

JOURNAL

Introduction essay to Elisabeth Condon 2019 exhibition catalog by Tyler Emerson-Dorsch

This essay by Tyler Emerson-Dorsch about Elisabeth Condon was originally published in the exhibition catalog called *Elisabeth Condon: Effulgence in 2019*.

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BY TYLER EMERSON-DORSCH

It is a great pleasure to present [Effulgence](#), Elisabeth Condon's show of new paintings. Elisabeth's intellect, spirit and sharp wit are on a full view in these pieces. As Franklin Einspruch wrote of her, "to know [Elisabeth Condon](#) is to understand the magnitude of art in her head." Her knowledge of art history and her commitment to sustained examination of past and present paintings have inspired me since I first began working with her in 2008. She is more than these attributes though. Einspruch gets it right when he elaborates that Elisabeth's head in that sentence is better understood as the Chinese word for heart, xin, which encompasses all aspects of enlightened being. Sporting cropped red hair and vividly patterned clothes, her spritely presence vibrates with her passion for art and life.

Her inexhaustible research fuels her practice, which begins a monk-like ritual each day and finishes after painting until 2 or 3am each night. Her Tampa studio, where she made the paintings for this show, has about 50 paint pots laid out on two or three tables, brushes neatly divided by size and texture, and paintings all around. The space has a lofted ceiling and natural light spills through the windows high above. The painting process

in this show came on the heels of a two week print-making residency with Graphicstudio, one of more than twenty renowned residencies all over the world Condon has attended through the years. Her travels are part of her research. She summoned her time in New, NY where she spends half of the year, in her depiction of pigeons as symbols of that city's landscape. Often within a single painting there is conflict, like a desire to be in another place than where she is. She tells me that when she is in New York she thirsts for Florida's lushness and space. Other conflicts manifest in her treatment of her subjects – they are not always easy depictions. She often explodes, obliterates or dissolves the flowers entirely. She can be irreverent. She enacts ambivalence while committing fully. The battle on view is part of the show.

Condon's erudition as a collector of visual material and as a practicing painter cannot be understated. The categories and depths of her references include the history of painting, pattern and decoration, Chinese literati painting, Chinese ink brush painting. In this catalog, Jason Stopa's essay entitled "[Domestic Aesthetics](#)," examines Condon's new paintings with a painter's eye. He situates her work both in the history of paintings and among peers. Stopa conveys the sense that for Condon, the flower motif is a pretext for painting prowess: "if the viewer takes the bait the symbol is used as a vehicle for image making itself." The trellis wallpaper and flower motifs' origins lie in her conservative childhood home in Los Angeles and her rebellion against it.

Her [continued focus](#) on the motifs – since 2016 – is related to her own sustained interest in both landscape and Chinese Academic Painting of the Yuan and Song Dynasties. Treating decorations as part of girlhood as subject, then, puts her in the company of Joyce Kozloff, while the focus on pattern is related but also quite distinct from Valerie Jaudon. Flowers as a subject has a long and wide history, and in modernism, the most important antecedent is Georgia O'Keefe, whose curved volumes and use of New Mexico light emphatically transcended numerous biases on the road to greatness. Yet painting flowers continues to be a risk. If you are still

uncertain, consider the role of pleasure – relish Condon’s deft use of color, her peerless command of the pour, and her compositional achievements. Relish watching her fight for – and win – our attention.