

Daydreaming in **DOODLES**

Richard Deon's art is a textbook case for finding inspiration in odd places; he'll talk about it today

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When he was younger, Richard Deon often found his mind wandering. In school, instead of paying attention to history lessons, he spent time contemplating the clouds outside the window.

What did hold his attention, however, were the striking black and white illustrations in his history book: a stern teacher with a pointer in one hand; Abraham Lincoln in profile. And, as is the wont of bored students, he doodled. On those textbooks. On Abe.

"I was a daydreamer and I'd look out the window, and visualize other things," says the now-adult Deon. He graduated high school, history lessons be damned, then went to art school and became a graphic designer. Struggling to find his style, he suddenly had a flashback. "I thought back to how much fun I had defacing those textbooks."

Deon will be at the Hudson River Museum today to talk about his successful experiences in doodling and to present his highly original and engaging show, "Paradox and Conformity."

It's an assemblage of nearly 50 works that include paintings, drawings and heroic-sized banners, all derived from, and inspired by, the motifs and illustrations from his long-ago textbooks. It will be on view through Sept. 6.

"One day, I really went nuts on this book; I doodled all over it, and I was called into the office for a big meeting," he recalls. "An English teacher defended me; he said, this looks artistic; let him pay for the book and go on his way."

For almost 30 years, this dreamy doodler has made that his metier, expanding and exploring the visual styles in those self-same 1950s-era textbooks with titles like "Visualized Civics." But where

academic images were contrived to have one meaning, Deon's reworking creates multi-layers that provoke thought and questioning.

In works like "Death in Long Grass," he uses an image of a spear-holding man he cut out of a textbook. "Then I replaced his head with some Hollywood head," he says, and added a cow from another textbook.

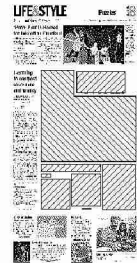
"I like to create a universal platform, a work of questionable origin, which will pose questions, so that viewers will want to look at it two or three times," he says.

Since it's drawn from textbooks, this is imagery that's nearly universally recognizable, says Deon, who lives in Dutchess County. "When people see my work, they think, 'I know something about this, I've seen this kind of thing before. I don't know where I've seen it, but I know I have.'"

And that tantalizing piece of visual memory, stored somewhere in the subconscious, makes you wonder where you saw it, ask questions about it, and ultimately, says Deon, explore the work.

"That's the key, the question, the response."

Look closely at his works and you'll notice the perspective is wrong, or things are incomplete, or it looks as if the head on the guy with the spear doesn't quite match his



body. In many works, the subjects are looking off the canvas, but at what? "I do like loaded art," he says. "It's not weaponized, but there's a lot of ammunition there; a viewer can start walking through, but they will still trip over something."

The process of creating this art is a bit like paper dolls, but certainly, not as straightforward as just cutting out shapes, although that is how Deon begins. He literally cuts out stylized figures and objects and then arranges them in his work, eventually painting his cut-out characters. "It's very like paper dolls," he says, "but there are a lot of crumbs, things that reappear often."

His recurring figures include The Instructor (with that pointer), The Scientist, and The Subject. "I liked the poor guy, standing rigid," he says of The Subject. "He was being fitted for a suit in the original illustration with two tailors hovering around him. I think it was an illustration for 'before and after.'

"I cut him out, stuck him on my wall, and then started putting him in my paintings. I put him in one that had been unfinished for four years, and that completed it."

The Subject has mileage. "He went much further than what I thought," Deon laughs. "I ended up using him in a big painting." That big painting is in the show, a giant mural 39 feet long created just for this installation, with a recumbent Subject taking up a wall in the atrium. He also shows up in another painting, "Weehawken," which depicts an imaginary Civil War naval confrontation in New Jersey.

Which only serves to show that even if all those civics and history lessons went in one ear and out the other, Deon retained enough to conceptualize those lessons in his art.

The one thing he has not

forgotten? The unsung illustrators of "Visualized Civics" and other tomes, who might have gone unheralded for their efforts at educating blase students like Deon, had he not taken up doodling as a profession.

"I have to hand it to them for inspiring me," he says. "I have been using some of these figures for 20 years."

"I thought back to how much fun I had defacing those textbooks."

Richard Deon

If you go

What: Paradox and Conformity, a show of 50 paintings, drawings and murals by artist Richard Deon

When: Today through Sept. 6. Gallery hours are noon-5 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday; noon-7:30 p.m. Friday.

