

Fin de Siècle

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This exhibition and the publication that accompanies it are as much about an artist, Elizabeth Peyton, as they are about an era. Although it began in the early to mid-1990s, it is difficult to pinpoint when this era ended; all that can be conclusively said is that it is definitely over. Peyton's work, though, endures, and to this day it continues to speak to us in the present tense.

One of the extraordinary things about Peyton's oeuvre is that it can serve as a chronicle of a particular period—at a certain moment in the history of culture in certain places among a few people who were enthusiastically making it. Sometimes they knew each other; sometimes they were just mutual fans. In retrospect, her paintings have become a kind of essence of a fifteen-year period in popular culture, something like a complicated perfume that retains the sensory grace notes of a hundred different exquisite elements, but on its own is distinct.

If that period in a certain slice of culture in the United States, as well as in cities like London and Berlin, is gone on the streets and in the galleries, it remains forever fresh in her paintings. Despite their myriad references to art history, they have never coaxed us into nostalgia, and even now, looking at a 1995 portrait of Kurt Cobain, we can feel a mix of rue, admiration, and sentiment, not as a memory, but again as if the picture were painted yesterday. This feeling is similar to listening to a great song recorded decades ago; it still does what it set out to do, even if it is so familiar as to be emblematic.

Peyton's paintings were seen by a relatively small but influential audience in 1995, the year of her first substantial exhibition in a commercial gallery in New York; since that time, her paintings, drawings, watercolors, and prints have been exhibited annually in either New York, Los Angeles, London, Berlin, or other major capitals across Europe, the U.S., and Asia. The regularity of her exhibition record has allowed interested viewers to follow her work closely and comprehensively. What is revealed when the work is seen in toto is an astonishing consistency of technique, of subject, and of purpose. From her first exhibition, this artist seems to have emerged in full possession of her faculties, with a project to capture in portraiture individuals in whom she discerns a magical quality—an indescribable mixture of romanticism, beauty, grace, creativity, innocence, sexuality, "zazz." She found her preferred medium early—oil on board mounted on a frame of about a quarter of an inch thick—and she has rarely deviated from these materials, or from her paintings' small size (most are around eleven by fourteen inches). From the beginning, her source materials were photographs that she found or snapped herself, as well as film, video, and stills.

By the mid-1990s she began to sketch from life, but the difference it made in the look of her paintings is subtle, almost negligible; all the work retains a mixture of intimacy and stylization whether it was painted from photographs or from life.

In the very contemporary art world, fifteen years is a long time to be at the center of a discourse. Peyton was not the only figurative painter to attract attention and controversy during this time, but her work arguably attracted more attention and more controversy than most others, at least during the first ten years of her career. It did this because it was and is the most radical example of a particular kind of popular realism that emerged in the 1990s and reached its apex during the first few years of the new millennium. Her paintings are also the most appealing, a characteristic that made them all the more problematic, emerging as they did in a period when many critics and institutions were suspicious enough of visual pleasure to have written it out of the aesthetic conversation.



Elizabeth Peyton
Gavin Brown February 2007
2007
Oil on board
11 3/4 × 9 in (29.8 × 22.9 cm)

Looking back, there is no doubt that the creation and reception of Peyton's paintings in the 1990s utterly changed the contemporary art landscape in New York, and perhaps in London and Berlin as well. Mapping out how much has changed since that time and considering the repercussions of that change are crucial not only to begin the task of making a history of our last fin de siècle, but to begin the work of forging an understanding of the start of our new century. Considering her paintings in the light of their origins offers us the possibility to do both of these things.

It is a truism that figurative painting has never left the contemporary art discourse, but it is also fair to say that at the beginning of the 1990s it was not central to the art conversation at the cutting edge, in criticism, in galleries, and especially in museums of

contemporary art, except in a highly ironized form. Critical and institutional taste in the early 1990s was built upon premises of anti-visibility, even though contemporary artists — not necessarily painters — were trying to find their way out of the deserts of cynical, endgame Conceptualism. Benjamin Buchloh's "Refuse and Refuge" (1993), an essay on the work of Gabriel Orozco, laid out the strategy that anti-object types would use to pump new life into the tired hard-line of doctrinaire Conceptualism. As made clear by Orozco's photographs and arrangements of tweaked found objects, Conceptualism at that moment had quietly been replaced by an adamantly material kind of sculptural work that hid under a veneer of Conceptualism, a bloody, beating heart of ecstatic visuality that included super-sophisticated graphic composition, gorgeous materials, and the irresistibility of serial repetition. Artists like Orozco, Mona Hatoum, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres were in the business of making lovely objects that metaphorically referred to highly politicized concepts. The elliptical narrative, formal elegance, and politically charged back story accompanying their works acknowledged the post-Minimalism of artists whose goal was to dematerialize the art object, with objects that could be produced in editions of five. Thus, anti-commodity cake was had, and eaten too.



Rirkrit Tiravanija
Untitled (Free) 1992
1992
Installation

Although New York has been developing (or devolving) into an elite playground for the wealthy shopper for more than twenty-five years, lower Manhattan, and many parts of north Brooklyn, definitively kissed their own bohemian asses goodbye in the 1990s. After slumping in the early 1990s, from 1995 to 2007 real-estate prices rose a stunning 245 percent and rents a "mere" eighty-seven percent. Tuition at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts hit \$32,000 per year (a hundred percent increase over a twelve year period), while at the same time NYU became the most popular school in the nation for graduating seniors. After a precipitous decline beginning in 1989, the contemporary art market began its

swift ascent around 1996, creating a bubble that, at this writing, is at its most swollen, with European and American figurative painters riding its crest.

At the very beginning of the 1990s though, New York was in a recession, real-estate prices were at a pause after the go-go 1980s, and the art market was definitely in the deep doldrums. This is where Peyton comes in, as do her then-husband Rirkrit Tiravanija, her friend the art dealer Gavin Brown, and, peripherally, me. Because I lived through the 1990s as a participant in the artistic discourse, this narrative can only be somewhat of a personal take on a small portion of the activities that took place at the time. I offer it, though, as history, with its biases and parameters made as apparent as possible.

By 1991, Tiravanija's truly conceptual notion of staging social events in cultural spaces like not-for-profits and galleries had begun to receive serious attention in magazines, galleries, and also in museums outside New York. The work has superficial connections to the narrative-Conceptualist crowd, but with his emphasis on the participatory, he created something new that would come to be called "relational aesthetics," a term coined by the French critic Nicolas Bourriaud in his 1998 book of the same title. In that book, Bourriaud defined a kind of Conceptualism that was audience-oriented to the point of being audience-inclusive and, most importantly, militated against the distrust and cynicism that surrounded the act of making and viewing art. A hallmark of Tiravanija's work has been its collaborative nature, not only with fellow relational aestheticians like Philippe Parreno, Liam Gillick, and Pierre Huyghe, but with those with whom he shared time and ideas. These artists included Gabriel Orozco, Maurizio Cattelan, and Elizabeth Peyton. There is a deep connection between Tiravanija's work and Peyton's that has heretofore remained unexamined. Although not immediately apparent, Tiravanija's work relates to her paintings, albeit in an oblique way, through its emphasis on audience reception as an integral part of a contemporary work of art.

Beginning with his earliest activities Tiravanija was reenacting a fundamentally Duchampian struggle with the readymade as channeled through a better-man-than-Warhol desire to engage art with a much broader community that included artists, spectators, and passers-by. During 1991 and 1992, in situations like the *Water Bar*, a series of one-night-only exhibitions held in various commercial galleries including 303, Randy Alexander, and Jack Tilton, as well as not-for-profit venues, Tiravanija organized social interactions such as meals, drinks parties, and a dance, for a growing coterie

of friends, friends of friends, and even strangers. Inspired by Gordon Matta-Clark's Food cafeteria, by Andy Warhol's Factory, by humanism, Buddhism, and the plain old desire to connect, Tiravanija's mediums as well as his grand themes were one and the same: love and community. Although her medium could not be more different, these are Peyton's grand themes as well. Community, for both Tiravanija and Peyton, is a rich and complicated notion. On the one hand, it signifies the stuff of the work itself, a very Warholian notion, as, in both Tiravanija's and Peyton's cases, the community in question is largely an orchestrated one filled with carefully chosen participants. Tiravanija, describing the medium of his installations, goes so far as to list "lots of people" along with wood, clothes, and food, and although there is often a large element of chance involved in the makeup of the participants, they are most often members of the artistic community, whether artists, spectators, or students. Community for Peyton is comprised of the subjects of her portraits. Although many are people she has never met, by painting them she brings them into her orbit, even consummates a dialogue — imaginary or not — with them. Thus, in fifteen years of pictures, Peyton can count as members of her closest coterie Napoleon and Gavin Brown, Kurt Cobain and Piotr Uklanski, Maurizio Cattelan and Jarvis Cocker, Sharon Lockhart and Queen Elizabeth II, Tony Just and John Kerry, David Hockney and Oscar Wilde, Marc Jacobs and Georgia O'Keeffe, among many others.

On the other hand, both Tiravanija's activities and Peyton's paintings are also made to be experienced by a much larger community, one composed, in his case, of curious or hungry passers-by, and in hers, any of us who recognize and/or relate to her young, beautiful, and luminous subjects. For both, their desire for community can be linked to a very contemporary notion of popularity. For Tiravanija this might mean an ever-growing circle of acquaintances emanating from an international nexus of art-world friends. For Peyton, though, it means the kind of mass recognition that can create an emperor or a superstar. Whether or not she dreams, like Warhol, of the transformation of her style into a logo (which I believe she does not), since her first exhibition she has endeavored to position her work in such a way that it remains accessible to a large and not necessarily art-oriented constituency.

I met Tiravanija in the late 1980s when I saw, and memorably participated in, a work by him staged at a non-profit gallery in Lower Manhattan. Peyton I met in 1991 through the painter Verne Dawson,¹ and it was then that I began to follow her work, over the years writing about it, including it in exhibitions,

and acquiring it for museum collections. By that time, Tiravanija and Peyton had already befriended Gavin Brown, an artist and budding art dealer who was working at 303 Gallery, which Tiravanija joined around that time. By 1994 Brown had opened his first New York gallery in a small storefront about as far west on Broome Street as you could go. Peyton was among the founding artists represented; Tiravanija left 303 to join Brown two years later. This choice of a marginally peripheral location, just far enough from the other important contemporary galleries to be inconvenient, would become a pattern; from Broome, Brown would move to the not-quite-Chelsea address of West 15th Street. Presently, his gallery is in the far West Village, an outpost in an area that has now attracted five or six galleries that, naturally, arrived some time after he did.



Elizabeth Peyton
Exhibition view, Room 828, Hotel Chelsea
(Chelsea Hotel), New York, 1993



Elizabeth Peyton
Exhibition view, Prince Albert pub,
London, 1995

In addition to Peyton and the sculptural duo Jake and Dinos Chapman, Brown's stable at the outset included a large number of figurative painters: Peter Doig, Chris Ofili (both of whom he knew from his days in London), Verne Dawson, and (within a year of opening) Laura Owens. What all these painters seem to have in common is an exuberance, if not outright joy in their medium; it permeates their palettes, and their unabashed embrace of painterly cuisine. You can see it in the gusto with which Owens and Ofili seize the decorative, and the way Doig experiments with five different techniques

of paint application in a single motif. You can see it in their love of the sinuous serpentine line and their fascination with the shocking clarity of primitive draftsmanship, from cave painting to Shaker design. The generosity, vigor, lack of cynicism, and, okay, *love* that emanated from the work of these painters was palpable to anyone who managed to see those early exhibitions of Doig (1994), Ofili (1995), Dawson (1995), Owens (1997), and of course Peyton (1995).²

By 1991 she had already hit on the seeds of what would be her mature style; her first exhibitions, as part of group shows in galleries or, more interestingly, in alternative spaces like the ladies room of a SoHo restaurant, a rented room at the Hotel Chelsea, an apartment in Cologne, and a pub in London, featured images of historical figures like Marie Antoinette and Napoleon Bonaparte, and fictional ones like the actor Jean-Pierre Léaud in the role of Antoine Doinel, as well as intensely intimate portraits of those closest to her. Some of the historical works were clearly inspired by art-historical precedents. As a freshly minted art-history graduate student who had studied under the great scholar of academic French painting Robert Rosenblum, I recognized many of her allusions and seized upon them with glee. I remember one instance, early on, when I excitedly talked at her about depictions of the young Napoleon of 1799, the Baron Gros, Jacques-Louis David, Arcole, and the Egyptian campaign for some minutes before I realized she was staring at me silently with a quizzical look on her face. After concluding my lecture with an offer to lend her the best biography of Napoleon that had ever been written, she politely declined, explaining that she wasn't at all interested in Napoleon the hero because her subject was Napoleon the *human being*. Later, I found out from an interview that Peyton was quite the scholar of nineteenth-century painting, literature (she professed a preference for Balzac), and Napoleonic history. It was then that I understood her interest in and knowledge of history was a parallel but ultimately different project than her depictions of historical figures. It was her way of getting to know her subjects better, not her way of selecting them. Above and beyond the more obvious patterns in her choice of subject matter — that is, the overwhelming choice to depict men over women, youth over age, as well as royalty and those involved in the arts — other thematic paths introduced early on continue throughout her oeuvre. Mothers, fathers, and sons, for example, appear with regularity, from Sid Vicious and his mother (1995) to Constance Wilde (wife of Oscar) and her child (1996), to Elvis and his mother Gladys (1997), to Jacqueline Kennedy and John John (1999) to Max, son of Gavin Brown (1996, 2007), and Prince Harry, son of Diana, Princess of

Wales (1997). Subjects, famous as well as obscure, are often depicted during the first flowering of their genius: Napoleon (1992) not as Emperor of the French, but as a victorious general of 1799; Princess Elizabeth (1993) at the age of eighteen, nine years before she acceded to the throne but just at the moment when she took on the weight of her royal responsibilities during World War II; Kurt Cobain (1995) before worldwide fame, drugs, and Courtney Love; Al Gore (2000) as an idealistic young man of the post-Vietnam era. Finally, these subjects are most often depicted in contemplative, private moments rather than active ones. Reading, sleeping, at leisure on a sofa, a towel, or a deck chair, her subjects have a self-contained absorption that is mutually reinforced by the compositional seamlessness, and indeed the almost vacuum-like quiet of pictures that depict their subjects as if they were details in the larger fabric of the world outside the frame.



