

Five on Five: Kylie Banyard on Dana Schutz's *Breastfeeding*

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KYLIE BANYARD [INTRODUCTION QUOTE]

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TIARNEY MIEKUS [INTRODUCTION]

For this series of Five on Five, we're asking five artists to talk about a painting that has influenced or inspired them. In this episode, hear Kylie Banyard reflect upon 'Breastfeeding' painted by American artist Dana Schutz.

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My name's Kylie Banyard and I'm primarily a painter, but I also make interdisciplinary installations, usually sculpture, painting hybrids, and works that encourage the beholder to engage in a multisensory way with the work. I'm from Sydney, and I recently relocated to Mildura. Most of the time my practice examines the rekindling of the utopian imagination, questioning whether the faded optimism associated with discarded utopias of the early counterculture and the radical technological and social experiments of the past can be combined and regenerated in the contemporary artistic context to poetic and critical effect. My work contributes to understandings about the renewed critical currency and political potential of the utopian imagination.

The painting that I'm going to talk about today is a painting by Dana Schutz, and it's called 'Breastfeeding'. It was painted in 2015. Schutz is a contemporary painter based in Brooklyn in New York City, and was a rapid rising art star of the early 2000s. I think her paintings just get better all the time. She makes pretty in your face, semi-abstract, figurative works that are really punchy, intense, and visceral. They possess a sense of interior or internal narrative. They're often absurd and evade logic or reason. She's definitely one of my top five living painters.

I first saw the Dana Schutz painting at the Art Gallery of New South Wales at the 'Something Living' exhibition. I'd been in love with her paintings for many years, and this was the first time I'd ever seen one in the flesh. It was hanging in a room with some of my other favorite artists like Neo Rauch and Philip Guston, and the Schutz absolutely stole the show. I know many people who saw that work in the show and were struck by its power and intensity.

My initial response to the work was that I was really excited to see her work in the flesh for the first time. It was so much more affecting in real life than what her works appear in reproduction, and this was shocking to me because her works are really striking in reproduction anyway on the screen or in a book. Apart from the fact that she's one of my absolute favorite painters, it's also a painting of a breastfeeding mother, and I assume that it's a self-portrait of the artist feeding her baby. I'm only assuming though. This resonated strongly with me. At the time I was breastfeeding my second child. I'd been thinking a lot, mostly while feeding, because you spend a lot of time sitting or laying around thinking when you're breastfeeding. Anyway, I'd been thinking of making a self-portrait whilst breastfeeding and wondering what it would look like.

I wondered would it be a harmonious and serene scene like all of those Mary Cassatt paintings of portraits of mothers and babies, or would I try to communicate the struggle that sometimes accompanies the experience? For me, the Schutz painting was captivating in this regard because it speaks to me of the struggle. It's like a wrestle between the mother and child. It's so different to the idealised Mary Cassatt paintings. The mother figure in the work is barely recognisable. She seems completely alien or other, and this sense of othering is a real emotional reaction to the breastfeeding experience. For me, it was an experience that was often very beautiful, but then often really hard and kind of ugly as well, and confronting. So the painting really captures that. When you're starting out as a new mum, you lose touch with your former self, so you feel very other.

Your life can feel completely transformed and turned on its head. It's also a struggle for artist mothers to continue to work with young children. Obviously, it's

doable, but it's hard. This painting feels hot, urgent, tense, and a little bit hard, so it really captured what I was thinking about with breastfeeding and trying to make a work about it. I think it's a political work in this way. For me it raises issues about some of the crazy taboos that still surround the act of feeding a baby in public; feeding without feeling embarrassed or without feeling shame, and it also speaks of the transformative effect of becoming a mother.

Firstly, the aesthetic qualities that resonated for me with the painting was Schutz's sense of color. No one working today I think has such a great, brave approach to colour. Her works glow in a hot, powerful, vivid way, and I love working with colour too, so I often reflect on Schutz's approach when I get stuck with my own work. The painting spoke to me about how to make a painting about breastfeeding that's a little in your face and confronting and not conventional. It makes me wonder whether I even need to try and do it myself now. She's done it so well and so powerfully. I think it's meaningful for me in many reasons. As a painter, it gave me so much pleasure just to stand in front of it and marvel at its formal qualities. It's intoxicating. It's beautiful and ugly or possibly excessive and abject in this sense. My friend Anna Christensen often used to explain the characteristics of a work to painting students when we were teaching together, and she'd say, this work has a 'yuck yum' quality, and I think she picked this up from artist Richard Tuttle originally, but it sums up the Schutz painting perfectly. It has a really powerful, 'yum yuck' quality. In addition to that, it's the subject matter; so relevant to my own experience at the time of seeing it.