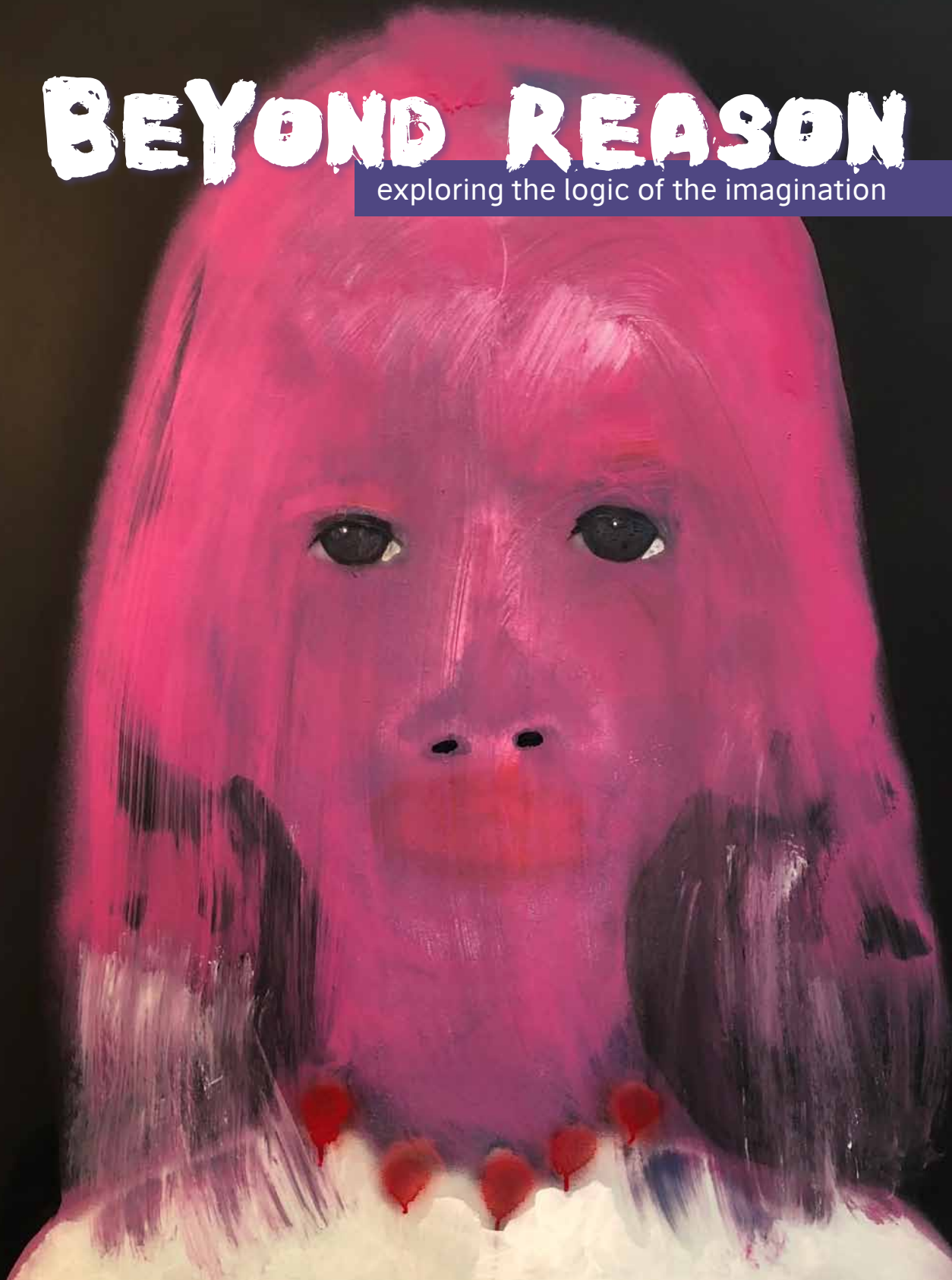


# BEYOND REASON

exploring the logic of the imagination





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Curated by Kevin Wilson

Karen Napaljarri Barnes, Karen Black, Amber Boardman, Sally Bourke,  
Angela Brennan, Matthew Clarke, Aleks Danko, DC Style Fylez,  
Rosie Deacon, Simone Eisler, Troy Emery, Heath Franco, Hannah Gartside,  
Minka Gillian, Kyoko Imazu, Laith McGregor, Amanda Marburg,  
Sharon Muir, Louise Paramor, Tom Polo, Zoe Porter, David Spooner,  
Jacqui Stockdale, The Ryan Sisters, Michael Vale, Yarrenyty Arltre Artists



