

A Nest in the Hills

*The Symbiosis of Women & Birds
in Contemporary Australian Art*



MUDGEE
ARTS
PRECINCT



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Foreword

I would like to thank all the artists – Michelle Cawthorn, Lorraine Connelly-Northey, Lucy Culliton, Denise Faulkner, Dianne Fogwell, Kim V. Goldsmith, Kim Harding, Petrina Hicks, Anna-Wili Highfield, Nicole Ison, Leila Jeffreys, Deborah Kelly, Aleshia Lonsdale, Fleur MacDonald, Michelle Steven and Pamela Welsh.

It has been a delight to work with such a dedicated and talented group of artists, and I would like to thank everyone involved in *A Nest in the Hills: The Symbiosis of Women and Birds in Contemporary Australian Art*. I particularly want to acknowledge the artists, who seized the theme with relish and worked extraordinarily hard to create new works that speak so thoughtfully to the intertwined lives of women and birds – as companions, witnesses, storytellers and omens. Their willingness to experiment, to draw on personal histories and local ecologies, and to respond so generously to the curatorial framework has shaped this exhibition in profound ways, and I am deeply grateful for their commitment and care.

Thank you to the Sydney galleries for their assistance: Olsen Gallery (Leila Jeffreys and Michelle Cawthorn), Michael Reid Gallery Sydney + Berlin (Petrina Hicks), Australian Galleries (Dianne Fogwell) and King Street Gallery on William (Lucy Culliton) for their assistance with the artists. Thank you also to Shoalhaven Regional Gallery for kindly loaning Nicole Ison's incredible artwork, *Shoalhaven River Mouth birds and habitat*.

Finally, thank you to the MAP team – it is our ongoing, shared love of art and of this community that keeps us bonded together and moving forward. *A Nest in the Hills* has been shaped as much by their care and commitment as by the works on the walls: from the long conversations about women's stories and local birdlife, to the countless practical decisions that make an exhibition sing. Their willingness to champion ambitious ideas and keep the focus on what this show might mean for our audiences has been invaluable.

Exhibition installation view at Mudgee Arts Precinct featuring Deborah Kelly
River of Birds 2025
Early Bird 2025
A Daphne: A Custodian 2025
each piece 183 x 137 cm



A Nest in the Hills

Lizzy Galloway – Gallery Curator, Mudgee Arts Precinct

*The creature gazes into openness with all
its eyes. But our eyes are as if they were reversed, and surround it,
everywhere, like barriers against its free passage.
If there was consciousness like ours
in the sure creature, that moves towards us
on a different track – it would drag us
round in its wake. But its own being
is boundless, unfathomable, and without a view
of its condition, pure as its outward gaze.
And where we see future, it sees everything.*

Excerpts from *The Eighth Duino Elegy*
by Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by A.S Kline

Moving from the city to Mudgee in 2012, the first thing the relocation bestows is constant, unavoidable contact with nature: the kookaburra laughing at sunrise, the (seemingly) endless screeching of cockatoos at sunset. Living in the Australian bush you might swerve to miss a kangaroo, wallaby, wild goat or echidna – all on the drive to work. When weary travellers arrive in Australia and are jolted awake by the raucous chorus of lorikeets and cockatoos, they're really hearing the echo of a very deep history. What can seem loud and unruly compared with the gentle, tinkling birdsong of many other countries is no accident: research over the past two decades suggests that songbirds – the oscine passerines – evolved here in Australia before spreading out and diversifying into the thousands of species now found across the globe. In other words, the noisy welcome at our shores comes from the original heartland of birdsong itself, a place where complex

calls and bold voices first took shape and never really learned to quieten down. In Australia, the early 'celebrity portraits' of our bird life were, in large part, the work of one woman quietly toiling away at the drawing table: Elizabeth Gould. While her husband, the ornithologist John Gould, strode about collecting specimens and ultimately most of the fame, Elizabeth was back home turning scruffy bird skins into glamorous hand-coloured lithographs. Her meticulous drawings gave *The Birds of Australia* its visual punch of scientific accuracy wrapped in sheer prettiness. The seminal work helped introduce European audiences to kookaburras, parrots and lyrebirds long before Instagram made bird photography cool. Yet for decades, John's name sat in the spotlight while Elizabeth's contributions were treated more like supporting spouse duties than the powerhouse illustration career they really were. In short: he got the glory, she got the gouache.

Denise Faulkner
Hanging in the Balance (detail) 2025
80 x 56 cm



The title *A Nest in the Hills* gently nods to the origins of Mudgee's own name. 'Mudgee' is widely understood to derive from a Wiradjuri word, often rendered as *Moothi* or *Moothi/Mudyi*, commonly translated as 'nest in the hills' or 'resting place in the mountains'. The town sits in a natural bowl, ringed by low, sheltering ranges, so the idea of a nest is more than just poetic: it reflects the way the landscape holds and protects life. While there have been many art exhibitions that explore the birds of Australia broadly in art, none have specifically looked out how the bird has been portrayed by our women artists. Thus, for this exhibition I sought out artists whose practices were deeply entwined with birds, inviting a conversation about how their visions diverge, echo one another and ultimately intersect. I approached several artists living in both the regions and the cities and was delighted that all (but one) agreed. Across the exhibition, women and birds are entwined through motherhood and family, nostalgia and memory, caregiving and

custodianship, feminism and the domestic, climate and environmental change, and birds as messengers, muses and goddesses. However, the exhibition's most persistent thread is perhaps one that highlights the way close attention to bird life draws us back into the present moment, inviting us to honour and respect the world we share.

