

Elisabeth Condon Wins the New York Pulse Prize for Miami (Kinda)

[March 11, 2015](#) [ART](#), [zJohn Hood](#)



Over this past weekend, New York City put a decided spring back into its step.

It had good reason to do so too. For not only had the city finally slipped from the grip of a very frigid February (the second coldest on record), but The Armory Show and its constellation of satellites replaced that cold-of-cold with a long, cool blast of vivid.

Among the most stellar (and vivid) of Armory Show Week fairs was [Pulse New York](#). Pulse, which launched in Miami a decade ago and added New York to its repertoire the very next year, is now being directed by Helen Toomer, who moved the de facto flagship from the Mainland to the Beach, and this year reset its sister from May to March. Reports are the moves made the fairs even more of a hit, in both cities.

Much of Pulse's punch derives from its devotion to emerging artists and galleries, and the fair applies a variety of initiatives to herald both. Among those efforts is the [Pulse Prize](#), "a jury awarded cash grant given to an artist of distinction featured in a solo exhibition at the fair." Of the 14 artists nominated for New York 2015, four (count 'em!) were either based or galleried in Miami. Only New York boasted as many nominees (one of whom happened to be Moby), which surely bodes well with regards to our town's art world bona fides.

As you might suspect, Wynwood played a major role in Miami's strong showing, and not only did three of the four nominations trace right back to NW 24th Street; one of those so situated walked away with the win.



Elisabeth Condon

Yes, we mean [Elisabeth Condon](#), who rosters with [Emerson Dorsch](#), and won the Pulse Prize with the stunningly sublime *Notes from Shanghai*. Condon may have been born in Los Angeles and now ricochets between Brooklyn and Tampa, but she's also got deep ties to the Everglades and (as you'll see) an avowed love of Miami. Condon also thinks Tyler Emerson and Brook Dorsch are tops, as do we, which makes her more than double-plus a-okay in our book.

So without further ado, here's Elisabeth Condon providing a lucid and enlightening look into what makes her a Pulse Prize winner.

Which came first, *Notes from Shanghai* or the Pulse Prize

nomination?

The work, [which is] a result of six months spent in that city.

Had you plans to show *Shanghai* in such a venue, Prize or no Prize?

Intuitively, without an idea about where or when, I began to consciously form an exhibition four months into my stay. The work was coalescing, I had a lot of momentum and the materials I'd bought in Shanghai were starting to feel familiar. I wasn't thinking about a venue as much as a group of paintings that would feel complete in conveying the feelings of the city.

Initially I'd experimented on rice paper and store-bought canvas, seeking a visual logic or structure to unlock Shanghai. After finding a groove with collages, I wanted to make larger scale paintings. The size of canvases I chose related to the scale of the studio at Swatch, so scale was visually harmonized.

What brought you to Shanghai anyway?

I was invited by Swatch, the Swiss watch company, to attend a six-month artist residency at the Swatch Art Peace Hotel. This residency is housed in a luxury hotel located at Nanjing East Road at the Bund — basically Shanghai's Main Street, across the Huangpu River from the Pudong skyline.



Hotel in Nanjing East Road

Did the city take some getting used to before you could work, or did you start pouring at once?

Though this was my seventh trip to China and second to Shanghai, adjusting

took a long time. Having a studio to work in makes it possible to live and work in a place, and penetrate its culture more deeply than touring. In the studio I didn't start with pouring, but drew in my sketchbook and on rice paper with brush and ink. It takes time to work up to pouring and paper is my way to warm up. But I began working the second day to acclimate, just to feel grounded after the fourteen hour flight.



How much of what you came up with is specific to Shanghai?

The imagery in the paintings is based on Pudong's skyline and Huangpu River view from the hotel. Any proper Chinese landscape encompasses time and season, and these paintings show a range of smoggy summer days and cool, glittery nights.

