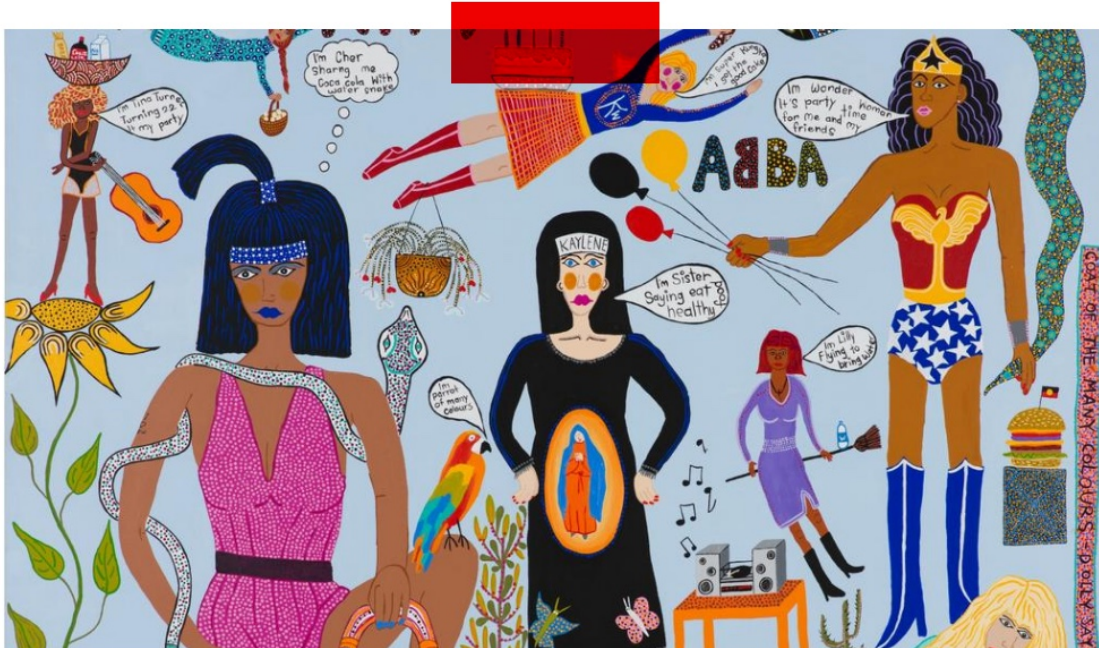


# VOGUE

FASHION BEAUTY BRIDAL CULTURE CELEBRITY VOGUE LIVING MISS VOGUE



Do You Believe in Love? (2019) by Kaylene Whiskey. Image credit: Supplied

HOME / CULTURE / FEATURES

## Double act: artists Del Kathryn Barton and Kaylene Whiskey on their debut joint exhibition

JANE ALBERT

4 DEC 2019

Rather than stage her new exhibition solo, Del Kathryn Barton reached out to Indigenous artist Kaylene Whiskey to show alongside her. The result is a colourful collection of works that showcase female strength, creativity and solidarity for the sisterhood.



Albert, Jane. "Double Act: Artists Del Kathryn Barton and Kaylene Whiskey on Their Debut Joint Exhibition." *Vogue Australia*, 4 Dec. 2019.

**albertz benda**

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001  
tel 212.244.2579 | [www.albertzbenda.com](http://www.albertzbenda.com)

The studios, and indeed lifestyles, of award-winning artists Del Kathryn Barton and Kaylene Whiskey are worlds apart. Barton's studio is tucked into a corner of the chic inner-Sydney suburb of Paddington, a fashionable hub of galleries, cafes, bars and high-end boutiques. Inside Barton's vast converted garage, where she works alone, the studio is a riot of colour, the tables and shelves groaning with paint pots, tubes, jars of pencils and brushes and vases of tumbling flowers. Every centimetre of wall space is taken up with her mesmerising, bright canvasses of diverse shapes and sizes, each in various states of progress but all unmistakably Barton.

Thousands of kilometres away, on the far northern tip of South Australia, you're likely to hear the sound of loud laughter underscored by Dolly Parton's distinct twang emanating from the converted old community hall where Whiskey paints alongside her fellow artists at the Iwantja Arts centre on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. Outside, the desert country is hot, dry and beautiful, the land itself a canvas for an impressive rocky ridge, native trees, flowers, even a large swimming hole when the rains have been. Inside the atmosphere is boisterous and Whiskey's workspace is also vibrant and colourful, its walls covered with pictures of her favourite pop stars, comic characters and her own bright, cheerful paintings and comic strips.

Albert, Jane. "Double Act: Artists Del Kathryn Barton and Kaylene Whiskey on Their Debut Joint Exhibition." *Vogue Australia*, 4 Dec. 2019.

