

ALEXANDER BOYNES

THE EDGE CANNOT HOLD

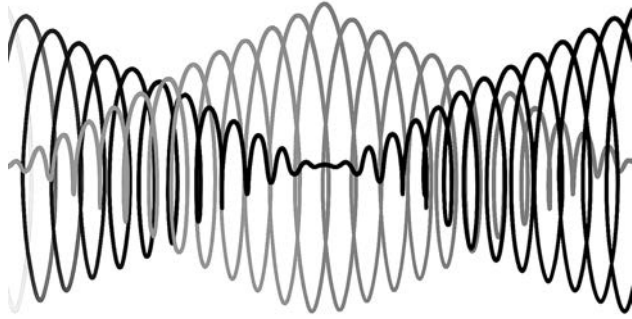




THE EDGE CANNOT HOLD
Paintings by Alexander Boynes
Curated by Benjamin Shingles
7.6.25 – 29.6.25

FRONT
Sulphur sky (detail), 2025
Ink, acrylic and enamel on board
61 × 61 cm

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T*he Edge Cannot Hold* presents a body of Alexander Boynes' new paintings set to the apocalyptic themes of W. B. Yeats' post-World War I poem, *The Second Coming*. The title presents an apt malapropism to Yeats' prescient observation, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" and bridges the disillusion pervading Boynes' body of work and the resigned sorrow of Yeats' poem. In *The Second Coming*, Yeats illustrates the cyclical pattern of earthly reckoning as intersecting vortexes, or what he calls 'gyres', occurring in two-thousand year intervals – our current epoch beginning at the birth of Christ and concluding presently.

Whereas Yeats was coming to terms with the hopelessness of war and the epidemic outbreak of the Spanish flu, Boynes reckons with our own looming threat. His studio practice is occupied with the profound cost of the extraction of fossil fuels and precious minerals from the Australian landscape and the inevitable cataclysmic outcomes. With present action only causing further damage, our dependency upon

these materials and the economic security they provide results in a fervent debate of ethics and existentialism. While a climate crisis is inevitable and overwhelming, Boynes' work conveys his assiduous belief in the power of art to bear witness, to advocate for change and to nurture a vision of a more just and sustainable future.

A departure from Boynes' previous works made on polished aluminium, these new paintings are grounded on birch artist board and achieve a receding pictorial depth which has previously been denied by the reflective metallic surface. In these, Boynes creates scorching grounds of toxic fluorescent and neon colours, with liberal washes of orange, yellow and red. In some works the blonde hue of the birch timber provides the only colour to otherwise greyscale compositions.

Regular units of square boards are assembled to make larger, modular paintings. The images are constructed of intricate line drawings rendered in erratic ink of cold black and white. Some graphics are striking and others serene. The photographic images are plotted in scribbly lines that appear like a dot matrix, a similar language to that which Boynes previously employed in pigment printed digital images and performative interventions overlaid on other artworks. The composite images hold in stark contrast to the verdant native forests, lush with cycads and tree ferns against the high-vis-clad figures of ubiquitous labourers. Oscillating, the ghostly figures are subsumed into the forest; the ancient forests recede behind the figures into the fiery grounds.

The innovative development that propels these new works is Boynes' employment of a computer controlled drawing machine. With the machine, drawings are rendered with a ballpoint or ink tip pen suspended in front of the artwork on plastic belts from two rotors. The clamp holding the pen at the centre of the apparatus acts as a proxy for the artist's hand. Three of these contraptions are at work

simultaneously in Boynes' studio, emitting a cacophony of shrieks and whirrs as the rotors perform continuous adjustments of tension and position; the pen constantly drumming on the hard wooden surface. The microcontroller display above the artwork shows the program's duration, at times in excess of 80 hours to complete a multi-layered image. At the culmination of this mechanical process the paintings do not emerge fully formed but are further layered with ink washes, splatters of spray paint and stain, sanding and further painting.

Despite being a mechanical process, this is the nearest to human hand that Boynes has worked with in recent years. As with human hands, the machine's resulting lines are irregular and not without fault. It is hard to identify the source of these idiosyncrasies in the works; are they native to the source image? Has the image been digitally modified with stock filters? Are these the limitations of the materials or the machine? The resulting line drawings exist so near to anthropoid creation, that it is untenable that any of these drawings were not made by the artist's own hand. The images appear broken, interrupted and affected by hazy carbon dust, particulate matter or acid rain. They recall printed newspaper articles depicting emergency services assessing the damage of life-threatening disasters, FIFO contractors excavating open cut mines, politicians in hard hats and high-vis announcing ambitious renewable energy targets.

