

PAUL GORMAN

Bang Bang Bang On The Door Baby!

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'Almost throughout the picture I used deep-focus lenses which have the effect of giving a harshness to the objects and a kind of enamelled, hard surface to the colours. I wanted this to bring out the inner violence, the energy of the characters which is all inside them and can't break through.' - Douglas Sirk on his 1956 film *Written On the Wind*¹

Welcome to the reveries of Holly Keogh, whose practice occupies a shadowland swollen with sensory suggestion, where fragments of found and family images are cast anew with surprising and sometimes ominous outcomes at the point where figuration meets abstraction.

The quizzically titled *Bang Bang Bang On The Door Baby!* considers femininity and glamour as well as the domestic and everyday, where the cinematic feel is replete with the possibilities of events unfolding beyond the frame as Keogh's distinctive washes of colour and compositional qualities evoke not only pulp ephemera but also the deeply saturated melodramas of auteurs such as Douglas Sirk.

Such heightened textures are achieved by Keogh's application of the idiosyncratic printmaking techniques she has developed over several years, in particular mono-printing where she paints onto memory foam – the slow-response, high-density material designed in furniture manufacture to mould to the body – and then presses the image onto canvas using her body weight. This creates one-off and sometimes distorted reproductions which foreground fragility.

As a result Keogh's interventions have manifested creations which meet the definition of British designer Peter Saville's memorable equation concerning *'the past, the present and the possible'*². Actual memories, as represented by photography from Keogh's family albums and stills from her grandfather's cine films, merge with imagined narratives whipped up from clipped homewares catalogues and pages torn from long-gone interiors publications and beauty mags.

And so a chimerical lingerie-clad female figure is seen from behind attending to her hair at a window opening onto a landscaped garden lawn, while a firmly closed panelled door – in the same house? – is overlaid with a repeated, slowly degrading image of a snooty sommelier sniffing red wine fumes from a tilted glass and a wooden stairway – again in the same house? – is overprinted with three representations of a slim calf and ankle with a blue shoe on the foot and a blood red background.

Of course, to ask such questions is to deny the allure of the mysteries presented by *Bang Bang Bang On The Door Baby!*

¹ From *Tales of Sound & Fury: Observations of the Family Melodrama*, Thomas Elsaesse, Monogram no 4 1972, as quoted in *Technicolor & The Sirkian Style*.

² Essay, *The Wild World of Barney Bubbles: Graphic Art & The Design of Music*, Gorman, Thames & Hudson 2022.

Keogh says she focused her 2025 degree show on building ‘a whole character through portraits/placing them in a very specific environment’. *Bang Bang Bang On The Door Baby!* is an extension and deeper exploration which, adds Keogh, ‘seems to have dissolved any specific character down to maybe an ‘essence’ or sensory experience of living in a home. It feels like it could be a couple or more people living within these spaces than in the previous work. There is more of an attention to the senses: soft, plush quilts, the taste of alcohol or the smell of a new car’.

Keogh has talked about her interest in glamour as ‘a strategic aesthetic, one used to seduce, obscure and construct desire within both cultural and personal narratives’.

She has also has cited as an influence the New York writer and curator Alissa Bennett, whose 00s zine *Dead Is Better* was preoccupied with the riddles and secrets surrounding the lives and premature deaths of such figures as Candy Darling, Peaches Geldof, Marilyn Monroe, River Phoenix and Judy Garland.

More recently Bennett has proposed an interest in the tensions between fiction and non-fiction which is wholly applicable to Keogh’s practice:

‘I like the idea that there is often only just a thin slash that distinguishes the truth from a lie, only a listing barricade that protects reality from invention,’ Bennett wrote in April 2025. ‘If I were a different kind of writer, I would use this moment to address what it means to live in a world made increasingly chaotic by the collapsing distance between obfuscation and candour, but the truth is that I really don’t mind when people are casually dishonest with me about their lives. I’ve lied about who I am before, and you probably have too; I think that sometimes deceit is just a shortcut toward authenticity, a way of dreaming or window shopping that helps us separate who we actually are from who we might eventually become.’³

The banalities of Artificial Ignorance serve to illuminate Holly Keogh’s delight in the power of the imagination as expressed in this exhibition. Let the bangs on the door commence, baby!

³ The Lonely Dolls: Alissa Bennett on early images and imaginations of Marilyn Monroe and Candy Darling, *Texte Zur Kunst*, 2 April 2025. <https://www.textezurkunst.de/de/articles/alissa-bennett-on-early-images-and-imaginations-of-marilyn-monroe-and-candy-darling/>