

Elizabeth Peyton (American, b. 1965) – Artist Resources

[Peyton at Gladstone Gallery in New York](#)

[Peyton at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac](#)

In 2008, one of Peyton's muses, musician Jarvis Cocker, [talked with the artist](#) for *Interview Magazine* about photography, creativity, and what she is drawn to in her subjects. "It was something I wanted to know existed—that people could be heroic or could come from anywhere and make great things out of themselves...I wanted to highlight that. I felt like there weren't pictures in the world of people who did things like that-pictures which were going to last." The interview was published to celebrate an exhibition of Peyton's photography at the [Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum](#) in Connecticut.

2008 also saw Peyton's first retrospective tour internationally, at [the New Museum in New York](#) followed by [The Walker Art Center](#) and [Whitechapel Gallery](#) in London.



Peyton, 2018
Photograph: Inez and Vinoodh

"The paintings are about the person, very much, and my feelings for them. But it is a transformative process. To see the work as autobiographical is just a little bit too literal to me somehow," Peyton tells [The Gentlewoman](#) in a 2013 profile about her rise to fame, love of music, literature, and art.

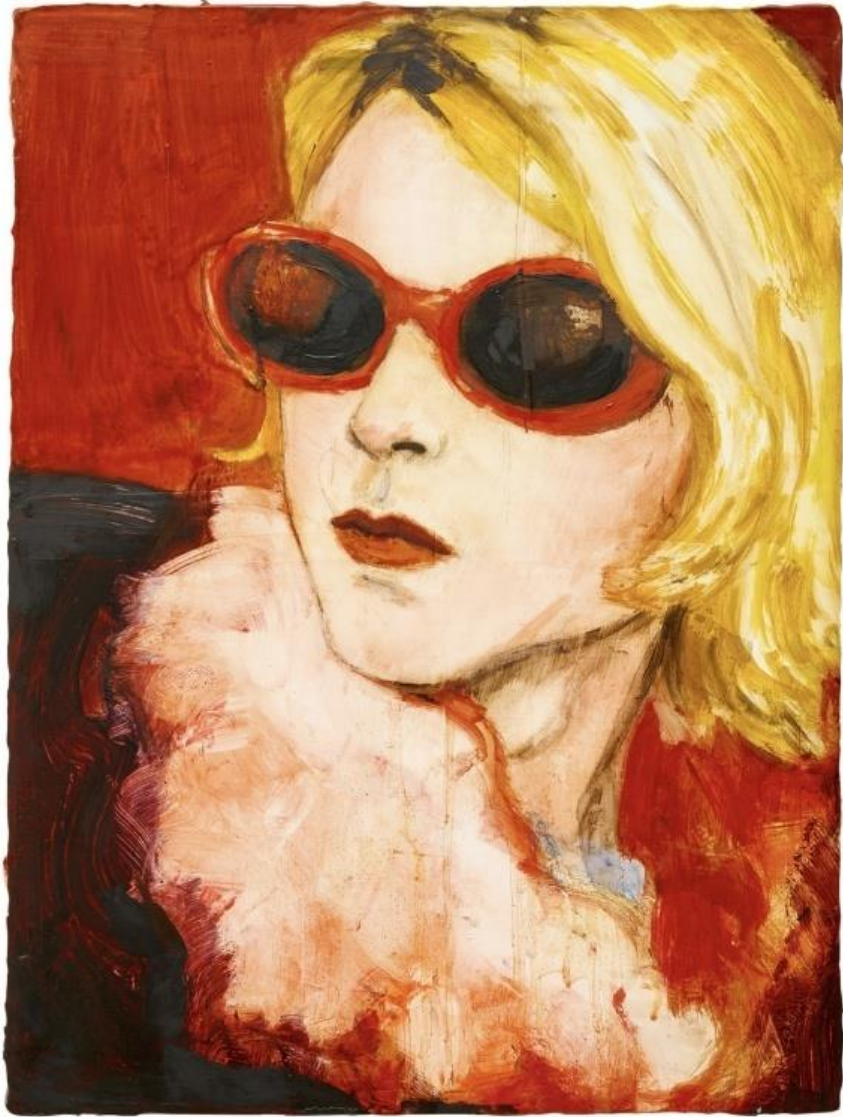
[The National Portrait Gallery](#) in London celebrated Peyton's prowess in portraiture with [a solo exhibition in 2019](#). Gallery director Nicholas Cullinan worked directly with Peyton to produce the show, which is the first in the institution's history to intersperse its historical collection with an exhibition of a single artist. Cullinan even sat for a portrait. Watch the two discuss the exhibition [in a talk at a Frieze Masters Talk](#).

Cullinan and Peyton also sat down for an interview for [The White Review](#) to talk about the different roles photography, printmaking, and painting serve in Peyton's work. "I'll work from life and then work from photos...I like the magical things that come from my own bad photography, or from photos found on the internet. They might contain something that you would never see in real life.

Peyton also spoke with [The Art Newspaper](#) about the connection between her portraits and the historical paintings in the NGP collection. "There's an individuality and a heightened expression among those powerful people of how they wanted to represent themselves to the world....I was thinking about what happens to somebody when they are looked at so much and how [these people] are icons now; they have this quality of being super-human in the way they are presenting themselves...but through different means and for different ends.



