love, becoming the unofficial face of the new youth counterculture. Unlike the work of other designers in the Pop or psychedelic genres, Max's art was neither ironic nor edgy—he presented a world of bubbly optimism, wide-eyed and excited for the future. The posters on view here are among his earliest, ranging from advertising design to wall decoration sold in head shops—all playing with themes that would resurface throughout his career: nature, collage, astronomy, and Eastern philosophy, boldly assembled to create graphic fluorescent dreamscapes.

*This exhibition was made possible through a generous loan from Peter Max Studio. All featured quotations are by the artist.*

**Curation**

Angelina Lippert

**Exhibition Design**

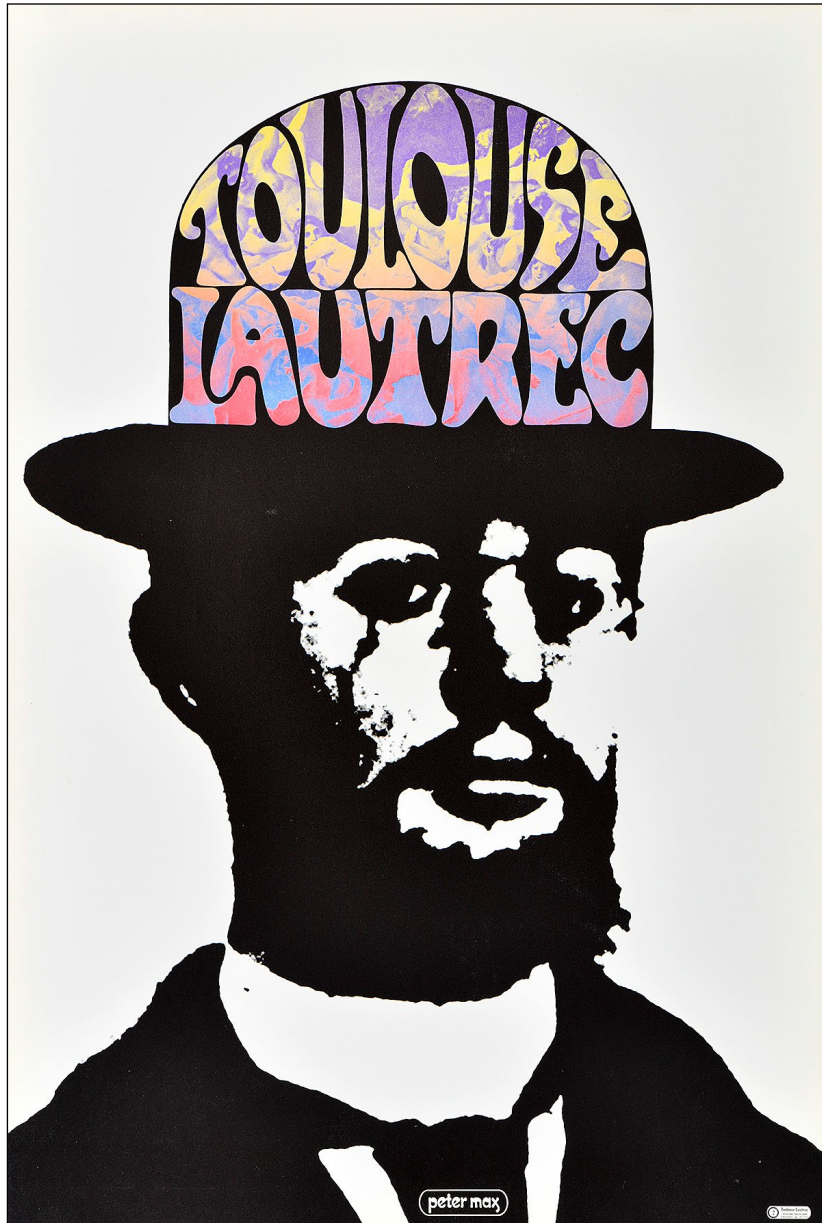
Mihoshi Fukushima Clark

**Installation**

John F. Lynch

**Graphic Installation**

Keith Immediato



## Toulouse Lautrec, 1967

Peter Max (b. 1937)

- This composition originated as a book-cover design. It shows an enlarged image of the preeminent Parisian poster designer of the Belle Époque, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, photographed in 1894 by his friend and client Paul Sescau (for whom he created a sexually suggestive poster advertising his photography studio that same year).
- Here Max modernizes the Parisian artist by installing his name in billowing, psychedelic letters on an English bowler hat. While the decoration on the letters at first appears abstract and marbled, it is actually filled with an ombré reproduction of William-Adolphe Bouguereau's painting *Les Oréades* (1902) in which a gaggle of nude nymphs prepares to join the goddess Diana in a hunt. This perhaps refers to Toulouse-Lautrec's favorite subject: prostitutes and other underworld figures who lived near the nightclubs he frequented, and who were, apparently, always on his mind.
- While not a traditional advertising poster, this design was sold in hundreds of head shops and poster stores across the country, installing Max's imagery into the bedrooms of thousands of young people. It was his first poster of many to achieve runaway success in an era defined by its insatiable appetite for fresh design.
- Max would paint over this photograph ten years later in a poster announcing his exhibition at the Odyssey Gallery in Ann Arbor, Michigan.



