

Amber Boardman

Retro Enchantment

Melbourne Art Fair, Sophie Gannon Gallery

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Building Blocks, 2024, oil on canvas, 183 x 152cm / 72 x 60in

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When I create an exhibition I think of each painting like a sentence, each contributing to a narrative that unfolds like a short story or an essay that illuminates something about our time. Working as a kind of visual anthropologist, I analyze crowd behaviour and the evolution of social norms that are influenced by the consensus we see online: what's trending. All of my paintings explore how the internet has changed and is constantly changing our lives.

At the dawn of the AI age, I've observed a yearning for simplistic wonder, a longing for the things AI can't manage—the satisfaction that comes from things you can do with your hands. Being an active participant in a present state of wonder stands in contrast to doom scrolling. To oppose this passive consumption would be to build things, make art, play games, tell stories, and experience natural phenomena.

This exhibition, *Retro Enchantment*, describes simple moments of wonder that result in the absorption of the present moment. These paintings celebrate the quiet exuberance of screen-free unmediated human experience. While not aiming to tell anyone what to do or how to live, this show attempts to shine a light on simple, yet magical possibilities found in the margins of our memories and experience when tech is so primary. These 16 paintings describe pre-internet activities in the form of play as ritual. Simultaneously, these works imagine a post-internet world we might return to should our screens go dark.

In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim makes the case for how fairy tales, wonder, and enchantment help children make sense of the non-sensical world, process fears, and prepare for independent lives. At the threshold of a groundbreaking technological era that threatens to accelerate social isolation, the quiet and collective acts of building sand castles, playing board games, catching fireflies in a jar, and telling stories around a campfire, can maybe help, and perhaps even enchant us adults too.