

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Peep show

Fiona Banner's work blurs the boundaries between art and pornography. On the eve of the publication of her new book, 'Performance Nude', TWIN looks in on the still inimitable YBA

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Fiona photographed in her studio, 29th September 2009

FORGET WORDS. FIONA Banner turns punctuation into art. She explores the problems and possibilities of written language. For Banner, it's all about the space between words, the urge and failure of communication. The British artist's public artworks have included bronze casts of giant full stops, to be used as seats or to lean against. They're objects to pause against just as we pause in conversation.

Emerging alongside the YBAs in the Nineties, Banner initially raised eyebrows with her wordscapes or still films – blow by blow written descriptions of feature films, ranging from pornos to war epics. Nominated for the Turner Prize in 2002, her X-rated version of Alice's adventures 'Arsewoman in Wonderland' crossed the line between art and porn. Graphic was an understatement. In 1997's 'THE, NAM' she turned

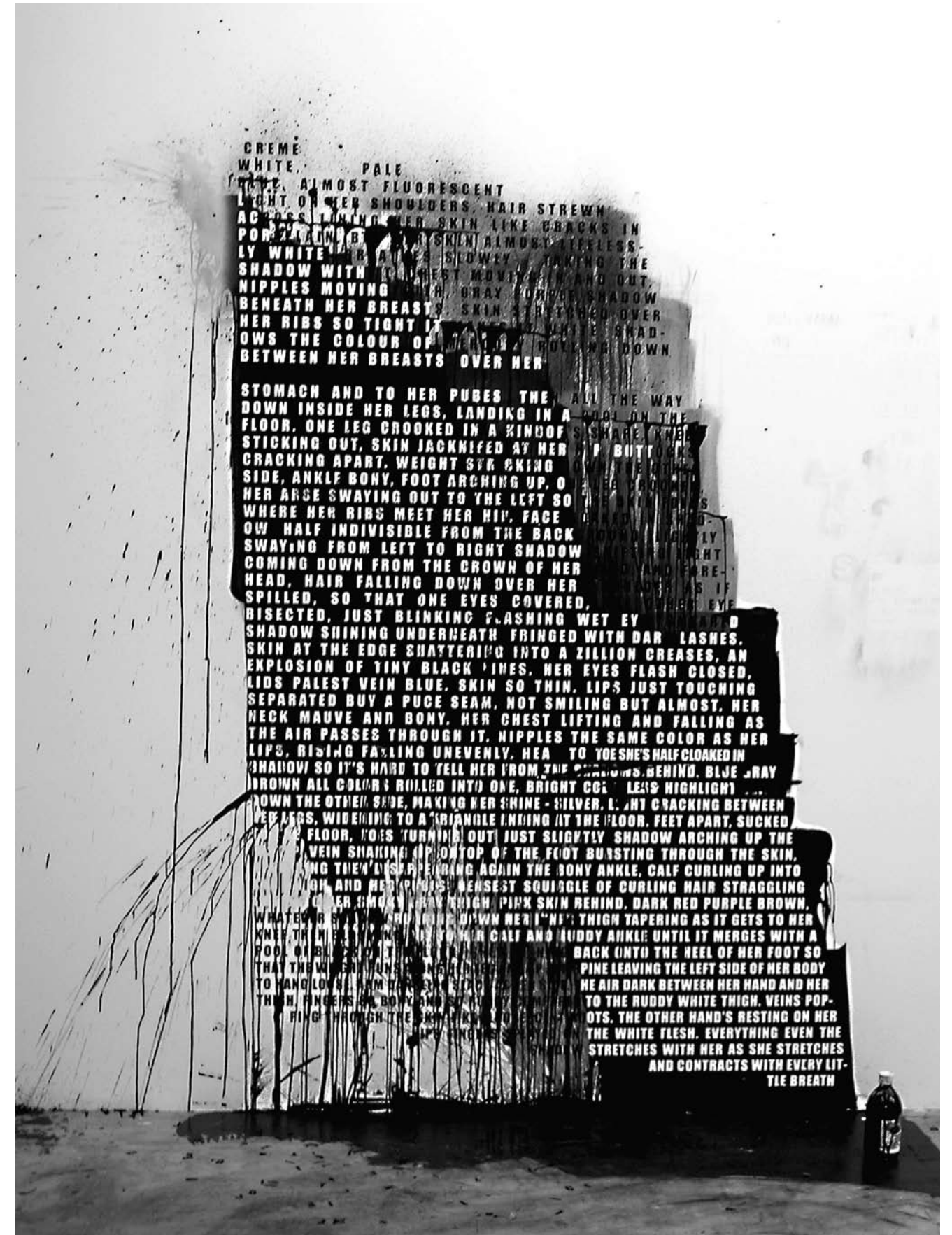
her eyes to war, describing six Vietnam films (*Full Metal Jacket, The Deer Hunter, Apocalypse Now!, Born on the Fourth of July, Hamburger Hill* and *Platoon*) in her own words. There's something confrontational about her work. Banner lays bare structures of domination and manhood.

Recently the artist's attention has turned to the concept of the art-historical nude. She observes a life model and transcribes their pose and form in the same way that she earlier transcribed. Banner's interest in life drawing has its roots in her love of pornography. Both have very limited narrative and virtually no dialogue – just the hovering gaze. For her performances she stages a classical studio set-up with an easel, then describes the nude model in front of a live audience. These events scrutinize the nature of voyeurism – the audience observing the model, but also the audience's voyeurism looking at

Banner making the art. The whole process plays with how artworks are treated as erotic objects.