When twitchers go birdwatching, they step into the birds' realm and are immediately subject to their vastly different timetable and whims. You cannot rush or command a bird – you have to wait, watch and adjust yourself to its movements, which means you are quietly pulled into the present. This is why birdwatching is so often described as meditative: to catch what may be only a fleeting encounter, you must slow down and fully inhabit the moment. Artists trying to capture birds are bound by the same rules, whether in the studio or out in the field. The bird sets the pace; you simply have to work to its time.

Two acclaimed photographers sprang to mind when I first began thinking about the theme of women and birds: Leila Jeffreys and Petrina Hicks. Both artists work in photography, yet they mobilise animals in very different ways. Petrina often stages carefully composed scenes in which animals appear alongside her recurring muse – usually a blonde girl or young woman – creating cool, luminous tableaux that hover between fashion image, fable and psychological portrait, and quietly probe ideas of beauty, innocence, tension and control. Her iconic photograph *Shenae and Jade* is arguably one of the most recognisable photographs in contemporary photography, featuring a young girl with her eyes closed, or downcast, with a budgerigar protruding from her mouth. Leila, by contrast, has built a career around intimate avian portraiture, beginning with her extraordinary large-scale images of budgerigars, enlarged to human size so that these small, familiar birds confront us as singular characters rather than decorative pets. Her practice has since expanded into film and installation and now extends internationally; at the time of writing she is in Antarctica as part of the Australian Antarctic Arts Fellowship, developing a major new body of work that will appear in her forthcoming book *Seabird* and in exhibitions in Sydney and London. Together, these two practices offer distinct yet resonant ways of thinking about women and birds as companions, doubles, symbols and witnesses in a shared, fragile world.

Further ideas for artists arrived quite naturally after this, and a series of conversations reinforced my sense that this was a rich theme to pursue. One especially intriguing exchange was with Auntie Lorraine Connelly-Northey, not long after she had been part of an exhibition at Mudgee Arts Precinct entitled: *Guwayu for all time*. I greatly admire Auntie Lorraine, not only her beautiful, large-scale installation art, but for how generous she is in sharing her vast Waradgerie¹

knowledge. I mentioned that I wanted to curate an exhibition focusing on women and birds, and she spoke about the Willie Wagtail and the meanings attached to its appearance. For her, the bird was a messenger that deaths had, or would shortly occur. What struck me was the strength of this conviction and the way these encounters were understood not merely as omens, but as simple fact. The depth of this belief resonated with me deeply. Her story now finds form in the new work she has created, *Our Spiritual Connection to Willie Wagtail*.

Another artist with whom I have worked closely is Aleshia Lonsdale. Aleshia is a Mudgee-based Wiradjuri woman and the Aboriginal Officer at Arts OutWest, and her curatorial practice has continued to grow from strength to strength. As previously mentioned, she curated the exhibition, *Guwayu: for all time*² held at Mudgee Arts Precinct in 2024. The exhibition explores First Nations' perspectives on truth-telling and examines the impacts of martial law, subsequent massacres, and their compounding effects on Australia's First Peoples.

For this exhibition, Aleshia contributed the artwork *Re-knitting*. Like Lorraine's practice, her work explores the close relationships her people maintain with birds, including the Willie Wagtail. This bird holds particular significance for Wiradjuri people as a messenger, though its specific meaning can vary slightly depending on location.

The work also focuses on the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater, whose natural habitat has been severely reduced through habitat loss and competition from other species, most notably the Noisy Miner. This highly aggressive bird forms large territorial colonies that actively attack and displace other species. The Regent Honeyeater's survival is further threatened by the fires currently burning in the Goulburn River and Capertee Valley regions, both

Exhibition installation view at Mudgee Arts Precinct featuring works by Pamela Welsh, Deborah Kelly and Leila Jeffreys



important breeding sites for the species.

Aleshia notes:

'Much like our own mayiny' (people) there have been major impacts in the last 236 years but there has also been work undertaken in supporting breeding programs, relearning song and reconnecting to kin and Country to strengthen the population.'

Aleshia also introduced me to multimedia artist, Kim V. Goldsmith for the 2022 exhibition, *Ngayirr Ngurambang: Sacred Country*.³ Kim's video and sound work, featuring the Goulburn River, was a memorable contribution to this exhibition. When Kim was visiting Mudgee around a year ago, we had a conversation about the forthcoming exhibition focusing on women and birds, and she mentioned some exhibitions to which she had contributed, where birds were featured as an indicator of an environment's health in relation to climate change – literally the canary in the coal mine. Interestingly we also discussed how the raven featured heavily in folklore in many regions around the world. She had done a fascinating project called *Eye of the Corvus: Messenger of Truth* which looked at the significance of the crow to both the Icelandic and Wiradjuri culture, elucidating the important role that this particular bird has in two polar opposite cultures.⁴

For this exhibition Kim's work comprises a field recorded soundscape featuring the sound of the Australian raven. Drawing on the work of Australian ecofeminist and philosopher, Val Plumwood, she explores the raven and its persecution, despite being highly intelligent birds. In many European traditions the raven is a bad omen or a sinister presence, but in Plumwood's terms it is a neighbour and an agent: a clever, observant creature making a living alongside us, not just a dark symbol on the horizon. Around

Australian homes, ravens are comfortable in both the urban and rural contexts; they pick over bins, watch from powerlines, haunt school carparks and paddocks – always on the edge of domestic life; never quite 'tame' but always present.

