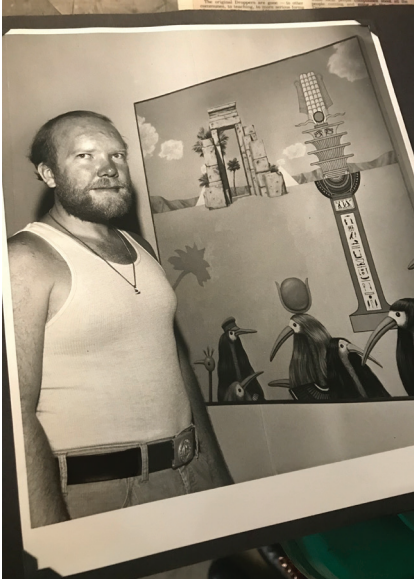


John Fudge

b. 1940, Des Moines, IA
d. 1999, Lakewood, CO



John Fudge (1940–1999) was an American painter whose meticulously rendered, darkly comic narratives occupy a distinctive position in late twentieth-century figuration. Born in Des Moines and raised in Denver, Fudge earned his BFA and MFA from the University of Colorado Boulder, where he emerged from an unusually active generation of artists in the 1960s. A formative encounter came through Joan Brown, who taught at Boulder as a visiting artist in 1964 and encouraged Fudge to pursue the subjects that genuinely interested him rather than prevailing expectations of what painting should be. More than a decade later, in a 1975 Smithsonian oral history, Brown named Fudge among the finest artists she knew.

Fudge developed his practice at a moment when abstraction still held considerable authority, yet he committed himself to a highly personal form of narrative painting. His work drew from Pop, Bay Area figuration, comics, popular culture and art history while remaining difficult to place within any single movement. That independence extended through a career in which painting and teaching were closely intertwined. Fudge taught at the University of Colorado Boulder and the University of Arizona before joining the University of Colorado Denver, where he taught from 1970 to 1991 and influenced generations of artists.

His work was exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Denver Art Museum, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Walker Street Gallery and OK Harris Annex, among others. Fudge

received a Western States Arts Foundation Visual Arts Fellowship in 1976 and a National Endowment for the Arts Artist's Fellowship in 1985. His work is held in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Denver Art Museum, The Kirkland Museum (Denver), Washington State Arts Commission, University of Colorado Boulder and Weatherspoon Art Museum, among others.

Artist Statement

Fudge's paintings draw freely from comics, pulp imagery, religion, mythology, domestic life, science fiction and art history. Familiar images are rendered with remarkable precision, then placed into situations that unsettle their ordinary meanings. Across the work, humor and unease become ways of approaching recurring questions around belief, authority, mortality, desire and social convention.

Although his paintings have often been described in relation to surrealism, Fudge's process was more deliberate than dreamlike. Jane Fudge, art and film critic and former assistant curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Denver Art Museum, described his method as an accumulation, sorting and classification of images whose meanings remained mutable from one painting to another. Symbols recur across decades without settling into a fixed vocabulary. Their significance changes according to context.

Fudge was particularly interested in the structures through which images acquire meaning and authority. Religious iconography, political imagery, domestic ritual, popular entertainment, war, death and the promises of American culture all became material for the paintings. His later engagement with the Church of the SubGenius and its pipe-smoking figure J.R. "Bob" Dobbs extended these concerns through a deliberately absurd belief system built from parody, commerce and invented mythology. Jane Fudge described the SubGenius material as a "powerfully ironic gospel," placing it naturally within his longer interest in the unstable territory between faith and skepticism.

Humor is central to the work but rarely functions as an endpoint. Drawing on the immediacy and timing of cartoons, Fudge could approach complicated subjects without resolving them into a single reading. The paintings reward recognition, then interrupt it, using wit, visual precision and carefully constructed contradictions to keep meaning in motion.