**Les Oréades, 1902**  
William-Adolphe Bouguereau





## Jazzmobile, 1967

Peter Max (b. 1937)

- Founded in 1964, Jazzmobile was the first not-for-profit organization in the United States dedicated to the promotion and preservation of jazz, “America’s classical music.” Based in Harlem, it continues to bring free performances to communities, with a focus on exposing young people to the genre and giving a platform to underrepresented artists.
- In its first year, Jazzmobile used an old parade float belonging to Ballantine Beer as its moving stage; the company also underwrote some of the concerts. In recognition of its early support of the project, Max incorporated an oversized Ballantine bottle into this composition.
- Max frequently experimented with collage, obtaining overruns of postcards, magazine pages, and other ephemera from printers in New York City. Here, he has inserted black-and-white photographs of silent film stars Ben Turpin and Phyllis Haver; Turpin appeared in other posters by Max from the same year.
- As a child, Max was fascinated by jazz performances he heard on the radio, one of his earliest exposures to American culture. He created a number of designs for jazz musicians during his career, including an award-winning album cover for Meade Lux Lewis in 1961 and a portrait of Ornette Coleman.



Comic books really taught me to draw.  
—Peter Max

**Penney's Rainbow Lane, 1967**  
Peter Max (b. 1937)

- Max designed this cosmically inspired composition for a special event put on by the department store J.C. Penney to promote its latest fashion offerings to the growing youth market. Max would go on to create myriad materials for the retailer, from mail-order catalogs to custom fabrics.
- Mary Quant was a prominent figure in the British mod fashion scene, and is often credited with inventing the miniskirt. Victoire and Ariel were lesser-known but equally hip Parisian designers.
- In spite of the fact that he was such a prolific graphic designer, Max only created one typeface during his career—the Art Deco-inspired “Riverside Drive,” seen here in blue and flanked by soda bottles.
- Max frequently experimented with production techniques, including the method of split-fountain printing in which multiple colors are fed into a printer simultaneously, blending together to create an ombré or rainbow effect. More than half the posters in this display were produced through this process.

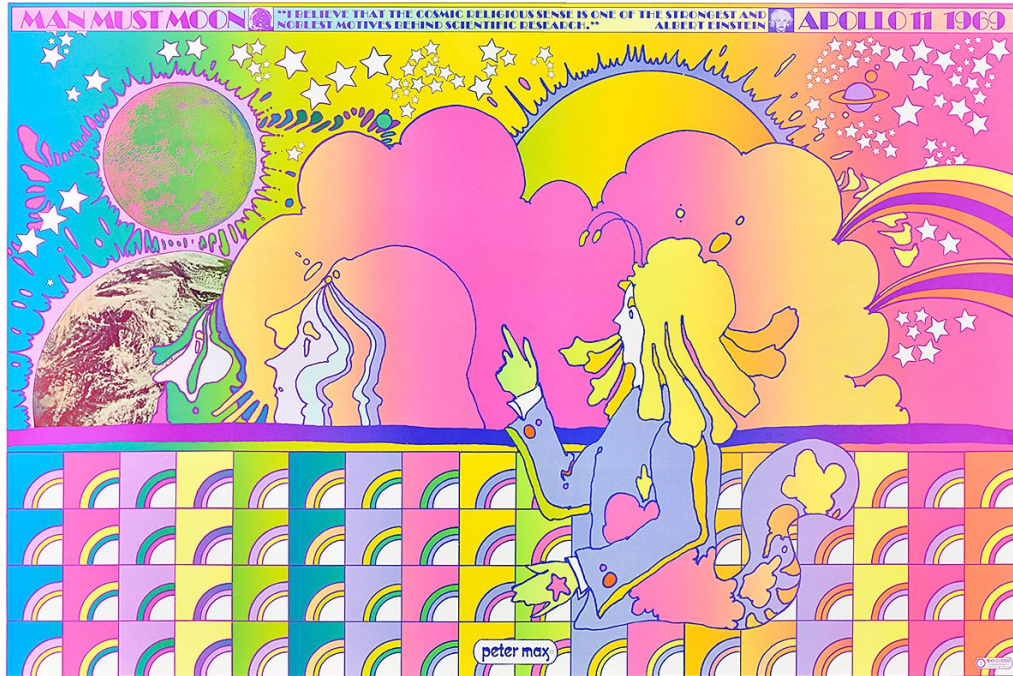




## The Different Drummer, 1968

Peter Max (b. 1937)