Read through Plumwood's gaze, this everyday presence starts to look a lot like women's domestic labour: constant, intelligent, adaptive, but often dismissed as background 'noise'. To 're-animate' matter in her sense is to recognise that the raven's harsh call is a voice, its scavenging is action and strategy, its willingness to live with us is a form of negotiation – a kind of running dialogue with our suburbs and farms.

As Goldsmith has said of her work:

'Ravens of all species have been credited as way-finders, messengers, keepers of secrets, and talisman, also associated with bad luck, death and the dark arts. Despite or because of this, ravens and crows are one of the most persecuted birds in human history. The raven's collective name includes an unkindness, a conspiracy, and a treachery, while a group of crows is commonly called a murder. It is indeed, an unkindness.'

Anna-Wili Highfield has also chosen the raven for her contribution to the exhibition, depicting the bird proud and alone on his pole, and notes again how it has inspired powerful narratives over time. Ravens (and their crow cousins) carry very different, though often overlapping, meanings across cultures. In Norse and Germanic myth, they are Odin's birds of wisdom, memory and battlefield prophecy; in Celtic and Irish stories they circle over battlefields as omens of fate, death and rightful kingship. Among Pacific Northwest and Inuit traditions, the raven is a powerful creator and trickster figure, bringing light, knowledge and culture to humanity. In East Asian lore, the divine three-legged

Lucy Culliton
Blond Cock (detail) 2002
75cm x 50cm



crow is a solar, guiding symbol, representing heaven's direction and royal legitimacy. By contrast, in Christian and medieval European imagination, ravens often foreshadow death, war and the uncanny, yet they also sometimes hint at God's provision in times of hardship.

Deborah Kelly's work expands the entwining of women and birds through language, myth and material practice. She starts by cataloguing bird-names for women, names including 'chick', 'old crow', 'mother hen' and so on, exposing the way avian metaphors infantilise, sexualise or deride women, particularly older women. Against this belittling vocabulary she invokes a powerful bird-headed goddess to be part of the exhibition and actively seeks stories where women lead, change and imagine futures, reclaiming the figure of the woman-bird as agent rather than insult. Her collage and weaving processes, drawing on discarded books and 'nest-making' textiles, align

with ecofeminist ethics of care, repair and attention to what is cast off or endangered. Deborah's recurring motifs are eggs, futures, failed custodianship and failure. In the context of her jacquard weavings, Daphne emulates a raptor whose petals catch fire, binding gendered experience to ecological crisis and suggesting that the fates of women, birds, and the more-than-human world are precariously intertwined.

I was treated to Michelle Cawthorn's beautiful bird artworks at the stunning *Twitcher* exhibition at Maitland Regional Art Gallery⁵ in 2024. Like Leila Jeffreys and Petrina Hicks, her practice is deeply concerned with memory and the way it slips between past and present. Birds recur as key motifs because, like memories, they are elusive and fragmentary. In these works, the Superb Fairy-wren, Red-browed Finch and Brown Treecreeper are reimagined as if assembled entirely from fleeting glimpses, rendered in print and ink. Echoing the Surrealist drawing

game, 'Exquisite Corpse'⁶, each drawing pairs a digitally rendered, dissected bird's head – originally painted by the unnamed colonial artist known as the Sydney Bird Painter⁷ – with Cawthorn's own repetitive, hatched mark-making in pen and ink. The dialogue between these two hands is akin to the antiphonal call of the Eastern Whipbird: the artist 'answers' the historical image, responding to the bird's shapes, lines and character in ways that transform an auditory memory into a visual one.

In the four watercolours presented by local artist, Denise Faulkner, she locates the relationship between women and birds in the intimate, traditionally feminised space of the tea table. Antique porcelain, long tied to women's social rituals and emotional labour, from 'tea and sympathy' to 'a storm in a teacup', becomes both setting and symbol. What began on a Mudgee bush block as watercolour studies to identify visiting birds has evolved into portraits where each bird is treated as a character with its own presence and personality, invited into the ritual of tea and cakes.

For this exhibition, the artist's 'painted collages' of birds and porcelain intensify into imagined, precarious sculptures she has called '*Precious Precarious Porcelain*'. These teetering stacks of cups, saucers and small local birds become a visual metaphor for a world and a woman's life under strain: environmental crisis, the rise of the right and growing political division, eroded empathy, the fragility of the arts, and even the artist's own health. Delicate and unstable, they look only a single rustle of feathers away from collapse, binding women, birds and porcelain together as finely made, historically linked and acutely vulnerable, yet still capable of beauty and quiet resilience.