Elizabeth Peyton
Princess Elizabeth's First Radio Address
1993
Charcoal on paper
14 × 11 in (35.6 × 27.9 cm)

I fell incontrovertibly in love with Peyton's paintings from the moment I first saw them, not because of my background in nineteenth-century French painting but because they were, and are, ravishing, in style, in execution, and in sentiment. They moved and continue to move me in a way that forces me into French; I am *boulevardée* in the face of such a gorgeous use of color and, later, pattern, such languid, almost erotic brushstrokes that slide the slick and shiny paint across the hard Masonite surface, such winsome faces masking wild romanticism, creative genius, and utter decadence. As I wrote at the time, it wasn't hard to self-diagnose; her paintings triggered in me, and probably in many others, classic Stendhal Syndrome: utter derangement as a result of an excess of beauty. Thankfully, in 1992 there were no emperors to follow blindly in to a Russian Winter, and much, much too little sensory enjoyment on the walls of contemporary art venues in

New York, so I decided to take a page from psychiatrist-cum-social-philosopher Slavoj Žižek and “enjoy my symptom!”³

Although it might have been difficult to tell from the 1993 Whitney Biennial, which infamously contained a large amount of socially aware installation work, some cracks in the aesthetic of anti-visibility were beginning to appear, and not just in art studios. A second seminal text of the early 1990s was Dave Hickey’s *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (1993), which contained a series of essays that pretty much outed beauty as the shared desideratum of artists and viewers alike. For Hickey, visual pleasure was a meeting point for art and life, and thus could do what narrative Conceptualism could, but in a more honest fashion.



Lucien Freud
Naked Man, Back View
1991–92
Oil on canvas
72 1/4 × 54 1/8 in (183.5 × 137.5 cm)

Hickey gave political correctness a pass, and although he never prescribed narrative painting — or even painting itself — his eloquent writing gave people like me leave to revel in what seemed like revanchism. If you accepted Hickey’s arguments, it was heady to believe in visibility again, to unashamedly embrace narrativity, to wallow in figuration, in oil paint. The book that followed, *Air Guitar* (1997), eloquently continued the fight for the triumph of precept over concept, and gave Hickey international cult status in art history programs everywhere — and to an extent, a position within the mainstream contemporary art discourse.

In retrospect, clues that sensibilities were ripe for change were apparent in the excitement caused by inspirational exhibitions of great figurative painters that appeared in New York museums when Peyton was at the School of Visual Arts at the end of the 1980s and in the first few years of the 1990s. At the end of 1986 the Whitney Museum of American Art mounted a

massively popular retrospective of the works of John Singer Sargent, and in 1988 Gustave Courbet had his first American retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum. 1993, the year of Peyton’s first important solo show, was also the year of the Lucian Freud retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Rather than annealing the great painter into the annals of the historical canon, this show seemed to propel Freud into the company of the youngest artists in the discourse. Scented by the still-wet paint on the newest pictures in the show (an unexpected effect in a venue like the Metropolitan), Freud’s exhibition seemed decidedly more contemporary than the sublime but staid monochromes hanging in the Robert Ryman retrospective forty blocks down Fifth Avenue at the Museum of Modern Art. A similar zeitgeist test would occur in 1994 with the match-up of a Willem de Kooning retrospective at the Metropolitan and a Cy Twombly survey at the Modern. While it seemed that there wasn’t a painter in town who wasn’t talking about the raw, emotional muscle of de Kooning, few seemed to be dilating on Twombly’s delicacies. With no critique implied of the organization of either exhibition, nor, in fact, of the genius of either artist, it seemed clear that at that moment we needed de Kooning’s all-out painterliness over Twombly’s cerebral restraint.



Jim Shaw
Exhibition view “Thrift Store Paintings,” Metro Pictures, New York, 1991

Exhibitions in commercial galleries, too, pointed to a new sensibility. Karen Kilimnik had her first solo exhibition at 303 Gallery in 1991, and Nicole Eisenman began exhibiting her raw, Mexican-muralist/WPA-inspired paintings and drawings in group exhibitions in New York of this time. In late 1991, the Los Angeles artist Jim Shaw exhibited his extensive collection of paintings by amateur artists at the SoHo commercial gallery Metro Pictures. “Thrift Store Paintings” featured more than 100 works of self-taught art of all genres, from portraits to landscapes to fantasy pictures bought by the artist and arranged quasi-salon-style in the elegant white box of the gallery space. Vulnerable as

these anonymous works were to derision, en masse they came off as naïve but fresh, even at times wondrous affirmations of belief in the power of representational art to communicate simply, directly, viscerally.

Shaw’s exhibition offered us a way to understand paintings like those of John Currin, who had already shown his portraits of yearbook girls to fanfare and controversy, at White Columns in 1992 and subsequently at Andrea Rosen that same year. Currin’s friends and classmates from the painting program at Yale — Sean Landers, Lisa Yuskavage, and Richard Phillips — were all painting figuratively in one form or another, and all had begun to exhibit in New York. Like Currin’s paintings, the work of this group of artists had been received with the assumption that they were painting ironically. Currin’s depictions of women in particular were decried as misogynistic jokes; he couldn’t be serious about the subject matter, let alone the reactionary technique, which conjured Vargas girls and Norman Rockwell in equal measure. What the “Thrift Store” paintings allowed us to see was that what might easily be read as an ironic appropriation of kitsch aesthetics can just as easily be read as a sincere — if awkward — attempt at unmediated expression. What stylistically could be condemned as reactionary, could also be seen as strategically *arrière-garde*.

The return of figuration at the beginning of the 1990s was a proof that diachronic notions of the “progress” of contemporary art since the advent of modernism were truly dead and buried, giving way to a more synchronic picture of artistic development. Just as historical figures, outsiders, and non-Westerners could be rediscovered, reassessed, and reinserted in to an ever-richer artistic canon, styles, strategies and attitudes could reemerge and be relevant again but in an entirely different manner than they had been heretofore. Contemporary figuration embraced illusionism, historicism, narrativity, and visual pleasure with unironic gusto. All complaints surrounding the medium of oil painting — its status as a commodity, or as a practice inherently anti-progressive in both political and formal senses of the term — its pandering to popular, or worse, mass culture — were cast aside for the tired, outdated arguments that they were. Willed or not, a certain ingenuity marked contemporary figurative painting of the period. And if it caused it to look a little stupid in comparison to some of the more theoretically hip Conceptual works that dominated institutional spaces at the time, then it was a refreshing, youthful, and optimistic stupidity that seemed to open the discourse to wider possibilities. To paraphrase Marcel Duchamp, at the time we all wanted to be stupid in precisely the way our new painters were.

Peyton’s solo exhibition in room 828 at the Hotel Chelsea in 1993 was a quiet but resoundingly successful debut. Included were seventeen drawings and watercolors of subjects ranging from Princess Elizabeth II to Napoleon to King Ludwig of Bavaria. Although she had made paintings of similar subjects, Peyton chose to show only works on paper, which served to emphasize both the modesty and the intimate nature of her practice. Some sketches were included — copies of a detail from a van Dyck painting, for example — but most of the show consisted of highly finished drawings, many of which canted towards the illustrational. In retrospect, this exhibition can be seen as a kind of inauguration of a notable transition in the field of contemporary drawing: rejecting the previous emphasis on drawing as process, contemporary artists began to adopt drawing as a primary means for public expression. Beginning in the late 1990s, a narrative, figurative, illustrational kind of contemporary drawing underwent a renaissance in the studios, galleries, and museums. Beginning, arguably, with Peyton’s Hotel Chelsea exhibition, figurative drawing began to be considered as central to the contemporary art discourse, a position that it had not enjoyed for 100 years.



Elizabeth Peyton
Ludwig II of Bavaria
1994
Oil on board
17 × 12 in (43.0 × 30.5 cm)

Organized by Gavin Brown, who paid the artist/critic Douglas Blau to write an essay for the pamphlet that accompanied the show, the Hotel Chelsea exhibition was not reviewed widely. Thanks to word of mouth, though, and probably the unconventional venue, enough artists and critics saw it to encourage genuine interest (as opposed to curiosity) in what seemed at the time to be extremely peculiar work.⁴ If a context had begun to be built for contemporary figuration, there was little precedent for contemporary and sympathetic (!) renderings of

European royalty, past and present. Peyton’s works could be interpreted as reactionary on the level of style as well as subject matter, and yet it was undeniable that they seemed to indicate a way, if not *up*, then *forward* in the discourse, away from ironic appropriation, sly conceptual pictorialism, and un-nuanced identity politics. Interestingly, in the decade after the definitive disintegration of conventional notions of left and right in 1989 and the ascendance in the U.S. and Britain of smack-in-the-middle centrist politicians like Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, the aesthetics that had accrued to those positions had begun to die as well. It seemed at the time that gradually, then all of a sudden, artists like Peyton stopped paying attention to critical theory, if they ever had in the first place; they threw away the suspicion of images and seized — with alacrity — the tools to make illusions again. This is not to say that politics were ignored by Peyton and the other young artists who were working figuratively. The decision to exhibit works in a hotel room — and several months later, in a pub — clearly indicated a desire to reach an audience outside of the art world. In some cases her direct translation of popular culture images into oil paint pointed to a more ambitious desire to breach a much more sacred divide. As T. J. Clark observed about the critical outrage ignited by the exhibition of Gustave Courbet’s *Burial at Ornans* (1849–50), “the critics did not object to the exploitation of popular art; on the contrary, it was already accepted as a source of imagery and inspiration, as one way to revive the exhausted forms of high art. But to adopt the procedures and even the values of popular art — that was subversive.”⁵ Like Courbet’s “history” painting, which featured the good and recognizable bourgeois of the provinces posed in a composition snatched from a mass-marketed print, Peyton’s drawings and paintings proudly and unironically lent the dignity of fine art to her cast of mass-market heroes, however discredited (Napoleon, Sid Vicious), mocked (Marie Antoinette, Mad King Ludwig, Lady Di), or excoriated (John McEnroe, Lord Alfred Douglas).

These early drawings prickled and sparked because they were figurative, because they were heartfelt to the point of ingenuousness, because they were politically incorrect in medium and in subject, and because, in a Warholian, Tiravanijan way, they reached out to a broader popular public beyond the specificity of the New York art world.

Peyton’s work did have a proper art world debut a little over a year later at Gavin Brown’s enterprise (GBE) on Broome Street in the spring of 1995. That exhibition included only paintings, most of which were of the rock star Kurt Cobain, who had committed suicide the

year before. If the Hotel Chelsea exhibition had been restrained in terms of color, the Kurt paintings glowed with yellows (hair), reds (jacket, lips), and blues (shirt, background) feelingly slathered on to the Masonite surfaces that would become Peyton’s signature support. The Kurt of this first series was recognizable as Kurt Cobain, but he was not the same Kurt we knew from MTV, the tabloids, or his recordings. Peyton’s Kurt was sleek, not scruffy, elegant, gentle, and almost feminine. When the show was reviewed, critics like Roberta Smith of the *New York Times* saw allusions to a heady mixture of precedents from banner periods of narrative realism in the history of art: the Pre-Raphaelites, Andy Warhol, and paintings of pinups made by Walter Robinson and shown at Metro Pictures in the early 1980s. Mention was also made of Karen Kilimnik, whose drawing of the celebrity model Kate Moss was on the cover of the February 1994 *Artforum*. Contemporary references were helpful in explaining Peyton’s work in the same way that art historical references were; they gave precedents for some of Peyton’s subject matter, for her composition, for her “crypto-reactionary” style, for her brushwork, but not for the way all of these elements coalesced to speak truth to power for the cultural moment. Smith did identify Peyton’s work as an avatar for a new sensibility, one that was “inherent in a lot of current work,” but one which lacked a name. Smith called it “realism” but then offered “emotionalism,” a tag that was more accurate but ended up not sticking.⁶



Gustav Courbet
Self-portrait, “Man with Pipe”
ca. 1849
Oil on canvas
17 × 14 1/2 in (44 × 37 cm)

Smith’s encomium in the *Times* helped establish Peyton as, at the very least, a regional phenomenon. But the GBE exhibition was followed in short order by several exhibitions abroad. Her first important forays in Europe took place in Cologne and London; both shows, notably, in spaces

that were not galleries. In Cologne, the art historian Burkhard Riemschneider organized an exhibition in his apartment. A year later when he and his partner Tim Neuger became early pioneers of the Berlin art scene, opening a gallery first in Charlottenberg and then in 1998 moving to the now-thriving gallery district in Mitte, Peyton was their only painter among a stable of artists associated with relational aesthetics, including Tiravanija, Jorge Pardo, and Tobias Rehberger.

