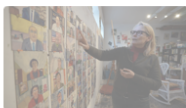


Chicago artist captures shared humanity of pandemic through Zoom portraits



By: Jessie Cohen

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CHICAGO — Art has no boundaries, there is always something new to explore. That is even more clear to Chicago painter Megan Williamson after nearly two years living through the pandemic.

As an artist, she immediately became fascinated with work-from-home spaces.

“The portrait series did start because I was watching the news a ton, like everybody, and I could only watch it on my phone,” Williamson said.

She took screenshots of people being interviewed on the news from the comfort of their homes. She then transformed those images into 100 portraits that are now hanging in her studio.

“It was the sense of one person in their place and I kind of couldn’t stop. When I get going on a series, it’s kind of like a runaway horse,” Williamson said.

The more she painted, the more she realized just how humanity was being captured in her art.

“Even the experts were at their kitchen table making their best guess,” Williamson said. “And then it’s like, ‘Oh, you’re wearing a sweater in front of your mantelpiece with the painting of your dog.’ It just made them human.”

Every portrait is unique and portrays a different person.

"I had to put a moratorium on balding white men in front of bookcases," Williamson said. "This woman's cat came in and she just kind of said, "Alright, we're going to go with it."

When this journey began, she didn't know what it would turn into.

"And I have never painted from photographs before. I am not a portrait painter. I do still lifes, landscapes and then work out of my head, so this was a new thing," Williamson said.

As it turns out, it spoke volumes to Williamson and has now become a center of relatability for others.

"It was a response to the time. I didn't know I was responding in the beginning, but yeah, I wanted to capture it," Williamson said. "It felt very personal. I was trying to work something out about being locked up in the pandemic in lockdown."

The art captures people from all walks of life, frozen in time, adapting to the world of lockdown.

"We've all seen these people or we are these people," Williamson said. "It's just people that do this. That make laws or invent things."

To Williamson, this piece is about shared humanity and the connection people have to each other.

"I just am so fond of all these nameless friends," Williamson said.