In this exhibition, the unruly chorus of Australian birds becomes a way of thinking about women's voices, care and inheritance.

Just as research suggests that songbirds first evolved here before spreading across the globe, these works consider Australia as a kind of ancestral ground for stories of motherhood, a place where complex, layered forms of nurturing and selfhood take shape, often loudly, often unseen.

Another Kandos-based, local artist I had previously worked with was Fleur MacDonald whose works were also included in our 2022 exhibition *Ngayirr Ngurambang: Sacred Country*. Fleur has applied her statement gouache on mid-century wooden bowls from the 1950s–70s. The bowls are mostly made in the Philippines from durable monkey-pod hardwood. The artist remembers her mother using them for nuts, dips and salads in the 1970s, giving the pieces a nostalgic, domestic resonance, particularly with the inclusion of the intricately painted doily. In Australia, doilies were a familiar feature of mid-20th-century homes: tucked under vases, lamps and bowls, lining trays, or placed beneath cakes, sandwiches and biscuits at afternoon tea. They signalled care, cleanliness and 'good manners', but they also quietly recorded the labour and skill of the women who made and washed them; a kind of soft architecture of domestic life, spread across sideboards and kitchen tables.

Like the use of the tea sets by Denise Faulkner, the doily becomes more than just a quaint prop: it links directly to that world of feminised hospitality and inherited expectations around keeping house and caring for others. By pairing teacups, saucers or in MacDonald's case, doilies, with birds which are sometimes treated like honoured guests, sometimes like chaotic intruders, the artists both playfully unsettle the polite rituals they represent. The tea set and doily stand in for the traditional script of womanhood; the birds introduce humour, unpredictability and change. Together, they allow us to reflect on how contemporary women inherit, remake



or gently subvert those older domestic codes, turning something once purely decorative into a layered symbol of memory, nurture and quiet resistance.

The ascent of local painters Kim Harding and Michelle Steven has been hard to overlook: the former was a recent finalist in the Portia Geach Memorial Award⁸, and the latter, a consecutive winner of Art Unlimited's Prize for Hanging Art⁹. Harding has become a deft portraitist, weaving her self-portrait and images of female family members together with native birds and flora to reflect on Australian women across generations, looking at family, culture and the shared foundations of our lives expressed through the natural world.

Michelle Steven, working in ink and charcoal, creates chiaroscuro in her works that evoke the shadows and illuminations of identity, exploring the layered experience of being a woman and a mother, both individually and collectively. Across her practice, birds – and

in particular, songbirds – surrounded by native flowers to act as metaphors for the quiet, often unacknowledged complexities of nurturing, growth and self-discovery. Viewed alongside Kim's portraits, the works form a chorus of maternal experience: sometimes raucous, sometimes whisper-soft, but always insistently present.

Lucy Culliton's birds belong to the household. Living and working on her Monaro property, she paints the animals she shares her life with, including chickens, ducks, geese, pigeons and aviary birds, as if they were extended family. Her models are hand-reared, rescued and utterly familiar; one writer notes that her chickens and pigeons are 'portraits of her friends'¹⁰, the result of months and years spent in their company. In works where show birds stand in cages draped with ribbons, or geese and chooks occupy sheds and pens, Culliton's thick, textured paint and close, frontal compositions give each bird a distinct personality: vain, wary, self-possessed, occasionally ridiculous. These are deeply

domesticated creatures, anchored in the mess, humour and affection of farm life.

Painted for this exhibition, *Bibbenluke Guinea Fowl* (2025) reflects Culliton's fondness for the 37 guinea fowl that roam her property. The flock began with seven rescued birds, but after a fox broke into their night pen and only two survived, she let the pair raise a clutch of eggs. Their offspring have grown into a noisy, bustling community that have been lovingly depicted for this exhibition. As Lucy notes, 'The thing about painting a hen... is if they change position there is usually another hen in the original pose,' a line that perfectly captures the lively, ever-shifting nature of her feathered companions and the remarkable skill with which she documents her charges.

Seen together, Lucy and Leila chart two complementary ways of 'portraiture' birds. Lucy keeps her domesticated birds firmly embedded in the everyday – sheds, cages, showgrounds and kitchen tables – emphasising intimacy, care and the comic dramas of shared domestic life. Leila strips away context to elevate her sitters, using the conventions of studio portraiture to grant parrots and owls the gravitas usually reserved for human subjects. Both artists, however, treat birds as individuals with inner lives, using very different mediums to ask a similar question: what happens when we look at these animals not as background, but as someone?

The work of both Dianne Fogwell and Nicole Ison came to my attention after being recommended by other artists. It was immediately easy to see how the work of Dianne would fit into the exhibition premise. Her beautiful artist book depicts magpies who stand as both companions and witnesses, chronicling the landscapes the artist inhabits and the environmental pressures that shape them. What began as a familiar, almost domestic comfort of

recognising individual birds in the garden, has become an acute awareness of their disappearance, informed by research into declining magpie populations and the wider fragility of birdlife. The works included in the exhibition: *Aves – Missing, Hindsight* and *Tempest* translate this awareness into a visual language: drought-stricken paddocks and flood-altered rivers appear not just as backdrops, but as shared habitats in which birds struggle, adapt or vanish. As a woman artist attentive to these gaps in song and presence, she positions birds as sentinels of change and herself as their chronicler, using carving, research and observation to honour their lives and to register, with quiet insistence, the vulnerability of the ecosystems that they – and indeed, we – depend on.

