

Fiona Banner aka The Vanity Press

*Pranayama Typhoon*

Patronato Salesiano Leone XIII, Venice - 19 April - 22 May 2022



(Still from *Pranayama Organ*, High-definition digital film. 10.35min Courtesy of the artist.)

14<sup>th</sup> April 2022 –

The exhibition *Pranayama Typhoon* by Fiona Banner aka The Vanity Press coincides with the 59<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale. Its title combines the word ‘pranayama’, a breathing technique that dates to ancient India, with the word ‘typhoon’ – both an overwhelming and increasingly frequent natural phenomenon and the name of a state-of-the-art fighter plane. The exhibition will be held in a basketball court within a converted church at Patronato Salesiano, a community playground in Castello, Venice, which is a short walk from the Giardini della Biennale.

The focus of the exhibition is the film, *Pranayama Organ* (2021), which features two full-scale inflatable military decoy aircraft, a Typhoon and a Falcon. Stuck in a combative bind, they yearn for another future, as they play out an unrequited desire for intimacy not conflict, as the protagonists enact a dream of emasculating the tools of conflict, they recognise their own demise.

The film begins at dawn; the two aircrafts slowly inflate on the beach, coming to life like long-slumbering creatures. The setting then shifts to a grassy precipice, where two figures, including the artist, are dressed as fighter planes. Birdlike, human and automaton, the figures dance around each other in an absurd ritual of courtship and combat. The location of the film, a coastal area on the English Channel between a submerged petrified forest under the seabed, and an eroding cliff face, creates a fantastical, timeless setting that evokes alternative realities, climate change, universal conflict and shifting lands.

Enhancing the mood of ritual and conflict, Banner’s soundtrack is both heroic and fragile, defined by a bathetic church organ that references the iconic song ‘Wild is the Wind’. The organ’s grandiose tones and the sound of breathing fill the basketball court, underscoring the tension of the work. The film concludes with the nose of the fighter plane eclipsing the sun, an image accompanied by the lyrics, ‘For we’re creatures of the wind’.

**Fiona Banner** comments: “*The decoy inflatable planes exist to create an image of power, and heroic force, but they are puffed up posturing beasts. With the wind knocked out of them they speak of our vulnerability and hubris, more than our power, our bathos. Venice seems like a resonant context for this work, which is ultimately personal, but considers that conflict and climate cannot be seen separated, it is a failure of our language, it is borders, and boundaries and territory, crossings, freight – conflict.*”

A seascape painting, *Capitalist, Capitalist, Capitalist (ellipsis)*, sits atop the basketball hoop, one of Banner’s series of found paintings in which the original subjects, seafaring vessels, battleships and destroyers, are painted out, replaced with black, oil-painted full stops. Though Banner is known for her text based works she has returned to this abstract form of language over the years, the full stop works punctuating her studio practice. To begin with these anti-texts were a way of exploring a crisis in her own language, here they are deployed to investigate a wider crisis of language; a failure of communication, of language adrift on the precipice.

In 2020, Banner deployed an ellipsis of granite hewn full stop sculptures in an action with Greenpeace to highlight a failure to fully protect Marine Protected Areas around the UK from destructive fishing practices. Two were deployed at the Dogger Bank, where they now exist on the seabed and one outside DEFRA. Following this and a longer sustained campaign by Greenpeace, in April 2022 the UK government committed to a total ban on bottom trawling in the Doggerbank Marine Protected Area.

Also on display at the Patronato is a published film *Dear Bathos, \_\_\_\_\_ Love.*, which is an address to our state of desire, hubris, and fragility.

The setup of the basketball court within the church becomes an apt theatre in Venice for the installation’s themes of spirituality, environment, ritual and conflict. The film, music and setting all combine to create a space of contending ideas – grandiosity, bathos, brutality and nature.