Pudong was a spectacular view. After 7 pm buildings and tourist boats glowed from over-the-top light displays. Beneath their spectacular illumination, barges passed silently, fully dark, as if from another century. Promptly at 11pm all lights shut down and police in golf carts ushered the throngs back

into the city. Its skyline is most literally in the portrayal of Pirate Ship 9559 in **Elephant Path** and impressionistically as **We See, We Don't See**. In Shanghai I discovered that work made while traveling becomes the unfolding of vision over time.



Glitter is Shanghai incarnate: glitzy, inviting, but also tarnished sometimes. I found, on Juangshu Road near the hotel, store after store with pound bags of color piled on shelves. I bought from a couple. The man rested while the woman handled the money. I mixed the glitter with acrylic binder in big batches of silver or pearly white and trowel it on with a knife.

The palette in these paintings is pure Shanghai: saturate, clear, neon color mitigated with black ink. Pouring Chinese ink felt like a transgression of materials. The greasy quality of the ink permeated the thinner, color inks and acrylics, toning the paintings with a layer of blackness that summons silent barges passing through, emblems of China's vast, mysterious history.

Could you see yourself doing such site-specific series in other world class capitals?

Tokyo, Berlin and Abu Dhabi ignite my curiosity for their cultural histories and visual impact. I'm also interested in natural environments: the Everglades, Taiwan's Taro Park, and the Ireland coast border on the sacred and look inviting to paint and learn about. I have already worked in Marseille, Miami and Los Angeles, all sumptuous environments I would return to.

In 2009 I made the exhibition **Beijing Sojourn** at Da Feng Gallery (located in Dashanzi 798) on location in Beijing. The premise was different than **Notes from Shanghai** in that **Sojourn** was installed in three stages that showed Asia's evolving influence on my work.

Have you plans to Condon either Tampa or Brooklyn (or are the two too close to home, so to speak)?

The Brooklyn Navy Yard and Port Tampa Bay both intrigue me as visual and historical expansions beyond what I know about each place. I also want to meet the challenge of painting places that are internalized on many levels.

Brooklyn we get (kinda), but how'd you end up in Tampa?

A professorship at the University of South Florida brought me to Tampa. For eleven years I commuted between Tampa and New York. Driving takes 18 hours door to door, if you can do it — the last two hours are pretty tough.

Tampa provides quiet, peace and time to work. From my studio, I only see trees and bamboo. It's very minimal in distraction. Brooklyn, where I live in a fourth-floor walkup, is more visible and social. In Tampa I have to drive to see people; in New York I have to recycle the paper right outside my door to see people.

How'd Emerson Dorsch get into the picture?

Craving urban culture when I first moved to Tampa, I visited Emerson Dorsch when it was Dorsch Gallery. This was probably 2004 or so. The scale of the exhibition room was perfect, and there was a bench to sit on and look at work. Based on the proportion of the space I vowed to exhibit there. As the gallery grew and evolved, that space got more and more gorgeous. The Pulse show was the fifth with the gallery.

In what way have Tyler and Brook affected your career (and your life)?

I paraphrase Louise Bourgeois when saying that “my friends are those who support my work.” In this sense I am indebted to Tyler and Brook on so many levels. They have been pivotal to my career and life, by representing my work. Our dialog sustains and pushes my work forward. We know each other well. Tyler’s curatorial perceptions expand my own because our thinking is so different, which is exciting. Brook is exacting, meticulous, and sharp. Each has a distinctive eye. Their program results from a dynamic partnership with genuine faith in the power of art to connect people. Agnes Martin used the phrase “friends of art” in speaking of those who are true believers. Tyler and Brook are friends of art.

Might Miami one day soon see more of Elisabeth Condon (and vice versa)?

Yes and soon. I know and love the city; it’s so lush and gorgeous. With more time available than the usual two-to seven-day long Miami blast I want to experience the city for longer intervals, during which I’d like to learn more about its ports and cruise ship industry. I also miss my friends and the art scene, so will definitely be back.

WORDS BY [John Hood](#)