Nicole Ison's work offers a deeply attentive portrait of the Shoalhaven River mouth, a place where Dharawal and Dhurga language continues to be spoken and where shorebird conservation remains vital. Through years of volunteering with the South Coast Shorebird Recovery Program, Nicole has gathered the stories that inform her intricate porcelain sculptures: hundreds of hand-built birds, plants, animals and human traces that map the fragile ecosystems shaped by colonisation, shifting climates and tidal change. Her observations of creatures such as the red-capped plover, little tern and recently arrived beach stone-curlew become quiet narratives within this immersive installation. As she explains, 'By making elements of the landscape, the birds and creatures that inhabit the Shoalhaven River mouth I am creating an immersive world... capturing some of the unofficial stories of this natural place.' In the context of the exhibition, Nicole's work invites viewers to consider the interconnectedness of species, histories and environments through the delicate, attentive act of making.

Exhibition installation view at Mudgee Arts Precinct featuring Leila Jeffreys
Wandering Albatross egg [Large], 2024
Emu egg no. 2 [Large] 2024
Spotted bowerbird egg no. 2 [Large] 2024
140 x 110 cm each



Finally, we can enjoy a moment of humour through the hilarious creations of Mudgee-based artist, Pamela Welsh. As a ceramicist, the works she created for her exhibition *The Princess and the Piano*⁷ in 2022 were extraordinary, expanding on a true story of Princess Alexandra Amalie of Bavaria (1826 – 1875) who had a rare condition whereby she was convinced she had swallowed a glass grand piano as a child. In this flock of sculptures provided for the exhibition, the artist cheerfully outs her entire family as birds in disguise – herself included. Each work starts with an Australian species, then gets nudged (or shoved) into the realm of human foible: Auntie Tammy, forever talking over everyone when she's anxious, becomes a flustered, over-chirping chook; Auntie Dora, poor as a church mouse but perpetually overdressed and spending all her money keeping à la mode, struts about like a feathered fashion tragic. Aunties Diana and Diaspora are full-blown galahs, pink, tipsy and squawking like a worn-out school mum on a Friday night out with the girls. Auntie Winifred turns up in funereal plumage whenever her mood dips, while Auntie Edna is a sugar-addled creature of the couch, expanding happily on Liquorice Allsorts. Auntie Margaret, wrapped in bold Marimekko prints, is the human magpie: confident, graphic and not remotely subtle. And finally in *Granma Gains Momentum* (a thinly veiled self-portrait) the cockatoo is a lead foot speed junky, hurtling down country roads, corner-cutting in and out of school zones, still being scolded by her mortal enemy: the in-car back-seat driver, otherwise known as Pamela's brother-in-law.

My deepest thanks go to the artists in this exhibition, whose works give such vivid, generous form to the relationship between women and birds. Threaded through this exhibition are quiet echoes of Rilke's *Eighth Duino Elegy* and his sense that animals stand in 'the Open' while we struggle to remain present. This reminds us that to look closely at birds is also to be called back into the moment ourselves. Here, women and birds appear as companions, doubles and witnesses, carrying stories of motherhood and

care, of grief, delight and endurance. Again and again, the works reveal how intimate lives are woven into larger ecologies: how drought, fire, flood and shifting climates press in on the spaces of home and family, and how the smallest gestures of attention – a drawing, a carving, a watchful eye at the kitchen window – can become acts of recognition and responsibility. Together, these artists show that to pay attention to birds is never trivial; it is a way of honouring the more-than-human world and imagining, however precariously, how we might still live well together within it.

1. 'Waradgerie' and 'Wiradjuri' are variant spellings referring to the same First Nations people. This text uses 'Wiradjuri' in line with contemporary usage, while acknowledging that both spellings continue to appear and may be used.
2. Guwayu: for all time is a major touring exhibition of First Nations artists, curated by Wiradjuri woman Alesia Lonsdale. First presented at Mudgee Arts Precinct in 2024, it examines dispossession, Indigenous activism, organisation and resistance, illuminating the entangled past, present and future of Australia's history and celebrating the resilience and strength of First Nations peoples.
3. Mudgee Arts Precinct Ngayirr Ngurambang: Sacred Country 23 September 2022 – 11 December 2022
4. Kim V. Goldsmith, Eye of the Corvus: Messenger of Truth, Western Plains Cultural Centre 14 December 2019 – 2 February 2020
5. Maitland Regional Gallery Twitcher October 12 2024 – February 16 2025
6. Conceived by the Surrealists, the game of Exquisite Corpse invites multiple participants to create a single drawing or text in discrete, concealed sections, only revealing the bizarre composite at the end. Named after the first sentence it produced – 'Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau' ('The exquisite corpse shall drink the new wine') - the game stages a playful surrender of individual control to collective imagination and chance.
7. 'The Sydney Bird Painter' is the name given to an unidentified group of late 18th-century colonial artists, probably working around Sydney Cove, who produced some of the earliest watercolour studies of Australian birds. Their ornithological drawings are now held in major collections, including the State Library of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Victoria.
8. Portia Geach Memorial Award 2025, S. H. Ervin Gallery 19 September – 2 November 2025
9. Art Unlimited Exhibition Dunedoo 21 – 29 June 2025
10. National Portrait Gallery *The Popular Pet Show*, 2016 and King Street Gallery on William
11. Pamela Welsh, *The Princess and the Piano*, Mudgee Arts Precinct 8 April 2022 – 26 June 2022



