

## Q&A with Illustrator Maira Kalman

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A new exhibit featuring Maira Kalman called “37 Paintings” opens tonight at the Julie Saul Gallery in Chelsea (6 to 8 p.m.). The show, which runs through June 23, includes myriad paintings that Kalman has done over the last two years, including work for Michael Pollan’s book *Food Rules* and *The New Yorker* and from her time at the American Academy in Rome. Sitting at the circular, sunny-yellow table in her West Village kitchen, fresh off a plane from Tel Aviv, Kalman told Departures about Rome, the art of embroidery and her time spent as a maid in Ireland.

**Q: Most of your work is for assignment, but when you went to Rome you were left to your own devices. Did you like it?**

**A:** No. No, I didn’t. It gets into the tricky area of being an artist or being an illustrator. I like being an illustrator. I like being Lois Lane, sent on assignment. I feel so sorry for artists. When I was in Rome, I thought, Oh these poor, poor artists!

**Q: In addition to your 37 paintings in the exhibit, you’ll actually be at the gallery during the show working on an embroidery piece that you started in Rome, right?**

**A:** Right. So my work in Rome was just to walk around, with my beautiful empty brain, and look at things. The embroidery is ongoing—I’m embroidering every single thing that happened to me in Rome. Everything that I saw, heard or felt.

**Q: I understand you recently did a stint as a maid in Ireland.**



**A:** It was in a castle. It was a thousand-year-old castle. I was the best maid they'd ever had. If anybody reads this, they can hire me to work in their castle, or palace. Preferably in England, but I'll go other places too.

**Q: Is the instinct to go to Rome and be an artist and the instinct to go to Ireland and be a maid the same?**

**A:** They're flip sides of the same instinct. For me, being a maid and doing that work—putting things in order and having that sense of a task—is a great complement to creating art. People garden and paint. Something happens to the brain. It's very calmed, and that's when I have lots of ideas.

**Q: Your work and your approach to life are so youthful. Do you ever think about aging?**

**A:** I think about age all the time. It is inevitable—you'd have to be a complete idiot not to notice the time that you have is getting smaller. It's hard to grapple with. So one works and stays occupied. Otherwise, you'll go mad.

*535 W. 22nd St., 6th fl.; 212-627-2410; [saulgallery.com](http://saulgallery.com).*