- Located on Lexington Avenue across the street from a doll hospital, The Different Drummer was a clothing store popular among rock 'n' rollers. At one point, it employed two future members of the band New York Dolls.
- This poster best exemplifies Max's "Cosmic period," when he incorporated space-related motifs into his designs. He had been transfixed by the cosmos since childhood, enrolling in classes on astronomy and staying up to date on scientific discoveries in the field. As a result, stars and planets populated his imagery of the late '60s and early '70s.
- The figure in profile facing left appears in many other designs by Max, typically surrounded by symbols suggesting an expanding universe. Interested in aspects of several Eastern religions, Max noted that this person is neither male nor female, but represents the oneness of all life.



**My Cosmic period of the late Sixties was a visual translation of the euphoria and expansion I experienced during those times.**

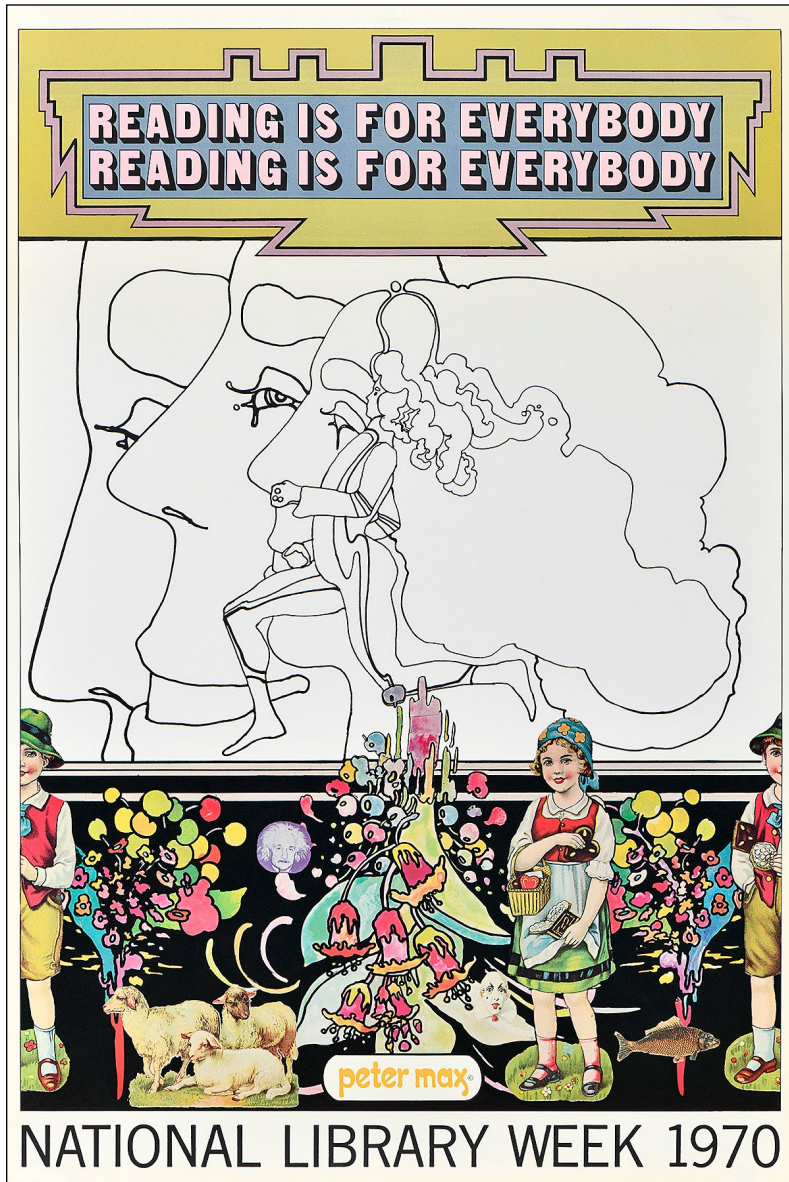
—Peter Max

### **Apollo 11, 1969**

Peter Max (b. 1937)

- Peter Max's interest in the cosmos was also reflected in his obsession with the moon landing of Apollo 11 in 1969. In anticipation of this event, he produced numerous images, including this joyful poster declaring that "Man Must Moon" next to a quotation from Albert Einstein.
- Max often used this photograph of Einstein in his posters. Can you find the other image of the theoretical physicist in this exhibition?
- For Max, the universe represented endless possibilities. In the foreground of this poster, one of his signature hippie figures appears to have the lower body of a caterpillar and antennae, about to emerge like a butterfly onto a higher plane of consciousness by way of the "giant leap for mankind."
- Astronauts Buzz Aldrin and John Glenn would both visit Max's studio and be painted by him over the next few years.





