

# William Betts

## Pinturas Paintings

<https://www.williambetts.com/>

*Nacido y criado en Nueva York, residió en Houston, Texas, y actualmente reside en Miami, Florida. En 1991, William Betts se licenció en Bellas Artes (Studio Art-Cum Laude) por la Universidad Estatal de Arizona y ha expuesto en Norteamérica y Europa. Sus obras han participado en la exposición colectiva Rasterfahndung (Tracing the Grid), Kunstmuseum, en Stuttgart, Alemania, en el Museo de Arte de Arlington, la Universidad de Texas, el Centro de Arte de Salt Lake City, la Universidad de Wisconsin, Eau-Claire, y el Museo de Albuquerque. Su bibliografía seleccionada incluye The Creators Project (entrevista en vídeo), junio de 2016; Politiken, København, ensayo fotográfico, 28 de marzo de 2016; Kinetic, Art from Polsinelli Art Collection, publicación privada de 2015; Victoria Machmudov, Under övervakningsradarn, Konstperspektiv, Suecia, junio de 2014 y Rasterfahndung (Tracing the Grid), Kunstmuseum Stuttgart (catálogo de la exposición). Fue nombrado ganador del New American Painting Annual Prize en 2011 y apareció en los números 60, 72, 84 y 96.*

*William Betts desarrolló su carrera profesional en industrias tecnológicas, donde adquirió conocimientos de programación y lenguaje informático. A partir de ahí, utiliza complejos procesos industriales para crear pinturas que reflejan las posibilidades de un medio analógico en una era digital. Betts utiliza su propio material (fotografías y vídeos) como conjuntos de datos que examina, muestrea, recontextualiza, manipula y representa. Normalmente se interesa menos por el contenido y más por los aspectos estructurales y sociales de la imagen.*

## STATEMENT

Today we are experiencing in real time the impact of digital surveillance on privacy and freedom of expression. A discussion of the creative process and surveillance seems almost a luxury. It may however serve as a worthwhile analysis of the tools the state or private actors may deploy for social control.

Artistic endeavors have always flourished during every age and every type of leadership, whether authoritarian, democratic, or monarchy. Artists for millennial have deployed different tools to speak to power safely.

The very structures that allow me as an American to not worry too much about surveillance and social control are under threat and crumbling before my very eyes.

Watching the geopolitical shifts happening throughout the world is scary and unfortunately make this exercise timelier.

As the state and private businesses seek mutually beneficial alliances, the possibility of oppressive behavior grows exponentially. As creative individuals, we must each develop a visual syntax that can use while providing the “cover” to keep us and our families safe while we continue to make important work. In this environment does art necessarily become a type or kind of an encryption or allegory? A way of communicating and provoking thought without provoking the state. As artists, we navigate these shifts while creating work that captures the zeitgeist. Artists have historically leaned on conventions like metaphor and allegory.

The West has been willing to tolerate the use of these technologies because the laws and values have provided a framework for their deployment that has largely prevented their abuse. As those start to erode, we must re-orient ourselves to the very real possibility that they will be re-deployed for nefarious purposes.

Ways of seeing: the surveillance perspective: panoptic, looking down: authority, remote, distant: outside of the subjects awareness.

The rise of photographic resolution. The ability to recognize something at 72 dpi is different at 300 dpi. As resolution has improved exponentially and cameras have become completely ubiquitous, it's not unreasonable to assume that we appear in other people's photographs. Further, it's

not unreasonable to assume that somebody could cross reference our photographs with other people's photographs, using facial recognition software, and create a very accurate and revealing portrait of us in our movements.

The convergence of technology: AI, resolution, ubiquity of phones, cloud computing, social media. All add up to a dangerous era of what I will call "Hyper Surveillance."

The era of hyper surveillance

The presumption of lawfulness and judicial structures in a surveyed society, make us take it for granted. What happens when society is not lawful or that structure is used for commercial purposes.

We were OK being surveyed when we thought it was for deterrence, and we thought the people doing it doing it for our safety and would limit it to the structures and confines of our social legal structure.

When it was applied for commercial purposes, that became a little bit gray. What happens when it's applied without legal and social structures? What happens if it is used to alter our behavior or to identify the "bad apples"

And yet inadvertently this is all the information that we have given freely to the social media companies to do with as they please. Now imagine if you will, if all of this information is combined with other data, for example, credit information. What happens when our information from social media sites is cross referenced with health insurance information or more controversially, our tax information and medical information? Quickly, you begin to see how this is a complete invasion of privacy.

many people would respond, I have nothing to hide. And while that may be true in the abstract, it relies on a complete trust of the parties who are holding and accessing and storing the data.

The presumption that data is siloed and not cross referenced with other data sets is a huge mistake in today's interconnected world.