In the painting, *Shrouded in Silence* (2025), the smallest on display, two labourers emerge from a forest. Clearly a composite image, evidenced by the rhythmic vertical breaks between white inked areas and the fluorescent yellow ground, the figures have been superimposed into a fernery. Dynamic graphic qualities punctuate the composition as we read from left to right; ferns emerge from the dense black areas, while the high-vis garment stands in sharp opposition to the rainforest foliage. Dark silhouettes of human figures appear against dense areas of white to create transparent veils behind



Shrouded in silence, 2025
Ink, acrylic and enamel on board
31 × 61 cm



them. The title implies we are witness to devious undertakings.

High-vis workwear is designed specifically to be in opposition to the natural environment – totally unlike camouflage that seeks protection in assimilation. Its vibrancy is a clear demarcation of the violent collision between industrial intrusion and natural beauty.

In contrast, the image underpinning the major painting, *Vapour* (2025), has been totally desaturated of any colour and the drawing dissolves. The black and white pen ink renders the forest and the human figures as foreboding totems and much of the left half of the painting is near to solid black. The only colour that remains is the fluorescent orange top-and-bottom edges of the boards, radiating onto the gallery wall as an alarming beacon. This is one of the most turbulent works in the exhibition, the painting corrupted and faltering as the image degrades to leave just remnant figures in an abstracted field. Two paintings of virgin forests are displayed together in isolation on an adjacent wall from these figures; it is a witness point before the labourers' work is resumed.

This formal device of the edge repeats across the whole body of works. The constructed layers are not fixed to one another and a collision occurs between them. Boynes has intentionally stopped and restarted the drawing machines, slightly altering the point of origin and encouraging the image to fall apart. Fissures emerge between elements that compound the composition's acute sense of crisis. Ultimately the greatest tension is around the perimeter as the image is untethered from the edges. By redistributing the force from the centre of the gyre to the edges, our situation is made more volatile. These are paintings in crisis; very truly, the edge cannot hold.

In navigating the liminal space between grief, loss and hope – both personal and planetary – Boynes advocates for the collective unconsciousness, collective responsibility and a meaningful lasting

change. In the face of the widening gyre, we all must aspire to restore balance and avoid catastrophic outcomes. Boynes' eschatology isn't derived from Christian imagery but it retains the same grave fears for the future. In engaging the mechanical drawing aid, Boynes has found a way to further his visual language and cast out his process just beyond his own reach. Whether he may be aware of it or not, the intrinsic motivations that propel his work are bound for change as he and his wife, Abby, welcomed their first child earlier this year. Despite the worldly ills of our moment, the slow ceremony of growth is protected in the most innocent.

Benjamin Shingles

The Second Coming

W. B. Yeats

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Artist statement

Alexander Boynes

I'm a multidisciplinary artist and curator based in Kamberri/Canberra, working across painting, photography, print, and video installation. My practice investigates the environmental and social impacts of fossil fuel extraction in Australia — how it has shaped our landscapes, communities, and future.

The Edge Cannot Hold marks a turning point in both process and perspective. After being diagnosed with non-radiographic Axial Spondyloarthritis—an autoimmune condition affecting the spine and pelvis, accompanied by chronic fatigue and pain—that made large-scale hand-drawing physically unsustainable, I began working with custom-built robotic drawing machines: X/Y plotters that function as studio collaborators. These machines render digital imagery into fine mechanical linework, which I combine with ink washes, spray paint, staining, sanding, and hand painting. The result is a hybrid visual language — part machine, part hand — where precision and entropy coexist.

The idea of “the edge” runs throughout this series: where images collapse, ecosystems fail, and social and political thresholds are tested. These works reflect a world under strain but also offer gestures of care, continuity, and resistance. They mourn the loss of Country to extractive industry — particularly on sacred Indigenous lands — and draw on long-held fire knowledge as a path to renewal.

This work does not seek to condemn workers in fossil fuel industries, whose labour has afforded us the lifestyles we now enjoy. Instead, it challenges the systems that profit from de-struction while stalling necessary change. We are all implicated in these systems, and that complicity comes with responsibility.

In a time of climate crisis, I believe art can bear witness, speak truth, and help imagine a more just future. Even when the centre cannot hold, we can still choose how to rebuild the edge — deliberately, differently, together.

Alexander Boynes
The Edge Cannot Hold

Curated by Benjamin Shingles
All works made in 2025. Ink, acrylic and enamel on board

1. *Say nothing / nothing said*

60 × 80 cm

\$2,400

2. *Shrouded in silence*

31 × 61 cm

\$950

3. *Mirage*

122 × 183 cm

\$7,200

4. *The weight of memory*

61 × 122 cm

\$3,200

5. *In plain sight*

61 × 61 cm

\$1,900

6. *Sheltering tomorrow*

61 × 61 cm

\$1,950

7. *Vapour*

122 × 244 cm

\$8,200

8. *Pyrocene*

120 × 240 cm

\$8,200

9. *Acid rain*

60 × 60 cm

\$1,900

10. *Dustfall*

60 × 60 cm

\$1,900

11. *File footage*

(The D. O'Connor cut)

60 × 60 cm

\$1,900

12. *Sulphur sky*

61 × 61 cm

\$1,900