

# PRIVATE AIR

## LUXURY HOMES



max

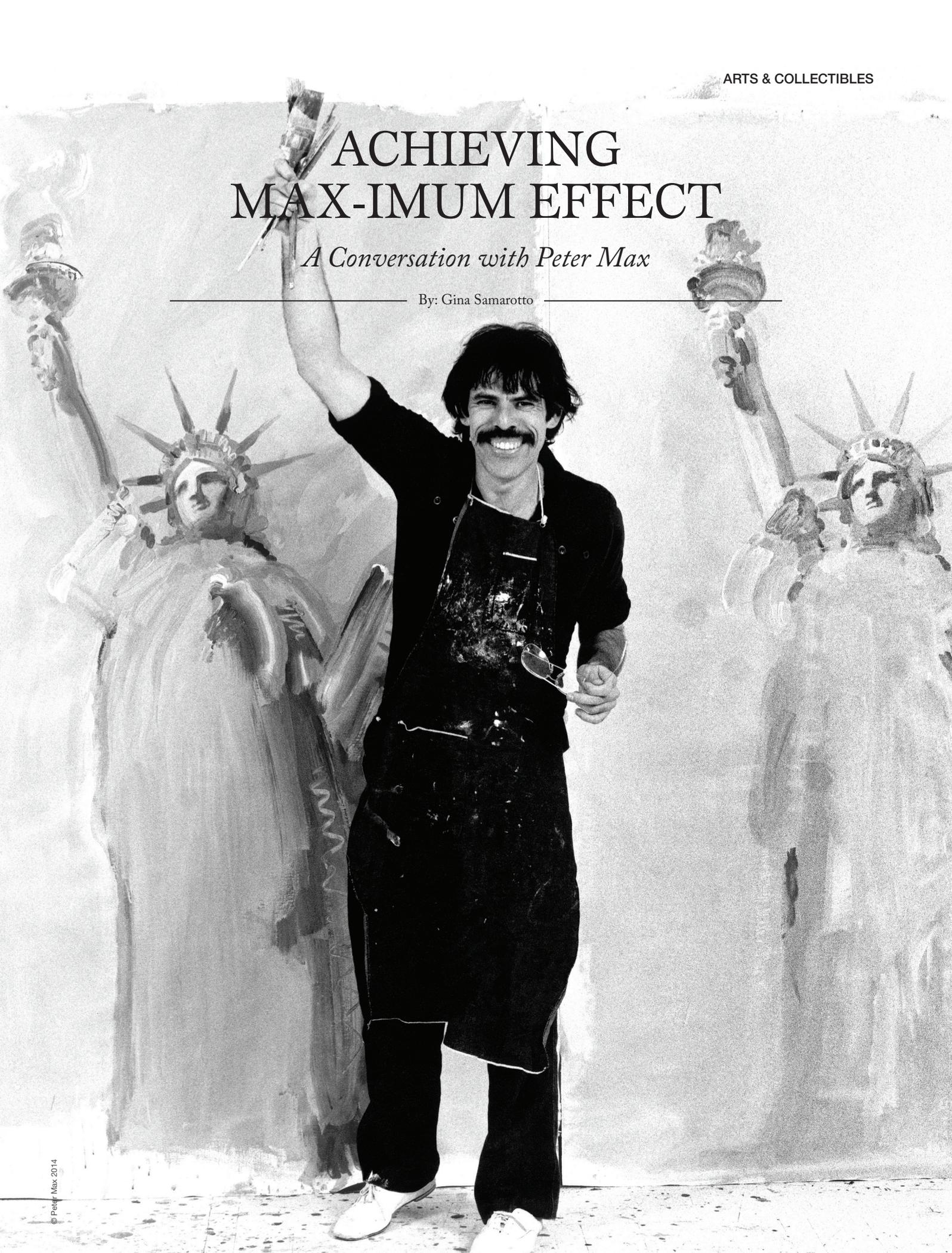
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**peter max**<sup>TM</sup>  
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# ACHIEVING MAX-IMUM EFFECT

*A Conversation with Peter Max*

By: Gina Samarotto





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Peter Max, sporting a pair of red sneakers paired with polka dotted socks and a smile that reaches all the way to his twinkling eyes, warmly welcomes me into his upper west side studio. With a handshake that ends in a hug and an invitation to sit down for some tea and a slice of chocolate cake, it's easy for a fleeting moment at least, to forget that the utterly charming man standing before me is arguably the most recognizable, successful artist of our time.

