AMBER BOARDMAN
DECISION FATIGUE

One of the country's most consistently interesting and ambitious young painters, Amber Boardman's work is always a satisfying blend of adult-witty and laugh out loud funny. Her new body of work extends these qualities into a thoughtful direction, one that sums up much of our contemporary situation. Specifically, it explores the phenomenon of decision fatigue – the innumerable and exhausting mundanity of decisions requisite to navigating daily life. Decision-making is a foundational component of contemporary living, paralysing when manifested in the endless sea of products and options that are available to a consumer, and producing effects like ego depletion. Within this infinite web of confusing commerce, it is impossible to imagine breaking free; decision-making as ensnarement. However, this freedom to choose can also be used to resist this drawdown on our attention – we are free to want what we want to want, to be who we want to be. It is here, from within our complex technological economy, that Boardman not only takes a stand but runs a kind of poetic diagnostics over our unspeakably ideologically granular troubles. Her paintings plot and project the series of small decisions – many of them screen-based – which slowly erode our energy and willpower throughout the day.

In many ways, the internet has expanded our vision of the world, creating new possibilities and modes of living that might not be constrained by social phenomena and its spatial components. As we encounter Boardman's wildly colourful artistic productions – in the flesh or through the screen - we enter a veritable dreamscape; a gamescape of unbounded pleasure, and conversely, comforting familiarity. The works Dizzying Array, Dream Home Renovation and Movie Night are composed of splintered forms, fractured movements and impossible perspectives, and while overladen to the point of near-duplicity, the realities they depict are anything but deceitful. Boardman, with her playful command of colour and a loose, light hand has carefully constructed her environments – be it an infinite supermarket shelf or a luxury villa illogically upheld by a thin blue scaffold – in a manner reminiscent of both her background in commercial animation, studies in fine art and recent investigations into 3D modelling. Effectively transforming these cartoon and painterly tropes into her own aesthetic framework, or visual grammar for establishing the veracity of simulated space. Much like the world we inhabit physically, Boardman's is a world whose rules might also be operating behind the scenes; algorithms, civil planners, cloud computing, are represented with an array of wipes, ripples, dots and dashes that all coalesce on the canvas to create an environment of unlimited optimism. By visualising the systems and structures that underpin our information age, Boardman holds space for contentment amidst the content cacophony.

Pulling further at the edges of space and time, in Boardman's Civil Planning, a stream of pedestrians bisect the painting in their passage along an urban sidewalk. Behind them, the schematically composed background of high-rise-come skyline-come gridline-come elevation becomes entangled with a turbulent mass of pipes and circuitry rising from below. Frontally composed yet choosing to directly work against the linear perspective of the landscape, there is no clear way into the picture, no path through which to move through and join the passers-by. The viewer is left indeterminate and undecided as each component of the work demands the viewer's attention; the image becoming almost realist in the manner through which it reflects the real-life traversal of the city, and the manner in which the senses are overloaded with constant stimuli.

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1. Outlined by social psychologist Roy F. Baum following his reading of Freud's energy model of the self, ego depletion proposes that there is a finite
store of mental energy for exerting self-control, such that will power and decision-making are inversely related to choice. Seeking convenience and fuelled by instant gratification, we tend towards
impulsivity, rash decisions or nothing, so as to avoid choice itself.

Rawly painted and crammed into the composition so that they impose directly on the viewer, Dating App Algorithm presents a grid of mercurial but relatable characters and cropped body parts. In a crowded bar would we pick-up any of these individuals? Yet within this stack of profiles, our decision is quickly made for us by the algorithm as we inflect ourselves into this world of hot hook-ups and romantic potentiality. The painting's ambiguous depiction of faces, limbs and sexual organs taps into our barely supressed discomfit of the algorithm and online dating, while, at the same time its fleshy vitality and oozing vulnerability creates space for libidinous boredom, or idle curiosity, or lust, or perhaps even love?

Through this series of works, Boardman exaggerates the problematic aspects of having agency to make decisions, demonstrating the capacity for this freedom to both transfix and paralyse. However, by narrowing her scope at times, so as to focus our attention on a series of small decisions – What to eat? What to wear, and who to take it off for? – Boardman reasserts the autonomy of the individual and the significance of our capacity to make choices. As we see in Boardman's dizzying, fleshed-out scenes of overspreading films, flesh and faces, there is an artist making a spectacle of decision-making, choosing to lean into our overloaded, hyper-stimulating environment of Netflix and Tinder, dream homes and wish lists. This flagrant display of commodification and commerce is manipulated by Boardman, becoming a poignant reflection on how valuable the capacity to choose is; a valuable reminder of what it means to be human.

If Boardman's works reveal the particular fractures and challenges, and the painful exhilaration of living through a massive technological and social transformation, then the question becomes one of becoming and potential, the possibilities of us adapting and evolving beyond our increasingly interconnected lives? To quote Simone Weil, 'Attention is what creates necessary connections. (Those which do not depend upon attention are not necessary.)' By refusing to fasten our attention to a single phenomenon, we weaken our dependency to the conditions and categorisations of the crowd, and with it, strengthen our capacity to be open to the world, and to receive it as it comes. By leaving the painting (the attention) open to all decisions, to desire all ways of being, Boardman releases herself from all decision-making for the satisfaction of her desire is not absolute. Like Boardman's paintings, we too hold space for indecision and understanding; aware in our bodies and spirit of our ability to reflect, self-actualise, creatively and otherwise intelligently engage with the demands and decisions that may at time fatigue us all.

<div align="right">Rachel Ciesla, 2020</div>

2.Simone Weil, First and Last Notebooks, trans. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 90.