Exhibiting Artists

Michelle Cawthorn

To have a memory it must leave a trace. The ideas and themes that underpin Michelle Cawthorn's practice stem from a sustained engagement with memory and its indexical relationship between past and present. But memory can be elusive, like a bird. Superb Fairy-Wren, Red-browed Finch, and Brown Treecreeper, each explore the elusive nature of memory by playfully reimagining how the birds might look if constructed solely from fleeting glimpses.

In a manner akin to the Surrealist drawing game of Exquisite Corpse, each of the three drawings pairs a digital render of a dissected bird head, painted by the unnamed colonial era artist, The Sydney Bird Painter, with the artist's repetitive, hatched mark-making in pen and ink. Like the antiphonal calling of the Eastern Whipbird, the artist responds to the shapes, lines, and character of each bird in ways that reflect a visual expression of an auditory memory.



Michelle Cawthorn
Superb Fairy-Wren 2025
pigment print, Sakura Pigma Micron pen, and acrylic on archival cotton rag
110 x 80 cm



Michelle Cawthorn
Brown Treecreeper 2025
pigment print, Sakura Pigma Micron pen, and acrylic on archival cotton rag
110 x 80 cm



Michelle Cawthorn
Red-browed Finch 2025
pigment print, Sakura Pigma Micron pen, and acrylic on archival cotton rag
110 x 80 cm





Lorraine Connally-Northeay

Narbong in the Waradgerie language refers to the pouch of a marsupial or a traditional Aboriginal fibre bag made from various plant materials. This *narbong* is my contemporary interpretation of a bush bag. Today, *narbong-galang* (many bush bags) are used in many ways by myself and my mob, from a fashion accessory to out on Country by our gatherers collecting food sources, such as small animals, mussels, yams, tubers and rhizomes, blackfella's bread, fruits, seeds to be ground into flour, honey and even water!

In this exhibition, the *narbong* is representing a vessel, holding knowledge, like our people, to be handed down to the next generation and so on. This bush bag's knowledge is about the Willie Wagtail bird and its spiritual connection to us Narrandra 'Sandhills' mob, throughout our Waradgerie Nation and beyond. As my mother's ancestors handed down to her and onto me, I, in turn, have handed down to my sons, grandchildren and our mob the spiritual connection we have with animals, reptiles and birds, and in particular, the Willie Wagtail.

In close proximity the Willie Wagtail's wagging of its tail side-to-side, flashing of its wings, darting around and vocalising loudly, with urgency, is a sign from the spiritual world that not one, but three deaths have or will occur. This is no old wives' tale, this is 'deadly' serious to us as deaths throughout our kindship networks occur just before or after the bird's warning call, three relatives at a time.

Lorraine Connally-Northeay
Our Spiritual Connection to the Willie Wagtail 2025
Rusted mesh wire, iron corrugated tin and cable wire
300 x 290 cm



Lucy Culliton

I have enjoyed going to agricultural shows ever since I can remember. With Steph, my mum and Anna, my sister, we would catch public transport to the Royal Easter Show, spending the long day looking at animals, craft displays, not rides – too scary, – going home with a couple of show bags.

Grown up and painting, agricultural shows have been a reoccurring theme in my practice. Birds in particular, were such great subjects. I would quickly draw (2B pencil), then colour with oil pastel. When I am brave, I paint with gouache. I take loads of photos for reference back in the studio. The thing about painting a hen for instance, is if they change position there is usually another hen in the original pose.

First was a show of game bird cocks. I drew loads of canaries at Lithgow Canary and Bird Show. For three years running, I was the artist in residence at the Royal Easter Show. Last year I took myself to the Ekka (Brisbane Royal Show). I am especially taken by the fancy pigeons - I feel I can never paint enough of them. Every year I get along to my local agricultural shows. There is always a spectacular chook or duck at the Bombala Show!

At present there are 37 guinea fowl living with me at Bibbenluke.

I have a collection of rescued animals, greyhounds from the racing industry, old horses, sheep, goats, a couple of cows then there are the birds – old cockies, pigeons, geese, ducks, fifty roosters and originally seven guinea fowl.

When a fox broke into the guinea fowl's nighttime pen and killed all but two I let the remaining pair raise a clutch of eggs and here they are – noisy, forever busy organising and bossing everyone around the garden.

