

Public Programs

Friday, October 17, 2008, 7:30 p.m.

John Giorno Reading and Book Signing

New Museum theater | FREE with admission

Poet, activist, and subject of a recent portrait by Elizabeth Peyton, John Giorno will read from his recently published anthology *Subduing Demons in America: Selected Poems, 1962–2007* (2008, Counterpoint/Soft Skull). Giorno will also sign copies of his book.

Friday, November 21, 2008, 7:30 p.m.

Matthew Higgs/Elizabeth Peyton: 20 Questions

New Museum theater | FREE with admission

Artist, curator, and director of White Columns Matthew Higgs will interview the artist Elizabeth Peyton using a list of questions contributed by twenty artists, curators, critics, and others who are familiar with Peyton's work.

Saturday, January 3, 2009, 3 p.m.

Portraiture from Four Points of View

New Museum theater | \$6 Members, \$8 general admission

Curator and art writer Dodie Kazanjian convenes a round table on the subject of portraiture.

Please visit newmuseum.org/elizabethpeyton for an interview with the artist and details about her career.

"Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton" is organized by Laura Hoptman, Kraus Family Senior Curator, with the assistance of Amy Mackie, Curatorial Assistant, and additional research provided by Sarah Demeuse.

The exhibition was designed by Jonathan Caplan, Project-Space, New York. Lighting design was provided by Hank Forrest, Fisher Marantz Stone, New York.

A 256-page catalogue, *Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton*, accompanies the exhibition. It includes 160 color reproductions of work by the artist, as well as essays by Laura Hoptman, Iwona Blazwick, and John Giorno.

Global Lead Sponsor **BANANA REPUBLIC**

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IMAGE: Elizabeth Peyton, *Frida (Frida Kahlo)*, 2005. Oil on board, 9 x 7 in (22.9 x 17.8 cm). Collection Tiqui Atencio

The New Museum is located at 235 Bowery
(at Prince Street between Stanton and Rivington,
one and a half blocks south of Houston).

HOURS

Wed.....12–6 PM

Thurs/Fri... 12–10 PM

Sat/Sun.....12–6 PM

Mon/Tues...CLOSED

ADMISSION

Members . . . FREE

General. . . . \$12

Seniors \$10

Students . . . \$8

18 and under. FREE

Please visit newmuseum.org for detailed
directions and information.

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For information on exhibition-related programs at the
New Museum, please visit newmuseum.org/events or call
212.219.1222 x261.

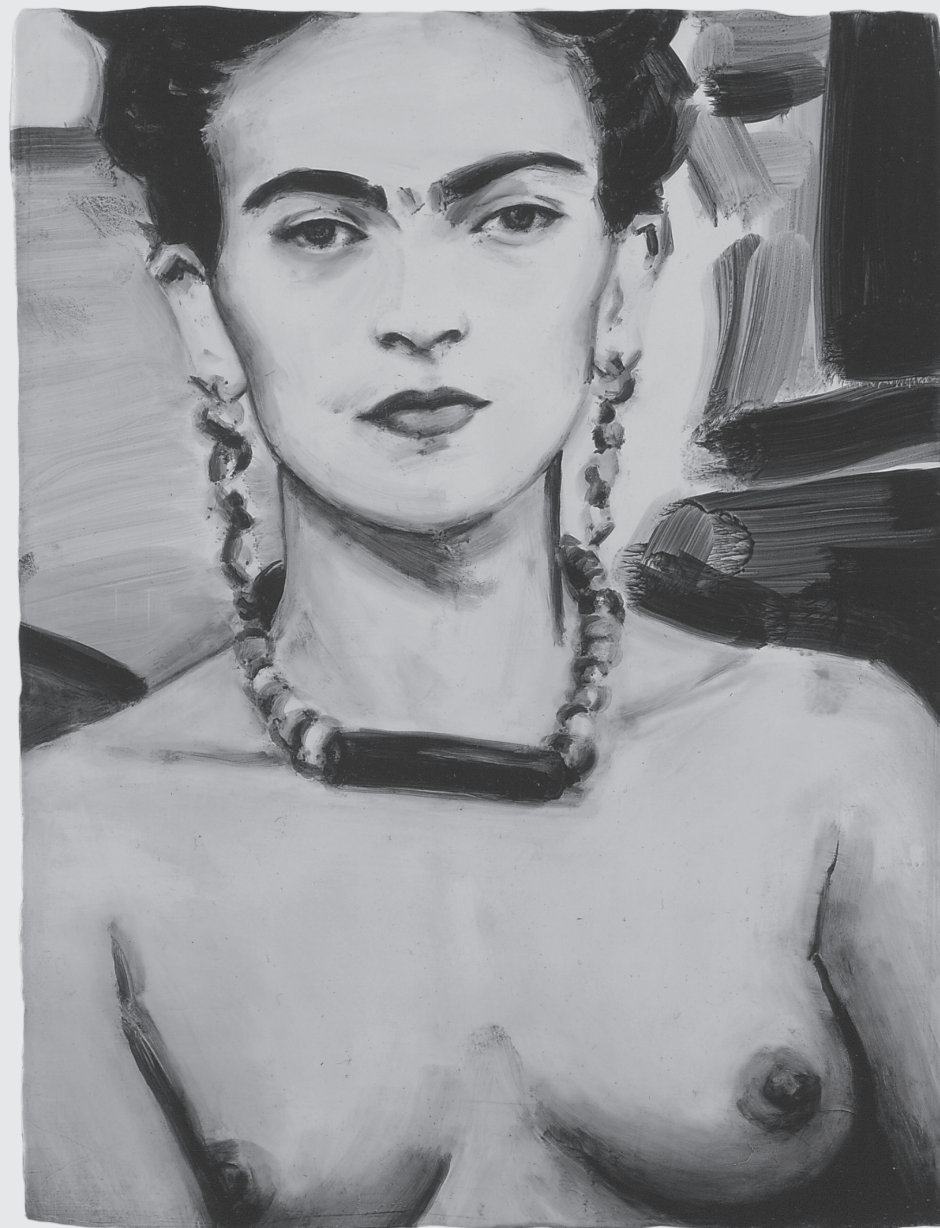
Free iPod audio tours are available for "Live Forever: Elizabeth
Peyton" at the Visitor Services Desk in the lobby.