# BEYOND REASON - exploring the logic of the imagination

Kevin Wilson

For me this exhibition project had its genesis in 19th century Romantic poetry and the 20th century novel. In an age of realism the Romantic poets shifted the angle of perception from the qualities external objects possess to the question of what effects the so-called qualities have on the mind and emotions of the subject. Contemporary fiction introduced the concept of 'peripeteia', which denotes a plot full of reversal and change as opposed to the more simplistic forward movement of the 'peripatetic'. With this came absurdity, satire, parody and a world vacillating between inner and outer realities. Comedy turned the world upside down and then put it back in place for a laugh. Satire turned the world upside down and left it that way.

The great Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge compared reason to a primary level of the imagination where we originate, create, unify and synthesize our experiences and then proposed a secondary imagination where the artistic imagination dissolves, diffuses and dissipates this world in order to recreate a new vision. For the Romantic poets the secondary imagination was the means by which the escape was made from swinging like a pendulum to the opposite view of pure solipsism that the dwelling on the mind could possibly create. Coleridge talked about the secondary imagination in terms of the logic of the imagination. In other words the artistic imaginative process actually had a structure.

*BEYOND REASON - exploring the logic of the imagination* sets out to survey the work of 26 artists and their structural engagement with what may appear silly, empty, absurd, dark, and fun. What attracted me to these artists was the raw engagement of imagery, the dark undercurrents of story telling, the strong colour and gestural painting, exaggeration, the play with masks and costume, the haptic mark making, the colourful exploration of popular culture, the use of animals, turning things upside down, the sharp satire and much more.

The diversity of structuring devices in the exhibition reflects the powerful push and pull dynamic the artists are grappling with in their representational approach. The gestural mark making of Karen Black, Tom Polo and Angela Brennan, capture moments of rupture, pause, release, whimsy and reverie or an in between place, at times delicate, at other times layered and confident. For Black painting has a special way of giving an idea form and opening up a different kind of space. Brennan's exuberant improvisation digs deeply into a vaguely meaningful imaginary world. Polo sees the geography of his canvas as a pausing mechanism that lets him capture a person, feeling, or moment before it exits a scene or stage.

Amanda Marburg and Michael Vale use the theatre construct as a distancing device. Many of the works are like sets that contain a cast of characters that don't have any purpose except to undermine the revered tradition of oil painting.

Marburg and Vale respectively create a series of non-characters in constructed play dough or classical European landscapes in order to elicit humour, absurdity and a cartoonish shallowness.

Jacqui Stockdale theatrically reworks documented history to reanimate voices that paternal histories repress in order to bring forth mothers, monsters, lovers and the wild folk known to haunt the colonial scene.<sup>1</sup> Sally Bourke creates a portrait gallery of theatrical proportions in which she imbues her figures in the form of mythological vagabonds, everyday hobos, loved ones and haters, with a collective identity incorporating our violent colonial past, the present and the future. Out of faces formed by colour and not line work, eyes peer out at us like the eyes of a doll trapped within inanimate form.

Amber Boardman's absurd and humorous paintings feature cartoonish figures, located within a theatre set of domesticity that highlights elements of personal relationships and the never-ending desire to be beautiful. For Boardman, these are characters that stress the uncanny tendency for people to change their bodies to look better but end up looking worse.

The DC Style Fylez extends Boardman's social media 'selfie' beauty narrative into theatre where the artist and character DC are aesthetically intertwined. The DC Style Fylez provides a satire of fashion obsession and video fashion blogs. The 'fun on the surface' evident in DC Style Fylez videos also is apparent in Laith McGregor's overdrawing with schoolboy like graffiti on his own self-portrait or in his video self-portrait *Clay*, where an anonymous pair of male hands invasively caresses and manipulates the artist's face, masking, so to speak, something unsettling and empty about our own character<sup>2</sup>.

