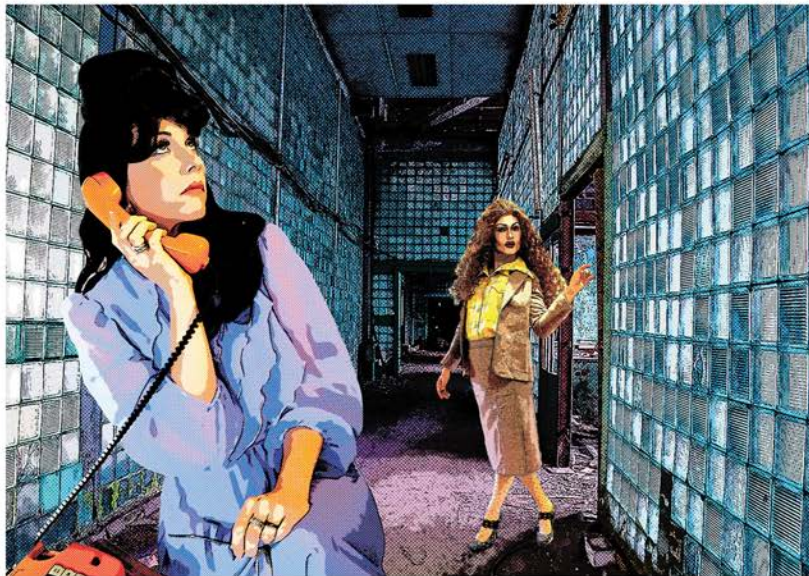


Fever Dream
Jackie Ryan

onespace

18 October – 16 November 2024





Jackie Ryan, *Old Gods and New* (Featuring Fez Fa'anana), 2024, Dye sublimation on aluminium, 84 x 118cm, 2AP + Edition of 5. Image: Courtesy of the artist and Onespace.

Jackie Ryan, *Out of Office* (Featuring Carody Culver and Myles McGuire), 2024, Dye sublimation on aluminium, 59 x 84cm, 2AP + Edition of 10. Image: Courtesy of the artist and Onespace.

Cover: Jackie Ryan, *It's a Long Story* (Featuring Myles McGuire), 2024, 59 x 42cm, 2AP + Edition of 10. Image: Courtesy of the artist and Onespace.

The woman I meet on the park bench is not Jackie Ryan. She has made that clear, or at least, someone claiming to be her did – the voice on the call I received from an anonymous number certainly sounded like Dr Ryan, despite her attempts to disguise it, with an accent pitched somewhere between Ulaanbaatar and Berlin. Swishing a wig that looks as though with one more blow dry it shall be reduced to smithereens, she hands me a briefcase.

‘Inside this is everything you need to know,’ she says, ‘about the artist Jackie Ryan.’

The briefcase is so heavy I wonder, for a panicky moment, if in fact it contains Jackie Ryan. Spilled onto my apartment floor I instead find video tapes, scrapbooks, six passports, four birth certificates, all annotated in the manic griffonage of a serial killer. *The beginning is now the end*, reads one such hieroglyph, and another, equally cryptic – *Mallory Towers made me a lesbian*. With a deep sigh I pop a dexamphetamine and begin to piece together Jackie Ryan – the artist, the woman, the mystery.

A true chronology is impossible to discern. At various points, Ryan has been an artist, a filmmaker, a writer, a historian – sometimes at the same time. Appraising the dossier, I wonder, is she a polymath? A Renaissance woman? Or are these merely cover stories, false identities worn and discarded? The defining feature of Ryan’s oeuvre is her affinity for masks and artifice, simultaneously camp and chic. The graphic monochrome of the *Burger Force* comics blurs into the lurid, Vaso-on-the-lens dreamworld of Fanciful Fiction Auxiliary. The most fanciful fiction of all, perhaps, is Dr Ryan herself.

Take, for example, that Ryan began her career in graphic reproduction. This origin story is perhaps a tad convenient – in traditional four-colour printing, images are burnt onto metal plates, then pressed onto paper. In *Fever Dream* her digital artworks are presented on aluminium, the process becoming the product (the beginning is now the end?). The evolution of printing technology dovetails (again, suspiciously) with another motif of Ryan’s work. Her predilection for retro aesthetics – the pre-colour seasons of the 1960s spy serial *The Avengers*; the glossy, draggish 1980s stylings of soap operas *Dynasty*, *Dallas* and their antipodean counterpart, *Return to Eden* – paradoxically refute nostalgia. In Ryan’s work the retro represents the cutting edge; the viewer is reminded that fashions which might elsewhere be perceived as dated were in fact, in their time, the product of new technologies, new styles, new imaginative horizons. Collaging stock images and manipulating her photographed subjects from the command centre of her Apple iMac, Ryan replicates the feeling of giddy acceleration characteristic of the latter half of the twentieth century – the bewildering sensation of rapid technological advancement, wherein each seismic innovation is promptly succeeded by the next.