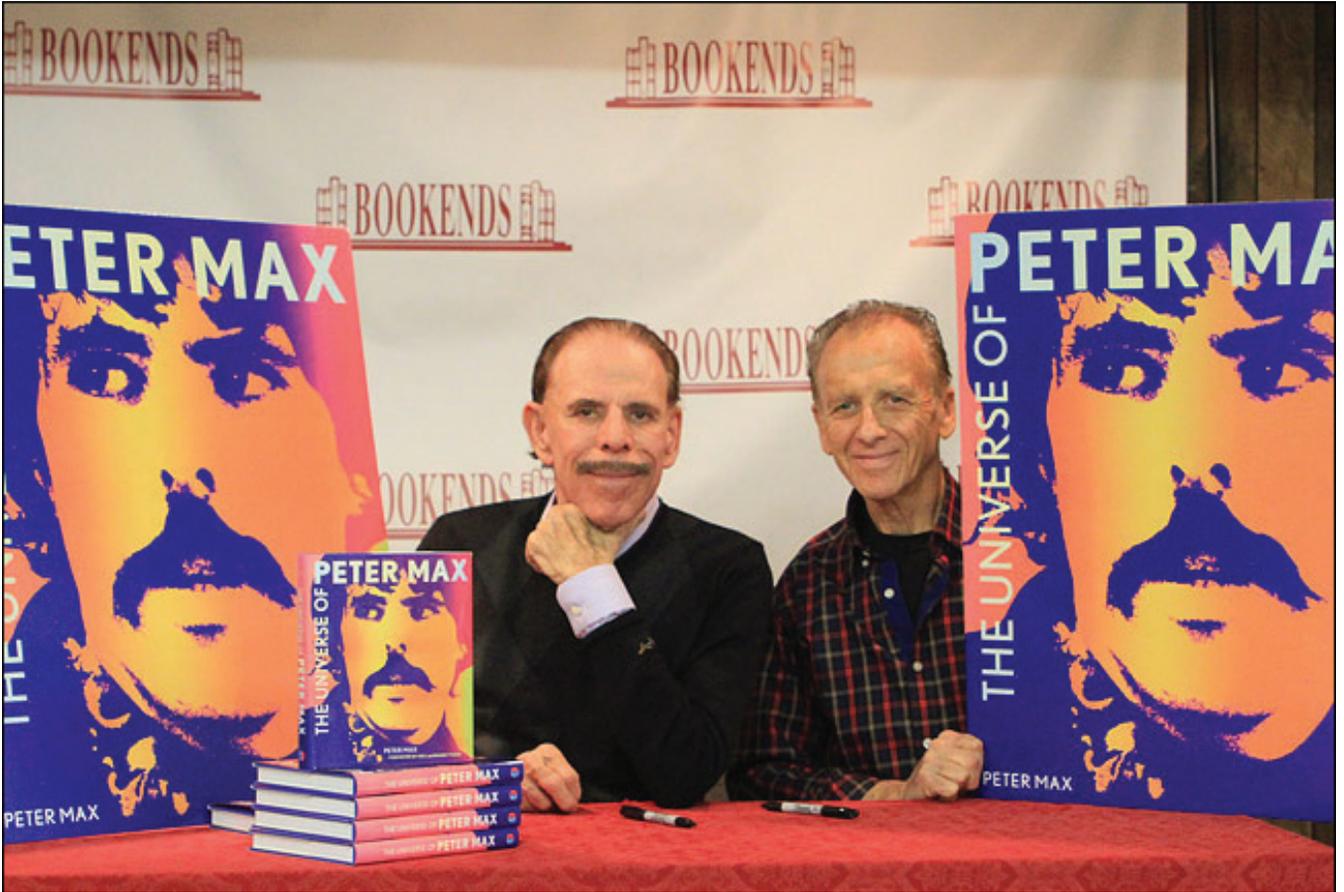
With nearly every square inch of the space filled to overflowing with everything from family photos to a prized collection of cookie jars to a life sized, cosmic cow; Max's upper west side studio is a jubilant reflection of the artist himself. Housed in a sprawling, sunlit loft, it's a fascinating place that begs you to linger. Here, you feel compelled to sink into a plush purple sofa sitting across from a wildly painted baby grand piano signed by Ringo -yes that Ringo- to visit and chat about art, the world and the universe at large. It's a place where creativity is so abundant as to be palpable and where canvas after spectacular, iconic canvas not so subtly reminds you that you are in the presence of an art legend.

