

A series of large-scale posters refer to Banner's live performances and publications: most notably *The Exquisite Corpse Will Drink the Young Wine* featuring *Snoopy Vs The Red Baron* and the world premiere of Orson Welles's unrealised screenplay<sup>4</sup> for Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*<sup>5</sup>. In the latter performance in 2012, Banner staged and directed Welles's script on board the *Roi des Belges* with actor Brian Cox. The film was live fed, four floors below, to the Queen Elizabeth Hall at London's Southbank Centre. This was the world premiere of the unmade film and captured views of the financial centre of London, the River Thames and the Houses of Parliament from the window of the *Roi des Belges*. It speaks to the themes in the *Heart of Darkness* in both a historical and contemporary light.

## Posters

*Snoopy Vs The Red Baron* fantasised about meeting the Red Baron in combat; he not only wanted to kill him – he wanted to become him. At a time when public consciousness was still grappling with the effects of that century's second global war, Charles M. Schultz presented a series of characters in the Peanuts cartoon who anthropomorphised this internal struggle and the communal failure to understand it. In 1966, shortly after the Red Baron first appeared in Schultz's cartoon, The Royal Guardsmen released the song *Snoopy Vs The Red Baron*. Snoopy's owners sued the band over the use of his name. As a result sheet music was never published. As well as being a cartoon beagle and a fantastical fighter pilot Snoopy aspires to be a great novelist. Banner references the hubris of this ambition in a series of what she calls "overblown posters".

from the riverboat, the *Roi des Belges*, captained by Joseph Conrad whilst in the Congo in 1890, a journey echoed in his famous work *Heart of Darkness*.

7. The *Peanuts* font was derived from Charles M. Schultz's handwriting. Its full stop does actually look a bit like a peanut.

This guide is been presented in its penultimate state – unfolded and untrimmed, using the imposition method, which would normally be folded and trimmed to make an eight-page A5 booklet. In the print industry this is referred to as an 'unfinished' sheet. The guide is also presented as a tower of sheets, stacked and glued along the spine so that it has the appearance of one epic publication. It assumes a sculptural presence and yet is ephemeral, as the viewer is invited to tear off a sheet and take it away.

The representation of process is typical of Banner's work – here through playing with, or 'unfinishing', the common gallery guide she has created a new interactive publication – Please help yourself!

*Buoys Boys* is part of the ROOT 1066 International Festival, in which artists loosely respond to the cultural and linguistic legacies of the Norman invasion. A further happening of the *Buoys Boys* Full Stop inflatables performance will take place on the closing of Hastings's ROOT 1066 International Festival on 16 October 2016, weather permitting.

Banner's film is set to a soundtrack based on the 1966 pop song *Snoopy Vs The Red Baron*. Banner has produced an on-going body of work related to these two characters and has returned to the song in a number of different live performances. The tracks here were recorded during the rehearsals for these performances: one with Viv Albertine (formerly of The Slits) who Banner collaborated with on a new musical arrangement of the song, at *The Exquisite Corpse Will Drink The Young Wine* event curated by Banner at the Welsh Congregational Chapel in London (2012); the other with the Sir John Cass School Choir at the St Andrew by the Wardrobe Church in the City of London.<sup>2</sup>

The Red Baron was the nickname given to ace of aces, Manfred Von Richtshofen, a German World War One fighter pilot, infamous for the number of young men he killed in combat and for the delight he supposedly took in doing so.<sup>3</sup> Largely thanks to wartime propaganda, Richtshofen was legendary in his own lifetime and mythologised posthumously. Amidst a booming, paranoid post-war culture,

## Snoopy Vs The Red Baron

"The full stops have the English Channel as backdrop. They are big black empty texts in one way, just floating buoys in another. There's something beautiful but also dark about the Channel. Britain was invaded across this stretch of water in 1066, the same stretch that today is both a route of attempted refuge and the increasingly contentious divider between Britain and mainland Europe. The black abstract forms are markers within language but also markers within space and time, sometimes absurd, comical, or even surreal."

**BUOYS BOYS** is an exhibition of new and recent work by British artist **Fiona Banner**. De La Warr Pavilion, 24 September 2016 – 8 January 2017.

## The Vanity Press

Banner first came to prominence with her 'wordscapes' or 'still films' which are written transcriptions of iconic films retold in her own words. Described as 'unreadable', the first Vanity Press publication was *THE NAM* (1997), a 1,000 page blow-by-blow account of classic Vietnam War films including *Apocalypse Now* and *Full Metal Jacket*. With an interest in how historical events become fictionalised over time and how conflict is mythologised through popular culture, the constant power struggle between words and their meaning is central to Banner's conceptual approach that examines conflict, language and its limitations.

The Vanity Press has been the backbone of Banner's practice since 1997. '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 by publishing posters, books, objects and performances that deploy a playful attitude and utilise pseudo grandeur.