**albertz benda**

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001  
tel 212.244.2579 | [www.albertzbenda.com](http://www.albertzbenda.com)

Now, for the first time, these two disparate worlds will come together as Barton and Whiskey launch their debut joint exhibition at Roslyn Oxley9 gallery in Sydney. Although each artist was a fan of the other's work, they'd never met.

Appropriately, it was art that brought them together, for the finals of the 2018 Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Prize competition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Barton began "squealing with delight" when Whiskey's painting *Kaylene TV* was announced as the Sulman Prize for best subject, genre or mural painting, and although her own self-portrait with her 'studio wife' dog Cherry-Bomb was unsuccessful this time, she is a dual Archibald Prize winner.

When they finally met there was an instant connection. "Meeting Kaylene stayed with me," Barton says. "She has the most extraordinary smile and beautiful energy. You never want to assume a personal connection, but she's a very special, unusual human, and I'm a huge fan of her work." It was a similar reaction from Whiskey. "I was in Sydney for the Sulman Prize, which was pretty overwhelming," she says. "When I travel for an exhibition it can be full-on, with lots of photos and interviews, it's busy and crazy and so different to what I'm used to. Del was really calm and normal, lovely and easy to chat to. We got on really well."

Albert, Jane. "Double Act: Artists Del Kathryn Barton and Kaylene Whiskey on Their Debut Joint Exhibition." *Vogue Australia*, 4 Dec. 2019.

**albertz benda**

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001  
tel 212.244.2579 | [www.albertzbenda.com](http://www.albertzbenda.com)



The pair had a chance to sit down to lunch together later, after Barton asked her Sydney gallerist Roslyn Oxley if she'd consider showing the artists' works together. A few months later, Oxley contacted Whiskey's art centre manager and put the wheels in motion. "It was a pleasure to spend half a day with Kaylene and get excited about the shows," Barton says. "She's got this wonderful sweetness and goofiness and strength and fierceness."

It was a generous move from Barton, one of Australia's leading figurative painters who is represented internationally and whose canvasses can command up to \$400,000 and beyond. Barton is highly regarded for her detailed, wildly imaginative depictions of otherworldly people, animals and environments, often rendered in psychedelic colours with intricate patterns that barely leave a square of canvas unadorned. She is well known for the rare achievement of winning the Archibald Prize twice – firstly for her self-portrait with her two children Kell and Arella, in 2008; and in 2013 with her portrait of Hugo Weaving.

Albert, Jane. "Double Act: Artists Del Kathryn Barton and Kaylene Whiskey on Their Debut Joint Exhibition." *Vogue Australia*, 4 Dec. 2019.

**albertz benda**

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001  
tel 212.244.2579 | [www.albertzbenda.com](http://www.albertzbenda.com)

At the age of 46, the Sydney painter has already been given a four-month survey at the National Gallery of Victoria; while her 20 solo shows have also featured sculptures, installations and photo montages. In addition to her visual art, this prodigious artist is also a filmmaker. In 2017 she made the short film *RED* starring Cate Blanchett; and *The Nightingale and the Rose*, an animation of Oscar Wilde's short story, voiced by Mia Wasikowska and Geoffrey Rush, which premiered at the 2015 Berlin International Film Festival and won the award for best Australian short film at the Melbourne International Film Festival.

Whiskey is also fast becoming a household name as she continues to win prominent awards – most recently the Telstra National Torres Strait and Islander Art Award's general painting award announced in August. Earlier this year she was commissioned to create a new work for *The National*, the biennial exhibition held across Sydney's AGNSW, Museum of Contemporary Art and Carriageworks that celebrates new Australian voices in contemporary art.

Albert, Jane. "Double Act: Artists Del Kathryn Barton and Kaylene Whiskey on Their Debut Joint Exhibition." *Vogue Australia*, 4 Dec. 2019.

**albertz benda**

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001  
tel 212.244.2579 | [www.albertzbenda.com](http://www.albertzbenda.com)

Unlike Barton, Whiskey isn't formally trained. Rather, she grew up watching her aunties and grandfather, the late respected Indigenous artist Kunmanara Whiskey Tjukangku, painting in the Iwantja Arts centre. "It's a big, busy studio where everyone comes together, sharing stories, cups of tea, listening to music," she says. "I started out making dot paintings like my *tjamu* (grandfather), putting in the bush tucker and *liru* (snake) then slowly found my own way, using my own style and ideas. I paint a little bit from real life, from *Tjukurpa* (traditional cultural stories) and from my imagination."

Whiskey always watches NITV (National Indigenous Television) or listens to music as she paints – Cher, Tina Turner, ABBA and various Christian songs are on high rotation – and says the music sparks ideas for her paintings, which are often depicted as comic strips with humorous speech bubbles.

"I like to make paintings of my favourite pop stars who I grew up listening to. When I'm listening to their music it's like the singer is coming to life in the studio and performing just for me. I start thinking: 'What if Dolly and Tina came to visit me in Indulkana? What would they do? What would they say?'"