Lucy Culliton
Bibbenluke Guinea Fowl (detail) 2025
Oil on canvas
130 x 130 cm



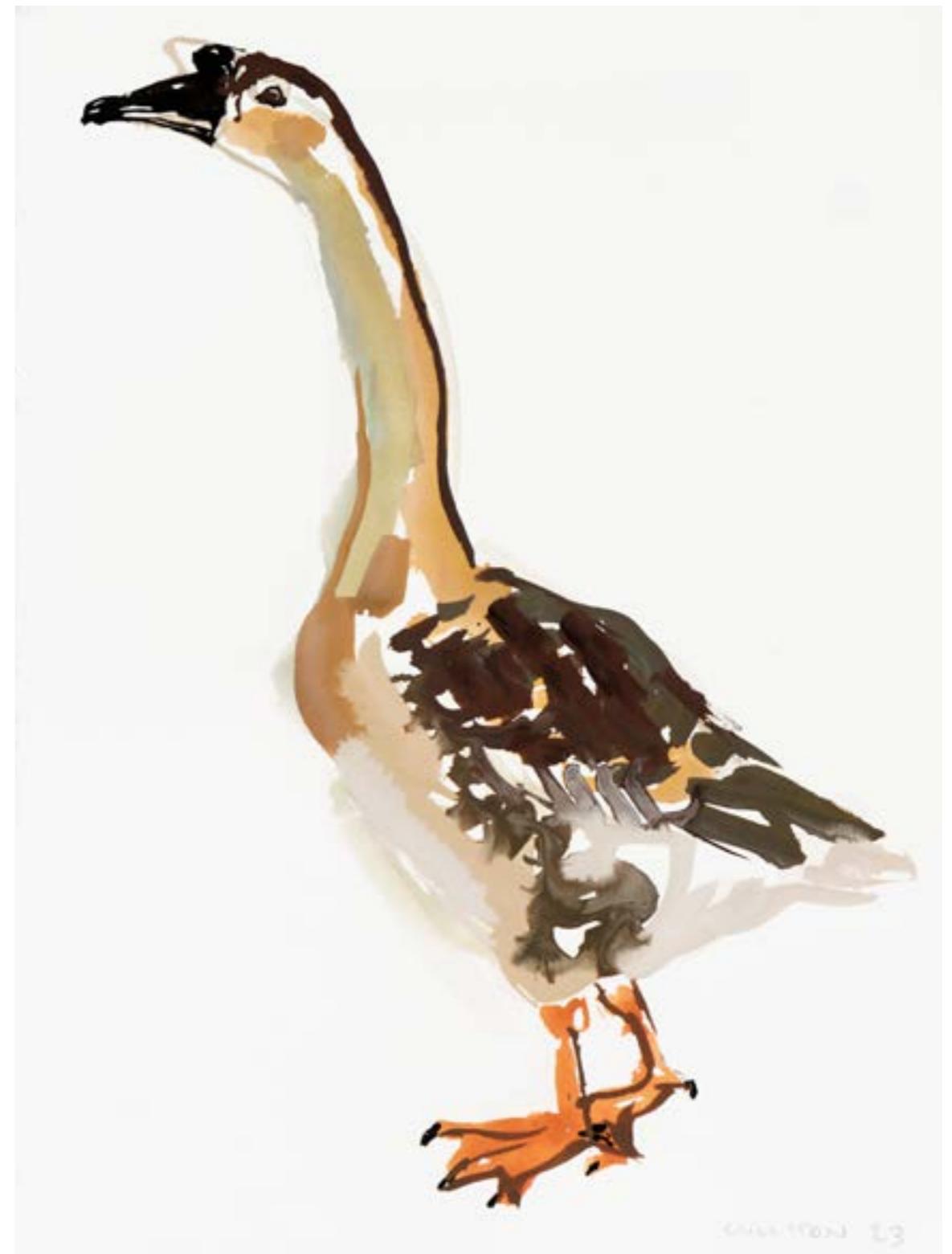
Lucy Culliton
Bibbenluke Guinea Fowl 2025
Oil on canvas
130 x 130 cm



Lucy Culliton
Pigeon V 2023
Gouache on paper
19 x 17.5 cm



Lucy Culliton
Drake any Breed Duck 2022
Gouache on paper
36 x 28.5 cm



Lucy Culliton
Goose 2023
Gouache on paper
38 x 28.5 cm



Lucy Culliton
Hamburg Silver Spangled Cock 2022
Gouache on paper
25.5 x 38 cm



Lucy Culliton
Cock 1 2022
Gouache on paper
38 x 38 cm



Lucy Culliton
Hen 2022
Oil on canvas
25.5 x 38 cm



Lucy Culliton
Ekka Two White Ducks 2025
Oil on board
60cm x 60 cm



Lucy Culliton
Ekka Two Roosters 2024
Oil on board
60cm x 60cm



Lucy Culliton
Ekka Pigeons 2024
Oil on board
40 x 40 cm



Lucy Culliton
Brunette Cock 2002
Oil on board
75cm x 50cm



Lucy Culliton
Ekka Black Duck 2024
Oil on board
60 x 60 cm



Lucy Culliton
Pigeon I 2024
Oil on board
40cm x 40cm



Lucy Culliton
Pigeon II 2024
Oil on board
40cm x 40cm



Denise Faulkner

The symbiotic relationship between women and birds has existed for quite a long time if the number of antique tea sets incorporating birds in their designs is anything to go by. My personal relationship with our avian friends didn't start until I moved to a bush block outside of Mudgee twelve years ago. Since moving here, I have been surprised and delighted by the sheer number of birds and wildlife who visit our garden and our now five bird baths. My first forays into watercolour were a way of trying to identify all the various birds which I saw and photographed. It made me slow down and actually look at them, at the details, over time I started to understand the personalities of our regular visitors, so I started adding elements to try to give a clue to the personality of the bird, often involving antique porcelain, so spawned a series of tea and cakes with the locals. Working mainly from photographic references, wherever possible my own, I will draw up the disparate elements into the perfect embodiment of my concept and once the details are all laid out on my handmade paper, I then start painting. I use many reference photographs in the creation of a single image, so I think of my works as painted collages.

