

The Collector #6

Posted on March 8, 2020 by [Talking Pictures](#) in [The Collector](#)

Elisabeth Condon / Peter Williams

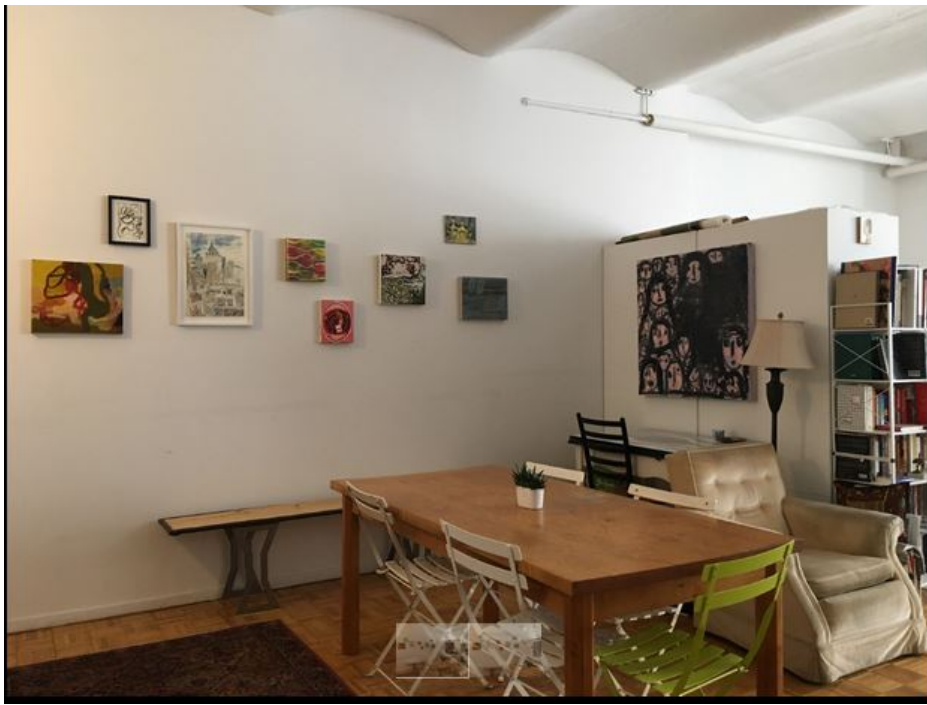


2015 seems so late when the Trayvon Martin trial date was 2013, his murder 2012. As Black Lives Matter raged on and people wrung their hands, Peter Williams stepped up to give their feelings a voice. He began posting paintings of giant eyeballs on Facebook. The paintings were small but so densely painted, and large in their internal scale, that they consumed space by the yard. Inside the oil painted eyeballs, figures could be glimpsed in their reflections, such as men with their hands up.

In that hot summer Peter and I (who first met in 2003 and keep up on social media as a mutual admiration society) agreed to trade paintings. He wanted a pour painting, and chose a black and gold painting in similar size to his, 12 x 9 inches. Having just returned to Brooklyn from six months in China I forgot to sign every painting I made, Peter's no exception. But in return he sent from Delaware the most shockingly wonderful eyeball I have ever seen, blazing with surprise, loathing, shock, anger, and fear—compressed in a single confrontation.

Encased in hot pink skin, painted with a blue-soaked red like alizarin or geranium lake, heightened with white, over which the most inexplicable but perfect cadmium yellow deep scrapings scatter, the pupil stares unblinkingly, ringed by pink, red and brown circles rimmed in black. In its center the yellow scrapings gather, gaining pitch and definition as blonde hair crowning, or blond birds settling in, like a reverse roll of film, upon the head of a human-parrot hybrid, impasto nose beak protruding beneath two blue eyes. Actually, one eye rests on the nose, implying an exaggerated perspective like Holbein's Ambassadors. Two white squares float beneath the visage, highlights, maybe, or a fleeting glance of a uniform. In any case, the narrative is not didactic, but it's awfully hard to argue with an eye staring at you, defining you as you define it.

In September I moved to Westbeth, an elegant white room with high ceilings, and hung the painting on a long wall, by itself. The painting held the wall just fine. I hung a mirror beside it. Still held. Then opposite. Held again. That month, watching light move across the wall, the painting continued to hold the wall on its own. As the apartment filled with books, table and chairs, other paintings, and cooking utensils, a small river of paintings formed along the long wall, then the other walls as well, and then the wardrobe. While Peter would not regret the company his painting keeps, his painting, scrawled on the back with magic marker "Keeping my eye on U! Elisabeth – 2015, Peter Williams" remains a singular witness to the madness of our world, insistent that the seductive skeins of color pigment expose, rather than flatter, the naked figuration in our lawlessness. I am the proud guardian of this painting. I look at it and see truth.



—Elisabeth Condon

The Collector” is an ongoing series in which I ask people to talk about a painting or a drawing they own. See other installments [here](https://talkingpicturesblog.com/category/the-collector/) (<https://talkingpicturesblog.com/category/the-collector/>).

To subscribe to Talking Pictures, see link below or on the right side [of the home page.](https://talkingpicturesblog.com/) (<https://talkingpicturesblog.com/>)

- Elisabeth Condon
- Peter Williams

Subscribe to Talking Pictures

Copyright 2016 ©