## National Library Week, 1970

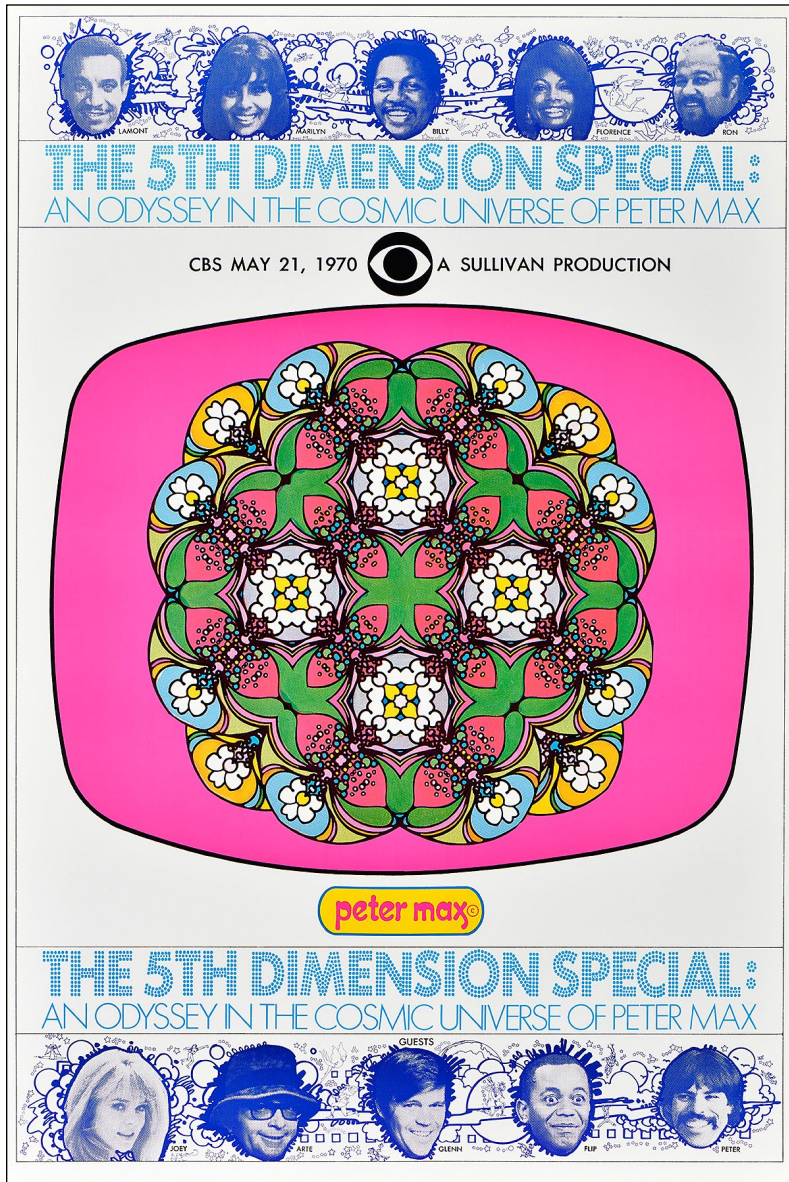
Peter Max (b. 1937)

- Held annually in April, National Library Week was established in 1958 by the American Library Association to promote local libraries and the benefits of reading.
- Peter Max was originally asked to design a poster for this event in 1969. That image was so well received that he was also commissioned to produce this 1970 poster.
- As Max viewed reading as an exercise in oneness, he combined the outline of multiple human profiles with his iconic "Cosmic Runner" to create a larger, unified mind symbolically enlivened through the written word. The fluid, black lines that define these figures also point to the influence of Chinese calligraphy.
- The lower register of this poster shows Max effectively combining collage and illustration, blending vintage stock imagery with stylized floral motifs.