Aleks Danko locates his work primarily in conceptual word play combined with a honed down, and at times, appropriated imagery which is intellectually dense and concise. It challenges our suburban laziness, complacency and political poverty. Its humour and nonsense mask a darker undertone and challenges our contemporary obsession with self and self-image and our powerlessness in the face of ignorance. The image of a series of placards printed with the word 'Ha'<sup>3</sup> leaning upside down against the wall make an ambiguous reference to political demonstrations or group dynamics, generally as both powerful and useless.

Perhaps, infused with the most theatricality are Heath Franco's videos with their hyper-reality, saturated colour, costumes, and their play with the real and illusory, fact and fantasy. In Franco's theatre there are many characters and all of them are played by him and are interchangeable. His work comes closest to the 'peripeteia' of contemporary fiction. His videos are full of 'psychedelic montages, disillusioned realities, simulated narratives, repetitive gestures, and

memorable jingles looped to create distressed rhythms and risqué climaxes'.<sup>4</sup> Franco's works are structured with respect to flow and rhythm not traditional narrative.

David Spooner's *Quartz Quilt* is a reference to Quartz clocks and is a time capsule of lots of different work he has collected and sewn together. This quilt, literally suspended like a tent over the gallery's ramp, becomes a room of stories. It is as if an alien animal(s)/hive mind has set up its home and we are moving through it. Similarly Minka Gillian's work is open ended and transparent. Gillian explores the idea that our bodies are not tightly sealed structures but loosely woven forms that are constantly and invisibly taking in and letting out minute amounts of liquid. Her works are vessels that contain and transfer our fluids, organs and ideas. Sharon Muir's seemingly playful sculptures, turn kitsch 50s style decorations upside down and locate them in surreal landscapes to act as flower vases via their original bases. Zoe Porter uses her own body as form and has a "relentless method of assembling objects, swathing the body, acting and enacting, dismantling, reassembling, shedding, gathering, and destroying."<sup>5</sup>

In the early development of this exhibition, it had the draft title of *Up, Up and Away*, and had a strong focus on play – 'dress-up, cut up, play up, make up' etc. At that time a childlike sense of play and storytelling was evident. But there were some deeper and more expansive themes underlying much of the work I was selecting. This was the case with three of the artists who employed the fairy tale as a vehicle for their work. Kyoko Imazu's beautiful and detailed paper cuts were like the illustrations from a children's illustrated story that exposed the animal kingdom hidden in the forest, but they also introduced an element of the supernatural, as the artist introduced a big group of monsters called Yokai – some of them strange animals, some objects, some natural phenomena like wind and thunder. Simone Eisler's depiction of a Grimm's fairytale speaks of deeper issues around incest, whilst Marburg's colourful picturing of scenes, also from Grimm's fairy-tales, contain surreal and dark subject matter. With the addition of The Ryan Sisters and their elongated figures and crazy Halloween style imagery, things definitely shifted from a childlike fun base to an adult perspective. The Ryan Sisters, despite the childlike fun and play, explore deeper social issues around class, death, body horror, duality and identity.

Animals also figure strongly in the exhibition. There are various painterly, ceramic, and sculptural representations of animals like wallabies, cats, rabbits, lions, foxes, birds etc. Matthew Clarke chronicles, in vibrant colour, the animals that surround him on his rural property, whilst Karen Napaljarri Barnes paints her Budgerigar dreaming story in intense abstract colour. The soft animal sculptures from found materials made by the Yarrenyty Arltere women reflect the deep connection the women have with their land.

But there are also indeterminate animals that are defined less by species than by a human interpretation of what that animal does or is feeling e.g. Troy Emery's *Loner* or *Lost Friend* or for the role they play in totally camouflaging the human as in Simone Eisler's *Allure* installation. Many are humans dressed as animals such as Jacqui Stockdale's *Araneus*, or Rosie Deacon's Kangaroo in *Bit Fat in DA Back*. There are animals that co-exist with other strange mythic creatures or perform human rituals such as weddings or parties in Kyoko Imazu's paper cuts. Zoe Porter tests the ground of human/animal hybridity in her works on paper and performances. And of course there are animals becoming humans as in Michael Vale's *Smoking Dog Surrounded by Phantoms* or animals doing human things like Rosie Deacon's water skiing Kangaroo in *Skidooroo*.

