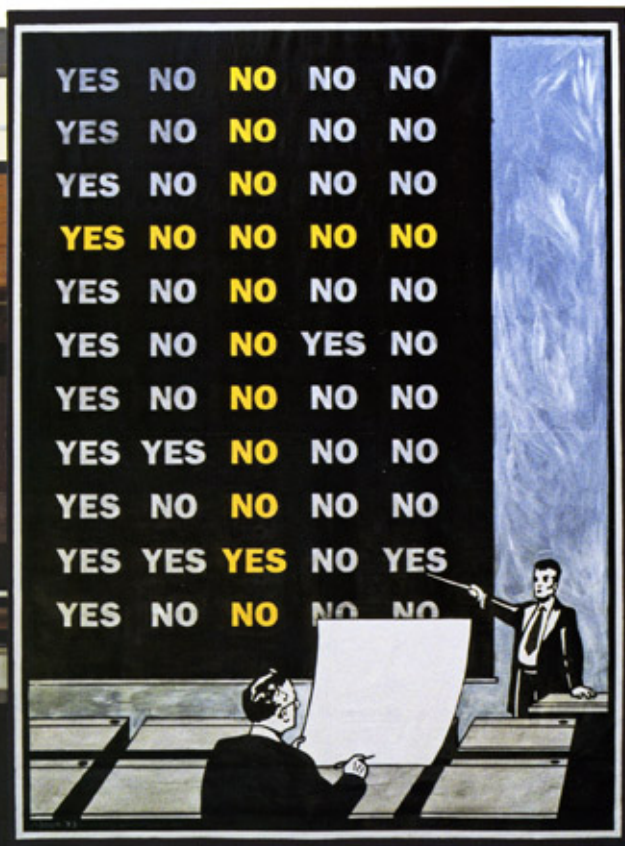


# The Paintings of Richard Deon



*Lesson*  
1993, 2001  
acrylic on muslin  
144" x 192"

**Paradox and Conformity**



**Death in the Long Grass**

2001

acrylic on canvas

58" x 37"

### **Gear Up**

2006

acrylic on synthetic canvas,

hanging rod

121" x 154"



## **Generational Concerns**

Coming from a generation of artists who have reinvigorated the graphic novel with significant content and thought-provoking storyboards, Richard Deon has applied similar ideas and stylistic concerns to painting. He shares with his contemporaries a predilection for infusing social issues with a uniquely personal perspective along with an intense and inventive use of color and a bold drawing style.

But where graphic novelists have comic books as a precedent Deon has the 1950s textbook *Visualized Civics*. "Fascinated by the content and the ability of the illustrations to render complex (social) concepts to young students on a personal level" he began to appropriate the book's imagery, an imagery that had, over the years, settled deep into our collective educational subconscious. By shuffling and enfolding this scholastic imagery into ordinary, everyday and oddly mundane situations, his work has achieved an absurdity emblematic of high art.

## **Chance**

In the late 1970s, while rummaging with friends through a dumpster full of books, Deon came upon *Visualized Civics*. The chance discovery of this book gave Deon a new set of characters with which to populate his paintings: delinquents, lecturers, demonstrators, authority figures—stereotypes

able to introduce, complicate and unhinge meaning and associations inherent in his work. A fabulist of the first order, Deon coined the term "Social Surrealism" to describe these paintings, a kind of history painting where storytelling and personal/political viewpoints dominate the art form. Here, painted images contain moments of fact and puzzlement, moments that we're apparently aware of, yet oddly unfamiliar with.



**Burning  
the Department  
of Interior**

1997  
acrylic on canvas  
79" x 136"

## Paradox and Conformity

Paradox and conformity mingle in works such as *Gear Up* where a suburban land development of the most usual sort gets a risible handling. Or *Lesson*, where adults teaching adults seemingly grapple with prayer in the classroom. Straightforward concerns, but thrown off by pictorial twists like the implausible window frame in *Gear Up* or a Hollywood leading man wearing primitive garb in *Death in the Long Grass*. Likewise, an uneasy pictorial humor jars *Repatriation*, an awkwardly comical, mostly blue send-up of a historically embarrassing, yet routine, government strategy for handling native people. In *Alexandria* (a Deon 'Arrangement in Grey and Black') juvenile delinquency duels educational aspirations on the steps of the town library. And in *Burning the Department of Interior* grass roots political activism mingles with antigovernment radicalism in the form of an ad hoc fireside coalition.

## Vive la difference

Throughout Deon's practice a particular way of doing things emerges, his *modus operandi* is actually a *modus vivendi*; a painted world that allows conflicting people and ideas to coexist not by softening differences or toning down incompatibility, but by forcing differences to confront and collide with each other—without resolution.

Peter Dudek  
Brooklyn, New York  
February, 2006

**Alexandria**

2001  
acrylic on canvas  
34" x 40.5"