**Be All You Can Be. Read, 1969**  
Peter Max

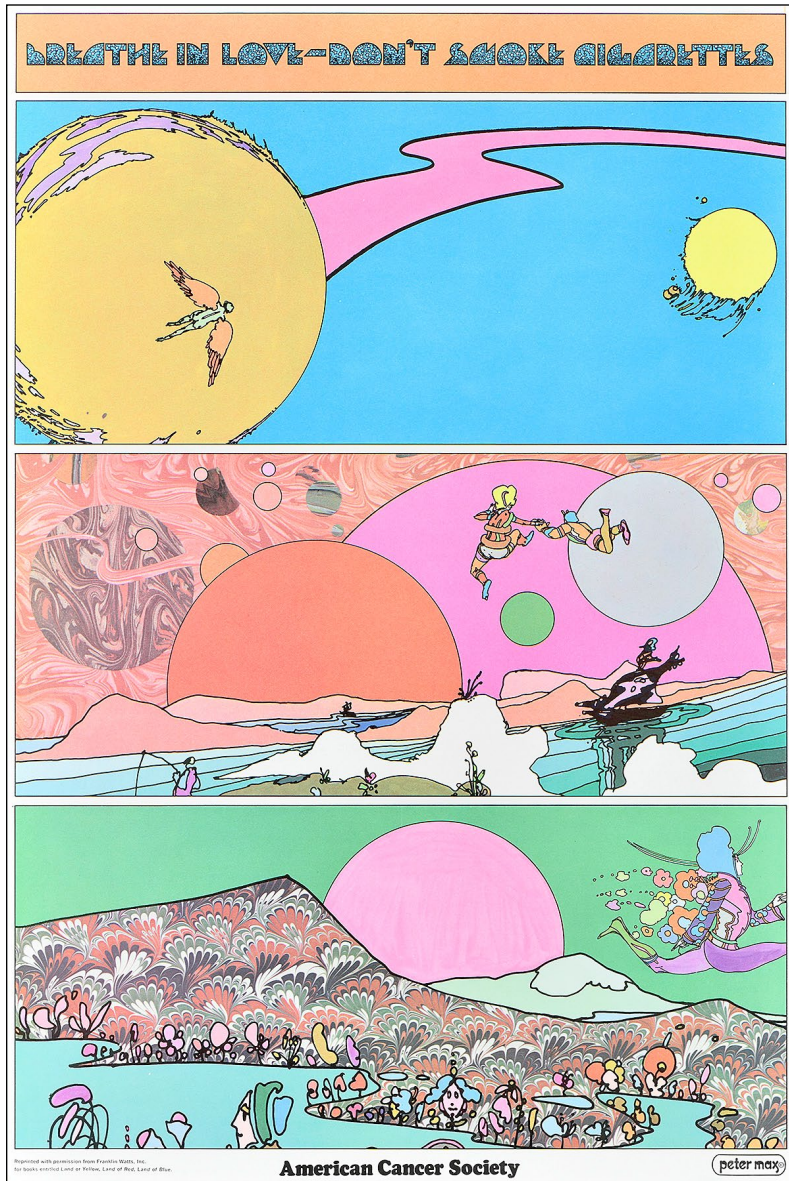




## The 5th Dimension Special, 1970

Peter Max (b. 1937)

- *The 5th Dimension Special: An Odyssey in the Cosmic Universe of Peter Max* was an hour-long variety broadcast that aired on CBS on May 21, 1970. It starred the popular musical group The Fifth Dimension—best known for the song “Aquarius”—with guest appearances by Glen Campbell, Arte Johnson, Joey Heatherton, and Flip Wilson on a psychedelic set designed by 33-year-old Peter Max.
- While photomontage portraits of the featured stars, including Max, decorate the border of this poster, the central image is an abstract floral kaleidoscope, filling the bounds of a hot-pink TV screen. This motif can also be seen as a mandala, a Buddhist symbol Max first encountered during his childhood in Tibet and that would appear in much of his work.



**Media is my canvas.**  
—Peter Max

**American Cancer Society, 1974**  
Peter Max (b. 1937)

- Max created at least three different posters for the American Cancer Society as well as a handful of related television commercials. Each was accompanied by peppy slogans like “happy people don’t smoke,” “beautiful things happen when you don’t smoke cigarettes,” or, as in this poster, “breathe in love—don’t smoke cigarettes.”
- These images were sold primarily on college campuses in an effort to decrease the number of young smokers. Max frequently produced work pro-bono for worthy causes.
- The three panels in this design underscore the powerful influence of comic books on Max’s ability to establish fantasy worlds. The central and lower registers also show him experimenting with marbling effects alongside his fanciful illustrational style. His “Cosmic Runner” makes several appearances, as does the segmented profile seen in earlier posters; the mountainous landscapes are reminiscent of the scenery that surrounded him as a child in Tibet and India.





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