The Vanity Press is also a channel for Banner to explore the act of publishing as a form of performative sculpture.

6. *Roi des Belges* was designed by Fiona Banner in collaboration with David Kohn Architects. Their design drew inspiration as its narrative framework.

5. Banner first came across Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* through her work *Apocalypse Now* (1996) and subsequently her artists book *THE NAM* (2007) both works refer to Francis Ford Coppola's epic Vietnam movie which uses Conrad's novel in Europe. Today other parallels are drawn.

4. In the late 1930s Orson Welles wrote a screenplay based on Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*. It would have been his first film but it was rejected by the studio RKO, and was never realised. It had never been performed since it was written in 1939. Welles went on to make *Citizen Kane* instead. At the time the *Heart of Darkness* script was considered too political, too expensive, and too uncompromising artistically, not to mention its narrative parallels with the rise of fascism.

3. It is a unique phenomenon of The Red Baron that all the boys he shot down are documented and named individually; Banner can be heard reciting the boys' names on the *Buoys Boys* soundtrack.

2. The church today is known simply as The Wardrobe, dating back to the thirteenth century, when King Edward III stored his state robes there.

1. When airplanes had no canopy and pilots needed a jacket to keep them warm. Today's nylon bomber is based on the MA-1, a design first issued in the U.S. Air Force and military around 1950. The bomber became part of popular culture initially with skinheads, punks and scooter boys in the 1970s.

Both performances depict the abstract but visceral notion of conflict through a semi-fictional story, which are both subject to tales of hubristic controversy around authorship.

## Font

The entrance way to this exhibition is marked by *Font* (2015), a found 1920's marble baptismal font, carved with its common name, 'Font'. It creates a playful slippage between naming, language and object/image; a recurrent theme in Banner's work.

The text in this guide, on the baptismal font, the gallery wall vinyl and in the book *Scroll Down And Keep Scrolling* are all set in Banner's new typeface *Font*, an amalgamation of typefaces she has worked with previously. Download the font for free at [www.fionabanner.com](http://www.fionabanner.com)

*"It's a family tree arrangement where the child of Avant Garde and Courier mates with Peanuts<sup>7</sup> 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."*

## Footnotes

1. The title of the exhibition *Buoys Boys* is a play on words and references the BOYS bomber jacket image, which Banner found during time spent at the Archive of Modern Conflict in 2013. The name Bomber Jacket comes from the word bombardier, which was originally created for pilots in WWI

Occupying the full length of the gallery windows is *Ha-ha* (2014), a panoramic installation placing peepholes, or illusory sculptural 'buoys' on the distant seascape. Banner has been producing full stop works since 1998, beginning the series after the epic task of finishing her book *THE NAM*.

## Ha-ha

The Vanity Press recently published *Scroll Down And Keep Scrolling* (2015), an 832-page book which focuses on the practices around the making of work, rather than the final art object. While known or exhibited works are adequately represented on the web, in this book Banner's work is represented through the hitherto unpublished ephemera surrounding it – the stuff that is not exhibited. It does not seek to present the work formally or as finite, but as a process. The title refers to the ancient form of publications as scrolls but also to how we read digitally. Here the book is presented alongside a wallpaper created from its book covers; the flat sheets used by printers to set colour balance and tone, a normally unseen by-product of the printing process.

## Scroll Down And Keep Scrolling

She asks questions about the way ideas are represented and circulated through one-off, unique publications in various forms: a neon sign handmade by the artist, sunburnt papers and a pair of trousers, each issued ISBN numbers and registered as publications. In 2009 she registered herself as a publication, "it's a kind of self portrait of myself as a book".

*"Much of my work is densely verbal. The full stop works were originally a way of engaging with the challenges and frustrations of language and communication. Instead of working with language itself, I started to work with this mark that represented a gap in language, the space in-between sentences; a literal escape from verbal language."*

Her full stops have been rendered in three dimensions in materials such as bronze and polystyrene, sculptures that literally punctuate space. In *Ha-ha*, the apertures are in the shape of full stops, which have been cut out of UV reduction vinyl on the gallery windows. The full stops here are enlarged to the same point size from a variety of different fonts, revealing the anomalies within this apparently uniform symbol. *Ha-ha* is named after the landscape design element of country estates; the walled ditch designed to conceal and contain the unsightly from view.

## Buoys Boys

In the new performance and related film *Buoys Boys*<sup>1</sup> (2016), Banner references the limitations of language through a new series of full stop sculptures. The full stops are massively blown up in scale but also literally blown up, as they take the form of helium-filled inflatables. When the helium forms are not installed on the roof of the De La Warr Pavilion, they are 'stored' in the gallery, some forming chairs or "human plinths," some "interrupting the space". In the film *Buoys Boys* the mammoth inflatable full stops in five typefaces – Capitalist, Courier, Bookman, Didot, Onyx – are documented floating from the roof of the Pavilion over the summer of 2016.