Born in the late 1930's to a businessman father with a penchant for art and a fashion designer mother, Max's early years were spent growing up in Shanghai. It was there, in a pagoda house standing in the shadows of a neighboring Buddhist temple, that a passion for drawing and painting took hold of the burgeoning artist. Yet despite the impressive, raw talent that surfaced when Max first put pencil to paper, it was the stars above that teased the imagination of the curious, demiurgic little boy. "What I really wanted to be was an astronomer," Max says when asked about those early years. "I loved - and I still love - everything that space and the cosmos and all the universes have to offer. I just ended up painting what I saw and how it made me feel rather than studying it from a scientific point of view."

A wise career choice, to be sure. Both literally and figuratively, artistic accomplishment was written in the stars for Max, and by the end of the 1960's in the first dawning light of the Age of Aquarius, that lucrative star was shining very brightly. The commercial successes brought about by a line of clocks for General Electric, a psychedelically-tinged ad campaign for 7Up, appearances



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on the *Tonight Show*, stints on Ed Sullivan, a popular series of posters, and his face featured on the cover of *Time Magazine*, all worked to catapult the artist to fantastic new heights, thus conclusively sealing his fate as one of the most successful contemporary artists the world has ever known.

"Almost from the start, from right out of art school, there was success," Max says. "I was famous overnight. People loved the cosmo style I painted... magazines loved publishing it and I loved creating it". The blaringly instantaneous, widespread fame wasn't lost on the Max family. The artist recalls the impact his fame had on his children, a son - aptly named Adam Cosmo - and daughter, Libra Astro.

"I was walking down the street with Adam one day when he was still very little" Max explains. "We passed a newsstand on the corner where they had magazines with my picture on the cover. 'Daddy, that's you!' he said. I turned around and saw row after row of my face. And that's when it really sunk in that this, the art, was going to be it for me. I bought every copy they had."

In the years that followed those early triumphs, Max's work continued to keep the art world on its toes. From U.S. Presidents to celebrities, Max is known for having immortalized the faces that have shaped our very culture over the last three decades. With a penchant for creating work reflecting a specific number, albeit numbers that range from the dutifully apropos to the completely personal, Max's work is often seen in series. In 1981, he painted six images of the Statue of Liberty on the White House lawn "at Ronnie's" request. There's the forty-four Obamas, "because he's our 44th president" and in the case of Max's personal friend, Bill Clinton, "I just love that guy so much I did a hundred of him."

Not content to restrict his images to the relatively limited parameters afforded by stretched canvas, Max reinvented the idea of working in large scale when he painted not just one, but two jets as well as a luxury cruise ship. In 1970 Max, himself a Yogi, vegetarian and avid peace activist, painted a twin-engine Piper Apache for Swami Vishnudevananda Saraswati. Called the '*Peace Plane*', the project was the precursor for the Boeing 777-200ER super jet he embellished at the



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turn of the millennium for Continental Airlines and a forefather to Norwegian Cruise Line's *Breakaway*, Max's newest behemoth.

What was it like for the artist the first time he saw his work emblazoned on the side of the *Breakaway* anchored in New York Harbor? "Oh, it was magic!" Max exclaimed. "It was wonderful! I felt like a kid. I wanted to jump up and down! I wanted to clap! I still feel like a kid every time I see it, the thrill is there every time."

His iconic and beloved characters – among them *'Umbrella Man'*, *'Sage'* and *'Zero'* – are the unofficial, symbolic poster children of pop art while his *'Liberty'* series elevated the already internationally famous landmark to rock star status. Not afraid to put his money – or influence – where his paintbrush is, Max's participation in the project to restore the Statue of Liberty was instrumental in ensuring her flame will continue to burn for generations to come. Max paints what inspires him, what moves him, and in the case of *'Flower Blossom Lady'* and other works featuring an elegant women in profile, what – or who – he loves.

"Oh my Mary," Max beams, his face instantly lighting up at the mere mention of his wife's name, "She's my love, my muse. She's so beautiful. Such a beautiful face, such a beautiful soul. I wish she was here today so I could introduce you."

In a story fairly well known to art lovers and oft-repeated among Max collectors, the artist was crossing Central Park West to grab a quick cup of coffee with a friend when he first laid eyes on the future Mrs. Max and declared, "I'm going to marry that girl". True to his word the pair were wed a year later and today, years later and by all accounts, the honeymoon has only just begun.

After revisiting his life and work to date, Max sits back and sums it all up with a simple, heartfelt expression of gratitude. "I have so much to thank the universe for, to thank ALL of the universes for. I've been blessed to be able do what I love and to share my life with those I love."

And we, Peter, have been blessed to experience it – however peripherally. May your star continue to shine. ✈