

Amber Boardman

@jadefad: a social media feed in paint

Eleanor Zeichner

On relocating from her home in Brooklyn, New York, to Sydney's Northern Beaches, Amber Boardman rediscovered her love of paint. She was drawn to its messy materiality, at odds with its fine art tradition. It seemed an apt medium through which to explore another fascination: the aspirational culture of social media. Rapid image making catalysed by quickly changing fads offered a window into a world curated and monetised for mass consumption. Instagram and YouTube are awash with beauty influencers deftly demonstrating the use of various makeup products, 'elements of paint in everyday life,' Boardman explains.

'@jadefad: a social media feed in paint' explores the transformative qualities of paint in an interwoven narrative that plays out both in the gallery and on Instagram. The series is buoyed with an absurdist sense of humour, mirrored by Boardman's confident and gestural brushwork. It tells the story of a fictional social media influencer called Jade whose performative self-care includes yoga, spray-tanning and the KonMari method. In *@jadefad; Experiencing some middle aged gravity on the yoga mat today :/ #thatprincesshairtho* (2017) Jade's distorted figure, legs and breasts akimbo, is topped with a mane of flowing blonde hair (visible roots notwithstanding). *@jadefad: Oh just casually relaxing on my busted vinyl lawn chair. #blondonlawnchair* (2016) satirises

the faux-casual posturing that belies the carefully art directed Instagram shot.

When Jade has the revelation that she is a character made of paint (after a big night on the turpentine cocktails), it opens up the possibility of an even greater performance of self-transformation and the expansion of her influence. There's a Looney Tunes-esque cartoon logic pervading these works, with the character wrestling the creator for control over her image. As a child Boardman woke up early to cram in cartoons before school, eventually ending up as a commercial animator for Cartoon Network and Comedy Central, skills honed with an MFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. The work *@jadefad: #renovatedpainting Sooooo @amberboardman tried to paint a portrait of me. Then I*





decided to make some changes ;) (2018) shows Jade's 'renovations' to be some blonde highlights emphatically painted over ashy hair, cheekbones and lips boosted with makeup.

With her new-found autonomy Jade creates the character Blob, a fleshy egg-shaped creature whose introduction extends the scope of the narrative and enhances its surrealism. Blob is depicted from childhood through adolescence, adulthood and eventual demise, his final fate depicted in *@jadefad: Paint Rags in a Landfill: RIP my dear Blob. #youwillbemissed* (2017). In true influencer fashion Jade monetises Blob's new fame with merchandise, a line of hand-painted sweaters with meme-worthy titles (the 'Goals AF Sweater' or the 'Adulging Sweater').

Boardman has animated each version of the paintings posted to Jade's fictional Instagram account, with tongue-in-cheek comments from Boardman's own account ("My how you sparkle Jade"), and has even created *@paintjobbod*, a fake beauty salon 'specialising in linseed oil and turpentine treatments' which interacts with both. While Instagram has become an essential tool for self-promotion for many artists as well as a medium in itself, Boardman is also pragmatic about its reach. As she explains, 'Many more people will see the Instagram version of this exhibition than the actual exhibition, which is wonderful in a way, and in another way, a three-metre painting is completely different in real life than viewed on a phone.'

The narrative direction of the exhibition was three years in the making, during which time Boardman says 'I realised I had been creating the same characters over and over.' The tonal consistency and narrative cohesion of the series is aided by Boardman's materially driven process, beginning with flesh-toned shapes and working towards her feeling for a character. Backgrounds are often highly worked patterns and swirls, lending the works a psychedelic air. As Boardman



explains, 'When I have leftover paint remaining at the end of a session I use it to create the background of a new painting... I'm drawn to the idea that the leftover paint from one painting is the beginning of the next painting, creating a continuous connection between the works.'

Boardman's skewering of the ubiquity of self care culture is writ large in her work *Self Care Exhaustion* (2018) currently exhibited in this year's Archibald Prize. Her work will be seen next at Sydney Contemporary with Chalk Horse, and also in group exhibitions in Brisbane and Rome in November.

Eleanor Zeichner is a writer from Sydney and current Assistant Curator at UTS Gallery.

Kudos Gallery
11 to 29 September, 2018
Sydney

@jadefad: *Paint Rags in a Landfill: RIP my dear Blob. #youwillbemissed*, 2017, oil on canvas, 153 x 122cm

@jadefad: *Oh just casually relaxing on my busted vinyl lawn chair. #blondonlawnchair*, 2016, oil on canvas, 91 x 122cm

@jadefad: *Experiencing some middle aged gravity out on the yoga mat today :/ #thatprincesshairtho*, 2017, oil on canvas, 41 x 51cm

Courtesy the artist and Kudos Gallery, Sydney