

HALL

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REVIEW: *Vermont*

PETER SAUL

Hall Art Foundation • Reading, VT • hallartfoundation.org • Through November 29, 2015

An exhibit of Peter Saul's work, with paintings from all phases of his career, is being held at the new venue for viewing contemporary art in Vermont, Hall Art Foundation. This compound of galleries on scenic grounds that was once a working farm in the tiny town of Reading, is made up of three converted barns and a farmhouse.

The spare, open space was helpful for viewing Saul's work, which tends to be so packed with figures and objects of everyday life—refrigerators, toilets—that it is slightly claustrophobia-inducing.

The show is set up chronologically. Oil paintings from the early '60s are blunt in their symbolism. Painted while the artist was living in Italy, they are almost apologia for moving out of the country. *Life In the USA*, painted in 1963, features a big red dog wearing a beanie cap, smoking a cigarette, and peeing money. In the background a plane is dropping bombs with dollar signs on them. *Mickey Mouse vs The*

Japs, from 1962, features guns and planes with Japan's WW II rising sun on them, along with Mickey Mouse cartoon figures. They crowd a picture plane flattened by a grid, dashes, loosely drawn objects, and collage.

There are several charming works on paper that are even earlier. They have an airiness, a light touch that is absent from the painting.

In the second half of the 1960s, Saul's paintings become filled with imagery that lambasts the Vietnam War. He also at this time adopts the lurid colors and dayglow-outlined blobby forms of psychede-



Peter Saul, *Peter Saul vs. Pop Art*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 75 x 72". Hall Collection. Courtesy of Hall Art Foundation. © Peter Saul.

lia. They have titles such as *Yankee Garbage*, *I Torture Commie Virgins*, and *Upper Class, Lower Class*.

Into the '70s and beyond, figures become increasingly sculpted, with heightened shading and exaggerated body parts. This period ('70s) was perhaps his most prodigious, with two large canvas standouts in the show: *Custer's Last Stand*, 1974, and *Subway*, 1979. Figures have taken on a Daliesque grotesqueness, in scenes of violence and mayhem. Saul is subversive—the viewer is

seduced by his neon-bright palette, sensuous forms in a pop-culture idiom, before the caustic political and social commentary is fully appreciated.

—Arlene Distler