



Educator Resource

# Margaux Williamson

## Shoes, books, hands, buildings, and cars

April 17, 2025 — August 3, 2025



## Exhibition Overview

**Margaux Williamson**'s paintings draw from the domestic views and objects of her home, studio, city streets, and the natural world around her. They are also shaped by a personal archive of gathered materials—photographs, torn magazine clippings, fragments of text, drawings, and lists. Though familiar, these source materials are reimagined by Williamson, allowing them to drift freely across her canvases. Her colour palette and brushwork, combined with contrasting perspectives, might remind you of memories and dreams. This creates a soft surrealism. In her experience, paintings serve as “a refuge from words.”

What distinguishes Williamson's work is her subtle yet evocative use of light and shadow, often lending a cinematic quality to her compositions. Her style embraces an abstract, gestural quality that invites multiple interpretations, creating a sense of both intimacy and distance. Each composition features objects that indicate the existence of a person, but the figure is absent.

*Shoes, books, hands, buildings, and cars* (2025) highlights the evolution of Williamson's painting practice, which has grown in both complexity and scale. It also aligns with the museum's vision of presenting artists who engage with a range of cultural disciplines. Beyond painting, Williamson has deep connections to literature, music, and film, which she has explored through various collaborations.

For the Ontario Curriculum, Margaux Williamson's work can be applied to explore the impact and influence of mass media and popular culture. This Educational Resource Guide appropriately considers the Ontario Curriculum for Grades 6—12 Visual Art and Grades 9-12 English.

### **About the Artist**

Margaux Williamson (b.1976) was born in Pittsburgh and lives in Toronto. She completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at Queen's University, Kingston, and was the recipient of an exchange scholarship to the Glasgow School of Art.



## Key Terms

**Still Life** a genre of art that depicts inanimate objects arranged in a visually appealing composition

**Domesticity** referring to home or personal spaces

**Surrealism** the principles, ideals, or practice of producing fantastical or incongruous imagery or effects in art, literature, film, or theatre by means of unnatural or irrational juxtapositions and combinations. Or, an arts movement that challenges traditional notions of reality through strange imagery.

**Abstraction** art that does not attempt to represent an accurate depiction of a visual reality but instead uses shapes, colours, forms and gestural marks to achieve its effect

## Questions (K-8)

What art materials do you think the artist used to create this art?

What painting techniques do you see in the exhibition?

What colours does Williamson primarily use? Why do you think the artist chose these colours?

## Questions (9-12+)

This artist uses still life paintings to encourage viewers to consider everyday objects in a new way. What object stood out to you?

What sort of narrative can you identify in the exhibition? What symbols, materials, or evidence does the artist use to tell this story?

What colour palettes do you notice in these paintings? How do they make you feel?

How does Margaux Williamson use colour and objects in Shoes, books, hands, buildings, and cars (2025) to engage the viewer?

# Activity | English

## Grades 6+

Margaux William's work aims to illustrate the narrative of everyday objects and contemporary life. Her work is observational to the nature, feelings, and representations of found objects.

### A Day In The Life Of An Object [40 minutes]

Students will write a short story, poem, or fictional narrative reflecting on the perspective of a selected object. Encourage students to be as fantastical or realistic as they prefer.

#### Suggestions

- **Short Story:** consider a short story where the object becomes a narrator. Develop a narrative that describes the object's day in the life
- **Letter:** write a letter written from the perspective of the object
- **Poem:** write a poem characterizing an emotion in the perspective of the object
- **Time-Traveling Object:** create a creative writing piece from the perspective of the selected object in an alternate location, timeline, etc



#### Guiding Questions

- The themes in this exhibition include memory, domesticity, and surrealism. What other themes does your work explore?
- Margaux Williamson's work can be described as **surrealist**. How can you use **surrealism** in writing?

#### Learning Objectives

This learning workshop provides students with the themes presented in *Shoes, books, hands, buildings, and cars* (2025) through hands-on activities, critical reflection, and group collaboration.



## Image Credits

Images courtesy of Margaux Williamson:

*Window*, 2017, oil on canvas.

*Solar Light*, 2025, oil on canvas.

*House*, 2025, oil on canvas.

*Flowers and Cup*, 2024, oil on canvas.

*Museum (detail)*, 2025, oil on canvas.

*Flowers and Money*, 2024, oil on canvas.

Margaux Williamson, *Shoes, books, hands, buildings, and cars*. Installation view, MOCA Toronto, 2025. © Margaux Williamson. Photo: LF Documentation.

## Resources

### Watch

[Margaux Williamson: Interiors, Curatorial conversation](#) | McMichael Canadian Art Collection

[Videos](#) | MOCA Toronto

### Read

[Margaux Williamson: Interiors](#) | Museum London