



Days on the Range, Storm Coming

A·K
BELLINGER
· GALLERY ·

GARY ABKIN

ON THE RANGE

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GARY ABKIN

ON THE RANGE

The moments when art and music collide are rare. It's a convergence that seems to skip decades and fuse most savagely in times of necessary rebellion. Kurt Weill had Otto Dix. Warhol had the Velvet underground and The Talking Heads had Jean Michel Basquait. So what about now? In the quick sand of late capitalism who can afford to play all night and paint all day or find the physical space to make noise and hurl pigment? Not many. The glory days of sub-culture smashing into high-culture have been ground into a fine dust by studio rent and the pressure for young artists to prematurely tune, polish and market their experiments into a branded identity. It's a serious loss. You can't fabricate freedom or subdue rage. And for that reason a lot of new painting reads like WILCO or TAME IMPALA sounds, safe low-allergy soft rock. But not Gary Abkin. The persistent drive of the bass line for his band "Coalfalls" and his stripped back horizons generate an atmosphere that is both minimal and charged.

Gary Abkin left California in the heart of a painting gold rush to re-locate to Ipswich Queensland. Born and raised in San Jose, he was a Cal Arts school drop-out who joined the navy and worked in the construction battalion as a steel worker. When he made it back to San Francisco Art Institute, he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting. But it was his 2003 transplant that inspired his palette and created the singular hybrid of genres that defines his work. Like Wim Wenders re-inventing Texas through German eyes, Abkin took a good hard look at Sid Nolan and the Australian Moderns while retaining the American swagger of polymaths like Robert Longo and Julian Schnabel. The light changed his perception of the sky. And the space, the sheer scale of Queensland, created a freedom of proportion. The result are paintings with radical frontality, ragged drawn lines, and a palette that verges from sparse to electric. I think the fact that Abkin is an American painter is important. The cliches of our tropes might weigh less heavily than on Australian shoulders. Cut loose from the anxiety of influence (and colonial angst) Abkin's horse and rider paintings riff on Ned Kelly, Breaker Morant and perhaps the equestrian sculptures of Marino Marini. There is a loose liberty to his reference that is both playful and dryly self-aware. Maybe his horse is just a horse, or maybe it's an icon like Pharlap that just ambled into the dust bowl frame. B-grade westerns, 80s club art, German expressionism and album covers all contribute to the raw joy of paintings with a single cleaving horizon line and a broad calligrapher's hand. Abkin admits he is something of an anti-purist. Although he has been trained to know colour, he lets it run to grunge:

"I sometimes paint in the colours that my palette devolves into. Like the drawing, the colour isn't meditated. The composition finds its way as I paint and characters re-occur without a plot. The new show is carved out of a series I have been working on for a couple of years informed by my time in Australia."

These paintings have gleaned an international following akin to cult films or graphic novels. Themes recur without meditation as the artist's library of figures is an open one. Like the people described in songs, they can shape themselves to personal narratives. Gun toting on horseback or distorted and almost wounded, his figures invariably go nose to nose with the viewer. It is an approach that is energised and deliberate:

'Frontal, yes, full on. I reckon it brings me in straight away without hindrance to the character of the figure and the landscape and it gives me a sense of the familiar and place. My recent awkward and sometimes grotesque images, vacillating between abstraction and the figure, offer an insight into the human condition. These insights, that I may not be ready to deal with or accept, intrigue me.'

In the past, Abkin described his process as 'automatic'. Others might see it as a fugitive branch of figurative expressionism, a style that peaked in Australia in the 80s to the back beat of independent bands and underground club culture. The paintings, even in candy shades of pink and eggshell blue, possess a certain urban grit, yet they are made in a mixture of birdsong and reverb in the quiet wilds of small-town Queensland. Unlike many artists who seek nature to replicate it, this painter has found a tension in open spaces and perhaps a tear in the fabric of the landscape narrative. Somehow they seem to poke into the complacent and often sentimental view of the Australian frontier and the distortions of our folklore. This new show is entitled "On the Range". It's an image that could be earnest or biting ironic, but it's apt. Abkin says he never set out to paint the Australian landscape. And he's not. The turf he's covering seems to be distinctly elsewhere, somewhere not quite on the map. Covering the ground between American mythology and the Australian void.