Shortly after Cologne, Cabinet, an adventurous, experimental, and adamantly marginal gallery in London established by Martin McGeown and Andrew Wheatley in 1991, organized an exhibition of Peyton's work in the Prince Albert pub, not far from their small gallery space in the Brixton neighborhood in South London. By electing to exhibit works on paper and paintings of Marie Antoinette, John McEnroe, Sid Vicious, and Kurt Cobain in a bar in Brixton, a place dubbed by one British art magazine as the "least glamorous part of London," Peyton might have accidentally engineered a soft critical landing in a city notorious for its vicious critics, because the exhibition venue was considered so off the beaten track that even the events magazine *Time Out* refused to list it. The exhibition did receive a substantial review, however, in *Frieze*, then a new but increasingly influential art magazine.

The reviewer, curator Gregor Muir, posed the question "Are these drawings for real?" and answered it with a moving argument for their relevance to the cultural moment in mid-1990s London. Through the grease and cigarette smoke of the Prince Albert, Muir observes, patrons "beautifully performing activities that are not worth doing" perfectly mimic what is going on in a picture like *Kurt Smoking* in 1992. Peyton's images of the charmed and the damned of yesterday and today, from Muir's point of view, stood for the "collective state of mind that we so desperately seek."⁷ The drinkers at the Prince Albert, like the critic, like all of us, were able to identify with the ability to invent "their reputations and the world around them," shared by all of Peyton's subjects, as well as by the artist herself. Hard as it was to believe at first, her drawings and paintings were for real, and she meant them as Muir recognized, as an offer of "escape from the reality of the Prince Albert" and a chance to "enter Peyton's near perfect world."⁷ What Muir recognized in her work so early on was that it embodied the hopes and dreams of those who saw them, and those who saw them were not connoisseurs or movie stars, but regular people in a pub. The appeal of the paintings was straightforward, giving viewers a picture of our time, but also a picture of ourselves as reflected in the faces of our shared heroes.

Amidst a crop of paintings and drawings of Kurt Cobain, John Lydon, Ludwig II, and Queen Elizabeth, for her first show at GBE, Peyton exhibited a portrait of her fellow GBE artist Jake Chapman. Although she had produced paintings and drawings of Tiravanija and other friends and relatives, this was the first instance in which she exhibited a painting of someone who was not immediately recognizable to a general audience and, most significantly, who was not (yet) famous. With the addition of an artist from her immediate circle, at this early date she made a giant step towards redefining the aesthetics of her portraiture. As the critic Jerry Saltz pointed out some time later, her choice to use her contemporaries as subject matter removed the fantasy aspect from the entire project, and brought her work closer to realism. It also made her subjects more empathetic, and easier to relate to, whether they were the beloved Cobain or the testy McEnroe. Saltz was an exception, because most critics either ignored the inclusion of regular people in to Peyton's lexicon or acknowledged them, with a nod to Warhol, as proto-superstars in the artist's firmament. Either way, her work was (and is) still most often incorrectly described as a high-art form of extreme fandom.



Elizabeth Peyton
Zoe's Kurt
1995
Oil on board
14 × 11 in (35.6 × 28 cm)

This might explain why until recently—perhaps the beginning of this new millennium— institutions like museums and biennials had an equivocal relationship with Peyton's work. It would be inaccurate to state that her work was shunned by major museums in the U.S., but it remains a fact that they did not avidly collect it until early in the next century, and with the exception of a few supportive curators it was not included in biennials or major institutional group exhibitions.⁸ When a group of her paintings was included along with those of John Currin and Luc Tuymans in a small exhibition I curated at the Museum of Modern Art in

1997 as part of its "Projects" series, it created a certain level of discussion. As the critic and curator Bill Arning pointed out at the opening of that show, it was not that Peyton's or Currin's or Tuymans' work was unknown, it was just that it was completely unexpected in the context of MoMA. More than out-of-place, it was interpreted within the museum as frankly hostile to the Modern's narrative of progressive modern art that had no room for a return of figurative painting. Not a few of the museum's curators were deeply unhappy with the show; nonetheless, it established an institutional beachhead for Peyton's works (as well as Currin's and Tuymans'). And by the early 2000s all three artists would have entered the MoMA collection.⁹



Elizabeth Peyton
Max
1996
Oil on board
12 × 9 in (30.5 × 22.9 cm)

In a review of an exhibition at GBE that same year, Saltz, writing for *Time Out New York*, commented that Peyton's work had "captured some kind of cultural shift," which he went on to describe as the relocation of the contemporary sublime in culture rather than nature.¹⁰ This extreme timeliness, reflected in her choices of subjects—which in 1997 included Lady Diana, Prince Harry, Jarvis Cocker, as well as Gavin Brown, his small son Max, and the painter Udomsak Krisanamis, a new member of the GBE stable—was thrilling, but it also was unsettling, particularly for institutions that prided themselves in taking a long view of art and its significance in history. Works so utterly contemporary would seem, in their specificity, to promise a short shelf life; what would Liam and Noel Gallagher signify after everyone had forgotten the music of Oasis?¹¹ Once again, it is illuminating to return to the precedent set by the history of art that is filled with great paintings and sculptures whose original narratives have been lost; in the final analysis, it is the painting itself—its composition, its color, its visuality—that enables it to hold its own

long after its subject recedes into obscurity. Saltz might have qualified the notion of the sublime by locating it in timely culture rather than timeless nature, but the thrill, the destabilization, the joy caused by extreme beauty is the same whether looking at the miracle of Niagara Falls or the boy, *Max* (1996), with his yellow hair and blue pullover set against a midnight blue and purple background.

In the years 1996 through 2000 Peyton produced a number of pictures that, like *Max*, can be considered both iconic and sublime: *Jarvis* (1996), with his head in his arms, taking up the entire picture surface save for a tiny triangle of sun-yellow background that reverberates perfectly with his plum-colored sweater; *Blue Liam* (1996), who is all white face, blue eyes, and red, red lips; *Harry* (1998), a portrait of the carrot-haired prince in his Etonian jacket; and *Palladium Martin* (1999), a silver-leaf rendering of one of the owners of Cabinet. In 1999 she found a new subject in her partner, the artist Tony Just. Like Kurt, Tony would become one of her grand subjects, with images of him sleeping, walking, and posing dominating her production for two years.



Elizabeth Peyton
Jarvis
1996
Oil on board
11 × 14 in (28 × 35.6 cm)

From 1998 to the turn of the millennium Peyton had thirteen one-artist exhibitions and participated in twenty-three group exhibitions, in galleries and museums throughout the world. Her paintings were written about and reproduced in art and general-interest magazines from *Artforum* to *Bazaar*, in newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. More than a phenomenon, her work had attained popularity, in the sense that it had penetrated the precincts of the same popular culture that she was using as a primary inspiration for her subject matter.

Around 2000 I began organizing a group exhibition that would attempt to sum up the massive changes that had occurred in the contemporary art discourse in the past decade, and for which Peyton's work was

emblematic. When "Drawing Now" opened at the Museum of Modern Art in January of 2002, figuration was dominating contemporary mainstream artistic practice in capitals like New York, London, and Berlin. Whether or not an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art marks an ending to a particular kind of contemporary art-making is open to question, but "Drawing Now" can serve as a chronological endpoint for this narrative of the beginning of Peyton's career as well as the beginning of the end of the century.

"Drawing Now" was an examination of the range of figurative drawing strategies, focusing on eight distinct types of drawing with roots in popular culture, beginning with those that had relationships to scientific drawing, architectural drafting, visionary architectural drawing, ornament, cartooning, vernacular drawing traditions, and finally illustration. By this time, less than a decade after its debut, Peyton's paintings and works on paper had spawned legions of followers among artists working in painting and, particularly, drawing. Some modified or outright adopted her youth-oriented subject matter; others emulated her small format, single-figure compositions, fresh brushwork, or insouciant line. "Drawing Now" was a popular success, as were subsequent exhibitions like "Chère peintre: Peintures figuratives depuis l'ultime Picabia" (Dear Painter: Painting the Figure since Late Picabia) (2003) at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, which also presented Peyton's work in the context of her own generation and that of younger emulators.

I began this narrative by stating that the sensibility that took form in the 1990s in New York and in certain European capitals was over, but only in the sense that it is no longer transformative. The profound revolution in thinking about and in seeing contemporary art that was sparked by the advent of Peyton's paintings has come to pass. So-called "reactionary" style has been reborn as radical; painting is no longer an automatically ironic gesture; and most importantly, popular cultural forms and subjects ranging from comics to pinups to illustrations have taken their rightful place in the contemporary art discourse. They have done so not as source material, not masked, subsumed, or transformed by high-art practices (see Pablo Picasso or Roy Lichtenstein) but as they are. T. J. Clark on Courbet in 1851 could just as easily have been writing about Peyton in 1991: "Instead of exploiting popular art to revive official culture and titillate its special, isolated audience, Courbet did the exact opposite. He exploited high art—its techniques, its size and something of its sophistication—in order to revive popular art. His painting was addressed not to the connoisseur, but to a different, hidden public;

it stayed close to the pictorial forms which were basic to popular tradition; it transformed its sources, but only in order to enforce their supremacy; not, certainly, to excuse their shortcomings."¹²

Peyton's work, then, introduced a new chapter in contemporary art, but it also introduced a new audience. We swooned, collectively, and, as the critic Lisa Liebmann pointed out at the time, in an arid, suspicious contemporary art atmosphere it was a release we sorely needed.¹³ There is no doubt that things are completely different now, with so many ideological and economic changes occurring inside the art world and, more profoundly, in this country and the world at large. It is a source of wonder and of joy that looking at Elizabeth Peyton's work now does not make us nostalgic for the time that created them, but affects us in a way that can still make us lose our breath and perhaps lose ourselves, propelling us into a deathless, but utterly pleasurable, state.

1 Although he was an acquaintance at the time, we were married in 1999.

2 Brown kept unreliable hours; I remember an awkward instance in which I found myself minding the gallery for several hours after walking in and finding it unattended.

3 Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, Routledge, Oxford, 2001.

4 Shaun Caley Regen remembers that her husband Stuart Regen attended the show, and Sadie Coles, who had yet to open her gallery, bought a drawing from it.

5 T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1982, p. 140.

6 Roberta Smith, "Blood and Punk Royalty to Grunge Royalty," *The New York Times*, March 24, 1995, p. C32.

7 Gregor Muir, "Elizabeth Peyton: The Prince Albert Pub," *Frieze*, September 8, 1995, pp. 70–1.

8 Francesco Bonami, who included Elizabeth's works in important group exhibitions at the Venice Biennale (1995) and at Site Sante Fe (1997), is a notable exception.

9 Interestingly, it would take until 2004 for Elizabeth's paintings to be included in a Whitney Biennial exhibition.

10 Jerry Saltz, "Review," *Time Out New York*, March 27–April 3, 1997, p. 43.

11 In fact, a portrait of Al Gore, the 2000 democratic candidate for president, was identified in a review published not two years after the election as a "portrait of a boy." Giorgio Verzotti, "Elizabeth Peyton: Deichtorhallen," *Artforum*, February 2002, pp. 139–40.

12 T. J. Clark, op. cit. p. 140.

13 Lisa Liebmann, "A Tender Trap," *Parkett*, No. 53, 1998, pp. 85–7.

Excessive Life

Iwona Blazwick

*Beauty is made up of an eternal, invariable element and of a relative, circumstantial element, which will be, if you like, whether severally or all at once, the age, its fashions, its words, its emotions.*¹

Charles Baudelaire, 1863

Elizabeth Peyton's rhythmic lines, crayon-box colors, and tightly cropped close-ups deliver a retinal punch that make her portraits always about and of the moment. Her paintings are utterly contemporary in subject and treatment. Yet they are also part of a historical continuity. They take their place in the epic story of portraiture in which artists have struggled since antiquity to use the artifice of stone, paint, or film to translate the lived reality of a face. But we might also see them within the genre of *nature morte*, in which the young lives she captures are given all the mutable beauty of cut flowers.