Albert, Jane. "Double Act: Artists Del Kathryn Barton and Kaylene Whiskey on Their Debut Joint Exhibition." *Vogue Australia*, 4 Dec. 2019.

**albertz benda**

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001  
tel 212.244.2579 | [www.albertzbenda.com](http://www.albertzbenda.com)

Whiskey is conscious of creating strong, powerful women for the younger generations to aspire to, and occasionally depicts her characters as local Anangu. “They feel more real somehow and I think how good it is for the kids here to see lots of strong Aboriginal women in the paintings, too.” The results are whimsical and bound to make you smile, although she doesn’t shy away from more serious topics. “There were problems with young people sniffing in our communities in the 90s,” she says. “This is really hard for people here to talk about, because a lot of people got sick or passed away – it was a really sad time. I made these paintings as a reminder that family, health, happiness are the most important things.”

Although Barton and Whiskey’s exhibitions are being held jointly, they are independent of the other but united in their shared celebration of female strength and creativity. This was one of the reasons driving Barton’s desire to exhibit together. “One thing that spoke to me on a joyous but deeper level was Kaylene has an enduring love of Dolly Parton, Tina Turner – all these incredible, iconic women but women who are really iconic to Western audiences. She’s one of the few Indigenous artists who is, in a very joyous way, celebrating diverse female expression. And I love that. I feel her voice is very important in that way.”

Albert, Jane. “Double Act: Artists Del Kathryn Barton and Kaylene Whiskey on Their Debut Joint Exhibition.” *Vogue Australia*, 4 Dec. 2019.

**albertz benda**

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001  
tel 212.244.2579 | [www.albertzbenda.com](http://www.albertzbenda.com)



Equally important to Barton was the chance to reach out to a fellow female artist, something she wishes had been done for her. “I’m very passionate about the sisterhood and the fine art world is a very competitive, brutal world and I often feel there’s not enough generosity between artists. I’m a strong believer there’s enough to go round,” she says. When asked if another artist had shown her that level of kindness when she was starting out, she replies: “No. I think that’s something I would have longed for.”

Barton has spent the past seven months creating more than 50 new works for her show *I wanted to build a bed for all the tired beds*. Laughing uproariously at herself, she says it’s also the title of a floor installation of 65 dollhouse and babies beds purchased on Etsy that she’s adorned with individual painted canvasses. They’ll be displayed on a large painting covering the wall and floor and supported with 16 bronze casts of her hands and one large bed she is building. “The beds are aspects of my inner self, that feels utterly depleted after my mum’s death [from cancer, in 2017] and my workload, which I love, but ageing and feeling more deeply into what it means to age physically and mentally and emotionally and managing all that within a physical form that potentially needs more looking after,” she explains.

Albert, Jane. “Double Act: Artists Del Kathryn Barton and Kaylene Whiskey on Their Debut Joint Exhibition.” *Vogue Australia*, 4 Dec. 2019.

**albertz benda**

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001  
tel 212.244.2579 | [www.albertzbenda.com](http://www.albertzbenda.com)



This level of thought and the detail that has gone into the work is typical Barton and runs through other aspects of the exhibition – from the 30 gouache portraits on handmade French paper complete with tailored, hand-finished frames to the wax sculptures cast in bronze and painstakingly mirror polished and the three large-scale, major paintings that up close reveal astonishing intricacy.

Next May Barton will appear in a group show in London, *SHEBODY*, exhibiting alongside Tracey Emin and Louise Bourgeois, and will participate in the 2020 Chicago Art Fair. She has also spent two years working on a feature film, her first, with scriptwriter Huna Amweero. “There will be lots of different animation styles, but it’s a live action, coming-of-age film based on *Puff the Magic Dragon* but with a young female protagonist, an auteur film,” she explains.

Whiskey’s output for the upcoming exhibition has pushed her in new directions, painting her largest canvas to-date – 167 x 198 centimetres, titled *Do You Believe in Love?* while she is working on a video work with animation. Whiskey is also part of a collaborative film project with other women from Indulkana which will be screened at the annual Tarnanthi Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia in October.

Albert, Jane. “Double Act: Artists Del Kathryn Barton and Kaylene Whiskey on Their Debut Joint Exhibition.” *Vogue Australia*, 4 Dec. 2019.

**albertz benda**

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001  
tel 212.244.2579 | [www.albertzbenda.com](http://www.albertzbenda.com)

She has decided to title her Roslyn Oxley9 show *Wonder Women*.  
“I like the idea of calling the exhibition *Wonder Women* because  
me and Del both represent strong women in our paintings, so it  
should be a real celebration of this.”

Albert, Jane. “Double Act: Artists Del Kathryn Barton and Kaylene Whiskey on Their Debut  
Joint Exhibition.” *Vogue Australia*, 4 Dec. 2019.

**albertz benda**

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001  
tel 212.244.2579 | [www.albertzbenda.com](http://www.albertzbenda.com)