

Sample of Work

The Black-Eyed Pea Series

Multidiscipline
By Terry French

Description of the Work

The Black-Eyed Pea Series is an ongoing body of oil paintings centered on a single, humble subject: the black-eyed pea. Rendered in isolation against expansive black fields, each painting elevates the object beyond still life into symbol—inviting reflection on ancestry, survival, tradition, and cultural continuity.

The black-eyed pea is deeply rooted in African American and Southern traditions, often associated with nourishment, luck, and resilience. By removing the pea from its familiar culinary context and presenting it alone, I ask viewers to slow down and confront its presence. The scale, texture, and subtle variation across the series allow the object to shift from ordinary to monumental, from overlooked to revered.

Each painting in the series is hand-rendered using traditional oil techniques. The dark background functions as both void and halo, emphasizing form while creating a contemplative space. Although the subject remains consistent, no two paintings are identical—each carries its own tonal balance, surface energy, and emotional weight.

This series currently consists of six completed oil-on-canvas works, with additional pieces in development.

Materials & Process



Terry French (Left) Herwicks Store Manager (Right)

All works in *The Black-Eyed Pea Series* are painted using **Old Holland Classic Oil Colors**, a material choice that is both intentional and symbolic. (Purchased at Herwicks)

Old Holland oil paints trace their origins to **1664**, when Dutch master painters established recipes that are still used today. These same pigments—made with traditional formulations and modern refinements—appear in the works of artists such as Vermeer, Van Gogh, and Frans Hals. Old Holland paints are manufactured in the Netherlands using time-honored methods that prioritize color intensity, permanence, and archival longevity.

By using Old Holland paints, I intentionally juxtapose **old-world European painting traditions** with a **culturally specific subject rooted in African American history**. This contrast reinforces one of the central themes of the work: the preservation of cultural knowledge across time. Just as Old Holland paints are designed to endure for centuries, the black-eyed pea represents traditions that have survived through generations.

The use of these materials is not nostalgic—it is forward-facing. It asserts that everyday cultural symbols deserve the same permanence, care, and reverence historically reserved for classical subjects.

Contemporary Extension (Contextual Note)

While the paintings stand independently as fine art objects, the series also extends into digital space through an NFC-enabled art format called the *Stream Disc*. Select works can be tapped with a smartphone to access accompanying digital experiences such as writing, spoken word, or visual media. This extension allows the work to exist simultaneously in traditional and contemporary forms, expanding access while preserving artistic integrity.

Cultural Relevance

This work reflects lived experience, regional tradition, and cultural memory rooted in San Antonio and the broader American South. The black-eyed pea functions as a shared symbol—one that crosses generations, households, and histories. Through repetition, restraint, and material intention, *The Black-Eyed Pea Series* honors the quiet power of what has endured.

Individual Works

The Black-Eyed Pea Series



Painting I

The Black-Eyed Pea (Eye Up)

Oil on Canvas

This painting establishes the foundational orientation of the series. The black-eyed pea is centered and presented with its “eye” facing upward, referencing a traditional belief: when hung in the home with the eye facing toward God, the black-eyed pea becomes a symbol of good luck, blessing, and prosperity. The dark surrounding field removes distraction, allowing the viewer to contemplate both form and meaning. This work introduces the pea not simply as an object, but as a spiritual marker—quiet, watchful, and intentional.



Painting II

The Black-Eyed Pea (Stillness)

Oil on Canvas

In this work, subtle shifts in tone and surface texture emphasize stillness. The black-eyed pea appears suspended, almost floating within the black field. The eye remains oriented upward, reinforcing the ritual placement associated with protection and blessing within the home. The painting invites pause, encouraging the viewer to reflect on how faith, tradition, and intention are often expressed through small, everyday symbols.



Painting III

The Black-Eyed Pea (Presence)

Oil on Canvas

This piece explores presence through weight and shadow. The pea feels grounded and substantial, its surface softly modeled through layered oil techniques. The upward-facing eye continues the tradition of orientation toward God, suggesting vigilance, gratitude, and continuity. Hung in a domestic space, the painting functions as both artwork and talisman—an object meant to be lived with rather than merely observed.



Painting IV

The Black-Eyed Pea (Quiet Offering)

Oil on Canvas

Here, the black-eyed pea is rendered with a gentler contrast, allowing warmth to emerge from within the dark field. The composition references offering and intention—echoing the practice of bringing black-eyed peas into the home during moments of transition, such as the new year. The upward eye signifies hope and blessing, reinforcing the idea that prosperity is not only material, but spiritual and communal.



