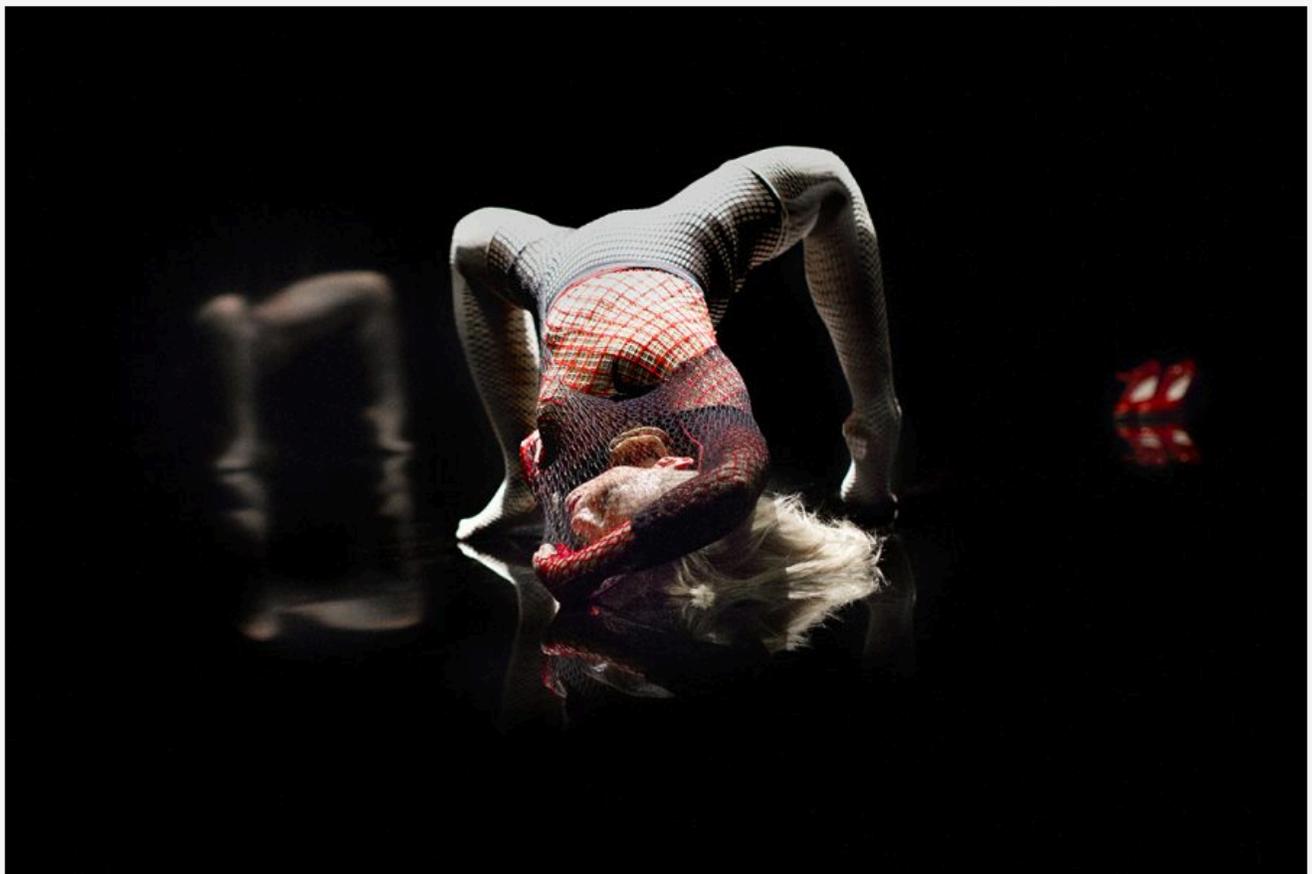


Del Kathryn Barton moves into live-action film with RED



Del Kathryn Barton, Australia, born 1972, *RED*, 2016, high resolution digital video, 15 mins, patrons edition 2/3 (film still); Gift of the Art Gallery of South Australia Contemporary Collectors 2016, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Images courtesy of the artist.

Best known for her dreamy, poetic portraits, two-time Archibald Prize winner Del Kathryn Barton is about to premiere her second short movie, which is also her live-action film directorial debut. *RED* features actor Cate Blanchett and dancer Charmene Yap in a tale driven by the redback spider's mating instincts.

Barton co-directed her first film with Brendan Fletcher. An animation of Oscar Wilde's 1888 romantic parable, *The Nightingale and the Rose*, it won Best Australian Short Film at the

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2015 Melbourne International Film Festival and the 2016 AACTA award for Best Short Animation.