These innovations have served Dr Ryan well. She cannot, by her own admission, draw, though this may be one among so many misdirections. Among the briefcase's ephemera are childhood sketches on tracing paper, her upcycling approach to found art formed in the nursery (the beginning is now the end). Her limitations in this regard are, I suspect, overstated; the real constraint (and constraints are a necessary precondition for innovation) is fiscal. Ryan's big-budget imagination finds expression through the DIY ethos of indie. *Burger Force* is televisual, with Ryan using flesh-and-blood actors/models to update the aesthetics of *Modesty Blaise* illustrator Jim Holdaway. The liquid eyes of Holdaway's drawings are given depth and gravitas; these are real people, feeling real, fake things. And her Ben-Day dot colossi, her subjects dwarfing their ersatz backgrounds, are properly gargantuan – an effect which, if attempted in a summer blockbuster, would cost half a billion dollars and frankly look like shit.

My fingers trembling as I guzzle pharmaceutical speed, I wonder whether this is the real Jackie Ryan, Dr Ryan, whoever. Are the performers, the characters, her masks, façades she dons, a riff on Cindy Shermanesque self-portraiture? Or does the real Jackie Ryan exist in the space around the subjects, in the totalising vision at once enlarging and compressive? Is this masquerade or authenticity, the generous act of an artist who understands that in one's private world, we are all of us larger than life?

My eyes slide from the picture of a woman seemingly being swallowed by her own hair onto one of the dark azimuths tattooing my apartment floor; I squint. I know what the shadows are; the thing is, I don't have venetian blinds. At the very same moment I hear a phone ringing, a landline I also did not know I possessed.

'Hello?' I answer.

'Now,' Jackie, or someone...fuck it. This time, she is Irish. 'Now, do you understand?'

Myles McGuire



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Image: Courtesy of the artist and Onespace.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the Brisbane region, the Turrbal and Jagera peoples.

We acknowledge their continuing connection to the lands, waters, culture and community. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present.

Onespace is a trusted gallery for quality artists, contemporary art exhibitions and public art commissioning services. Our gallery work is part of a valuable conversation with curators, institutions and collectors that draws a wider audience towards the cultural and environmental narratives that shape our era.

Directors, John Stafford and Jodie Cox

john@onespace.com.au

jodie@onespace.com.au

Exhibitions Manager, Demi Conrad

demi@onespace.com.au

onespace.com.au

25A Bouquet Street South Brisbane QLD 4101
Australia

Tues to Fri: 10am–5pm | **Sat:** 12pm–5 pm
(07) 3846 0642

The person playing the role of Jackie is a multi-award-winning Australian artist. She has an abiding interest in culture that connects her work across forms and genres, from writing and research to performance, arts administration, film work and visual design. She holds a PhD in History and Political Science from The University of Queensland, where she was also an Honorary Research Fellow.

If she's to be believed... her book *We'll Show the World: Expo 88* (UQP, 2018) won two Queensland Literary Awards – the Queensland Premier's Award for a Work of State Significance and the History Book Award – and was also shortlisted for The Courier-Mail People's Choice Queensland Book of the Year Award. Her graphic novel series, *Burger Force*, has won an Aurealis Award and a Bronze Ledger Award and been shortlisted for the Russell Prize for Humour Writing. Her visual art has been the subject of solo and group exhibitions and is held in public and private collections. Her writing collective, the Fanciful Fiction Auxiliary (FFA), has sold out performance venues. *Allegedly*.

The websites for *Burger Force* and the FFA have been preserved by the National Archives of Australia as sites of cultural significance. Jackie has received funding from the Australia Council, Arts Queensland and Copyright Agency Limited and has *purportedly* had two art commissions from Brisbane City Council. She's also received a Queensland Writing Fellowship and a Lord Mayor's Writers Residency.

This construct of Jackie also happens to be the Artistic Director of the Brisbane Writers Festival.

In retrospect, her whole bio seems implausible. Jackie is either a fabulist or fabulous.

Onespace and the artist would like to thank:

Melt Festival, the extraordinary people at the core of these images, Jackie's parents, chief investigator Myles McGuire, the blindingly magnificent Carody Culver, and the real Jackie Ryan.