

F i r s t F l o o r

Marking the entrance is *Font* (2015), a found 1920s marble baptismal font, carved with its common name, 'Font', typeset in *Font*. It creates a playful slippage between naming, language and object/image; a recurrent theme in this exhibition.

Banner came to prominence in the 1990s with her wordscapes, written transcriptions of iconic films retold in her own words. *THE NAM* (1997), a crucial entry point to this exhibition, is a 1,000 page book that details scene-by-scene well known Vietnam War films – including *Full Metal Jacket*, *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* – the films apparently never begin or end, but are described in their entirety, spliced together to make “a gutting 11 hour supermovie”. When Banner first completed the book a writer friend declared it unreadable. In response she added the line “*THE NAM* it has been described as unreadable” to posters that promoted the publication. Later she made *Trance* (1997), a thirteen-hour unabridged reading of the text. The garish collage of original *NAM* posters creates absurd wordplays animated by coloured light which flows through this first room in *CMYK vs RGB* (2014). A direct reference to the Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Key (black) system commonly used for printing, the lightplay makes a visually trippy environment with the works shifting in and out of visibility.

Arsewoman in Wonderland (2001) is a written description of a porn film of the same title, directed and produced by, and starring Tyffany Minx and her friends. Written 15 years ago, the work refers to a genre of porn that was loosely tied to narrative arthouse cinema. Here it has been installed upside down:

This work was always awkward and uncomfortable, and that has been exaggerated because of the changing nature, context and ubiquity of porn in the internet age. I have installed the work upside down to reflect that and mess with the act of looking, interpreting and reading.

The Bastard Word (2007) is emblazoned on an adjacent wall. Recalling the title of one of Banner's previous exhibitions, this neon is handmade by the artist:

Because I have no experience working in glass, the neon is kind of crappily made. The piece reflects a continuing struggle to control the medium—the language if you like—and that in turn reflects the struggle to control the meaning. Making this work was like regressing, and getting back to some kind of very simple battle with language. I mean here we are now, impossibly moving around this work in words, trying to fix something that can't be fixed, you can't fix meaning ... Personally, I am very conscious of the brilliance of language and it's power—I mean it is the blood to our thoughts—but also I find it very frustrating and I have a lot of fear about language and communication, this piece addresses that too.

A neon sign of an ISBN number, likewise handmade by the artist, is registered (through the International Standard Book Number Agency) as a publication under the name *The Vanity Press*, so that it acts as a sculptural publication in its own right. *Life Drawing Drawings* (2007–2013) is an ongoing series of drawn, dummy, figure-drawing manuals. Banner has drawn the book covers only, and so the empty pages within allude to images unrealised and biographies unwritten.

Every life drawing, good or bad, is an attempt to stall time, to assert some kind of control over our own image, in a way that is absurdly literal, hopeless, but also tender. By extension film is a kind of life drawing.

In 2012 Banner was invited to work with the Archive of Modern Conflict, a London based collection of photographs and ephemera relating to conflict, where she noted a lack of images relating to the here and the now. In response she commissioned Magnum photographer Paolo Pellegrin to explore the City of London through the lens of conflict photography. The artist then gifted a selection of images to the archive, now filed under 'Heart of Darkness, 2014,' recalling the text Banner and Pellegrin used to navigate the City.

The title of *Mistah Kurtz – He Not Dead* (2015) is misappropriated from a key line in Joseph Conrad's psychological tale of trade and corruption, *Heart of Darkness*, 1899, that reads, 'Mistah Kurtz – he dead.' Banner has long been drawn to this text, which she first encountered through Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* which uses it as a narrative template. In her film Banner has edited together hundreds of Pellegrin's photographs, animated to a soundtrack which mixes the voices from the open outcry trading at the London Metal Exchange with a persuasive and hypnotic drumbeat. Related to this is the large-scale graphite drawing *Pinstripe* (2014), depicting magnified details of pinstripe suits, the iconic costume of trade in the City.

S e c o n d F l o o r

Work 3 (2014) is a vertiginous life-sized glass scaffold tower. Such structures are associated with the preparation of an exhibition, the making of an artwork, yet it is always removed before the opening. On this occasion the scaffold becomes the sculpture, the major exhibit itself.

I spend a lot of time up scaffold towers during the making of large wall drawings, so the experience of being high up on a scaffold is intimately associated with process, the tension between the idea of the work and the completion of the work; between something not existing and existing, it's a kind of fantasy space, it is a precarious moment. When the scaffold is gone I always miss it.

In the adjoining gallery, *Jane's* (2013) apparently documents Banner's attempts to stack her complete set of *Jane's All The World's Aircraft* encyclopedias, begun by Fred T. Jane in 1909. Collecting is a recurrent theme for Banner, with this particular compilation taking over 20 years. Banner has said that the stacking of the books tells the story of the history of flight and with its inevitable collapse exposes the fallacy of a linear approach to history. *1909–2015* (2010–2015) is a four metre stack of *Jane's All The World's Aircraft* books. As a grounded, yet slightly implausible tower, they have been transformed, through the simplest of means, from a library, list and collection into a sculpture.