Many of these artists use animals for a broad range of reasons. No doubt there is the human attraction to the animal as the 'unknown'; that despite observation and study they still elicit a range of emotions from playful to sinister, cute to scary, beautiful to repulsive. Emery explores the idea of the animal as a specimen, a decoration, and as a kind of undermined museological display. Deacon's fun play with popular culture explores our obsession with the animal as symbol of Australian culture and Stockdale's tableau of a kind of mythical spider woman emerging from a European flavoured 19th Century post card theatre set suggests to me a kind of zoomorphism. Hannah Gartside's sexy bunnies not only is a play on the 'breed like rabbits' slang that we use to link rabbits to human breeding patterns, but also links fashion and attraction.

*BEYOND REASON - exploring the logic of the imagination* is a rambling picaresque exhibition of works that venture into the fairy-tale, the absurd, masquerade, animal/human transformation, theatre, satire, anti-fashion and parody. The exhibition exudes whimsy, improvisation, spontaneity, humour, gesture and intuition whilst exploring ideas of cultural identity, popular culture, and sexuality.

Kevin Wilson is a curator at QUT Art Museum, Brisbane and has worked as a curator and arts manager for over 30 years across Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

1. Damien Smith, *Hoovanah in the highest: Jacqui Stockdale and the post-colonial lens*. Art Blart, 13 July 2018  
2. Hamish Sawyer, *Laith McGregor: Borrowed Time* catalogue, 2018, page 7  
3. "...you might as well laugh mate, there's nothing else to do...or we can stand with Pauline and chuck gravel.", 2017, silk screen text on plywood, pine timber and acrylic paint, dimensions variable  
4. Melissa Pesa, *Heath Franco: LIFE IS SEXY* Art Almanac 29 March 2018  
5. William Platz, *Penumbra by Zoe Porter*, OneSpace Gallery room brochure, February 2018

# How to use this book

This catalogue is also a tool for you to use. Apart from learning about the work of the artists and their creative process we have designed this publication with blank pages after each artist section to provide you with space to:



Be creative or structure your response. There's 26 blank pages that's one for every letter of the alphabet; that's one for every fortnight.







## Karen Napaljarri Barnes

### *Skin name – Napaljarri*

#### BIO

Karen Napaljarri Barnes was born in Lajamanu, a remote Aboriginal community in semi-arid country on the edge of the Tanami Desert 1000km north-west of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. She moved to Yuendumu, 700km south, after finishing school in Lajamanu, to be with her family.

She has been painting with Warlukurlangu Artists Aboriginal Corporation, an Aboriginal owned and governed Art Centre, since 2001. She is the granddaughter of Warlukurlangu's acclaimed artist Judy Napangardi Watson and they would sit together painting at the Art Centre every day when Karen first started painting.

Karen paints the dreaming stories handed down to her by her family for generations of millenia, stories which come from Mina Mina, country west of Yuendumu of which her family are the custodians. She also paints Karnta Jukurrpa (Women's Dreaming), Wakulyarri Jukurrpa (Wallaby Dreaming), Ngarlajiyi Jukurrpa (Bush Carrot Dreaming) Ngatijirri Jukurrpa (Budgerigar Dreaming). Karen loves sport, especially basketball and softball, and is an avid football spectator, barracking for Lajamanu.

The Jukurrpa site shown in these paintings for ngatijirri (budgerigar) is at Yangarnmpi, south west of Yuendumu. Ngatirirri are small, bright green birds native to central Australia which are common around the Yuendumu area, especially after the summer rains. Men would hunt for ngatijirri nests, robbing them of eggs and juvenile birds, which are both considered delicacies. The men would go also go out hunting for adult, flying ngatijirri, which they would kill by swinging branches, killing sticks or karli (boomerangs) to hit the birds in flight. The ngatijirri travelled to Yangarnmpi from Patirlirri, near Willowra to the east of Yuendumu and travelled further on to Marngangi, north/west of Mount Dennison and west of Yuendumu. Each time the flock of ancestral ngatijirri lands, they perform ceremonies, singing and dancing as they fly and roost in trees. After good rains ngatijirri breeding cycles shorten, resulting in an explosion of colour.