Hans Holbein
A Lady with a Squirrel and a Starling
ca. 1526–28
Oil on board
22 × 15 in (56 × 38.8 cm)

What gives Peyton's small paintings their remarkable intensity? Their scale ranges from being one-to-one with an actual head or even smaller, telescoping down to as little as nine by seven inches. This format recalls the panel paintings of Northern Renaissance masters such as Lucas Cranach or Hans Holbein, a period when "Portrait painting witnessed the confrontation between a meditation on death — the memento mori — and a glorification of the magical powers of painting."²

She shares with them their use of flat, non-perspectival space and enamel-like monochromes to create a backdrop for a sitter. Her precious, intimate pictures could be happily installed in the chambers of a grand old European house. At the same time her oil-on-board paintings approach the humble scale of the common snapshot, an association reinforced by the informal and intimate poses of her subjects. Like photo-

graphers such as Jack Pierson or Wolfgang Tillmans, Peyton portrays friends in domestic interiors, out in bars, or at holiday destinations — dreaming, being in love, convalescing.

The power of her paintings rests partly in the tension between a modesty of scale and subject matter, the barely containable energy of her mark-making, the flat rawness of her sumptuous colors, and the volatility of her compositions.

Although Peyton is a figurative painter, her work owes a debt to the legacies of abstraction. The internal structure of her images is geometrical. Just as early modernists were in thrall to the futuristic vitality of the diagonal — think of Rodchenko's upwardly gesturing workers or columns of marchers — so Peyton harnesses the energy of the angle. The shallow, internal spaces of her images are often divided into three sections. A work such as *Luig (Tony)* (2001) positions the head of her subject at the point where three blocks of color — blue, pink, and white — meet. Our gaze is led up the thick black stripes striating the figure's sloping, blue, bathrobe-clad shoulders and along the red tip of his cigarette to become locked on his chiseled features. Against the summit of his upper body and the simple monochromatic division of the background between chalky white and plaster-of-Paris pink, Peyton unleashes the dark brown octopus of the young man's hair and the oceanic energy of a fabric pattern. Executed with the aristocratic panache of Ingres, Peyton substitutes the nineteenth century's exquisite velvets and opulent brocades for the patterns and textures of the everyday.



Lucas Cranach the Elder
Portrait of Johann the Steadfast
1509
Oil on board
16 1/4 × 12 in (41.3 × 31 cm)

Against the architectonic internal structure of Peyton's images, her figures lounge, lean, or sway. They are all on the diagonal. But it is not the directional diagonal of the revolutionary avant-gardes that

points upwards to a utopian future. Rather these figures — their youth, their beauty, and the moment of time they inhabit — are about to fall. This sense of something fleeting and vulnerable is intensified by the delicacy of Peyton's drawing.

Peyton uses a traditional range of mediums, including oils, watercolors, and, recently, etching and lithography. Throughout, her use of the graphic is critical, as demonstrated by drawings such as *Crown Prince Ludwig* (1995) or *Julian* (2003). These two works on paper display the full repertoire of curves, arabesques, curlicues, stripes, and tones that Peyton deploys, to a number of ends. Almost like calligraphy, her use of the line serves to structure space; it dances across the image to generate a vibrant surface dynamic; and it creates an iconography of the face.

The symmetrical zigzags of Ludwig's lapels, the swooping curves of his shirt, and the bubbly, lace-like silhouette of his coiffure make this deceptively simple image a small study in rococo ornamentation. The shape of his face is indicated by one sparse outline, giving it a puppet-like quality that locates him in the narrative frame of the fairy tale. Unlike the flat, silkscreened resolution of Andy Warhol's heads, where Liz Taylor or Marilyn Monroe are translated into static, mass-cultural icons, Peyton's emblematic marks are reminiscent of hand-drawn children's historical book illustrations, which gives many of her portraits, particularly the historic ones, a fictive quality. These are characters from a magical fable.



Elizabeth Peyton
Luig (Tony)
2001
Oil on board
14 × 11 in (35.6 × 27.9 cm)

By contrast the semi-naturalistic drawing of Julian emphasizes his physiognomy in a brooding, expressionistic way. Peyton's singular treatment of eyebrows, the slightly pouting lips, ragged hair, and darkly smudged eyes looking into the middle

distance locate this figure within the Romantic tradition. The naturalistic and the exquisitely graphic are combined in the beautiful drawing *Spencer* (1999). Here the artist uses colored pencils to transform a shirt into an undulating river of thin red and blue stripes. They move from the center left of the image towards the bent head of a pallid, dark-haired youth with the thinnest of moustaches hovering above his succulent lips. Propped up on his elbow, Spencer might be in bed or lying on a couch. The sensuality of the work is enhanced by the pulsating fabric that ripples between his face and the exposed triangle of his naked stomach and — out of the frame — his groin. Yet even this potentially erotic charge is held in check by his luxuriant yet peculiarly demure eyelashes, which shield his downward gaze.



Wolfgang Tillmans
Chris Cunningham
1998
Color photograph

The fashionably artless, casual attire of Peyton's sitters contrasts with the sheer opulence of her palette. Many of her paintings juxtapose colors that are at the outer edges of being complimentary — violet and brown (*Silver Tony*, 1999), buttercup yellow and lilac grey (*Elliott in the Park*, 1999), sky blue and orange (*Andre*, 2004), pea green and scarlet (*Nick*, 2003). Again, the languid detachment of her subjects, who rarely meet the gaze of the viewer, contrasts with the ravishing dazzle triggered by these juxtapositions. The picture surface arrests our gaze just as her enigmatic subjects evade it. In the notable *Flower Ben* (2002), the monochromatic and angular treatment of the figure is almost overwhelmed by the vivid green stalks and candy colored petals of a bunch of red, yellow, and orange zinnias, snaking their way out of the vase and diagonally across the image. Their hothouse exuberance contrasts with the hollow-eyed and tattooed young man. Screened by the flowers, he is closed in on himself, the hand buried behind his neck adding to his self-absorption.

Like Francis Bacon, Peyton has looked to photographs of English football for inspiration.³ *Michael Owen* (1998) shows three footballers against a backdrop of the grandstand. Two players tackle each other and are momentarily united in a serpentine dance, knees going one way, shoulders another, their arms extended. The lime green pitch at their feet slides downwards, topped by a cascading bank of pointillist color. Peyton heightens the fluidity of the figures by setting them against the horizontal bands of red, blue, and green. The location of the player at the left-hand side of the picture and the white posterior of the eponymous football star add depth of perspective. And remarkably, the mosaic of colored blobs that offers its own abstract picture plane also conveys the overwhelming energy of a crowd and the thrill of a packed arena. As with all her paintings there is no hierarchy of surface. There is an all-overness that makes each particle of equal importance in the visual apprehension of the work.

Across the vibrant profusion of Peyton's oeuvre, we can see color playing a dual role — creating a representation and generating a pure, chromatic sensation. Even when its job is purely literal, the choice of color adds resonance to representation — why is the image of Keith Richards arriving at Heathrow airport executed entirely in violet? Peyton's transmutation of the source black and white photograph into a whole symphony of purples lifts the archival and the documentary into the space of reverie and even reverence. Her use of color also leaps out of the constraints of picture-making to offer a rich optical play that takes on its own irreducible being.



Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres
Madame Duvaucay
1807
Oil on canvas
29 7/8 × 23 1/4 in (76 × 59 cm)

Peyton's figuration does not focus on the physicality of the body, either naked or nude. Aesthetic pleasure rests rather in the pattern of a dress, the positioning of a limb, the arch of an eyebrow. This insistence on surface recalls Alex Katz's manifesto-like provoca-

tion on the importance of the superficial: "I prefer superficiality to Communism, academia ((Abstract Expressionist) or otherwise), Fascism, serious avant-garde, born-again religion, neo-Nazis, and French philosophers."⁴

Elizabeth Peyton's work takes its place in a specific genealogy of portraiture far from the realism of a painter such as Lucian Freud. Rather we might situate her within a trajectory that includes the somber yet plush plays of satin, jewelry, and piled coiffure in a painting such as Ingres' *Madame Duvaucy* (1807); the anguished eroticism of a poplin dress in Schiele's portrait of *Edith Schiele* (1915); David Hockney's painting of 1960s fashion designers Ossie Clark and Celia Birtwell, *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy* (1970–71); or Alex Katz's tribute to lipstick and sunglasses in *Grey Day* (1990). These artists have all offered celebrations of style, of the richness of the visual world as expressed through the furnishings and fashions of an era, the visual manifestations of a civilization.



David Hockney
Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy
1970–71
Acrylic on canvas
84 × 120 in (213.4 × 304.8 cm)

Most avant-gardes provide us with a portrait of their milieu, the friends who are also the cultural protagonists of a generation. Elizabeth Peyton has painted many artists who, like her, became known in New York and London throughout the 1990s, including Maurizio Cattelan, Jake Chapman, Martin Creed, Angus Fairhurst, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Piotr Uklanski. Peyton has also portrayed gallerists Colin de Land, Gavin Brown, and Pauline Daly, as well as musicians such as Jarvis Cocker and Liam Gallagher. She defines a period in transatlantic Anglo-Saxon culture in which a financial boom has coincided with an eruption of creativity in music, choreography, fashion, cooking, cinema, and art. The energy of the art scene (fired by the dynamism of some key art schools, globally informed artist-curators, entrepreneurial gallerists, graphically seductive art magazines, and a new generation of collectors) is on par with the heyday of Paris in the first half of the twentieth century. Peyton has por-

trayed those who define a sensibility in contemporary culture.

Yet these are not studies in the psychology of each individual. Like Hockney or Katz, Peyton draws on her social circle not only because of what they do, but also because of how they look. She is drawn to their physiognomy because it coincides with the delicate angularity that she can't help reproduce in her portraiture. (As Warhol once commented, "Even when the subject is different, people always paint the same painting."⁵) It is their style, posture, and attitude that she presses into the service of her very particular aesthetic process.

*Photographs are almost Nature. And they drop onto our doormats, almost as uncontrived as reality but smaller.*⁶

Gerhard Richter, 1989

Not all of Peyton's subjects are personally known to her. As well as portraying friends, she also draws on lives that are played out in the public arena of the mass media. Like many painters of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Peyton does not regard photography as a threat to or substitute for painting, but rather as a vast resource, a way of accessing the universal. She is aware of the mythic status that the omnipresence of the mass media can instantly confer on a few individuals. In any city in the world, the faces of a few celebrities from the worlds of music, fashion, or film are as ubiquitous as Coca-Cola. Their constant presence in the media and in advertising makes them both unattainable objects of desire and peculiarly familiar. Soap opera stars often comment that strangers will address them with the warmth of old friends.



Alex Katz
Grey Day
1990
Oil on linen
40 × 130 in (101 × 330 cm)

Peyton herself is drawn to this cast of characters — dead or alive — and includes them as honorary members of an extended family. Her choice of whom to portray is very specific. She has pictured Hollywood celebrities such as Chloe Sevigny and Leonardo DiCaprio; and rock casualties such as Sid Vicious and Kurt Cobain. She has also drawn on the family albums of the British House of Windsor, returning on numerous occasions to images of the young Prince Harry. These individuals are all painted in a way that makes them at once feminine and masculine, and sensual rather than sexual.

What connects them with people she knows personally is their dandyism. As Baudelaire commented, "Dandyism is a sunset; like the declining day star, it is glorious, without heat and full of melancholy. The distinguishing characteristic of the dandy's beauty consists above all in an air of coldness which comes from an unshakeable determination not to be moved; you might call it a latent fire which hints at itself, and which could, but chooses not to burst into flame."⁷

Her subjects are all made beautiful by the artist's own exquisite and generous aesthetic. In the way they are depicted, or in what we know about their lives, they are also alone, lacking animation or connection. Her portrayals of young Prince Harry at a football match, or on his first day at Eton, show him in the spotlight, demonstrating tremendous composure, yet unsmiling, detached, and somehow vulnerable. He is on duty, there but not there. The photographer Eve Arnold recounted going for a walk with Marilyn Monroe and becoming aware that no one on the street recognized her. Commenting on this, Monroe replied that she had not switched "Marilyn" on. She then visibly transformed into her screen self, at which point passers-by started to turn, stare, and beg for an autograph. Peyton's stars are all "switched off," on standby, retreating for a moment into themselves. Their beauty is innate, not projected. Peyton bypasses the poses demanded by the camera to transmute their unselfconscious beauty into paint.

Another overwhelming characteristic of Peyton's portraits is their emphasis on youth. To the young, life is infinite and therefore disposable. The Oedipal impulse relates not only to the family but also to society itself — the young reject industriousness and good cheer, in a defiant embrace of inertia and depression. Freud recognized the allure of youth. Children and young people are unselfconsciously absorbed in a world of their own making. As tantalizingly out of reach as Alice's looking-glass world, the fascination this impenetrable sphere of existence exerts becomes a locus of desire.