Banner, through The Vanity Press, has also reissued three largely forgotten science fiction novels written by Jane. *The Venus Trilogy* (2010) features *The Violet Flame*, *The Incubated Girl* and *To Venus in Five Seconds*, originally written in the 1890s and out of print for nearly a century. These absurdist fantasies represent an endlessly deferred future and reveal a complex relationship with the contents of the annual compendium to which Jane later dedicated his life. They are exhibited amongst a collection of Vanity Press publications and prints including the series *April – September 2015*: pieces of paper Banner left outside her studio over the summer of 2015 with stencils of the name of the month left on them. When the stencil is later removed it leaves a kind of 'bikini mark' of text in its place.

Chinook (2013) focuses on the spectacle of military air shows in the UK in which the Chinook helicopter performs an aerial ballet, carefully choreographed to push the craft to its limit for the purpose of display.

The double-bladed Chinook helicopter is an engineering phenomenon. It is visually a contradiction; it looks clumsy and prehistoric, and yet is able to perform the most extraordinary aerodynamic function. When in motion the rotor blades at the front and back of the aircraft spin in opposite directions, often appearing to collide and pull the vast craft in opposite directions.

For Banner, *Chinook* parodies the contradictory relationship she has with the military and its hardware. In 2012 Banner devised a performance event called *The Exquisite Corpse will Drink The Young Wine* at the Welsh Congregational Chapel in London, which focused on the fictional cartoon beagle, Snoopy and his nemesis, First World War ace of aces, The Red Baron. This became the launch pad for a body of work called *Snoopy vs The Red Baron*.

Furnishing the gallery are various *Full Stop* bean bag sculptures (2015), based on full stops from different typefaces which inform and include her own, *Font*. In the past Banner has rendered these in Polystyrene and Bronze, here they are playfully blown up to human proportions and provide a moment to sit, to pause for thought.

T O W E R R O O M

In *Tête • Tête* (2014) two mechanically operated windsocks participate in a kind of dialogue based on a scene from a costume drama. Set in the pastoral English countryside, they perform a new language, their fitful semaphore referencing Banner's concern with the power and limitations of language and the struggle to communicate. Please note the Tower Room is only accessible via a number of steps.

T H A N K Y O U

Ikon is supported using public funding by Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council. Fiona Banner's exhibition *Scroll Down And Keep Scrolling* is supported by Ikon's 50th Anniversary Endowment Fund and a donation from John Lewis to Ikon. All works courtesy the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London; 130PE, Los Angeles; Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin; Museum Abteiberg, Germany; David Roberts Art Foundation, London and Peer, London. *Font* is designed by Fiona Banner with Fraser Muggeridge studio. Visit the Resource Room where you can find a selection of books, audio and film. *Scroll Down And Keep Scrolling* is available for a special exhibition price £25 from Ikon Shop or online at www.ikon-gallery.org. Subscribe to our e-bulletin at www.ikon-gallery.org and find us on [f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [k](#) [g](#) [a](#) [l](#) [l](#) [y](#). Ikon Gallery, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS. Open Tuesday - Sunday, 11am-5pm, free entry, 0121 248 0708 / www.ikon-gallery.org. Printed on recycled paper. Ikon Gallery Limited trading as Ikon. Registered charity no. 528892.

A R T I S T ' S T A L K

Fiona Banner, Thursday 26 November, 6-7.30pm, free. Join artist Fiona Banner in conversation with Michaela Crimmin, co-Director of Culture + Conflict as she discusses her work, including the inspiration behind her current exhibition. Places are free but should be booked. Visit www.ikon-gallery.org to book online or call Ikon on 0121 248 0708.

Scroll Down And Keep Scrolling is the most comprehensive exhibition to date of work by British artist Fiona Banner. Ikon Gallery, 10 October 2015 – 17 January 2016

Alongside recent and previously unseen works, it includes key ongoing projects, in particular *The Vanity Press*, Banner's own publishing imprint, through which she has published a number of books.

Vanity Press is a term commonly used to describe a publishing house that allows authors to publish their own titles at their own cost (as opposed to one that is highly selective and covers the costs in the hope of future commercial success). Banner toys with the snobbery inherent in this classification and throughout the exhibition revisits her own work with intensity and humour.

The text in this guide, on the gallery wall vinyl and in the book that accompanies this exhibition are all set in Banner's new typeface *Font*, an amalgamation of typefaces she has worked with previously, as she explains:

It's a family tree arrangement where the child of Avant Garde and Courier mates with Peanuts and Didot's child. Bookman and Onyx mate; their child mates with Capitalist and Klang's offspring – the final font is an unpredictable bastardisation of styles and behaviours.

Scroll Down And Keep Scrolling is an 832 page book published by The Vanity Press which focuses on the practices around the making of work, rather than the final art object. *Font* is available to download free from www.fionabanner.com and www.ikon-gallery.org