The false assumption that our privacy is going to be protected by laws.

In the west, we've always talked about surveillance and control as an abstract. Increasingly, the recent and alarming political shifts in the west

may cause us to rethink this and treated less as a warning, and more as a reality. Accordingly, as artists, we will have to deal with and comment on this shift without provoking retribution by the state or various actors with power.

My mother was a photographer so from an early stage, I have always had a strong photographic influence in my painting work. I am not and have never been interested in it as a finished craft but rather as a method of gathering and storing visual data. When I was in school I used to go and sift through the trash of an aerial photography company in Phoenix and get the 9x9 inch contact prints. It seems so archaic in this day of Google earth but before all that, these were very expensive to buy and hard to get. I was using them as a source for the paintings I was doing at the time. These were really just visual data to me, not sentimental at all and not recording anything specific or events of any kind, just visual data to be kept and possibly used at some point later on much like paint in a tube.

I think that is an aspect that has a thread through all of my work. I accumulate visual stuff and keep it like a stock room. Some of it is specific and sentimental but a lot of it is just stuff.

Specifically to the video surveillance work, I have always been drawn to the passive aspect of it. The camera just records everything in a strange kind of parallel to the real life. I think of video as a data form not as a time series per-se but as a big stack of images to sift through... As an aside, I have done several portraits based on video and I found that in this day of ubiquitous cell phone cameras where everyone knows how to pose, its very hard to capture anyone on film and break through that posed veneer. With video, I shoot the tape and then can go back through the time series frame by frame and find the perfect expression, or gesture that was hiding among the images and would not have been revealed by a straight on photograph.

Photography and image capture is in a huge transition right now and while certainly there are politics to the surveillance work. I do not however think that the political aspect of the work will have the longevity of the structural aspect of the work. Does that make sense? It is still something I am trying to sort out in my head and through my work.

As a painter, I create an incredibly specific thing that is of something very specific cast indelibly into paint. To take a moment from a tape and



select one frame over another and cast that into permanence is something I am always trying to get my head around. I do not have any special criteria or method. An image that I have passed up for months or years will all of a sudden make perfect sense and will become a painting. Strange.

As far as method, When I started the series, I sometimes used the still images that others had pulled from the tapes. I found this unsatisfactory beyond liking the aesthetics of the images and how they worked with my painting technique. Once I was happy with that aspect, then I started getting video tapes to work from. Sometimes I will use tape I have found and sometimes I will use tape I have harvested. When I say harvested, I have gotten tapes by licensing them (traffic cameras) and also gone into areas and mounted my own temporary camera systems. Then I go over and over the tapes for still images until I find just the right ones or ones.

Its funny but I do have tapes that show petty crimes and the images could be used as evidence and offer a good bit of sensationalism but I have always been more drawn to the more ambiguous stills. those that really don't show anything but offer the possibility that something 'could' happen or could have happened. I think this is more true to the video source as it forces the viewer of the painting to 'think' up and down the time series.

My paintings are an investigation into the connection between the structural nature of video and digital photography as an organized collection of color and location data and its role as documentation. I have always been more concerned with the structural and social aspects of the image and its component information and how these are transformed through layers of mediation.

To create my paintings, I use industrial production methods to achieve a level of precision that allows me to manipulate and corrupt specific aspects of this connection. The technology-based industrial methods I develop require complex workflow processes. Defining these helps me to organize my thinking and closes the loop with my aesthetic and conceptual thinking.

My practice is non-linear and I work on several bodies of work and techniques concurrently. They inform and help clarify each other.



