

If, since the 1990s, life has been about the constant reshaping of multiple performed identities, Boardman, in response, suggests that self-malleability can be exhausting.

effortlessness of her paint-handling belies a more complex process in which people and things seem 'discovered' rather than 'represented'. Her great skill is in knowing exactly when to stop a painting, at the point when her figures look most absorbed by their own stuckness, anchored by their viscous discombobulating surrounds.

The numerous grids in 'Decision Fatigue' – in works such as *Classroom*, *Porn Categories*, *Paint Shelves* and *Dating App Algorithm* (all 2020) – are not tributes to industrial or capitalist life but to the scaffold-quality of digital showrooms, the thumbnails that temporarily assist quick selection. Is 'decision fatigue' what Boardman's characters are suffering from in their unstable, antically digital worlds, or is it the artist's own lament? The ultimate irony of making an exhibition like this is that it adds to the consumer landscape of choices: Should I purchase the porn painting, or the one with the faces that remind me of my students? Is the larger painting worth the AU\$12,000 price tag if it may not actually fit in my lounge room? Decrying communicative capitalism, or lampooning the implications of the long tail in the age of Amazon's dominance, are difficult to justify when one's critical response is itself a high-end product. But the sheer texture of Boardman's paint suggests to me that complicity is part of her purview; its pleasures protrude from the picture plane to implicate 'the structure[s] we've imposed on ourselves by our reliance on tech to help us decide what might titillate us.'⁴ Like Mark Leckey's 2013 exhibition 'The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things', Boardman's framing of the overabundance of consumer choices also posits critique as a neoliberal pharmakon: a remedy and a powerful poison, the grease of contention that keeps markets haphazardly moving.

Self-care has been a consistent theme in Boardman's work, especially early on, building a repertoire of imagery that spans yoga classes, pedicures, tanning salons, glamour photography, hikes and home organising regimes. In the 2017 work *Princess Hair Middle Aged Gravity*, a naked de-sexualised female torso in a yoga studio takes centre stage with no discernible head; just golden curly hair sprawling across a stiff pink leg, an abstract painting in the background. A sugar-coated version of the strained and spotlighted bodies of Francis Bacon or Maria Lassnig, the work would make great company with Dana Schutz's *Breastfeeding* (2015) and

Tala Madani's *Cave Interior (Ancestors)* (2019), both of which are in the Art Gallery of New South Wales collection. Whereas Schutz's characters are always zany busy and Madani's are afflicted with a spiritual glow, Boardman's are more gawkish and ungainly – archetypes of the stupidly aware. Her crowd scenes in particular (such as *Multipurpose Crowd* from 2019, and *Civil Planning* and *Classroom*, both from 2020) convey something of the stolid quality of Philip Guston's furtive personas, even if eschewing the boys-club mentality of the neo-expressionists he ultimately inspired. More garish than Guston, Boardman nonetheless brings a similarly intimate particularity to what is a melancholic and mysterious sociopolitical ethos. As satire, the works hold onto something undecodable in their messages: the tragicomic spirit of pretension beaming in from Planet Boardman.

Surprisingly for someone so in love with the materiality of paint, Boardman has a background in animation, working in the United States for Adult Swim, a late-night comedy programming block on the Cartoon Network cable TV station. One of her past gigs involved the movie version of the cartoon series *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* (2000–15), whose inside jokes and grotesque humour have been described by one commentator in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's take on the Rabelaisian carnival, a metaphor for cultural practices that, with the public's permission, joyfully destruct, lampoon and symbolically overturn the values of the status quo.⁵ For Peter Sloterdijk: 'Class societies can scarcely survive without the institution of the inverted world and the crazy day.'⁶ In this case, it is the crazy adult inversion of a children's cartoon channel which has produced the likes of Eric Andre and Tim & Eric – scatologically fixated jesters who blend the macabre with the slapstick, the hokey with the esoteric, mocking all coherence and convention. Boardman retains something of the dysmorphia of the Adult Swim world: the squidgy figures in *Home Perm Panic* (2016) and *Sausage Queen* (2015) are not so far removed from the *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* character Meatwad, whose impressive unintelligence is matched only by his ability to mould his body into various shapes and forms (especially igloos and hot dogs). As with an older generation of painters such as Sue Williams and Nicola Tyson (who are both now in their sixties), Boardman's work brings a sense of the pliable animated female body to the legacy of neo-expressionism – contorted, pressured, prodded,