Banner's work juxtaposes the brutal with the sensual, performing an almost complete cycle of intimacy and alienation. She examines the complexity around nudes, ideas around gender and the history of description itself. There is an obsession with freeze-framing brutally intimate moments in time. No before or after, no narrative embellishment, just the bare figure standing there. Is she scared of her own mortality and inevitable decay? She sees life drawing as an attempt to make permanent something that is always passing, always slipping away. Like a gravestone, Banner's work is an everlasting relic of an expired moment in history. Long after she has expired, her words will remain.

'Performance Nude' is published by Other Criteria



'Almost Fluorescent Nude', 2007
Indian ink on wall



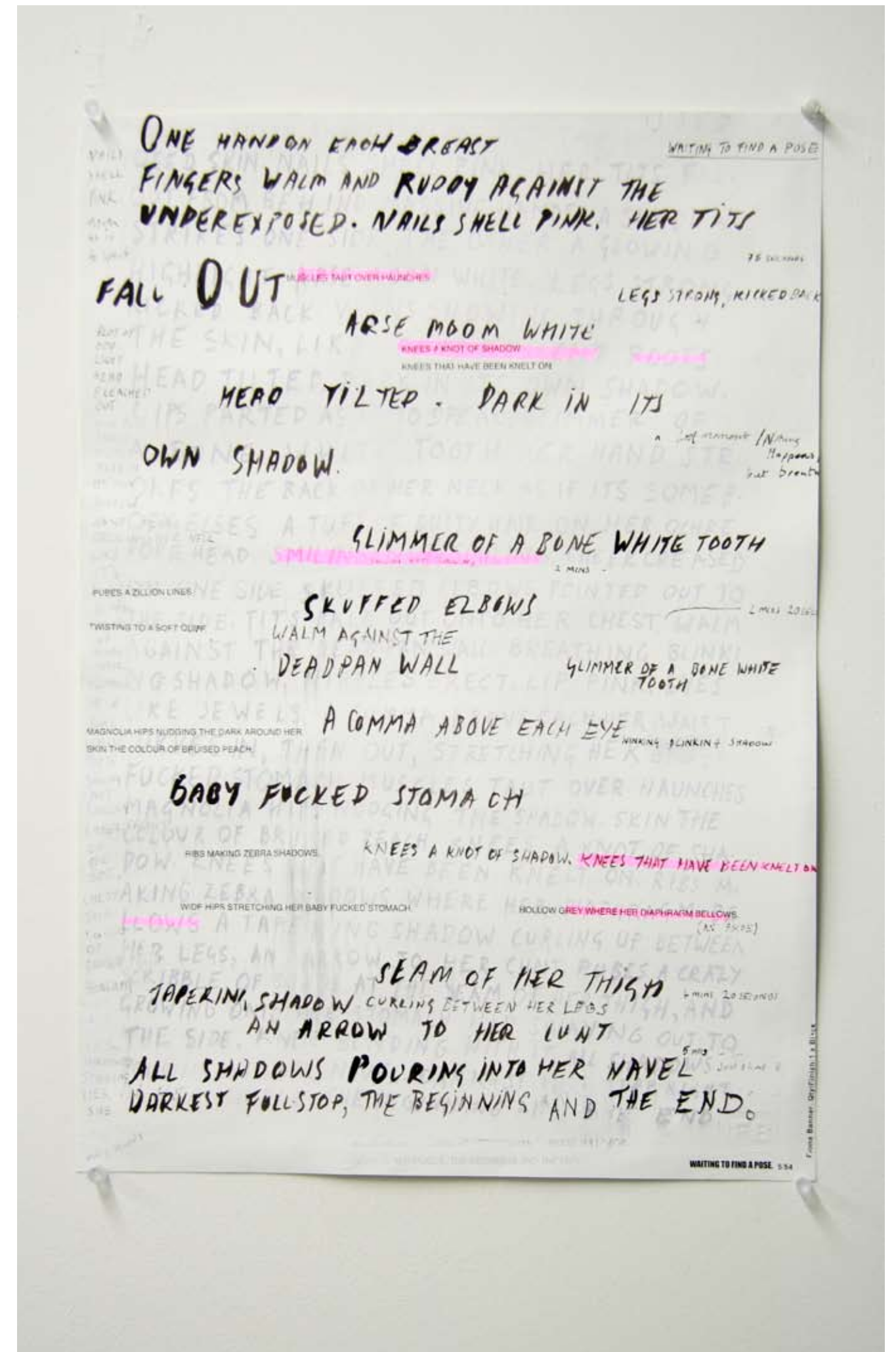
Banner's Best: here are a few of Fiona's favourite things, above (left to right), a stack of 'The Oxford English Dictionary', her own book 'All the World's Fighter Planes' (The Vanity Press, 2006), 'The Mark on the Wall and other short fiction', by Virginia Woolf (Oxford University Press) and a selection of Jane's 'All the World's Aircraft' dating from 1909 - 2009



Above, (left to right), 'LAGNAPPE', poems by Nick Santos-Pedro (LET), 'The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke' (Picador Classics), Fiona Banner artwork entitled 'Mother', 2009, comprising of a reconstructed typewriter (33 x 15 x 30cm) and a 'Chinook' a helicopter kit model, of which Banner says: "Named after the huge Chinook winds of North America, I started making drawings of these helicopters 25 years ago, and still do them today. They are strangely anthropomorphic. The Army still struggles to build anything that matches them."



'Nude Performance', Toronto, 2007
Performance with Ame Henderson
The Power Plant, Toronto



'Waiting to Find a Pose', 2008
Mixed media on paper