

Amber Boardman

DUDE

Chalk Horse, Sydney

15 June – 8 July 2023



Amber Boardman, *Baggage Competition*, 2023, oil on canvas, 122 x 152 cm / 48 x 60 in

On Dude

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Thousands of bodies have passed through my brushes over the last several years while in the process of creating giant canvases filled with internet-fueled crowds. In contrast, when I started out on the journey of forking paths that became this exhibition, DUDE, I asked myself, what if I removed all figures from my work? It's worth mentioning that I'm not really the kind of artist who is interested in the traditional genres of portraiture, still life, landscape, and yet I found myself wanting to paint inanimate objects as a vehicle for exploring some 'back to basics' and nerdishly intricate facets of image making, namely, how light and shadows can behave differently depending on the material an object is made from; shiny gold, frosty glass, sparkly diamonds.

I like mulling over the ways that paintings can operate on multiple levels. I think of it this way: Level One is the realm of the purely visual, think color, shape, and pattern. Most abstract paintings operate on this level. Level

Two could include representational painting and incorporates the previous elements (color, shape, pattern) but adds another layer of understanding, an 'aboutness' in the work. Here, liquid goopy paint transforms into a coherent subject and viewers can more easily make connections between what a work is about—this red-hued rounded shape is an apple, or perhaps a face—as they compare the rendered shapes on the canvas to symbols in their own visual vocabularies. The Third Level is one I've centered my work around for the last few years and is not commonly seen on the walls of contemporary painting exhibitions as it belongs more to the realms of film and literature. Level Three involves an extended narrative. I want my exhibitions to resemble something like a short story where each painting is a sentence and the works taken together tell a story. This is the case with DUDE, an exhibition of 22 paintings at Chalk Horse Gallery in Sydney Australia.

Narratives naturally emerged as I thought through some of the ways still lifes—or piles of objects—could have stories attached to them. I asked myself what sorts of things are more than just things: engagement rings, cryptocurrency USB sticks: love and money. In the process of creating this show a central character emerged, some dude, and I followed him home. I found a serial subculture hobbyist who is into coffee, hiking gear, sports and its trophies. I saw evidence of the ebbs and flows of love relationships. In *Grovel Gifts*, offerings of flowers, jewellery and an expensive silk scarf pile up in a box, given in apology throughout the course of a rocky relationship. Sometimes the detritus from one painting becomes fodder for another. The mark of a moment of questionable judgement in *Site Specific Wall Punch Installation* becomes the source material for *Drywall and Pink Insulation*, a still life made from the broken bits of punched wall from the previous painting. Many of these paintings contain objects that appear in several others, allowing for a cohesive narrative to emerge for the observant viewer.

Authors of fiction will sometimes talk about the ways their characters make choices they didn't exactly intend. It's almost as if there is a consciousness that emerges in the creation of a story that is its own thing. The author, or artist, isn't completely in control. Our stories, our characters, our paintings have a mind of their own. While this is a show about some guy, there is no guy present. This dude materializes through arrangements of objects. He is part me, part people I've met, part internet caricature, and part friends of mine (incidentally, many of my closest women friends greet each other with the words "hey dude" or "hey man", a cultural artifact less about gender than about us making fun of ourselves and the culture we find ourselves in). This dude is creating these still lifes as a way of coping with the events of everyday life. He goes to work, comes home, tries out new hobbies, makes love, and all the while, turns these experiences into his art.