**9x12 SPACED 4x5 1556**

*Acrylic on canvas.*



***AgaliBeach\_48x72\_2016***

*Acrylic on canvas.*





***CoupleWithStroller\_24x32\_2011***

*Acrylic on canvas.*



*executives\_30x40\_2009*

*Acrylic on canvas.*





**IAH\_III\_36x48\_11**

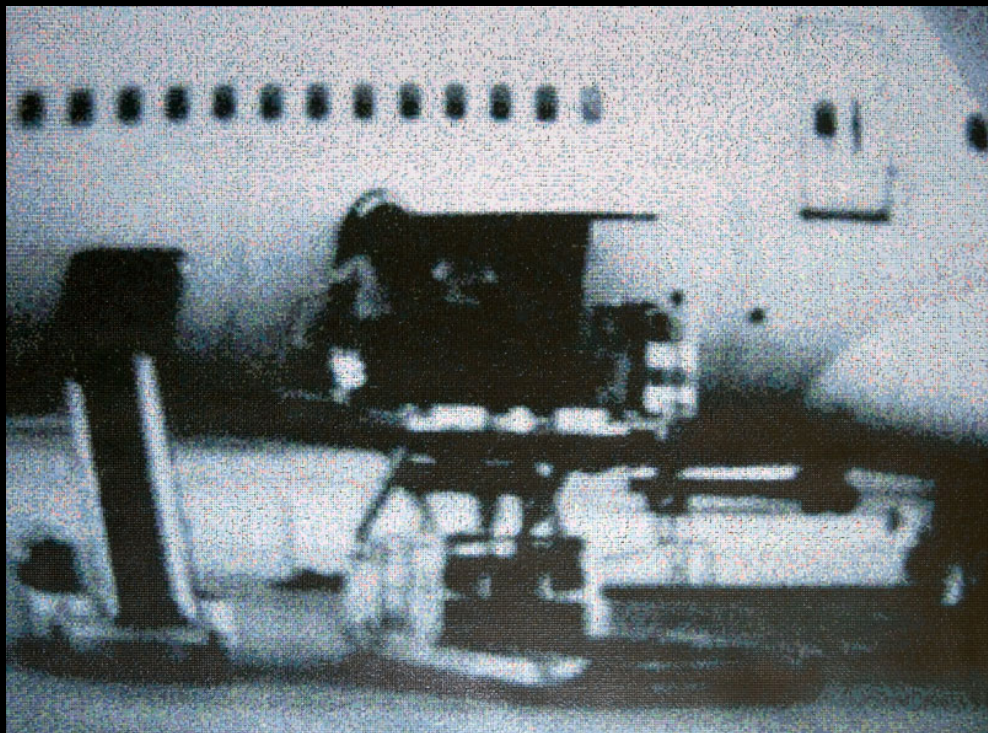
*Acrylic on canvas.*



***LastSeen\_40x60\_07***

*Acrylic on canvas.*





**MIA2\_52x70**

*Acrylic on canvas.*





***Mother&Daughter\_48x72\_2016***

*Acrylic on canvas.*



***Office\_I\_36x48\_2011***

*Acrylic on canvas.*





***Party\_48x60\_2011***

*Acrylic on canvas.*



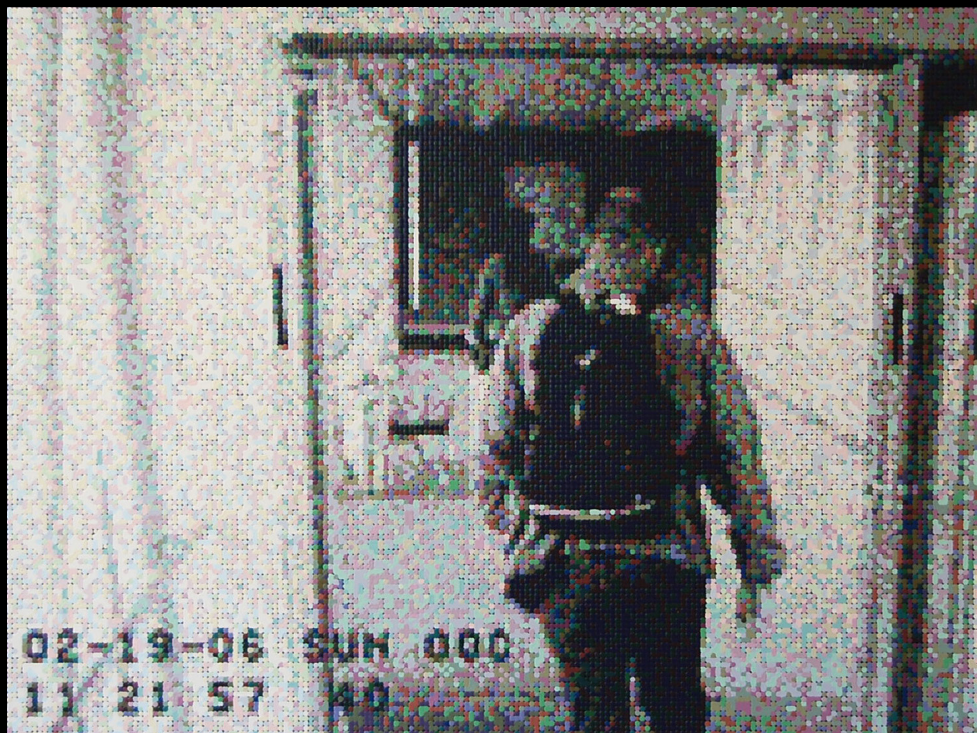
***Selfie\_MiamiBeach\_36x48\_2016***

*Acrylic on canvas.*





*Suspect\_acrylic\_on\_canvas\_40x60\_2006*  
*Acrylic on canvas.*



*Terminal\_Version\_II\_36x48\_07*

*Acrylic on canvas.*





**THREEGUYS\_40X54**

*Acrylic on canvas.*