

Fiona Banner aka The Vanity Press

21 March–3 May 2025

Press Release

Frith Street Gallery is delighted to announce a new exhibition of works by Fiona Banner aka The Vanity Press.

In this show the artist continues to explore language, conflict and gender through a range of media, including drawing, sculpture and the moving image. Here Banner considers the possibilities and meanings embodied in the word ‘Disarm’, most notably in recent films where nature and landscape collide with the contradictory realities of fear, destruction, naivety and hope.

Disarm (landscape) (2024), captures the absurdity of military flypasts which Banner describes as ‘a raw moment of extreme weather; a violent murmuration.’ This flypast manifests an instant in which language meets its limits – subverting the macho message of military power, as the planes in formation race across an immense cloudscape spelling out the word DISARM. These jets perform a desire for peace rather than conflict and in doing so signal their own demise, transforming a jingoistic display of military might into a call for global disarmament. In contrast to the scale and hubris of the flypast itself, Banner’s image seems low-key, contradicting the technological precision of the event. The action happens amongst the birds, the sky ... the banality of an undistinguished landscape ... the sound coming first, waiting for the planes to erupt into the frame. The aircraft within the formation are different and from non-allied countries. Banner notes that the planes are named after forces of nature ‘so it speaks of our assault on the planet as well as each other.’ D: Flying Leopard, I: Typhoon, S: Flanker, A: Falcon, R: Golden Eagle, M: Lightning. Banner explains:

A few times a year a flypast goes right over my studio. It’s weirdly exciting it is such a brief moment ... of extreme weather, of obscene ego and nationalist folly, yes, but it also hits you viscerally, something about the planes high in the sky performing like that is emotional, frightening... possibly beautiful. It’s both uber-exciting and uber-boring. There’s a strange bodily effect subliminally acting out some deep trauma about conflict, or perhaps an animal desire for it ...

In *Disarm (portrait)* (2023), discarded Topshop dummies are taken apart and repurposed – mannequin limbs hurtle through the sky, emblazoned with texts such as *disarm*, *obsolete*, and *delegation*; referring to parts of the body as well as to the body politic. Banner describes this film as ‘a gravity defiant concrete poem – which is actually more fluid than concrete.’ The film’s soundtrack, recorded by the artist with friends, heightens the surreal sense of desire, conflict and lost

aspiration as it veers from the vulnerable to the grandiose, summoning the ‘runway’ as a site for aircraft as well as a theatrical fashion space.

A series of graphite drawings (2024-25) will also be on display, which could be storyboards for, or documentation of, the flypast. These drawings are presented in artist-made frames formed of recast metal from Tornado ZE728 that highlight the liquid and solid possibilities of the material. In these graphite drawings the artist alludes too to the industrial purpose of graphite as a lubricant and probes the possibility lubricating a language that has calcified into its opposite.’

Vulva Volvo (2025) is based on a text/poem by Banner that plays with the shared etymology of the two words; she has edited the text to a single word, a wry look at the commodification of language, the piece attempts to re-engender the word and re-route the conspiracy of the linear notion of time and space. In *time, the anti-hero* (2025), a mannequin’s arm, tattooed with the word DISARM, marks out the minutes of the day; a one-armed clock which calls for urgency yet displays time as circular, something perhaps endless and unaccountable.

Fiona Banner was born in Merseyside in 1966. She studied at Kingston Polytechnic and Goldsmiths College. Selected recent solo projects and exhibitions include *DISARM*, CIRCA, Piccadilly Circus, London, UK (2024), *DISARM*, Chester Contemporary, Chester, UK (2023), *Pranayama Organ*, Zeppelin University, Lake Constance, Germany (2023), *Pranayama Typhoon – Soft Parts Wing Flap Fin*, Hartware MedienKunstverein Dortmund (HMKV), Germany (2022), *Pranayama Typhoon*, Patronato Salesiano Leone XIII, Venice, Italy (2022). *P E R I O D*, Voorlinden Museum & Gardens, Wassenaar, The Netherlands (2020), *Runway AW17*, De Pont Museum, Tilburg, Netherlands (2017); *Buoys Boys*, De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, UK (2016); *Scroll Down And Keep Scrolling*, IKON Gallery, Birmingham and Kunsthalle Nuremberg, Germany (2015-2016); *Wp Wp Wp*, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield (2014); *Mistah Kurtz - He Not Dead*, PEER, London (2014); *A Room for London*, with David Kohn Architects and Artangel, Southbank Centre, London (2012-13); *Harrier and Jaguar*, Tate Britain Duveen Commission, Tate Britain, London (2010).

Disarm (portrait) was originally commissioned by Chester Contemporary and shown in an abandoned Topshop in Chester in 2023.

Disarm (landscape) was originally commissioned by CIRCA. First screened on Piccadilly Lights, London as part of the CIRCA 20:24 programme in 2024.