Visitors can participate in free, docent-led public tours of
the Museum's current exhibitions Wednesday and Thursday
at 2 p.m., Friday at 2 and 7 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday
at 2 and 4 p.m. Spanish and Chinese tours are available
on Saturdays and Sundays. For group tours, please visit
newmuseum.org/learn or call 212.219.1222 x235.

Target First Saturdays For Families take place on the first
Saturday of every month from 10–12 p.m. and are free to the
public. Tickets are given on a first-come, first-served basis.
For more information, please visit newmuseum.org/learn/school_and_youth or call 212.219.1222 x235.

OCTOBER 8, 2008–JANUARY 11, 2009

Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton



**NEW
235 BOWERY
NEW YORK NY
10002 USA
MUSEUM**

OCTOBER 8, 2008–JANUARY 11, 2009

FOURTH AND THIRD FLOORS

Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton

Over the past fifteen years, Elizabeth Peyton has created a large, remarkably consistent body of work that includes paintings, drawings, watercolors, and prints. With a handful of notable exceptions, these works are portraits of individuals ranging from historical figures, to artistic contemporaries, to friends. Born in Connecticut, Peyton's fascination with portraiture began in childhood and continued throughout her years in art school at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. In the early 1990s in New York, she was one of a very few young artists who chose to paint figuratively, and her work has proven to be paradigmatic of a popular realism that has had a major influence on contemporary art in the US and Europe.

Peyton's combination of intimate scale, luscious palette, and graphic ingenuity have contributed to the accessibility of her work, but it is her subject matter—one that has included popular cultural icons like Kurt Cobain, Keith Richards, and Frida Kahlo—that has fueled its popularity, as well as made it a controversial addition to the development of contemporary art over the past decade.

From her first gallery exhibition in New York in 1995, which featured paintings of Cobain, Peyton's works were described as examples of extreme fandom, of-the-moment responses to, or more critically, results of American culture's voracious consumption of images of the famous. The Cobain paintings, which Peyton completed scarcely a year after the musician's suicide, have become signature images, but they are far from being straightforward likenesses, let alone rock star homages. Inspired by photographs from magazines and tribute books, as well as video stills from concerts and television appearances, the Cobain that emerges from this first important series is a younger, more vulnerable version of his super-famous self. Youth, and its promise, are themes that can be traced throughout Peyton's oeuvre through her choice of subjects, as can the misfortune of dying young. In addition to Cobain, Peyton has made portraits of King Ludwig II of Bavaria, Sid Vicious, Elvis Presley, John Lennon, John F. Kennedy Junior, and Lady Diana Spencer, all of whom lived the majority of their short lives in the international media spotlight before dying tragically—and publicly. Despite early critical opinions, celebrity itself holds no fascination for Peyton. As she has noted recently, "Celebrity in itself is not that interesting to me, but it is interesting what people do...I think about art and what it is in society through the people I paint and how [they] are a part of their time, maybe more than other people are."

