

## (DON'T) BE AN ARTIST

Kay Abude

Gertrude Glasshouse

Friday 26 November - Saturday 18 December 2021

Using text- and fabric-based work, performance, and documentation, Kay Abude explores questions of labour, collaboration, and commerce, particularly in the context of the art world. *(DON'T) BE AN ARTIST* functions as a concise survey of her work and a response to the present moment. Abude reflects on the increased sense of precarity experienced by many artists, and especially early-career artists, as a consequence of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The show is marked by urgency, but also by humour and wit. *ART IS NO FORTUNE* comprises a bowl of fortune cookies (individually plastic wrapped in line with public health best practice), which evoke the fantasy of making a packet as an artist, and emphasise the low probability that anyone will be so lucky. Their predictions, derived from pop songs like 'Survivor' by Destiny's Child, are unrelentingly pessimistic.

*BE CREATIVE REMAIN PRECARIOUS*, a platform bearing that slogan, serves as a stage for *Money affirmations*, a series of spoken word performances. Donning a garment printed with the title of the show, Abude recites mantras reminiscent of those sometimes seen on social media—impotent attempts at 'manifesting' improbable successes. Photographic and video works featuring members of her family acknowledge their central role in shaping her interests in factory and production line processes, social art practices, and the ways in which different kinds of work are valued. Semaphore performances—carried out at Gertrude Glasshouse and a location near both Melbourne Airport and the family home—touch on diverse themes, including coordinated or cooperative activities, international trade, migrant experiences, and scepticism towards creative careers.

Taken as a whole, *(DON'T) BE AN ARTIST* testifies to a period of high productivity for Abude. She has been fuelled by a genuine desire to make work, but also by fear of losing the ability to do so—due to lack of access to materials, studio space, or opportunities to exhibit.

Comfortable chairs upholstered with the well-known Abude phrase 'LOVE THY LABOUR' invite visitors to take a load off (without getting too close to neighbours), and nod towards collapses between spaces dedicated to relaxation and spaces dedicated to work. Of course, many artists have long worked from home or crammed artmaking in around day jobs. Many are all too familiar with the difficulty of drawing boundaries between 'free time' and work. As Abude observes with Shakespearian insight, 'A FOOL'S WORK NEVER ENDS'. Perhaps the pandemic has made fools of us all.

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Please note: as a result of COVID-related calendar disruptions, *(DON'T) BE AN ARTIST* coincides with a presentation of the same name by Abude on *The Hotel Windsor* produced for Flash Forward (see <https://flash-fwd.com>).

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## List of works

1. *(DON'T) BE AN ARTIST semaphore flag*, 2021  
Screen print on linen, timber, plastic  
34 x 47cm
2. *Art is no fortune*, 2021  
Fortune cookies individually wrapped in plastic packaging, stainless steel bowl  
23 x 36 x 36cm
3. *FOR LOVE OR MONEY*, 2021  
Screen print on calico, plinth  
100 x 35 x 35cm
4. *BE CREATIVE REMAIN PRECARIOUS*, 2021  
Screen print on linen, platform  
100 x 100 x 20cm
5. *Money affirmations*, 2021  
Spoken word performance by Kay Abude  
15 minutes
6. *(DON'T) BE AN ARTIST costumes*, 2021  
Screen print on calico, canvas and linen, Rasant thread, cotton bias binding, polyester zips, chrome display rack
7. *LOVE THY LABOUR chairs*, 2021  
Screen print on polyester, plastic  
74 x 232 x 68cm
8. *(DON'T) BE AN ARTIST semaphore performance (family)*, 2021  
Single channel video  
9:48 minutes on loop
9. *WORK WORTH DOING*, 2018  
Screen print on linen wallpaper  
210 x 210 x 11cm
10. *Production Line (family)*, 2010  
Inkjet print on matte ivory 230g inkjet paper  
40.8 x 51cm
11. *(DON'T) BE AN ARTIST semaphore performance (family)*, 2021  
Inkjet print on matte ivory 230g inkjet paper  
40.8 x 51cm
12. *A FOOL'S WORK NEVER ENDS*, 2021  
Screen print on canvas, aluminium screen, timber screen printing rig  
204.5 x 260 x 64cm

Costumes: 18 pieces, dimensions variable

Display rack: 170 x 60 x 128cm

