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KYLIE BANYARD

STORY OWEN CRAVEN

Kylie Banyard works across a multitude of media: painting, photography, video and installation. Her art creates other worlds, repurposing objects and spaces from the past to imagine an alternative existence to the present. Her recently completed PhD – *Imagining Alternatives: Gazing at the contemporary world through figurations of the outmoded* – saw Banyard immerse herself fully into examining these alternative ways of being.



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CAN YOU TELL me about your interest in objects from the past and how they influence your practice?

Central to my practice is the seemingly disparate and at times uncanny relation between technical obsolescence – understood as remnants or objects from the past – and visual nostalgia, as a type of retrieval of former ideals. For me, the outmoded objects and ideas given new life in my artwork hark back to times in the recent past when it seemed easier to imagine a space and a thinking outside the dominant socio-economic system of modern Western culture; when faith in inventing alternative visions of the world via utopian imagination seemed more vital. I work with these forms and ideas in an attempt to access the historical past and find alternate ways to think through the present and better understand just *how to contemplate the future*.

Your paintings often depict building façades or unique spaces. Can you tell me about them – are they real places or imagined? What do you see is their function in your work?

My process often starts with a nostalgically based interest in photographic imagery of faraway places and another time – sometimes found and at other times self-documented. Working with images of this type acts as a catalyst in my construction of vivid spaces of imagination, such as the handmade houses. This reflective romantic tendency stems from a deeper longing for something else – a searching for an uncertain allusive space that is neither *here* nor *there*, but always immeasurably better than the harsh realities and clutter of the everyday *real* world. This sense of utopian yearning is a romantic turn that has a long art historical lineage, however, it also plays out in the escapist everyday desires of the armchair traveller, who in the online world of today might find themselves on Tumblr, Instagram or Pinterest. These social media forms offer users the chance to construct mediated spaces and filtered feeds as a way of presenting idealised or alternate spaces; offering a momentary distraction from the *here* and an ideal and manufactured impression of *there*.

Ultimately, I am very interested in examining the many ways people have explored more experimental ways of living. The spaces I

reference in my works function in recognition of my research into some of the examples I have discovered from across the world. My artworks also possess a fantasy element, like a layer of fantasy, which I consciously place over the research I have done into these places. I do this intentionally, I want to tease out and linger in this space of imagining. I am making work from the point of view of the daydreamer, musing about what a radically different or experimental way of living might be like; it is speculative and does not cross over into pragmatism. I combine this interest in alternative or experimental living with optical devices like stereoscopes, the Dreamachine or View-Master to activate or encourage a sense of wonder and interest in other ways of living by simultaneously presenting the viewer other ways of seeing. As a child I picked up a View-Master and used the apparatus to journey magically to different places. In this way I use the optical device as a through-line and in service of this layer of fantasy I lay over the work, to signal towards the otherworldly places that interest me, the counterculture, the experimental lifestyle, etc.

You work across a diverse range of media from painting to large-scale installations, as well as video and photography. How do you approach these very different mediums?

It feels very fluid. I am a product of the post-medium age. The medium I employ for any artwork I make is determined by the conceptually driven idea. Having said that, my heart belongs to painting.

Do they operate as a whole or can each medium stand apart from the others?

I'd say it works both ways, the different works always seem to stand apart and they also operate as a whole no matter what the medium.

With the installations, you often encourage the viewer to interact and immerse themselves with the spaces and objects. Why is this important to your work?

This interest comes back to my desire to imagine alternatives or other ways of being in the world. I use the interactive (normally optical or scopic devices) as a way of encouraging the audience to partake in

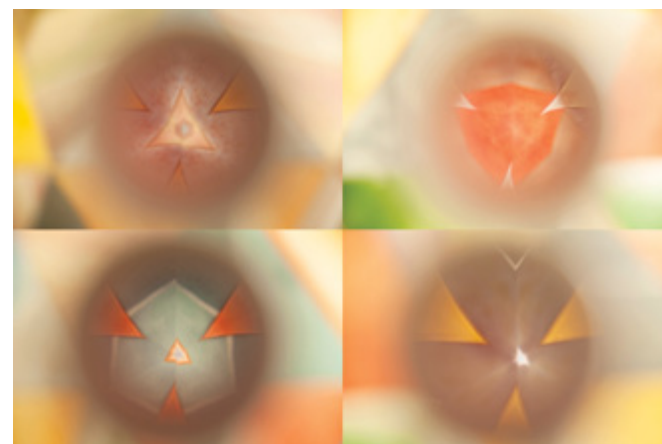
“seeing differently”. By looking through a viewing mechanism they experience an altered space and are experiencing a different view (literally), so I guess I use the devices as a metaphorical tool. I am interested in the way these simple manual technologies can renew a sense of wonder. My personal attraction to optical devices like the View-Master and the kaleidoscope stem from a childhood attraction. The View-Master holds particular poignancy for me, insofar as it activates my earliest and most vivid memories of image-based reverie as a child.

You recently completed your PhD. What is your topic, and has this research changed aspects of your art making?

I completed my PhD at UNSW Art & Design late last year (2014). My PhD research was my art making. By that, I mean that it was a practice-based research project so its effect on my art making process is that it provided me a focused space for sustained investigation, critical, theoretical and experimental. I'm the type of artist who loves the research stage of a project. I really thrive on an intertwined process of conceptually driven critical analysis and making in the studio. In other words, I like writing, while also pushing paint around canvas; so, for me the reflective and multi-faceted structure of theorising and making, which is integral to a PhD, was a natural way of working. I was lucky enough to have a scholarship so in a very pragmatic financial sense, the PhD allowed me to spend a good four years exploring and questioning my practice in a full-time capacity.

My research topic explained the reasoning behind the convergence of two cases of the outmoded in my art practice. The two instances of obsolescence were old fashioned, pre-cinematic optical devices and the social model of the counterculture commune. My thesis investigated the theoretical, socio-cultural and formal issues associated with my interest in these outmoded phenomena. It also examined the role of obsolete technologies and ways of living in other contemporary art, asking whether the rekindling of anachronistic forms possesses critical agency in the present. ■

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Kylie Banyard is represented by Galerie pompom, Sydney.

www.galeriepompom.com
www.kyliebanyard.com

- 01 Somewhere, 2014, oil and acrylic on board, 45.5 x 40cm
- 02 Daydreamer II (install view), 2013, Oregon Timber, plywood, acrylic, turntable, Dreamachine, cushions, ELO record, dimensions varied
- 03 Soler's Studio, 2014, oil and acrylic on canvas, 183 x 137cm
- 04 Cosmic Chimes, 2014, oil and acrylic on canvas, 76.5 x 61cm
- 05 Bell Chamber, 2014, oil and acrylic on canvas, 91.5 x 76.5 cm
- 06 Imagining Alternatives, 2013, View Master with custom reel containing images of seven oil paintings, red cedar shelf, dimensions varied, edition of 5
- 07 Cosmic Tudor, 2011, oil on canvas, 38 x 31cm
- 08 Domescope Haze1, 2014, lambda print, 64 x 81cm, edition of 3 + 2 AP
 Photography by Brett East
 Courtesy the artist, Galerie pompom and Artbank Australia's collection