

## “MAXimum Exposure”:

Artist, Author and Arlington Arts Commissioner  
Lola Lombard meets and interviews legendary  
Artist Peter Max

May 22, 2015

editor: Jim Byers

[www.arlingtonarts.org](http://www.arlingtonarts.org)

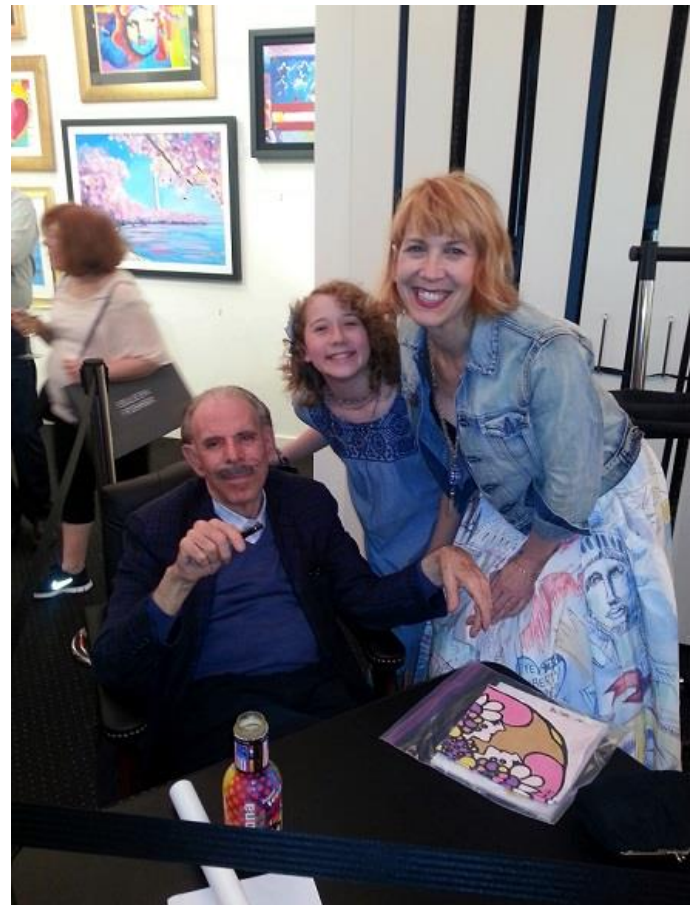
by Lola Lombard

I met the legendary artist, Peter Max. At 78 he is a man and a brand, and perhaps the wealthiest artist who has ever lived. His influence everywhere - especially in advertising and illustration. Here is a [link](#) to some of his work, or just google the man and marvel at the endless stream of images.

My parents loved modern furniture so when I was young, I grew up with a set of Peter Max linen napkins on the dinner table (shown on the table in the photo at right). We also had a cool Peter Max ash tray. No one smoked in my family so my mom called it a “candy dish,” but it never had any candy in it either (gee, thanks mom).

Since those days I have always wanted a piece of his art so while researching prices for his 1960’s cosmic era work and vintage items all over eBay, I discovered that Peter Max was making a personal appearance in the area. I arranged to see him and to thank him for his influence on my art and my children’s art company. Though I did not go home with a piece from the Wentworth gallery at Tysons 2, (\$\$\$\$\$!) that did not stop other attendees: his paintings were flying off the wall for anywhere from \$5,000, up to \$60 thousand dollars each.

For this auspicious interaction I wore a sequined top with the enormous painted skirt that I made. I figured it would be exciting for him to see his influence on my work for himself. In my purse, I had the linen napkin from my mom’s china closet.



I get to the gallery and wow, it was like an out of body experience. There he was! He was sitting behind a small roped off area in the middle of the gallery. I head over to get in line when I am actually told I am not *supposed* to enter the rope line to meet Peter. “This line is for purchasers,” the staffer said. I waited feeling very inadequate, especially since I was the one in the evening gown. Peter sat in polka dot socks and maroon suit, taking photos with customers next to their art for provenance. There

was a bottle of Arizona Ice Tea on the table (Peter Max had illustrated the label on the tea, btw). He was signing and doodling on the back of the purchased framed art works with Sharpie on the brown paper. I decided to wait near the wine table working up the courage to make my move to the roped off line.

Finally with a gap in the line, and the gallery assistants distracted with ringing up the sales, I walk up to Peter behind the line and tell him how much I love and appreciate his work. I tell him I am an artist and an art teacher. I give him a copy of the book I wrote and illustrated, "Zoopossible, Royal Kingdom," I tell him about the napkin as I pull it magically out of my purse. I swear you could have heard the room gasp when I did that.

He says "What's your name? Let me see that," and he signs on the napkin, "Lola, Love Peter Max 2015" We take a photo together. He says I am allowed only one photo, so of course my husband snaps away. The picture isn't great but at least it didn't cost me a painting. And then the next person comes up in line behind me. They saw I got my napkin signed and viola! Out of nowhere, other household items start to appear out of handbags and coats!

People flooded the line, as they pulled out Peter Max ties, Peter Max album covers, Peter Max scarves and more. Everyone had a story about their item. It was a pop culture convention! Each of the owners were giddy, congratulating each other for having the nerve to bring that stuff out of their parent's closet.

Now with my shyness behind me, I had to have more time with Peter, of course. So closer to the end of the event, the line dwindled as the crowd thinned out. I notice that Peter Max is suddenly sitting alone! I tenaciously step up and tell him that as an artist I have a million questions and I am hoping I may ask a few if that's OK.

He asks, "Did you really make that dress?" He says "I love it!"

I give him a tour of the images I painted on the dress. He says they are all his favorite and he asks if it's a one of a kind piece. "Yes," I reply, sort of stunned.

"You can ask me anything," he says. But only 3 questions." (Interesting! Is this man a lesson in creating desire, or what?)

Here is what I asked:

Lola: "Mr. Max, You have been working for a very long time. You have had different styles during different eras. Which has been your favorite so far?"

Max: "I like all my styles."

I try again, hoping to get a better answer.

Lola: "Do you have a favorite work?"

Max: "Whatever I am working on at the time, is my favorite style."

Hmm...OK, I try a better route:

Lola: "Not many people have had a career that has placed them on the cover of Time magazine. Not many people have painted household items, presidents and planes. So what led you to your big break, opening the gates for such amazing opportunities?"

This time, I get a really great answer. He looks right at me and says:

Max: "You should paint famous people. You should paint things that people are interested in. Then you should call the press. They want pictures of it. You'll get a lot of attention."

Awesome!!!! Now that is a practical answer by the leader in the field.

I sneak in a fourth question by introducing him to my daughter and reminding him that I am an art teacher. I ask what advice he'd give to kids.

Max: "Make silly squiggles." He says, "Keep making them and eventually they'll one day turn into something."

I agreed. Great advice.

And so I left, walking on air in my hand painted evening gown, clutching my signed Peter Max napkin from 1969. I intend to frame it until one day when I can maybe afford an original.

I heard he'll be back again in September. Now that we are buddies, I'm going back too. Maybe I'll bring the candy dish. Maybe I'll see you all there.

*Arlington-based Artist Lola Lombard is an expressive artist with a background in theatrical and fine arts and creative writing. Her work can be found on her websites [www.Lolaslab.com](http://www.Lolaslab.com) and [www.lolalombard.com](http://www.lolalombard.com).*