There is a publication to accompany the exhibition featuring a text by Joanna Pocock and *The Woods Decay, The Woods Decoy and Fall A Nob Play in Three Acts* (2021), a collaborative and performative text, by the Tom McCarthy as T (Typhoon) and Banner as F (Falcon).

**ENDS --**

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### **Notes to Editors**

**Address:** Patronato Salesiano Leone XIII, Calle san Domenico, 1285 30122 Castello Venezia

**Exhibition dates:** 19 April - 22 May 2022

**Opening times:** 11am – 7pm, Tuesday – Sunday. Closed on Mondays.

### **About *Pranayama Organ***

*Pranayama Organ* (2021) was first exhibited at Barakat Gallery, Seoul during the city’s lockdown.

The soundtrack for *Pranayama Organ* was recorded by Banner and friends in an empty East London church during the 2021 lockdown.

The song 'Wild is the Wind' referenced in the soundtrack was originally written by Dimitri Tiomkin and first recorded in 1957, by Johnny Mathis for the film of the same name.

*Pranayama Organ* was filmed on the beach at Pett Level, on the south coast of England, bordering the English Channel, where Banner has a studio.

In 1980 David Bowie filmed the video for his song *Ashes to Ashes* on the same beach at Pett Level.

In recent years record numbers of refugees have crossed the English Channel in small boats, some arriving onto this beach.

### **About the *Patronato Salesiano***

This is the first time the Salesiano has hosted an exhibition. Banner's project actively supports the egalitarian ethos of the community center, social enterprise and the only youth centre in Venice open to kids every day.

### **About Greenpeace action and April 2022 Government announcement**

John Sauven, Head of Greenpeace UK: "The Fullstop Ellipsis action created not only an iconic image of defiance, but a concrete barrier to trawling. Not often does art and activism form such a poignant and practical protest, that creates a real legacy.

The UK Government has just committed to respecting the whole of the UK Doggerbank, Marine Protected Area with a total ban on bottom trawling (and all gear that touches or comes close to the sea bed), after decades of brutal, destructive fishing. This is where Banner's granite full stop sculptures were delivered ("for squid not quid") as part of a massive underwater barrier built by Greenpeace.

Banner, working alongside Greenpeace activists, also dropped a huge Full Stop sculpture onto the doorstep of the Department of Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (Defra) to call out the governments, as part of this action."

Fiona Banner aka The Vanity Press: "The full stop sculptures are symbols of language on the precipice, blown-up, made physical and confrontational, they symbolise an impasse and crisis in language. They are agents for change... for squid not quid! Seventy percent of the planet is ocean, it is our most critical ally in the fight against climate change. The seabed is invisible to us, if we could see what is being done to it there is no way we would allow it. The Full stops will exist on the bottom of the sea, forming part of a barrier to bottom trawling. The seabed is the bottom line."

### **About Fiona Banner aka The Vanity Press**

Born 1966 Merseyside, Fiona Banner lives and works in UK.

Her work explores gender, language and publishing through a range of mediums, including drawing, sculpture, performance and the moving image. The struggle between language and its limitations is central to Banner's work. With an interest in how conflict is mythologised through popular culture, her early work took the form of 'wordscapes' or 'still films', blow-by-blow

accounts in her own words of feature films, from war movies to pornography, from intimate scenes to historical events. Banner often works under the moniker of The Vanity Press. She established the imprint in 1997, with her seminal book *The Nam*. Since then, she has published many works, some in the form of books, some sculptural, some performance based. In 2009 she issued herself an ISBN number and registered herself as a publication under her own name. Humour, conflict and language are at the core of Banner's work. Banner has exhibited internationally with solo exhibitions at institutions including Tate Britain and IKON Gallery and her work is held in many public collections including Tate and MoMA. She is Professor of Perspective at the Royal Academy and is based in the UK.

Instagram: [@fionabannerakathevanitypress](#) Website: [www.fionabanner.com](http://www.fionabanner.com)

Prananyama Typhoon has been enabled through a partnership between Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Frith Street Gallery, London, Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin and 1301PE, Los Angeles.