Peyton has made a drawing after a portrait of the writer Gustave Flaubert. Master of the evocation of obscure objects of desire, Flaubert was also mindful of that desire remaining unrequited, to avoid "the ironic chill of disenchantment." A passage from *Sentimental Education* could be a description of one of Peyton's paintings: "She would wear a dress of flaming red velvet with a jeweled belt, and her wide sleeve, lined with ermine, would reveal her bare arm, which would touch the balustrade of a staircase going up behind her. On the carpeted balustrade there would be a silver dish containing a bunch of flowers, an amber rosary, a dagger, and a casket of old, yellowish ivory, overflowing with golden sequins;

some of these sequins would have fallen on the floor and lie scattered in a series of shining drops, so as to lead the eye towards the tip of her foot."⁸

Peyton has also sketched a scene from his modernist masterpiece, *Madame Bovary* (1857). Emma Bovary, Marie Antoinette as envisaged by Sofia Coppola, and the young Diana Spencer have all featured in Peyton's oeuvre. These young women are connected. Lovely but uneducated, indolent, credulous and given to romantic fantasy, all existed as ciphers. All three are manipulated and ultimately destroyed. The poignancy of this doomed innocence is another leitmotif in Peyton's work. Yet her portrayals of the young also encapsulate the imminence of yet-to-be-realized promise, giving Peyton's art the "what if" quality of the utopian.



Egon Schiele
Edith Schiele
1915
Oil on canvas
71 × 43 1/2 in
180 × 110.5 cm

Peyton has paid tribute to the historic cultural figures she admires; they range from Manet, Flaubert, and Cezanne to Warhol, Hockney, and Truffaut. An exquisite recent painting of the writer Susan Sontag, *Susan Sontag (after H. C. Bresson's Susan Sontag, Paris, 1972)* (2006) is part of this genealogy of influence. Painted with muted eau de Nil and stony browns and grays, this elegiac, crystalline study in contemplative solitude is something of a monument. But Peyton also gives life to her heroes and heroines. Regardless of their historical moment, they are given equal presence with her other protagonists, in the here and now.

Portraiture is an act of celebration, tinged with melancholy. It is interesting to note how often Peyton portrays her friends when they are on crutches or wearing slings. The porcelain fragility of their complexions and the unnatural redness of their lips make them at once sensuous and vulnerable.

Peyton uses the historic genre of portraiture and the traditional mediums of oil, watercolor, or print to distill the fragility of the contemporary as it is encapsulated in the young, the lovely, the iconic, and the beloved. The "excessive life" of modernity is caught as it speeds towards oblivion, in fleeting remembrances of things past.

1 Charles Baudelaire, "Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne," 1863, *Curiosités esthétiques*, Paris, 1868, translated by Jonathan Mayne in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, Phaidon Press, London, 1998, p. 8.

2 Oskar Bätschmann and Pascal Griener, *Hans Holbein*, Reaktion Books, London, 1997, p. 151.

3 Francis Bacon collected hundreds of sports photos from newspapers and magazines, favoring "spot the ball" competition stills in which the football had been airbrushed out of the image and the public were invited to locate it for a cash prize. Bacon's focus, actually indicated by incised lines, was firmly on locating the players' genitals.

4 Alex Katz in conversation with Richard Prince, *Journal of Contemporary Art*, vol. 4, no. 2, Fall/Winter 1991.

5 Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*, Harcourt, New York, 1975, p. 149.

6 Gerhard Richter in conversation with Jan Thorn Prikker, "Concerning the Cycle 18 October 1977," 1989, in *The Daily Practice of Painting, Writings 1962–1993*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1995, p. 187.

7 Charles Baudelaire, op. cit., p. 29.

8 Gustave Flaubert, *Sentimental Education*, 1869, translated by Robert Baldick, Penguin Classics, London, 2004, p. 163.

Her Hand Dipped in Wisdom

John Giorno

Elizabeth Peyton is painting a portrait of me. The first sitting was on Tuesday, December 18, 2007. She had asked me about two months before, and after a few e-mails, as I was on several tours, when I got back we did it. Elizabeth liked the idea of starting in the old year. I went on my bicycle from 222 Bowery to her nineteenth-century clapboard house on Stuyvesant; across the curving street was the Pudding Lane Theatre. While I was chaining the bike to Elizabeth's black wrought-iron fence, I had a flash of the past: in 1950, when I was thirteen years old, I went to the Pudding Lane and saw Truman Capote's *The Grass Harp* and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, among other plays, before there was an off-Broadway and an off-off-Broadway, and before Circle in the Square, before the Beats. I had gone desperately seeking wisdom to escape from middle-class America, the deadening affluence and privilege which left a lot lacking, even though I came from a loving, kind family. Literature was my exit to freedom, my escape from stifling bourgeois values. I rang the bell at the black door in an old brick wall that led into a garden. As I waited, there was another flashback: in 1960, my ex-girlfriend had rented an apartment on the top floor of the house a few doors down on the corner of Pudding Lane and Hawthorne. A fire that started from a candle left burning had burned off the roof of the historic building. In those years my friends and I thought Elizabeth's house and the twin house next door, connected by a brick wall and garden, were witches' houses, wonderfully so, because they were worn and tattered American Gothic like the ones in Salem, Massachusetts, smack in the middle of New York City. Fifty-seven years later, it was a pleasure going through the door. I really liked Elizabeth. We had known each other slightly for about eight years in a group of artist friends around Gavin Brown's gallery. I arrived at the house, Elizabeth made tea in the kitchen, we talked and went up to her studio. I sat for the portrait. I wasn't sure what painting a portrait was: obviously not a photograph, a totally different process. I didn't know what that was, and it was not my problem. I was supposed to sit, so I sat. I treated it as a continuation of my meditation practice. I am a Tibetan Buddhist, and do practice, resting the mind, without any concepts, recognizing thoughts as they arise and not holding on to them, non-thought, spontaneously present, just being there. With a feeling that there was no one sitting, no one making a portrait, and there was no portrait, and with a happy feeling of clarity. This is easy for me; I like doing it, and it can be powerful. My eyes were half-open, occasionally Elizabeth and I looked at each other and smiled. We took breaks and burst into wonderful conversations. Over four

months, Elizabeth did two paintings and three drawings. At about the same time in the fall of 2007, completely separately, Laura Hoptman, a friend, asked me to write a piece about Elizabeth Peyton for the catalogue of her exhibition at the New Museum. "I am delighted," I said, "I love her work." This was a slight problem for me, as I am a poet, and I never learned how to write art criticism, and never read it, except in newspapers on airplanes. Elizabeth said happily, "Thank you for doing it!" Sitting for the portraits, talking and being with each other in a profound way, we became good friends.

"Your house is so great!" I said. "I'm half remembering what I heard: it was built in 1830 by a baker, and the twin house was for his daughter? What's the story?"

"In 1831. He was a dairyman," said Elizabeth. "He lived in the other house and built this house as an investment. He was going to build a third house in between, but he didn't, happily, and now we have the garden in between. They say he was a dairyman, but I don't think he ever saw a cow. He just had them somewhere."

"Well, yes, of course," I said, "cows and lots of land up in New York State. The cows and those families are still there, in Delaware and Sullivan Counties, among others, which is where our friends have bought places, next to dairy farms, land formerly owned by farmers. Gavin in Callicoon, Rirkrit in Hancock, Meredith Monk and countless other artists, and Ugo and I in Barryville."

"You're up on the Delaware?"

"Yes, somehow we all ended up along the Delaware River. When I was young, in the 1950s and 1960s, I spent a lot of time along the Hudson River, Rhinebeck. Do you know where the man who built this house was from?"

"No, but maybe I can find out."

"Verne Dawson and Laura live on the Delaware, too, Rutledgedale Road. The Rutledge family is one of those cow-and-land families who received a vast British land grant in the eighteenth century, and now there still are dozens of the families descended with the name Rutledge who are dairy farmers on the remnants of that land."

"The twin house where he lived is unchanged," said Elizabeth. "Pretty much the way it was, nothing much has been done. It's curious how we're all connected to this old part of New York City and the rural country in New York State, and not to cows."

The first sitting, we sat in the living room on the second floor. Elizabeth started a drawing, then a second drawing, then a third drawing, which she worked on for about two hours. When she was finished she held it up; it looked like me, but more important, it was a beautiful drawing. The second sitting was on Tuesday, January 8th, 2008. Elizabeth began the first painting. We did it on the top floor.

"I've just moved my studio up here."

"It's totally wonderful!"

I looked up at the big skylight and the north light of a sunny winter day.

"The skylight, I just found out, is from the nineteenth century," said Elizabeth.

It had extraordinary cast-iron gears and wheels.

"Oh, an artist's garret studio!"

We laughed.

"I first had my studio on the ground floor, I don't know why."

We were here for the portrait, and both of us went back to it. I did meditation practice, abiding in the continual flow, and Elizabeth did the drawing.

"When I was fourteen, I saw a TV mini-series about Oscar Wilde," said Elizabeth, "the fabulous people of the Edwardian Era, the mauve decade, and I said to myself 'These are the people I want to know!'"

"They were Andy Warhol's Factory," I said, "and our friends of their day."

Elizabeth is totally American, from Connecticut, with a strong attachment to the old Europe of London and Paris. During the second sitting, Elizabeth played Patti Smith from an iPod. Patti is a friend from 1971, and we perform often together. Patti was attracted to and believed she belonged to a lineage of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine, direct descent. Elizabeth was devoted to them too, and to Patti. It was wonderful that they felt so connected; I felt less so, though I loved them all. Listening to Patti was a pleasure, and the sitting went wonderfully.

"When did you start making portraits?" I asked.

"When I was four," said Elizabeth. "Paper and pencil, crayon, magic marker, anything. I really liked making portraits. I said to myself 'This is what I want to do!'"

"This is very important!" I said. "Recognizing your true nature. When you do someone and you have a special feeling, it makes you feel a little brighter, an imperceptible bliss."

"Yes, I know," said Elizabeth.

"Congratulations, you recognized your true nature as a painter at a very early age. The cartoon is a light bulb in your head, but reality is quite similar."

"I wasn't that good at it," said Elizabeth. "Nobody said, 'She is the greatest.' I liked doing it."

"Something similar with me," I said.

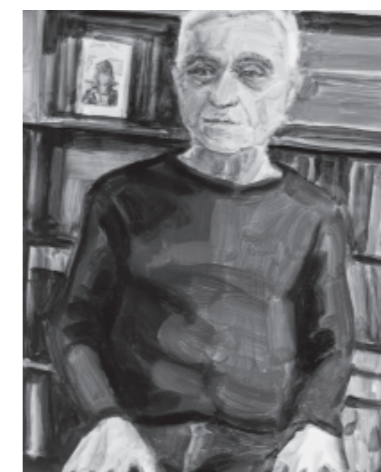
"When I was thirteen in class the teacher was teaching poetry, and one day she said that for homework everyone should go home and write a poem. I was shocked. I did it, and I really liked doing it. I handed it in, and two days later she talked about everyone's poems and read three out loud, and my poem was the third poem. It made me feel really good, and writing the poem had given me this extra bright feeling. I said to myself, I want to

do this some more. And I did!"

"There's an idea," said Elizabeth, "that if you do something 10,000 times, something happens, and you begin to do it really well."

"Yes, 10,000, 100,000, hundreds of thousands, millions of repetitions produce something inexplicable, like magical powers come, self-arising. It is nonverbal and perfects great skills."

We were here for the portrait, and went back to it, me doing meditation, in and out of a state of non-thought. Elizabeth painted a thickly gessoed wood board, eight by ten inches, with dabs dipped from her palette on the table, mostly brown, yellow ochre, and umber. The third sitting was on Tuesday, January 15. Elizabeth continued working on the painting. Each sitting was about two hours, until after five, when the winter sun set at the end of the street that dead-ends at



Elizabeth Peyton
John Giorno
2008
Oil on board
10 × 8 in (25.4 × 20.3 cm)

the house, directly west of the window where we sat, and the light went out. I was very happy that Elizabeth was doing this. I loved her work, the brilliant use of Pop color and brilliant use of Pop brushstroke, the colors of Matisse in the style of dandyism. Elizabeth seemed to me to be a young Andy Warhol, the way he was in the early 1960s.

"I asked my school friends to sit for portraits," said Elizabeth, "as characters in the books I was reading: Baron de Charlus in Proust, *The Red and the Black* by Stendhal, *Lost Illusions* by Balzac. I painted made-up portraits."

"What a heroic thing to do!"

"In art school, I began painting from live models.... When I was twelve, I asked the teacher if I could use oil paint, which was about a year before the teacher taught it to the class."

At each sitting, besides tea, Elizabeth offered me fabulous chocolate truffles from Debaue & Gallais on Madison Avenue, which I really like. I was always high on chocolate.

"When I was twelve, I listened to The Jam, The Clash, David Bowie, Talking Heads, and Blondie while I painted."

