

Chicago Artist Paints '100 Zoom Portraits'

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A landscape artist is ditching the dirt for some more formal paintings in a new series titled “100 Zoom Portraits.”

What started out as 300 screenshots of Zoom interviews from her favorite newscasts, has since transformed into a declaration of the times.

“I started because I can only watch the news on my phone, the bigger screens are too much,” painter Megan Williamson says. “I could cover what I didn’t want to look at while watching. It was during lockdown, it was intense. But we suddenly got to look in each other’s homes and I found comfort in that. So I started taking screen captures. I had never worked from photographs before, but there was something there.”

As someone who has never painted portraits, Williamson never expected to complete 100 of them.

“One day I walked in [to my studio] and there were about 20 on the wall and I said, ‘my friends are here,’ she said.

Without realizing, she’d developed a routine that gave her solace and comfort during a time of uncertainty.

“In a way I feel like I was partnered with these people,” Williamson says. “When I was painting from the photographs, and I have multiple, I felt like I was climbing into their homes. I’d start noticing things when painting that I didn’t notice when I did the screen capture. I can’t remember everyone’s name, but I can tell you everything about what’s in their room and what they’re wearing.”



Megan Williamson created a hundred portraits based on interviews she saw on newscasts. (WTTW News)

From February to May, Williamson made one portrait a day. She recreated living rooms across the country and even a few guests seen on “Chicago Tonight.” Despite growing in popularity, Williamson does not intend to offer them as individual portraits.

“I think of this as one piece. The 100 pieces are one,” Williamson said.

It’s about a communal connection.

“To see them all together, I hope is the best Zoom call you’ve ever been on,” Williamson said. “It’s about our shared humanity. We’re all looking into these screens. That’s why we’re here. To make connections. The look that I choose to paint is, they’ve just spoken or are listening. I thought, We’re all doing so much yelling and not listening. This is just a moment of being present. And to see 100 people be present is really happy. It’s a hopeful series.”

Williamson plans to have “100 Zoom Portraits” debuted in newsrooms across the country.

[Visit Williamson’s website](#) to see close ups of the portraits.

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Angel Idowu is the JCS Fund of the DuPage Foundation Arts Correspondent.