

British artist Fiona Banner poses questions on humans' desire, power

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Installation view of “Pranayama Typhoon,” at Barakat Contemporary in Seoul (Barakat Contemporary)

British artist Fiona Banner aka The Vanity Press' first exhibition in Asia is being held at Barakat Contemporary in Seoul, unveiling the artist's 14 new works comprising paintings, installations and video art.

Banner first gained attention in the mid-1990s for her “wordscapes” and “still films,” which explored the relationships of primitive human desire and violence conveyed through traditional nudes, pornography and Hollywood war films relayed as dense verbal depictions.

Upon entering the exhibition, a 10-meter-long decoy military fighter plane lies on the floor, slowly breathing as a living organism. The actual decoy plane, titled “Falcon,” incrementally inflates and deflates, ventilated by a fan. While the inflatable vinyl plane looks similar to a toy or leisure product, it's rather scary when one is reminded of its actual use.

“Through the process of inflation and deflation, the artist questioned the image of power,” commented curator Kim Min-jung.



"Pranayama Organ" by Fiona Banner aka The Vanity Press (Barakat Contemporary)

Next to the large decoy plane is the artist's film work "Pranayama Organ," where two decoy military aircrafts slowly inflate on a desolate beach with the majestic and profound sound of a pipe organ.

The film transitions into a ritualistic performance acted out by two people -- one of which is the artist -- who are dressed as fighter planes, dancing around each other performing a darkly comical ritual of courtship and combat. With the sound of the organ, which refers to both the massive wind instrument and corporal body, the film work reveals the ambivalent aspects of humanity's attitude toward nature, which is both exploited and revered.

The exhibition also features Banner's seascape painting series "Full Stop." Banner paints full stops, or periods, of various fonts -- including Helvetica, Peanuts, Klang and Orator -- that float on a sea.



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Banner has described the full stop as a "symbol of language without content, representing the emptiness of language, language poised on a precipice, a crisis where fonts, letters and words no longer function as couriers of meaning."

Before heading out of the gallery, visitors encounter a rearview mirror that reflects back an image of the gallery. The artist has written the words "bad review" on the mirror, questioning gallerygoers' perceptions.

The exhibition, "Pranayama Typhoon," runs through Aug. 15.