Painting V

The Black-Eyed Pea (Legacy)

Oil on Canvas

This painting focuses on continuity across generations. The black-eyed pea appears weathered yet enduring, its form familiar and steadfast. The upward-facing eye acts as a symbolic link between past, present, and future—between those who carried the tradition and those who continue it. The work reflects how cultural knowledge survives not through grand monuments, but through repetition and care.

- NO IMAGE AVAILABLE

Painting VI

The Black-Eyed Pea (Home)

Oil on Canvas

This piece emphasizes the relationship between the artwork and domestic space. The black-eyed pea is positioned as it would be when intentionally hung within the home—eye facing upward toward God—serving as a quiet guardian of the household. The painting reinforces the belief that art can function as a living presence, offering protection, blessing, and prosperity through intention and placement.

Digital Works (White Background)

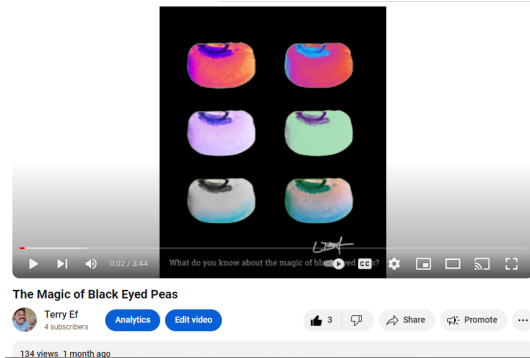


The Black-Eyed Pea (Digital Studies)

Digital Works

The digital works presented on white backgrounds are contemporary extensions of the painted series. Stripped of the black field, the black-eyed pea appears isolated in open space, allowing the symbol to be recontextualized for modern platforms and reproduction. These works maintain the upward-facing eye orientation, preserving the spiritual and cultural significance while expanding accessibility. They function as studies, repetitions, and affirmations of the central symbol across mediums.

Spoken Word



The Magic of Black-Eyed Peas

Spoken Word Video | 3:45 minutes

The spoken word piece serves as the narrative voice of the series. Performed and written by the artist, *The Magic of Black-Eyed Peas* explores memory, tradition, faith, and cultural inheritance through language and rhythm. The poem reflects on the belief that black-eyed peas carry luck and blessing, particularly when honored with intention. Presented alongside the visual works, the spoken word deepens the emotional and spiritual context, allowing the audience to hear what the paintings hold in silence.

Link: <https://youtu.be/qMdjzox-eZg>



Book Series (Draft)

The Magic of Black-Eyed Peas

Illustrated Children's Book Series (In Progress)

The Magic of Black-Eyed Peas is an illustrated book series that extends the visual language of *The Black-Eyed Pea Series* into narrative form. The story centers on a familiar tradition: the presence of black-eyed peas in the home as a symbol of good luck, blessing, and prosperity—particularly around the new year.

The opening scene depicts a home in quiet anticipation. A single black-eyed pea hangs on the wall, its eye facing upward toward the sky. This orientation reflects a cultural belief echoed throughout my visual work: when displayed with intention—eye facing toward God—the black-eyed pea becomes a watchful symbol of protection and abundance within the household.

As the story unfolds, the sudden disappearance of the black-eyed peas disrupts the home's sense of balance. What follows is a journey rooted in faith, memory, and collective responsibility. The narrative treats the black-eyed pea not as a magical object in isolation, but as a carrier of meaning—activated by belief, care, and tradition.

The illustrations mirror the tone of the oil paintings: restrained, reverent, and centered on domestic space. The pea is often shown suspended, looking upward, reinforcing the connection between the object, the home, and the divine. The book is designed to be read across generations, allowing cultural knowledge to pass organically through story and image.

This book series functions as a narrative companion to the painted works. While the paintings offer stillness and contemplation, the book provides context—showing how the black-eyed pea lives within the rhythms of daily life, faith, and family. Together, the visual and literary works form a unified exploration of how small symbols carry lasting power.

Closing Note

Together, these works present the black-eyed pea as more than a subject—it becomes a symbol of intention. Hung in the home with the eye facing upward toward God, the black-eyed pea represents good luck, blessing, and prosperity. Through repetition, restraint, and reverence, *The Black-Eyed Pea Series* honors a tradition that continues to watch over those who choose to remember it.