The fourth sitting was on Thursday, February 21. Elizabeth did a drawing and began a second painting. The first painting was leaning against some things on a cluttered table on the far wall. The color of my long-sleeve shirt had changed from burnt sienna to black, and in the finished painting it was dark blue against a red book in the bookshelf, and was many layered. The painting had a riveting presence. A few days later, at a dinner party at her house, Elizabeth said, "I worked a little on the first painting, after you left." At each sitting, Elizabeth took a few photographs. And she took photos when I performed at Pati Hertling's event at Gavin's, and a week later at the Bowery Poetry Club with guitarist Javier Colis. Photos are a part of her process of making portraits. During one sitting, after having seen me perform, Elizabeth said softly, and quite seriously, "You're a rock star." She believed it, and it seemed quite funny. Elizabeth paints her friends, intimate friends, imaginary friends, poets, and famous people whose special qualities are so personal to us. Each person in each painting has the glamour and grace of a movie star. Even though you may not know who anyone is, each portrait is of a superstar, with whatever the qualities are that make you believe in them; each has perfect color and perfect poise, confidence and certainty, rock stars and royalty. Kurt Cobain in a tiara with stubble beard, the Baron de Montesquieu, who is dressed up as Ludwig II, who is dressed up as Louis XIV, caressing a bust of Marie Antoinette in Versailles, are reflections of our mind, are us looking in a mirror at ourselves, delusion inside delusion inside delusion. In the people she paints Elizabeth sees their special qualities as light, their vitality and accomplishments illuminating their bodies, an extra brightness in their form, deities in aggregates of color, gods almost transparent in shimmering light, their nature displayed in translucent radiance. It is as though her brilliant use of color and line are superb disguises, and the true portrait is the white background radiating primordial purity. Even though Elizabeth and I really liked talking and exchanging ideas, our true communication was nonverbal, beyond conceptualizations, and the results were miraculous paintings. Ink washes, frail pencil lines, blurred charcoal, pale oil, and small, her paintings are of deities in an ever-expanding heaven world, and Elizabeth Peyton, herself, is Sarasvati, goddess of painting, her hand dipped in wisdom.

Illustrated Works

All works are included in the exhibition except those indicated by an *



65

Marie Antoinette Between Germany and France on Her Way to be Married
1995
Oil on board
8 × 6 in
20.3 × 15.2 cm
Private collection, Los Angeles



66

Princess Elizabeth's First Radio Address
1993
Charcoal on paper
14 × 11 in
35.6 × 27.9 cm
Collection Karen and Andy Stillpass



67

Napoleon
1991
Charcoal on paper
22 × 18 in
55.9 × 45.7 cm
Private collection
Courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London



77

Ludwig II of Bavaria
1994
Oil on board
17 × 12 in
43.2 × 30.5 cm
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Peter Norton



79

Rupert Brooke*
1994
Charcoal on newsprint
16 1/2 × 11 3/4 in
41.9 × 29.8 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise



80

Sidney
1995
Charcoal on paper
13 × 11 in
33 × 27.9 cm
Private collection



81

Dallas, TX (January 1978)
1994
Oil on board
20 × 16 in
50.8 × 40.6 cm
Private collection
Courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London



68-9

Kings and Queens
1993
Ink on paper
5 1/2 × 7 1/2 in
14 × 19.1 cm
Collection Laura Stevenson Maslon



70

Rirkrit, age 3 (Argentina)
1993
Ink on paper
5 1/2 × 3 3/4 in
14 × 9.5 cm
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise



72

Ludwig Caressing the Bust of Marie Antoinette
1993
Charcoal on paper
13 3/4 × 10 3/4 in
34.9 × 27.3 cm
Collection Karen and Andy Stillpass



82

Antoine Doinel*
1994
Oil on Masonite
14 × 11 in
35.6 × 27.9 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise



83

John Lydon
1994
Oil on canvas
12 × 9 in
30.5 × 22.9 cm
Private collection



84

John and Sid (John Lydon and John Beverley)*
1994
Ink on paper
9 × 7 inches
22.9 × 17.8 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise



85

Zoe's Kurt
1995
Oil on board
14 × 11 in
35.6 × 27.9 cm
Collection Zoe Stillpass



73

Ludwig in Versailles
1994
Charcoal on newsprint
16 1/2 × 11 3/4 in
41.9 × 29.8 cm
The Stephanie and Peter Brant Foundation, Greenwich, CT



75

Ludwig with Josef Kainz
1992
Charcoal on paper
16 1/2 × 11 3/4 in
41.9 × 29.8 cm
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise



76

Ludwig Riding to Paris
1992
Charcoal on newsprint
11 3/4 × 16 1/2 in
29.8 × 41.9 cm
Private collection



86-7

Kurt Sleeping
1995
Oil on board
11 × 14 in
27.9 × 35.6 cm
Private collection, New York



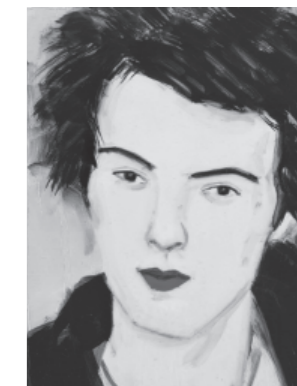
89

Alizarin Kurt
1995
Oil on canvas
24 × 20 in
61 × 50.8 cm
Private collection, New York



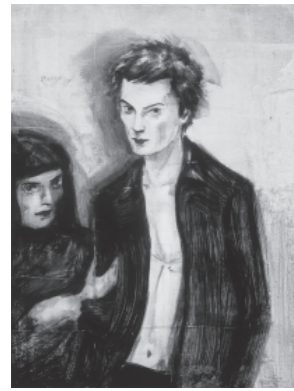
90

Princess Kurt
1995
Oil on linen
14 × 11 3/4 in
35.6 × 29.8 cm
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, T.B Walker Acquisition Fund, 1995



91

John Simon Beverley Ritchie (Sid)
1995
Oil on board
12 × 9 in
30.5 × 22.9 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Contemporary Curator's Fund



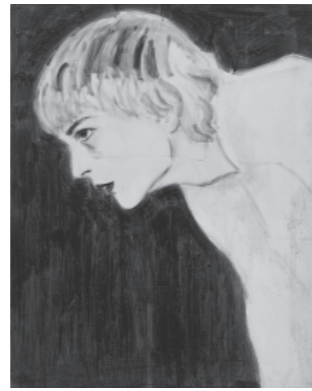
93

Sid and his Mum
(John and Anne Beverley)
1995
Oil on board
17×12 in
43.2×30.5 cm
Private collection
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery



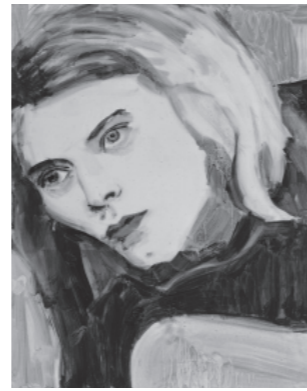
94

Kurt with cheeky num-num
1995
Oil on board
14×11 in
35.6×27.9 cm
Collection Lisa and John Miller



96

Blue Kurt
1995
Oil on canvas
20×16 in
50.8×40.6 cm
Private collection, New York



97

Kurt
1995
Oil on board
10×8 in
25.4×20.3 cm
Collection Glenn Fuhrman
Courtesy the FLAG Art Foundation



110

Constance Wilde and Son
1996
Pencil on paper
7 1/2×6 in
19.1×15.2 cm
Collection Neda Young



111

Jarvis on a Bed
1996
Oil on board
17×14 in
43.2×35.6 cm
Collection Laura and Stafford Broumand



112

Jarvis and Liam Smoking
1997
Oil on canvas
12×9 in
30.5×22.9 cm
Collection Tiqui Atencio



113

Max
1997
Oil on board
12×9 in
30.5×22.9 cm
Private collection
Courtesy Gavin Brown's enterprise



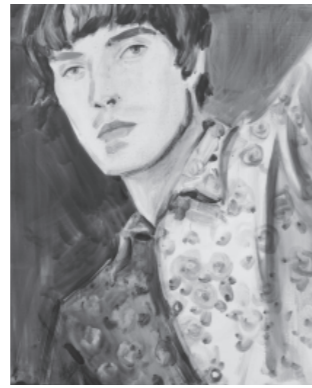
98

Piotr
1996
Ballpoint pen on paper
12 1/8×9 3/4 in
30.8×24.8 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise



100

Gladys and Elvis*
1997
Oil on canvas
17×14 in
43.2×35.6 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise



101

Flower Liam
1996
Oil on board
17×14 in
43.2×35.6 cm
Private collection
Courtesy Zwirner and Wirth



103

Piotr
1996
Oil on board
8 1/4×6 in
21×15.2 cm
Private collection, New York



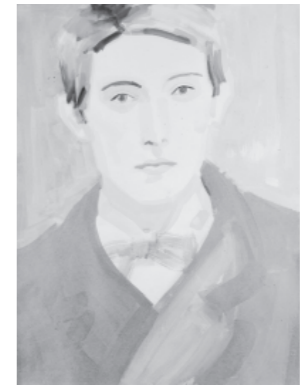
115

Craig
1996
Pencil on paper
8×7 in
20.3×17.8 cm
Private collection, New York



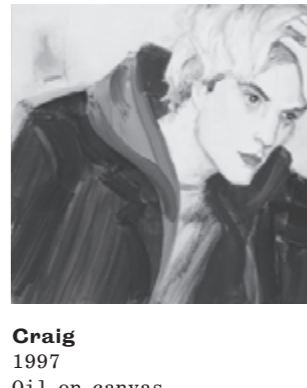
116

Prince Harry's first day at Eton, September 1998
1998
Pencil on paper
11 3/4×9 in
29.8×22.9 cm
Austrian Collection



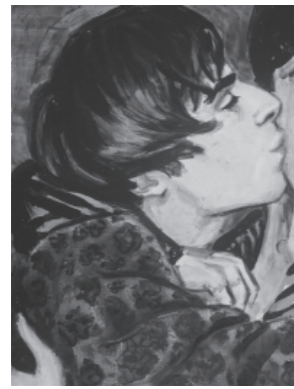
117

Silver Bosie*
1998
Watercolor on paper
30×22 1/4 in
76.2×56.5 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise



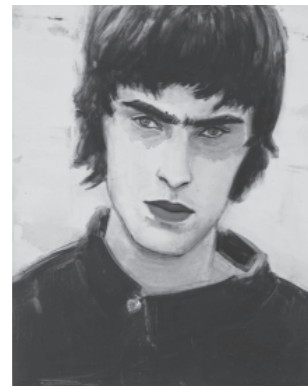
118-19

Craig
1997
Oil on canvas
14×17 in
35.6×43.2 cm
Collection David Teiger
Partial gift to the Museum of Modern Art, New York



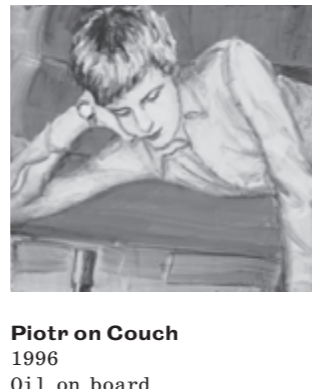
104

Earl's Court
1996
Oil on board
10×8 in
25.4×20.3 cm
Collection Nina and Frank Moore, New York



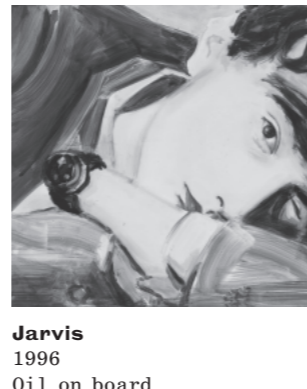
105

Blue Liam
1996
Oil on board
17×14 in
43.2×35.6 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise



106-7

Piotr on Couch
1996
Oil on board
9×12 in
22.9×30.5 cm
Seattle Art Museum, gift of the William E. Weiss Foundation, Inc.