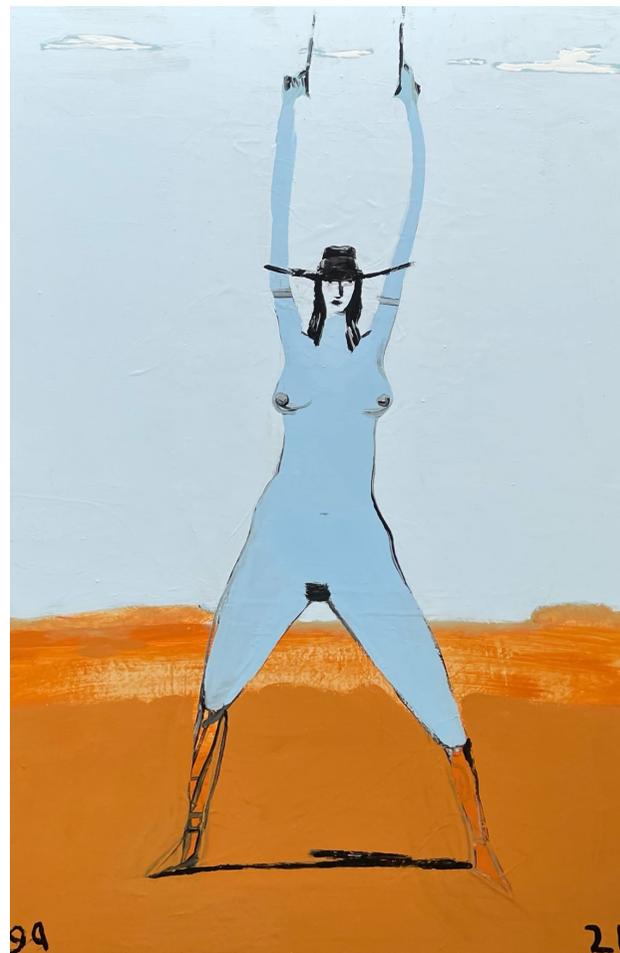
As he says simply "The landscape needs an awareness".

GARY ABKIN
ON THE RANGE



Australian and Bird, Days on the Range

80 x 120 cm
Oil and Enamel on Plywood
\$2250



Australian Woman

82 x 122 cm
Oil and Enamel on Plywood
\$2250

GARY ABKIN
ON THE RANGE

Brush Turkey on the Run



Australian Turkey #5



Brush Turkey on the Run

60 x 80 cm

Oil and Enamel On

Plywood

\$1375

Australian Turkey #5

60 x 80 cm

Oil and Enamel On

Plywood

\$1375

Turkey in the Yard



Turkey in the Yard

60 x 80 cm

Oil and Enamel On

Plywood

\$1375

GARY ABKIN
ON THE RANGE

On the Range, Sisters



Drover and Bird



Australian on the Range, Australian Drover



On the Range, Sisters

60 x 80 cm

Oil and Enamel On

Plywood

\$1375

*Australian on the Range,
Australian Drover*

60 x 80 cm

Oil and Enamel On

Plywood

\$1375

Drover and Bird

60 x 80 cm

Oil and Enamel On

Plywood

\$1375

GARY ABKIN
ON THE RANGE

Australian Landscape, Blue Rider on the Range



Australian Woman Dreaming, Days on the Range



Australian Rider, Coming Storm



*Australian Landscape,
Blue Rider on the Range*
60 x 80 cm
Oil and Enamel On
Plywood
\$1375

*Australian Rider,
Coming Storm*
60 x 80 cm
Oil and Enamel On
Plywood
\$1375

*Australian Woman Dreaming,
Days on the Range*
60 x 80 cm
Oil and Enamel On
Plywood
\$1375

GARY ABKIN
ON THE RANGE

Drover on the Range, Blue Storm



Days on the Range, Storm Coming



Australian Woman in Landscape, Tree Stories



Drover on the Range,
Blue Storm
60 x 80 cm
Oil and Enamel On
Plywood
\$1375

Australian Woman in Landscape,
Tree Stories
60 x 80 cm
Oil and Enamel On
Plywood
\$1375

Days on the Range,
Storm Coming
60 x 80 cm
Oil and Enamel On
Plywood
\$1375

GARY ABKIN
ON THE RANGE

Australian Rider, Brush Turkey



Australian Rider



Australian in Landscape, Bush Ranger



Australian Rider, Brush Turkey

60 x 80 cm

Oil and Enamel On

Plywood

\$1375

Australian in Landscape,

Bush Ranger

105 x 123 cm

Oil and Enamel On

Plywood

\$2650

Australian Rider

90 x 120 cm

Oil and Enamel On

Plywood

\$2650



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