

Text Hannah Lack  
Photography Johnnie Shand Kydd

# Fiona Banner

Delves into

## The Oxford English Dictionary

"I use dictionaries as a reference to life. I see the dictionary as a kind of poem about everything – it's every story waiting to be told and constructed, or every story unmade and deconstructed. What I really enjoy about the *Oxford English Dictionary* is that it's reissued every year, so it acknowledges that language is never definitive, it's always changing and reflecting us. Through language, we make ourselves up. And if it's a reflection of us, it's also the means through which we become ourselves and share ourselves. So I suppose this massive dictionary is a sculpture of us somehow. Words are my medium, kind of like my oil paint. That being the case, I'm always examining language and looking at its freedoms and limitations. There are so many great words. Daffodil. Spunk. Concise. I suppose my favourite words are ones that admit their failure as pure language – they confess that language is not enough, and they become concrete because they try to sound like what they represent. And I think that's quite cool."



**"It's every story waiting to be told"**

Fiona Banner revels in language, its rainbow of possibility as well as those inevitable moments when it fails us. The Merseyside-born artist's work includes a blow-by-blow account of David Lean's epic *Lawrence of Arabia*, scribbled in tiny, barely legible text across a canvas worthy of the film's scope at 17 feet across. She has talked dirty all over a wall of the Tate Britain in an explicit, neon-pink account of

pornographic movie *Arsewoman in Wonderland*, and published a mammoth 1,000 page flickbook *The Nam*, containing descriptions written from memory of every Vietnam film she has ever seen. Meanwhile the shiny round full-stop sculptures that have punctuated gallery floors focus on the intangible spaces between words and grapple with the elusive nature of language. After decorating the Tate's Christmas tree with tiny plastic fighter planes in a sculpture drolly titled *Peace on Earth*, Banner has recently taken to undressing people – with words – in her intimate descriptions of nudes.