Where: The [Hudson River Museum](http://www.hrm.org), 511 Warburton Ave., Yonkers, 914-963-4550. www.hrm.org

Admission: \$5 adults, \$3 seniors and youth 5-16. Children under 4, free. From 5-7:30 p.m. on Fridays, museum and planetarium admission is free.

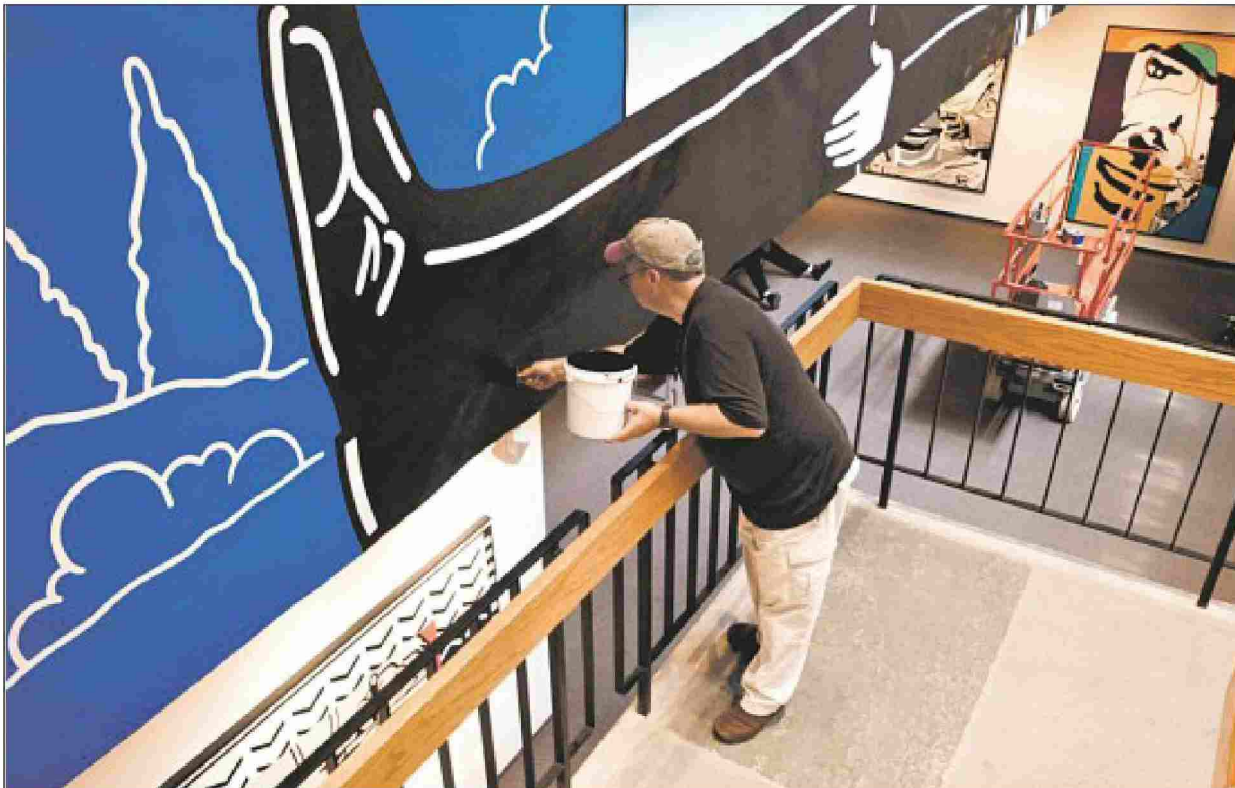
Today's events:

1-2 p.m. Tour the galleries with Deon to discover how he works.

1-3:30 p.m. Drop-in art workshops for families (children 7-plus) include Textbook Tear-out Collage with Jesse Lambert, and Chalk 'n Around with Jeff Hopkins (you get to draw in chalk)



Richard Deon's "Lincoln With Remnant" is one of his pieces inspired from motifs and illustrations from a long-ago civics textbook.



Photos by [Hudson River Museum](#)

Artist Richard Deon works on one of his paintings, a mural called "Low Tide." Deon will have a show of his work "Paradox and Conformity" at the Hudson River Museum through Sept. 6. Above: Deon's "Feedlot" is one of the works in the exhibit.



Photos by [Hudson River Museum](#)

Artist Richard Deon, with his painting "Low Tide" finds inspiration in a pastime familiar to many inattentive students — doodling. Below, "President," is part of a series called "Part Unrelated Morse Code Edition."