By 1996, Peyton had begun to paint her close circle of friends, which included artists, writers, musicians, and DJs. Certain subjects, like the artist Tony Just who Peyton met in 1999, would inspire almost two years' worth of paintings, drawings, and prints depicting Just in a multitude of poses, intimate as well as formal. Like Cobain, Just's distinctive features, his long, chiseled face and large wide-set eyes, are recognizable from picture to picture, but within this matrix of similarities Peyton depicts a wide range of Tonys from the fragile dandy of *Prince Eagle (Fontainebleau)* (1999) to the wig-wearing hipster of *Berlin (Tony)* (2000). In 2001 and 2002, Peyton would give her sustained attention to two other subjects: Ben Brunnemer and Spencer Sweeney, both artists/musicians. The choice of Brunnemer as a subject coincided with Peyton's move from Manhattan to the North Fork of Long Island in

2001. Like so many other painters who incorporated the light and colors of the Long Island coast in their paintings, with the move, Peyton's palette brightened and the surfaces of her compositions became lively with saturated colors and bold patterns. There is a particular stillness to Peyton's early portraits. Figures are often posed against neutral, unarticulated backgrounds that seem to freeze them in time and space. Later works like *Ben Drawing* (2001) or *Flower Ben* (2002) are fairly buzzing with specific details; so much so that the subject is less the main event than a part of an overall compositional scheme more intricate than seen previously in Peyton's oeuvre. Where her earliest portraits can be compared to those of Dutch masters or Spanish painters in their quietude and focus on the aspect of a single, centered subject, beginning in the 2000s, Peyton's maturity as a painter is expressed in the increasing complexity of her compositions. In the history of portraiture, these later works can be more closely compared to figure compositions by Henri Matisse or Eduard Vuillard, both of whom integrated their human subjects with their static ones in dense and intricate surfaces of shapes and colors.

From the beginning, Peyton has worked from photographs. She was employed for several years in the 1980s at a photo agency and used her familiarity with, and clear appreciation for, mass-media images to create some of her most memorable works. Painters from Edgar Degas and Gustave Caillebotte to Gerhard Richter and Chuck Close have utilized the compositional quirks of photography—cropped images, dramatic points of view (bird's or snail's eye, close-up)—and its ability to capture a gesture, an expression. Peyton was at the cusp of a wave of figurative painters in the 1990s that included Peter Doig and Luc Tuymans among others, for whom photography would be almost a compositional given. In a number of paintings like *Tokyo (Craig)* (1997) and *Frida* (2005), Peyton adopts the monochromatic blue, sepia, or grayish palette of black-and-white photography. Although they are portraits, these works are also paintings of photographs: still lifes, in a sense, and notably more distanced from their subjects. Over the past two years, Peyton has begun to explore more traditional still lifes, albeit with a heavy element of portraiture. Earlier portraits like *Flower Ben* (2002) incorporate still-life elements along with portraiture; new works like *Flowers and Diaghilev* (2008) and *Pati* (2007) also merge the genres, but the images of the subjects are subsumed among an array of static objects, all of which, in the artist's words, "stand in for a person or a particular mood."

In 2004, with the rental of a temporary studio in Manhattan, Peyton began to paint her subjects from life. The difference between the works painted from life and those painted from photos is subtle. Peyton has noted that the light in works painted from models is more natural, the colors lighter, and the poses of the subjects less stiff and more relaxed. Peyton has continued to periodically paint from life as more recent paintings of the artists Jonathan Horowitz (2007) and Matthew Barney (2008) attest.

Peyton is a painter of contemporary daily life, seen in sum, her oeuvre gives us an idea of the kind of people who have created our popular culture, and thus, an idea of our world over the past decade and a half. It is daring to be so utterly contemporary, but it furthers her goal to reach a broader public. From the beginning, Peyton's project has been a frankly populist one. Her radically contemporary subject matter and her realism make clear that her grand theme is community, one that includes her most intimate friends, a fantasy cohort of luminaries we all know but only through media images of them, and most importantly, us, her viewers, who are drawn in to Peyton's world by her works' appeal to our senses and to our common mass cultural vocabulary.

—Laura Hoptman
Kraus Family Senior Curator