Peyton, 1999
Self-portrait



Elizabeth Peyton (American, b. 1965)

Kurt (Sunglasses), 1995

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2025:54.2

“There is no separation for me between people I know through their music or photos and someone I know personally...there’s no difference between certain qualities that I find inspiring in them.” – Elizabeth Peyton

Elizabeth Peyton began painting at a young age and attended the School of Visual Arts in New York in the mid-1980s. She quickly became known for her portraits, which feature pop culture icons, historical figures, and close friends. **Kurt (Sunglasses)** is a portrait of the musician Kurt Cobain (1967-1994) painted the year after he died by suicide at the age of 27. Peyton depicts the iconic Nirvana frontman with care, balancing his celebrity status with the vulnerability of his personal life.

On view August 20 – November 30, 2025

Elizabeth Peyton (American, b. 1965)

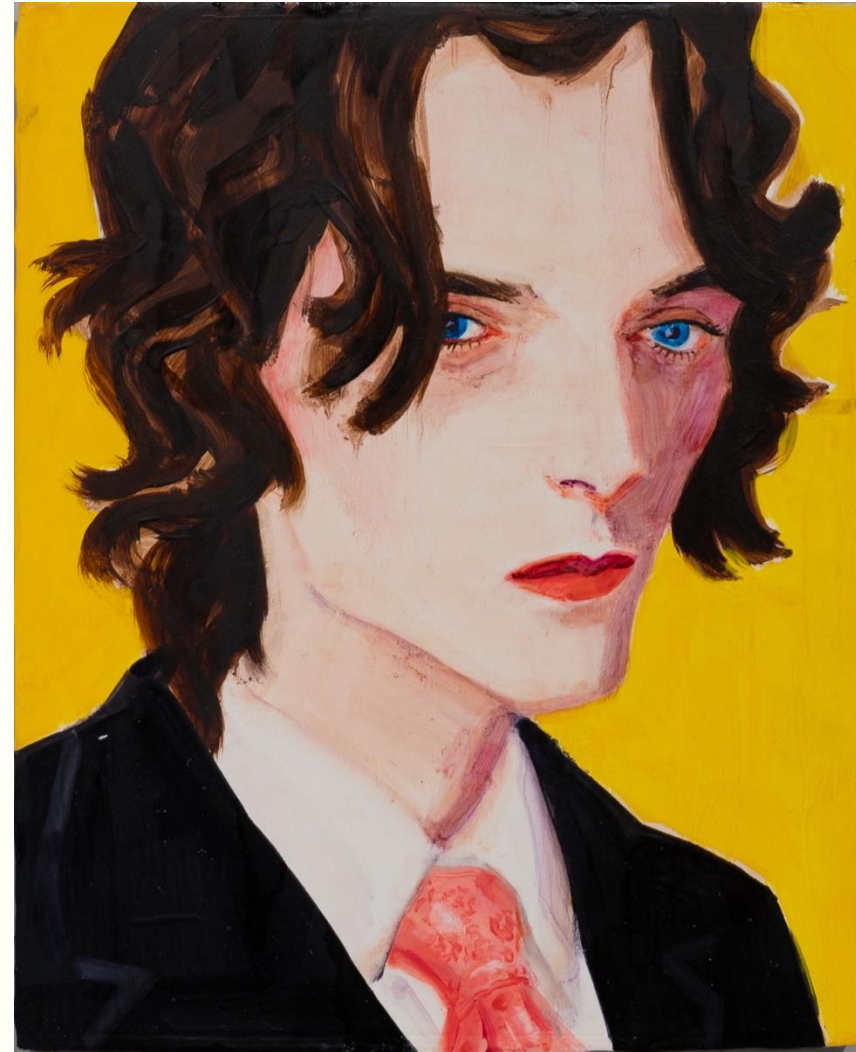
Birthday (Tony), 2000

Oil on MDF board

Private Collection; L2020:30.5

As one of the most significant and innovative contemporary American portrait painters, Elizabeth Peyton demonstrates a sophisticated ability to capture emotion and personality in line, color, and brushwork – skills perfected at the School of Visual Arts in New York in the 1980s. Though she also paints landscape and still life scenes, portraits are her passion. Distilled from Peyton's own photographs and reproductions in magazines, these intimate, modestly-scaled studies feature expressive brushwork, vivid palettes, and transparent washes. Merging life, memory, and imagination, Peyton intuitively crafts her style to compliment her subjects, which include friends, historical figures, and celebrities (living and deceased). **Birthday (Tony)** is a subtle yet striking portrait of one of her favorite subjects, her partner and fellow artist Tony Just. Peyton created a series of portraits after meeting Tony in the late 1990s, entranced by the similarity she saw between him and one of her earliest favorite subjects, Napoleon.

On view August 5 – November 8, 2020





Elizabeth Peyton (American, b. 1965)

Greta, 2019

Pastel on Paper

Private Collection, Los Angeles; L2019:155.3

Elizabeth Peyton is a leading American painter and printmaker, whose work showcases a sophisticated ability to capture emotion and personality in line, color, and brushwork. While Peyton has experimented with genres such as landscape and still life, her true passion lies in portraiture and she is celebrated for her talent in figure drawing, which she perfected at the School of Visual Arts in New York in the 1980s. Merging life, memory, and imagination, Peyton intuitively crafts her style to compliment her subjects, including friends, historical figures, and celebrities (living and deceased). Her portraits, modest in scale, feature expressive, subtly abstract brushwork, vivid palettes, and transparent washes. In **Greta**, contrasting colors of pastel mark the paper in a turbulent blur that nearly overtakes the carefully defined face of seventeen-year old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg. Peyton grants viewers a moment of quiet intimacy with her subject, a request to reflect on the humanity at the center of Thunberg's extraordinary fortitude and influence.

On view February 19 – May 24, 2020