Custodians for the Ngatijirri Jukurrpa are Napaljarri/Nungarrayi women and Japaljarri/Jungarrayi men.

Traditional iconography can be used to depict the sites and birds of this Jukurrpa. The iconography used for the sites and waterholes are concentric circles, while cross-like shapes depict the footprints of the birds on the ground and give an indication of the large flocks of ngatijirri that can be found near Yangarnmpi.

In this painting Karen has used a non-traditional way of painting the Jukurrpa. She has used a more realistic depiction of the birds and a very abstract representation of the landscape and colours.



#### WORKS

1. *Ngatijirri Jukurrpa – Budgerigar Dreaming*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 152 x 107cm
2. *Ngatijirri Jukurrpa – Budgerigar Dreaming*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 107 x 152cm
3. *Ngatijirri Jukurrpa – Budgerigar Dreaming*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 46 x 92cm

Courtesy of the Warlukurlangu Artists Aboriginal Corporation and Jan Murphy Gallery.





Karen Black

- Layering
- Extremes
- Splashed
- Colour
- Painterly
- Unwieldy
- Abstract
- Narrative
- Figurative
- Moments
- Experimental
- Materiality
- Disaster
- Emotive
- Associative

WORKS

1. *Licking the rain*, 2017, oil on canvas 152.5 x 122cm, courtesy of Kurt Crowther and Rosco Goodworth.
2. *As high as she can get*, 2018, earthenware, glaze, 82 x 30 x 20cm, 15 x 15 x 12cm, QUT Art Collection purchased 2018.
3. *Floating Dream (Lullaby)*, 2018, oil on linen, 66 x 117cm, courtesy of the artist and Sullivan + Strumpf, Sydney.
4. *The Hand That Feeds*, 2017, acrylic and oil on linen, 152.5 x 122cm framed, QUT Art Collection purchased 2017.
5. *Yellow Dress, dancing woman*, 2018, earthenware and glaze, 53 x 20 x 34cm, courtesy of Kurt Crowther and Rosco Goodworth.
6. *Harriet from upstairs*, 2018, earthenware, glaze, 86 x 40 x 34cm, courtesy of the artist and Sullivan + Strumpf, Sydney.



2.



Karen Black's painting practice explores time and space within global social, economic and political situations. With an interest in architecture, culture and history, the work tells the human stories within these environments, blending the historical with the mythical and traversing the complex interchange between the personal and the political.

www.karenblack.com.au | Instagram: @black.karen

BIO

Black completed a Bachelor of Fine Art at Griffith University in 2011. She is the recipient of the 2018 Artbank and QPAC commission and was the recipient of an *Artspace one year Sydney Studio Residency* in 2017. Black's inclusion in recent exhibitions of note include *Sidney Myer Fund Australian Ceramic Award*, Shepparton Art Museum, 2017, *Shut up and Paint*, NGV International, Melbourne 2016-17, *Borders, Barriers, Walls*, Monash University Museum of Art 2016 and *Painting, More Painting*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne 2016.

In 2016 Black was a finalist in *The Gold Award* at Rockhampton Regional Gallery and in 2014 was awarded the *Belle Arti Prize* and was the *Art and Australia/Credit Suisse Private Banking Contemporary Art Award* recipient in 2013. In 2011 Black was named as a *Global Spotlight Artist* at Art Taipei. Black's work has been exhibited at Art Basel HK, Art Stage Singapore, Art Taipei, and Tokyo Art Fair.

Her works are held in prestigious public collections including Monash University Museum of Art, National Gallery of Victoria, Australian War Memorial, Griffith University Art Gallery, Artbank, Macquarie Bank Collection, QUT Art Museum and the Salsali Private Museum in Dubai, in addition to various private collections both in Australia and overseas.

Q&A

*How does your artistic vision connect with your everyday life?*

My work is my life. They feed into each other.

*Is there a specific audience you think your work is suited to?*

No, not really. That is not something I think about.