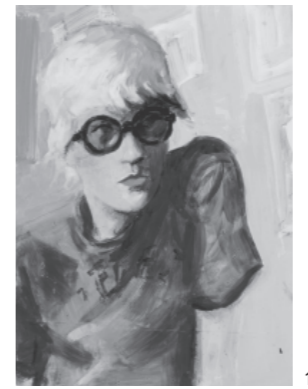
108-9

Jarvis
1996
Oil on board
11×14 in
27.9×35.6 cm
Hort Family Collection



120

David Hockney
1997
Watercolor on paper
10 1/2×7 in
26.7×17.8 cm
Collection Nancy Delman Portnoy



121

David Hockney, Powis Terrace Bedroom
1998
Oil on board
9 3/4×7 in
24.8×17.8 cm
Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg



122

Prince Harry
1997
Watercolor on paper
11×8 1/2 in
27.9×21.6 cm
Private collection



123

Silver Bosie
1998
Lithograph
29 1/2×22 1/2 in
74.9×57.2 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise



124

Craig
1998
Watercolor on paper
13 1/2 × 11 in
34.3 × 27.9 cm
Private collection



125

Palladium Martin
1999
Oil and palladium leaf on board
12 × 9 in
30.5 × 22.9 cm
The Stephanie and Peter Brant
Foundation, Greenwich,
Connecticut



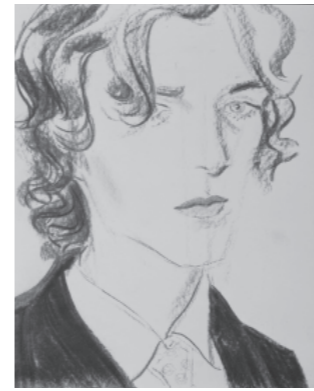
126

Celebrity (Leonardo DiCaprio)
1998
Watercolor on paper
60 × 40 in
152.4 × 101.6 cm
Collection Mima and
César Reyes, Puerto Rico



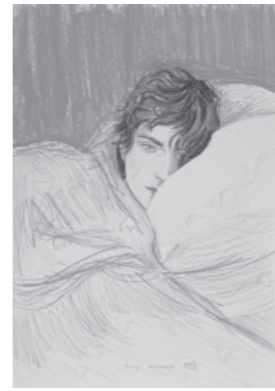
127

Roseland
1997
Oil on board
12 × 9 in
30.5 × 22.9 cm
Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation,
permanent loan to the
Öffentliche Kunstsammlung
Basel



139

Birthday, 20 December 1999
2000
Charcoal on paper
13 1/2 × 11 in
34.3 × 27.9 cm
Private collection



140

November (Tony)
1999
Colored pencil on paper
8 3/4 × 6 in
22.2 × 15.2 cm
Private collection, New York



141

Prince Eagle (Fontainebleau)
1999
Oil on board
12 × 9 in
30.5 × 22.9 cm
Private collection, New York



143

Savoy (Tony)
1999
Ballpoint pen on hotel
stationery
5 3/4 × 4 in
14.6 × 10.2 cm
Collection Patricia and
Morris Orden, New York



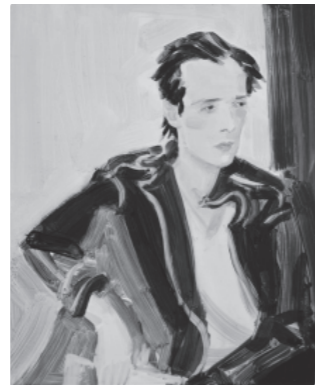
129

Maurizio Eating
1998
Oil on board
12 × 9 in
30.5 × 22.9 cm
Collection Nancy Delman
Portnoy



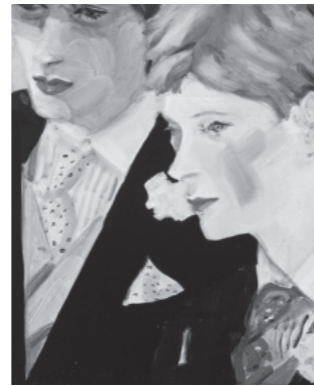
130

Tokyo (Craig)
1997
Oil on board
10 × 8 in
25.4 × 20.3 cm
Ole Faarup Collection,
Copenhagen



131

Silver Colin
1998
Oil on board
10 1/4 × 8 1/4 in
26 × 21 cm
Private collection



132

Prince Harry and Prince William
1999
Oil on board
9 1/2 × 8 in
24.1 × 20.3 cm
The Musée national d'art
moderne, Centre Georges
Pompidou, Paris



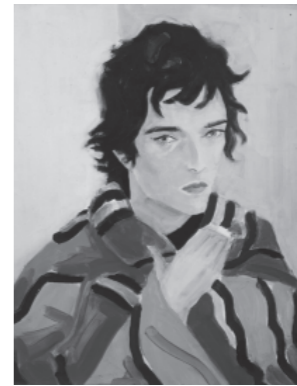
144-5

Savoy (Tony)
1999
Oil on board
14 × 16 1/2 in
35.6 × 41.9 cm
Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation,
permanent loan to the
Öffentliche Kunstsammlung
Basel



146

Pierre*
2000
Colored pencil on hotel
stationery
10 1/2 × 7 1/4 in
26.7 × 18.4 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and
Gavin Brown's enterprise



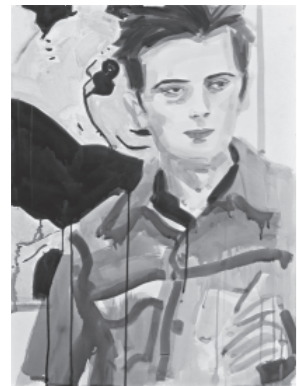
147

Luigi (Tony)
2001
Oil on board
14 × 11 in
35.6 × 27.9 cm
Collection Dianne Wallace,
New York



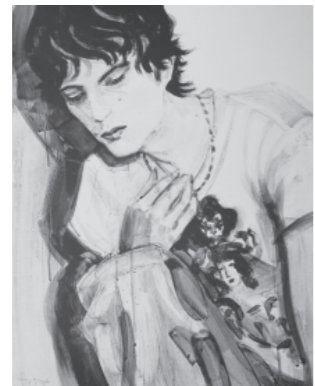
149

Berlin (Tony)
2000
Oil on canvas
40 × 30 in
101.6 × 76.2 cm
Private collection



133

Panda Rob*
1999
Watercolor and glitter on paper
30 × 22 3/4 in
76.2 × 57.8 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and
Gavin Brown's enterprise



135

Kiss (Tony)
2000
Lithograph
24 × 19 in
61 × 48.3 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and
Gavin Brown's enterprise



136

**Jackie and John
(Jackie fixing John's hair)**
1999
Oil on board
14 × 11 in
35.6 × 27.9 cm
Collection Mr. and Mrs.
Jeffrey R. Winter



137

Silver Tony
1999
Oil on board
14 × 11 in
35.6 × 27.9 cm
Collection Byron R. Meyer



150

Torosay (Tony)
2000
Oil on board
12 × 9 in
30.5 × 22.9 cm
Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg



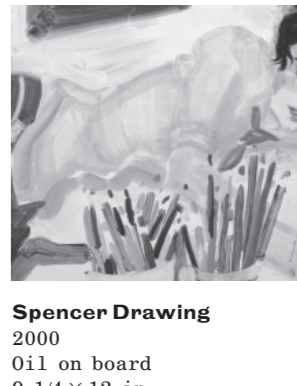
152

Spencer*
1999
Colored pencil on paper
8 1/4 × 6 in
21 × 15.2 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and
Gavin Brown's enterprise



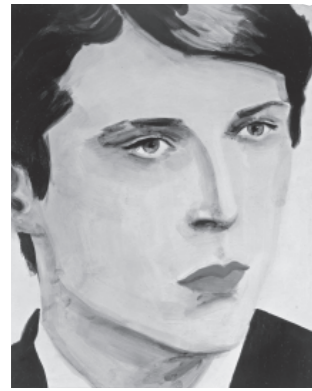
153

Spencer Walking
2001
Oil on board
12 1/4 × 9 1/4 in
31.1 × 23.5 cm
Philadelphia Museum of Art,
purchased with the Adele Haas
Turner and Beatrice Pastorius
Turner Memorial Fund



154-5

Spencer Drawing
2000
Oil on board
9 1/4 × 12 in
23.5 × 30.5 cm
Collection Laura and
Stafford Broumand



157

Democrats are more beautiful (after Jonathan Horowitz)
2001
Oil on board
10 × 8 in
25.4 × 20.3 cm
Collection Laura and Stafford Broumand



158

Poo (Rirkrit)
2001
Colored pencil on paper
5 7/8 × 8 5/8 in
14.9 × 21.9 cm
Private collection, New York



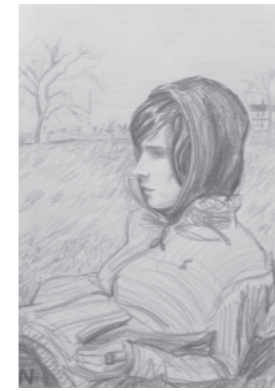
160

Ben Drawing
2001
Oil on board
10 1/8 × 8 1/4 in
25.7 × 21 cm
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, A.W. Mellon Acquisition Endowment



161

September (Ben)
2001
Oil on board
12 1/8 × 9 1/8 in
30.8 × 23.2 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise



172

Green Nick
2003
Colored pencil on paper
6 × 8 1/2 in
15.2 × 21.6 cm
Collection Isa Genzken, Berlin



173

Nick Reading Moby Dick
2003
Oil on board
15 × 12 in
38.1 × 30.5 cm
Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, partial and promised gift of Mandy and Cliff Einstein



174

Harry and Tittie
2003
Oil on board
9 × 7 in
22.9 × 17.8 cm
The Stephanie and Peter Brant Foundation, Greenwich, Connecticut



175

Lady with an Ermine 1489-90 (After Leonardo da Vinci)
2003
Oil on board
12 × 9 in
30.5 × 22.9 cm
Collection Matt Aberle, Los Angeles



162

Breakfast (Adi)
2003
Oil on board
14 × 11 in
35.6 × 27.9 cm
Collection Sam and Shanit Schwartz



163

Flower Ben
2002
Oil on board
10 × 8 1/4 in
25.4 × 21 cm
Collection David Teiger



164

Haircut (Ben and Spencer)
2002
Oil on board
12 × 9 in
30.5 × 22.9 cm
Private collection



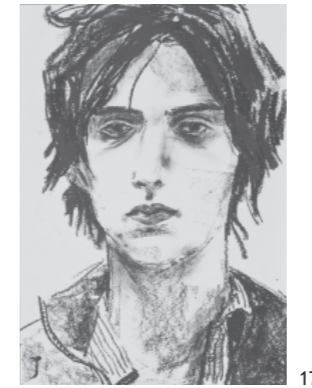
165

Little Em (Eminem)
2002
Oil on board
12 × 9 in
30.5 × 22.9 cm
The Stephanie and Peter Brant Foundation, Greenwich, Connecticut



177

L.A. (E.P.)
2004
Oil on board
14 × 11 1/4 in
35.6 × 28.6 cm
Collection Marc Jacobs, promised gift to the Art Institute of Chicago



178

Julian
2003
Pastel on paper
16 3/4 × 11 in
42.5 × 27.9 cm
Collection David Teiger



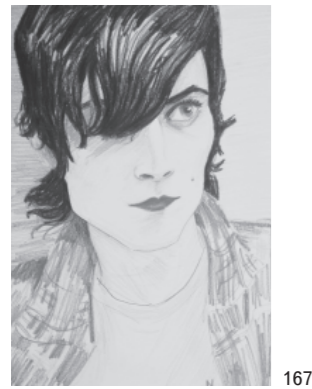
179

Live to Ride (E.P.)
2003
Oil on board
15 × 12 in
38.1 × 30.5 cm
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, partial and promised gift of David Teiger in honor of Chrissie Iles



180

Julian with a broken leg
2004
Oil on board
14 × 11 in
35.6 × 27.9 cm
Collection Beth Swofford



167

Nick (First drawing)
2002
Colored pencil on paper
8 3/4 × 6 in
22.2 × 15.2 cm
Collection David Teiger



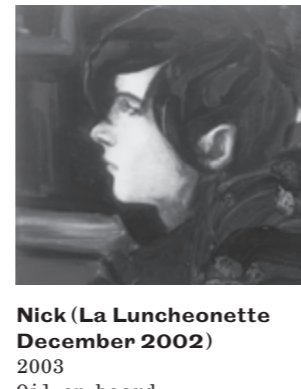
168

Orient
2003
Oil on board
10 × 8 in
25.4 × 20.3 cm
Courtesy David and Monica Zwirner, New York



169

Nick (Chateau Marmont, Los Angeles, September 2002)
2002
Oil on canvas
40 × 30 in
101.6 × 76.2 cm
Collection David Teiger



170-1

Nick (La Luncheonette December 2002)
2003
Oil on board
7 1/4 × 9 in
18.4 × 22.9 cm
Collection Karen and Andy Stillpass



181

Julian
2004
Oil on board
14 × 11 in
35.6 × 27.9 cm
Private collection, New York



183

Marc
2004
Oil on board
10 × 8 in
25.4 × 20.3 cm
Private collection



184

Walt
2003
Colored pencil on paper
8 5/8 × 6 in
21.9 × 15.2 cm
Private collection, New York



185

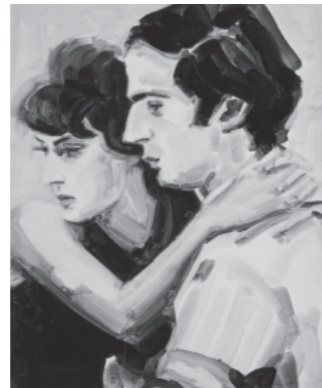
Anette
2004
Oil on board
14 × 11 in
35.6 × 27.9 cm
Private collection



Keith
(From Gimme Shelter)
2004
Oil on board
10 × 12 in
25.4 × 30.5 cm
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York, purchased with funds
by the International Director's
Council and Executive Committee
Members



