

## 24 Questions for Artist Jim Shaw

by Chloe Wyma  
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Jim Shaw's "Rinse Cycle," 2012, acrylic on muslin. Courtesy the Artist and Metro Pictures, New York



**Name:** Jim Shaw  
**Age:** 59  
**Occupation:** Artist  
**City/Neighborhood:** Eagle Rock, Los Angeles

**What project are you working on now?**

My Metro show.

**Your show at Metro Pictures features 20 drawings from comic books you've created, as well as a large-scale mural based on your personal religion, Oism. When and why did you become an Oist?**

I never became an Oist, but I'm in the process of writing the history and theology of it.

Jim Shaw/Courtesy Metro Pictures,  
New York

**You have said that Oism is a feminist version of Mormonism. What does it mean to be an Oist? Do you have to be an artist to be an Oist?**

The Oist project began as an attempt to make artwork that formed a previously nonexistent culture, to further investigate aspects of religion and American history that imbued "My Mirage." I wanted to see what might happen

in an alternate history, to try and formulate a religion I might want to be a member of, to create a framework I could make a wide variety of art pieces in. No one has to be an Oist.

**Stylistically, you're very inspired by the tradition of '70s album covers. Why is it important to revisit this aesthetic today?**

It's only important to me, and it's in part because I have a soft spot for the middle-brow art of creating images that complement a musical production without illustrating it.

**Your work on view at Metro Pictures illustrates scenes from a proposed rock opera. Do you have plans to execute this performance? What can we expect?**

I do plan to record the prog-rock opera in the near future, but I need to complete the final two comic pieces that will finish the core storyline of the opera before I can truly complete it, as well as have some spare time and money to record it. My attraction to the genre was twofold – I wanted to try something I was totally ill equipped to do, as a sort of absurd challenge, and I was inspired by the failure of Yes's "Tales from Topographic Oceans," which was to be the pinnacle of their career, but instead became a symbol of their overreach and pretension, at least to the critical world, however, it also contained some of their most unusual work.

**You've recently joined Blum & Poe in L.A. Do you have anything planned with them?**

I will someday do a show there, but first I have a show at the Baltic Centre, and one at Simon Lee to get together.

**You and Mike Kelley began making music and zines together as members of the proto-punk band "Destroy all Monsters" in 1973. What is your favorite memory of him?**

I guess when he was double drumming with Dennis Duck at the LAFMS show a month ago. He was quite happy.

**What's the last show that you saw?**

"Under the Big Black Sun" at MOCA.

**What's the last show that surprised you? Why?**

My memory isn't good for that sort of thing, I always have too many deadlines to go out to see shows, but there was a large psychedelic portrait of an artist's (whose name I forgot and had never heard of before) father in that show (UTBBS), as well as a couple of Mike's pieces I couldn't remember, so those impressed me, having been here for most of that time.

**What's your favorite place to see art?**

In L.A., the Geffen is the best space for contemporary art.

**Do you make a living off your art?**

Yes.

**What's the most indispensable item in your studio?**

I'd say my CD player, but it stopped, so I guess the pencil sharpener.

**Where are you finding ideas for your work these days?**

Reading and thinking about madness, the future, Raymond Roussel.

**Do you collect anything?**

I'm trying to reform myself from being a pack rat, but horror comic reprints are getting to be a habit.

**What's the last artwork you purchased?**

It was a swap meet psychedelic landscape.

**What's the first artwork you ever sold?**

Possibly a hand made T-shirt when I was a teenager.

**What's the weirdest thing you ever saw happen in a museum or gallery?**

A Russian guy and his girlfriend started to chant in my London opening, then began to disrobe, when a helpful guest and personnel ushered them out, then I heard they'd done the same at a friend's opening the night before, where the finale was she vomited and he shat on cue, then smeared feces on the gallery window. I'm not sure that's weird, but shitting on cue is impressive.

**What's your art-world pet peeve?**

Long text interviews.

**Do you have a gallery/museum-going routine?**

No.

**Know any good jokes?**

Only dirty ones.

**What's the last great book you read?**

The first half of Philip K. Dick's "Eye in the Sky."

**What work of art do you wish you owned?**

The Sistine Chapel.

**What would you do to get it?**

Become Pope.

**What international art destination do you most want to visit?**

Easter Island.