"I found *Nightingale* pretty fully on, although I was pleased with the end product," Barton says. The long-time film buff, whose influences include the works of the late US-born director Stanley Kubrick, wanted to go on "immediately" to another film that "felt more manageable" than the Wildean animation, hence the foray into live action. The result is *RED*, a more abstract narrative, written by Barton, which will premiere at the 2017 Adelaide Festival. Barton's inspiration was the mating ritual of the redback spider in which the little male, having copulated with the female, somersaults into her mouth, offering himself as a meal, or to be bound in her web for later consumption.

"The redback spider, she's so fierce looking and so beautiful," says Barton, who sees the surreal *RED* as a celebration of raw female power. "She's really a weapon, so she speaks to me aesthetically."

If the new work seems like a radical departure, consider that the nightingale and the male spider both die for the pleasure and propagation of others. (In the first film, the nightingale of the title sacrificed her life by piercing her breast on a rose thorn.) And both stories play with anthropomorphism, imbuing these creatures with nobility.

The female protagonist is almost always at the centre of the narratives that Barton tries to interrogate but, curiously, she sees *RED* as her first true feminist work. "It has encouraged me to engage with the subtler politics of feminist issues with which first-world countries are dealing," she says.

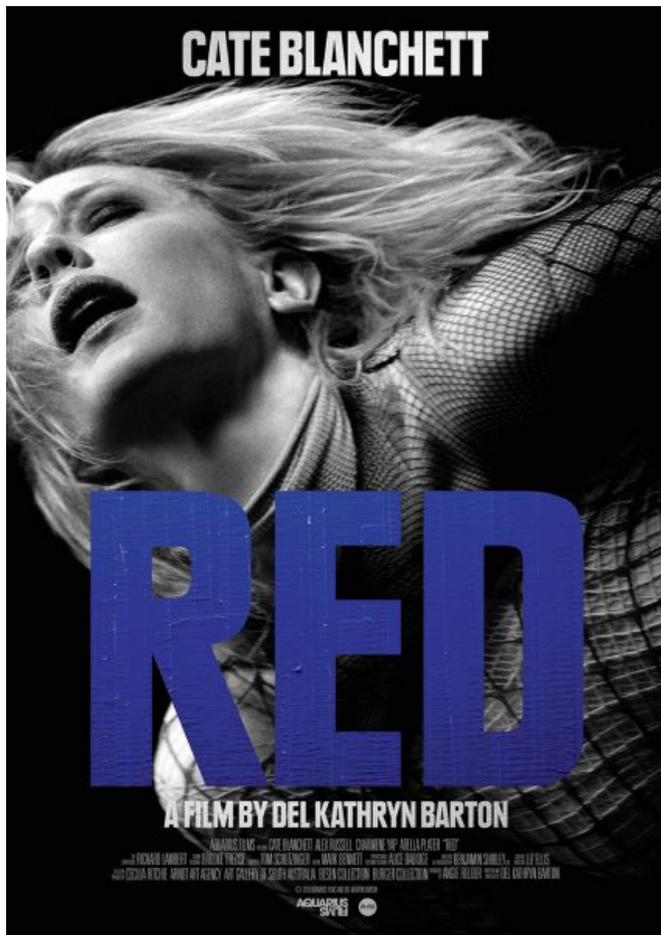
Surely, I ask her, Barton would also read some of her own celebrated portraits (including one of Blanchett and her three sons, *Mother (a portrait of Cate)*, which was a 2011 Archibald finalist) as feminist works? Both that portrait and *RED* engage with a fierce, archetypal mother. "Yes, I would," says Barton, "but at the time I wasn't engaged in that kind of thinking. They were more just a true eruption."

"Whereas the film, I suppose, it's such a different way of working," Barton explains. "You have to work in a more mindful way and articulate so many times what the work is about, which is very challenging for me. I arrived at a richer dialogue, or a more self-aware gesture, if that makes sense, of what *RED* means to me, as opposed to the paintings, which come through a lot of discipline, but more organically." For Barton, painting is more intuitive whereas film requires upfront thinking.

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In imagining this story, Barton realised she didn't know much about dance, so she emailed Sydney Dance Company's artistic director, Rafael Bonachela. "He recommended Charmene, and she couldn't have been more perfect." Working again with Blanchett, recently seen in Julian Rosefeldt's multi-screen film project *Manifesto* at the Art Gallery of NSW, was also a delight. "In my experience of Cate, I see her as an artist of the highest order. She puts herself in situations where she's approaching the unknown and there's a lot of tension in that moment," Barton says. "I think she works very well with fine artists, for that reason. She wants to go on a bit of a mad journey and turn it upside down."

Barton recently received development funding for her intriguing first feature film, called *Flower*, which will involve a male protagonist and his sexual proclivities, "an everyman coming to terms with an increasingly urgent fetish for flowers." But Barton insists that she won't sacrifice her

other art: film and painting will remain her two primary disciplines. After Adelaide, *RED* will be shown in New York, and later in 2017 at the National Gallery of Victoria as part of a large Barton survey show.

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