

Sophie Barber

They don't make them like they used to

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Chris Sharp Gallery is pleased to present Sophie Barber's second solo exhibition at the gallery, *They don't make them like they used to*.

Sophie Barber is the consummate 'outsider', or maybe better yet, cultural tourist. This is not to say that she is not formally educated— she is— but rather that she is very aware of and plays with her status as a woman located neither at any center of the art world, nor the world of cultural production in general (i.e., Hastings, England). As such, she is always a kind of distant, if bemused spectator of the asymmetrical production of culture, which often assumes a hyperbolic self importance and improbability in her portrayal of it. Whether she is depicting the work of other, often male artists, pop stars or rappers, she does so with an ambiguous homage-like quality that exists somewhere between droll adulation and loving satire. Consider, for instance, her work, "Kendrick Loves Camber Sands". Crudely painted at large scale, the work appropriates a well known image of the rapper Kendrick Lamar and stentoriously declares him to be a fan of a beach near where Barber lives, a region he has most likely never even be to, never mind that he is probably not even aware that it exists. By the same token, Barber's exaggeration of scale can also and often does go the other way, as in, say, her very small depictions of outdoor Franz West sculptures on homemade, coarsely fashioned supports upon which the West sculptures become tiny, antic doodles. Indeed, it's as if the work vacillates between the stentorian and the whispered. In every case, her use of and insistence on unconventional supports— large unstretched canvas or small, home-made canvases which are stuffed with recycled canvas such that they take on a wonky objecthood— and her impasto application of paint seeks to challenge and deflate (through inflation) the self-important, precious and self-preening enterprise of painting.

The work for her exhibition, which revolves around the theme of Los Angeles, art and culture, insists on her status as cultural tourist. Playfully engaging icons, cliches and insider nods to and of Los Angeles (Venice beach, Giorgio Baldi restaurant, Chateau Marmont, Runyon Canyon, etc), Barber sketches out a series of ambivalent homages to the city and the cultural customs for which it has become known and celebrated (food, hiking, the beach). Not since maybe LA Story has Los Angeles looked this funny, strange, and ridiculous.

Sophie Barber (b. 1996, St Leonards-on-Sea) lives and works in Hastings, UK. Sophie Barber has had solo exhibitions at Alison Jacques, London (2021), Chris Sharp Gallery, Los Angeles (2021), Goldsmiths CCA, London (2020), and Project 78 Gallery, St. Leonards on Sea (2018). Her work has been included in recent group shows at Trespass sweetly urged, Tanya Leighton, Berlin; Some Dogs, Green Family Art Foundation, Dallas, Texas, US (2024); Sublime Synthesis, Xenia Creative Retreat, North Hampshire, UK; Spark birds & the loneliness of species, curated by Xander Karskens, Kasteel Wijlre Estate, Wijlre, Netherlands; Some Dogs, Four One Nine, San Francisco, California, US (2023); A Minor Constellation, Chris Sharp Gallery, Los Angeles; Small Paintings, Venus Over Manhattan, New York; Il était une fois..., FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, France; Familiars, Et al., San Francisco, California; Lismore Castle, Lismore (2022); Office Baroque gallery (online), X Museum, Beijing (2021), LA MAISON DE RENDEZ-VOUS, Brussels (2020); Flatland Projects, Hastings (2019); Phoenix Art Space, Brighton (2019); Towner Gallery, Eastbourne (2018); De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea (2017); and the Observer Building, Hastings (2016).