*How do you approach planning and making your work?*

In many different ways – collage, drawings, writing, reading or just starting to paint.

*What are some of the ways that in the process of making you find yourself detouring from or refining your original idea/vision?*

I run off on tangents that sometimes lead to better work.

*Where does a work take you personally?*

Depends on all sorts of things.

*When is a work finished?*

That is the question I often ask myself!



4.



5.



**Amber Boardman**





## Amber Boardman

Humour  
Self-acceptance  
Empathy  
Textural  
Playful  
Vibrant  
Grotesque  
Distortion  
Cartoonish  
Chaos  
Exaggeration  
Transformation  
Aspiration  
Character  
Social media  
Narrative



### WORKS

1. *Height Discrepancy*, 2018, oil on canvas and polyester, paint can, paper, 186 x 91cm
2. *Before and After Glamour Shots*, 2018, oil on canvas, 41 x 51cm
3. *Familial Triangulation Field Day Event*, 2018, acrylic and oil on canvas, 56 x 91cm
4. *Triangulation*, 2018, oil on canvas and polyester, 103 x 91cm
5. *Grab*, 2017, oil on polyester, 112 x 92cm
6. *Blonde on Lawnchair*, 2016, oil on canvas, 91 x 122cm
7. *Princess Hair Middle Aged Gravity*, 2017, oil on canvas, 41 x 51cm
8. *You Look Great. I'm Spilling Out of This Dress*, 2016, oil on canvas, 46 x 56cm

All works courtesy of the artist.

Through the invention of alter ego characters, Amber Boardman's paintings explore the ideology of the American Dream and the endless desire to transform and improve the body as promoted by Internet and social media culture. 'Jade', Boardman's recent insta-persona, is a quirky painted character who melts, drips, and molds her image, face, body, and lifestyle in an epic 21st Century pursuit of the ultimate self-care routine. (Brigitte Mulholland – catalogue essay for @jadefad, a social media feed in paint).

[www.amberboardman.com](http://www.amberboardman.com) | Instagram: @amberboardman

### BIO

Amber Boardman lives and works in Sydney, New York, and Atlanta. She has exhibited her paintings and animation throughout the US, Australia and internationally including BAM's Next Wave Festival in NYC, and the 2018 *Archibald and Geelong Prizes* in Australia. Her work has appeared in numerous publications including Juxtapoz Magazine. She has been the recipient of multiple awards and her works are held in many private and public collections. She is represented by Sandler Hudson Gallery in Atlanta.



### Q&A

#### *How does your artistic vision connect with your everyday life?*

These works highlight everyday occurrences that are easy to overlook, such as the process of striving toward something like beauty, the appearance of youth, or the perfect relationship.

#### *Is there a specific audience you think your work is suited to?*

The people who tend to see themselves portrayed in my work the most are women. But anyone who identifies with the aspiration to transform the body and the self into something more might connect with my paintings. The younger generation of people who are familiar with internet memes and internet culture will also get something extra out of the work.

#### *How do you approach planning and making your work?*

A lot of research from a range of

sources goes into the planning of my work. This includes looking at Instagram, reading novels, peer-reviewed journals, essays on the effects of social media, and contemporary art magazines. This research helps me to create characters who can carry a narrative and portray the behaviours, trends and personalities I observe on social media.

#### *What are some of the ways that in the process of making you find yourself detouring from or refining your original idea/vision?*

I see painting as a dialog between an idea and the visual manifestation of the idea. There is a continuous question and answer session happening with each application of more paint. As a figure develops, the questions become more specific to the character. For example, is this person comfortable in her own skin? How might this character be handling

being middle-aged and still single?

#### *Where does a work take you personally?*

My paintings communicate ideas for me that I'm not able to articulate with words. Visual information is a faster mode of communication than that of language. I'm interested in how both of these, the painting and the title of a painting, can create meaning and feelings within myself and the viewer.

#### *When is a work finished?*

A work is finished when I feel it speaks for itself and doesn't need me anymore. But being sensitive to this 'voice' has been an ongoing learning process for me over the last 20 years. Perhaps it's like tasting a soup and knowing what it needs or when it's ready.