

WICKER PARK ENTERTAINMENT AND CULTURE NEWS

Wicker Park artist Megan Williamson shows faces of pandemic Zoom calls: 'It looks like America to me'

The project consists of 100 small paintings of people who appeared in the media via Zoom during the height of the pandemic.

By Mitch Dudek | Mar 28, 2022, 9:59am CDT



Wicker Park artist Megan Williamson says her latest project, "100 Zoom portraits," was inspired by watching virtual interviews during the heart of the coronavirus pandemic. | Brian Rich/Sun-Times

Seeing the faces of people being interviewed virtually during the heart of the pandemic gave Wicker Park artist Megan Williamson a bit of hope.

“We were all so isolated, and I was just looking at people’s faces and I felt hopeful just really looking at all these people working so hard, doing their jobs, trying to solve problems, even if they were at home in lockdown,” said Williamson, 61.

She began to take screenshots on her phone — her main source of media consumption — of people being interviewed in the media.

“You know, I’m a painter, I never really know what’s going to start something,” said Williamson, who likes to joke that when she’s spitballing projects in the art studio in her garage it’s just her and her dog, Zeus, and Zeus thinks everything is a good idea.

Faces, necks and jawlines caught her eye. And though she doesn’t usually paint portraits, she tried it.

“Some people, their homes are super curated, some are just like ‘I’m in my kitchen’ and the angle of the computer camera would affect how the walls looked,” she said.

She did one a day, each on small 5-by-7-inch canvases.



Megan Williamson said she doesn’t usually paint portraits but was intrigued by virtual interviews during the height of the coronavirus pandemic. | Brian Rich/Sun-Times

“The first few were really bad. I said, ‘Do seven, see if this is a thing.’ And then I had 20, 40, 50 and when I finally got to 100. I stopped because people were starting to report from newsrooms again and 100 seemed like a very nice number,” she said.

She grouped the **paintings next to each other** on a wall in her studio.

“It looks like America to me,” she said.

Several Chicagoans made the cut.

After seeing them as guests on WTTW’s ‘Chicago Tonight,’ Williamson painted state Sen. Mike Simmons, D-Chicago, writer Dan Sinker and Alia Bilal, deputy director at the Inner-City Muslim Action Network.

Williamson found two more Chicago subjects after watching a Zoom chat featuring Agnes Callard, a University of Chicago philosophy professor, and Rachel Wiseman, managing editor of The Point, a print and digital magazine of philosophical writing.

But she isn’t sure of the identities of many of the people she put on canvas.

Her paintings will be on display soon.

They are slated for exhibition at WTTW’s studio at the Renee Crown Public Media Center on the Northwest Side when the building reopens to the public, hopefully in the next few weeks, said David Blowers, who serves as board chair for WTTW and WFMT, Chicago’s classical radio station.

“It’s a nice way of being able to celebrate a very talented local artist who found some goodness at a difficult time for our community and the world,” said Blowers, who has known Williamson since first grade. The two grew up in Deerfield.

“The notion of being brought into people’s homes and the different ways the homes were decorated and the way people presented themselves show a great variety and array of humanity,” Blowers said.