Pete and the Wolfman
(From the NME)
2004
Pastel on paper
13 3/4 × 11 in
34.9 × 27.9 cm
Private collection, New York



**Jeanne Moreau and Francois
Truffaut (The Bride Wore
Black)**
2005
Oil on board
11 × 9 in
27.9 × 22.9 cm
Sender Collection,
Courtesy Levin Art Group



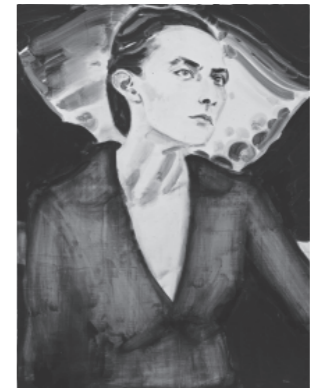
Ken and Nick
(Ken Okiishi and Nick Mauss)
2005
Oil on board
11 × 9 in
27.9 × 22.9 cm
Collection Glenn Fuhrman,
promised gift to Tate, London
Courtesy FLAG Art Foundation



Georgia O'Keeffe
(after Stieglitz 1917)
2006
Watercolor on paper
14 1/4 × 10 1/4 in
36.2 × 26 cm
Collection James-Keith (JK)
Brown and Eric G. Diefenbach,
New York



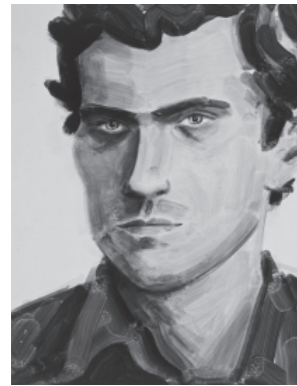
Elizabeth and Georgia
(Elizabeth Arden and Georgia
O'Keeffe 1936)
2005
Oil on board
10 × 8 in
25.4 × 20.3 cm
Private collection, Berlin
Courtesy neugerriemschneider



Georgia O'Keeffe
after Stieglitz 1918
2006
Oil on canvas
30 1/8 × 23 1/8 in
76.5 × 58.7 cm
Collection David Teiger



Pete (Pete Doherty)
2005
Watercolor on paper
14 × 10 in
35.6 × 25.4 cm
Private collection



Jonathan (Jonathan Horowitz)*
2005
Oil on board
12 × 9 in
30.5 × 22.9 cm
Telbasa Collection, Madrid



John (John Reinhold)
2005
Oil on board
10 × 7 in
25.4 × 17.8 cm
Private collection



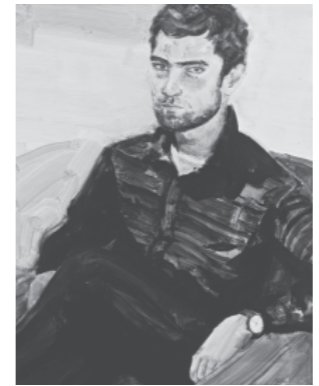
E.P. reading (self-portrait)
2005
Oil on board
10 × 8 in
25.4 × 20.3 cm
Collection David Teiger



Nick in Orient (Nick Mauss)
2004
Oil on board
12 × 9 1/4 in
30.5 × 23.5 cm
The Parrish Art Museum,
Southampton, New York, purchased
with funds contributed by the
Collections Committee



Max
2007
Pastel on paper
8 1/2 × 6 in
21.6 × 15.2 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and
Gavin Brown's enterprise



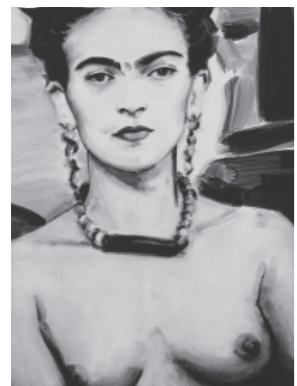
**Jonathan (Jonathan Horowitz)
January 2007**
2007
Oil on board
9 × 7 in
22.9 × 17.8 cm
Private collection, New York



**Picnic (M.A.) after Sofia
Coppola's Marie Antoinette**
2006-07
Oil on board
13 × 10 in
33 × 25.4 cm
Collection David and Susan
Gersh, Los Angeles



Susan Sontag
(after H.C. Bresson's Susan
Sontag, Paris, 1972)
2006
Oil on board
9 × 7 in
22.9 × 17.8 cm
Collection Tia and David
Hoberman, Los Angeles



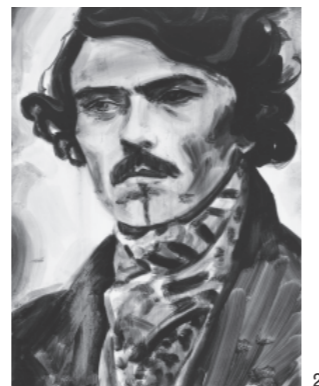
Frida (Frida Kahlo)
2005
Oil on board
9 × 7 in
22.9 × 17.8 cm
Collection Tiqui Atencio



Jonathan Horowitz
2006
Oil on board
12 × 9 in
30.5 × 22.9 cm
Private collection
Courtesy neugerriemschneider



Liz and Diana
2006
Oil on board
12 × 9 in
30.5 × 22.9 cm
The Sander Collection



Eugène Delacroix, 1842
2005
Oil on board
9 1/4 × 7 in
23.5 × 17.8 cm
Collection Doug English



**Angus and Jonathan (Angus
Cook and Jonathan Caplan)**
2006-07
Oil on board
10 × 8 in
25.4 × 20.3 cm
Collection Mandy and Cliff
Einstein



Madame Bovary
(Vicente Minnelli, 1949)*
2007
Charcoal on paper
13 1/2 × 11 in
34.3 × 27.9 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and
Gavin Brown's enterprise



Nick and Pati
(Nick Mauss and Pati Hertling)
2007
Oil on board
13 × 10 in
33 × 25.4 cm
Private collection



**Joe (Joe Montgomery)
July 2007***
2007
Oil on board
12 1/8 × 9 1/8 in
30.8 × 23.2 cm
Private collection
Courtesy the artist and
Gavin Brown's enterprise



217

Gavin Brown February 2007
2007
Oil on board
11 3/4 × 9 in
29.8 × 22.9 cm
Collection Mitzi and Warren Eisenberg



219

The Age of Innocence
2007
Oil on board
14 1/4 × 10 in
36.2 × 25.4 cm
Private collection, New York



221

Pati
2007
Oil on board
9 × 7 in
22.9 × 17.8 cm
Private collection, New York



222

Matthew
2008
Oil on board
12 1/2 × 9 in
31.8 × 22.9 cm
Private collection



223

Flowers and Diaghilev
2008
Oil on linen over board
13 × 9 in
33 × 22.9 cm
Private collection



224

West 11th Street, Greenwich Avenue, and 7th Avenue, New York City, 2008
2008
Oil on board
9 × 6 in
22.9 × 14.2 cm
Collection Mitzi and Warren Eisenberg

Not illustrated but included in the exhibition

Hotel, 1966 (John Lennon)
1996
Oil on board
17 × 14 in
43.2 × 35.6 cm
Collection Carlo de Stefani

Biography

Elizabeth Peyton was born in Connecticut in 1965. She received her BFA from the School of Visual Arts, New York, in 1987. She lives and works in New York.

Peyton has exhibited regularly at the following galleries:

Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York, since 1995
neugerriemschneider, Berlin, since 1996
Regen Projects, Los Angeles, since 1997
Sadie Coles HQ, London, since 1998

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2007

Aldrich Museum of Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut (Larry Aldrich Award recipient)
Institut im Glaspavillon, Berlin

2006

Guild Hall, Easthampton, New York

2005

Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, Easthampton, New York

2002

Royal Academy, London
Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg

2001

Deichtorhallen, Hamburg

2000

Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster
Aspen Art Museum

1999

Castello di Rivoli, Turin

1998

Georg Kargl, Vienna
Galleria II Capricorno, Venice
Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany (traveled to Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel, Switzerland)
Seattle Art Museum

1997

Gallery Side 2, Tokyo
Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne
St. Louis Art Museum

1995

Cabinet Gallery at The Prince Albert, London
Burkhard Riemschneider, Cologne

1993

Hotel Chelsea, room 828, New York

Selected Group Exhibitions

2007

"The Painting of Modern Life,"
Hayward Gallery, London

2006

"Surprise, Surprise," Institute of Contemporary Art, London
"Contemporary Masterworks: Saint Louis Collects," Contemporary Art Museum of St. Louis

2005

"Superstars: from Warhol to Madonna,"
Vienna Kunstforum/Vienna Kunsthalle
"Getting Emotional," Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston

2004

"Likeness: Portraits of Artists By Other Artists," California College of Arts, Watis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (traveled to the McColl Center for Visual Art, Charlotte, North Carolina; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Dalhousie University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia; and the University Art Museum, California State University at Long Beach)
"Whitney Biennial," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

2002

"Cher Peintre, Lieber Maler, Dear Painter," Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris (traveled to the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt; and the Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna)
"Remix," Tate Liverpool

2001

"Drawing Now: Eight Propositions," The Museum of Modern Art, New York
"Abbild: recent portraiture and depiction," Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria

2000

"Greater New York," P.S.1, New York

1999

"Examining Pictures," Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (traveled to Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles)

1998

"Young Americans II," Saatchi Gallery, London
"Auf der Spur," Kunsthalle Zurich

1997

"Truce: Echoes of Art in an Age of Endless Conclusions," Site Santa Fe, New Mexico
"Projects 60," The Museum of Modern Art, New York

"Longing and Memory," Los Angeles County Museum

1996

"a/drift," Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

"Universalis," São Paulo Bienal
"Wunderbar," Kunstverein Hamburg

1995

"Campo," Venice Biennale

1993

"Okay Behaviour," 303 Gallery, New York

Her work is represented in the collections of:

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh
Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris
Guggenheim, New York
Kunstmuseum, Wolfsburg, Germany
Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Seattle Art Museum
St. Louis Art Museum
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

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2007

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Smith, Roberta, "It's Just Clay, but How About a Little Respect?," *New York Times*, September 7

2006

Herbert, Martin, "Monographs: Elizabeth Peyton," *Modern Painters*, May

Johnson, Ken, "Beautiful People Caught in Passivity," *New York Times*, August 18

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2005

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Siegel, Katy, “All Together Now: Crowd Scenes in Contemporary Art,” *Artforum*, January

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2004

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2003

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2001

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2000

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Acknowledgments

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This is truly Elizabeth’s show, but this is not to say that we have not had important collaborators. Amy Mackie, Curatorial Assistant at the New Museum, has played a crucial role in the organization of the show and the creation of this book. Her background research on each of the objects in the exhibition (accomplished with the help of research intern Sarah Demeuse) is reflected in the essays and in the educational materials, and will be an important resource long after the exhibition has run its course.

Elizabeth and those who have worked with her at her galleries have close, long-standing relationships that, although they might not be unique in the contemporary art community, are increasingly rare. Gavin Brown and Corinna Durland of GBE, New York; Tim Neuger and Burkhard Riemschneider of neugerriemschneider, Berlin; Sadie Coles and Pauline Daly of Sadie Coles HQ, London; and Shaun Caley Regen of Regen Projects, Los Angeles, are part of the community of interesting, alive people that are Elizabeth’s inspiration, as well as her subject matter. Not only are they contributors to her history, they are players in it, and all of them and their excellent staff, including Lisa Williams and Alex Zachary at GBE, Alexa Galea at Sadie Coles, HQ, Joseph Imhauser at Regen Projects, and Florian Seedorf at neugerriemschneider, have contributed enormously to this exhibition.

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A special place in this organizer’s pantheon must be reserved for the New

Museum’s indefatigable, resilient, positive-energy-radiating Director of Development, Regan Grusy, and our equally ardent and adept Corporate Sponsorship Consultant Fred Wodin. Regan and Fred were cheerleaders for this show from its very inception, and it is no exaggeration to say that their hard work made it possible.

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The New Museum is also grateful for the enthusiastic participation of our tour partners. Olga Viso, Director, Philippe Vergne, former Chief Curator and Deputy Director, and Betsy Carpenter, Associate Curator at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Iwona Blazwick, Director, and Anthony Spira, Curator, at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London; and Alexander van Grevenstein, Director, and Paula van den Bosch, Curator, at the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht couldn’t have been better colleagues. We look forward to seeing the show at these great institutions.

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Laura Hoptman

Kraus Family Senior Curator

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This book is dedicated to Paul Peyton.

Elizabeth Peyton

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John Giorno is a poet, performance artist and AIDS activist and fundraiser. He met Andy Warhol in 1962 and become a prominent figure of the Factory and the subject of one of Warhol's best-known films, *Sleep*. In 1965 he created *Giorno Poetry Systems* as a way of connecting poetry to new audiences through new technology. Through his work, he has long been an advocate of collaboration, counting William Burroughs, Patti Smith, Laurie Anderson, Philip Glass, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Mapplethorpe, Keith Haring, and Ugo Rondinone among his many associates.

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