In this series for *A Nest in the Hills: The Symbiosis of Women and Birds in Contemporary Australian Art* I have taken my 'painted collages' to the next level. I have created imagined unwieldy sculptures of tea sets and local birds, painted Precious Precarious Porcelain pieces. These are my visual interpretation of the state of the world, from the environment, climate change, the resurgence of the right and the loss of empathy, the emergence of Ai and the lack of respect (and funding) for the arts, world events, even down to my health after my recent autoimmune diagnosis, all of which have left a feeling of insecurity, instability and

quite unbalanced, exactly as if a whole lot of delicate porcelain was stacked precariously on top of each other without the proper foundations to hold it up and the slightest rustle of bird feathers would send it all crashing down into a broken yet sharp chaos. Tea has long been associated with emotions, from 'storm in a teacup' to 'tea and sympathy', even 'high tea' as a form of celebration, and patterned teasetts are historically associated with women, often depicting birds in their designs. In each of these four Precious Precarious Porcelain paintings I have taken a different local small bird and made them the feature amongst my chaotic tea sets.

Denise Faulkner
Precarious Paradoles (detail) 2025
Watercolour on handmade paper
80cm x 56cm



Denise Faulkner
Balancing Act 2025
Watercolour on handmade paper
80cm x 56cm



Denise Faulkner
Cup Shaped Nest 2025
Watercolour on handmade paper
80cm x 56cm



Denise Faulkner
Hanging in the Balance 2025
Watercolour on handmade paper
80cm x 56cm



Denise Faulkner
Precarious Pardalotes 2025
Watercolour on handmade paper
80cm x 56cm

Dianne Fogwell

The magpies I carve are both friends and chroniclers of the landscapes I inhabit. Their presence has long been a familiar comfort, yet over recent years I began to notice gaps – individual birds I once recognised no longer appeared. A social media story about a family whose magpies had also vanished echoed my own observations, prompting me to look more closely. Research led me to several reports highlighting worrying trends. BirdLife Australia's citizen-science data indicates significant declines in Australian magpie populations: a 31% drop along the East Coast, including Sydney and Brisbane, and around 20% across the South-East Mainland from 1998 to 2013. One veterinarian noted an increase in rescued magpies, from about 30 annually to more than 200 – possibly linked to habitat disturbance, poor human feeding practices, or secondary poisoning. As Sean Dooley of BirdLife Australia stated, if even these resilient birds are beginning to struggle, something deeper is shifting in the environment. I agree, and this conviction informed the creation of my artist book, *Aves – Missing* and continues to shape my artistic practice.

Many of my works draw on direct encounters with the changing Australian landscape. *Hindsight* emerged from travelling through countryside once lush and reliably green, now transformed by cycles of prolonged drought. Colours that were once markers of vitality – rich reds, golden ochres, glowing yellows – now contrast starkly with sparse, tenacious patches of green. These scenes carry both beauty and unease: beauty in their chromatic intensity, and unease in what they foreshadow. The drought of 2023–24 felt like a harbinger of future realities, pressing the need to observe how local ecosystems, especially birds, adapt or falter under escalating environmental stress.



Dianne Fogwell
Aves – Missing (detail) 2025
Artist book (unique copy), linocut and stamps, concertina format, hardcover.
31 x 21.5 x 4 cm (closed)
31 x 735 cm (open)

Tempest turns towards another force of upheaval – flood. Floodwaters transform landscapes abruptly, creating both moments of overwhelming beauty and scenes of devastation. Watching the Murray River in flood, I saw debris carried downstream and a solitary raven flying across the water. Its determined path made me wonder what it had endured: Was it fleeing? Searching? Returning home? Flood events often leave birds disoriented, soaked, or displaced, their survival pushed to the edge by extreme weather.

Across my practice, I return to birds not only as subjects but as indicators – sentinels of change whose stories mirror the shifting state of our world. Through carving, research, and observation, I hope to honour their presence and draw attention to the fragility of the ecosystems we share.



Installation view at Mudgee Arts Precinct featuring
Dianne Fogwell
Aves – Missing 2025



Dianne Fogwell
Hindsight 2024
Linocut, woodcut and pigmented inks
145 x 150 cm



Dianne Fogwell
Tempest 2023
Linocut, woodcut and pigmented inks
145 x 150 cm



Kim Harding

My self-portrait was the first painting I completed in this series exploring the connections we share as Australian women across generations, family, culture and the shared foundations of our lives expressed through native flora and fauna.

These everyday markers, represented by common birds and native flora of Australia, become the quiet constants in the background of our lives whether we are on the coast, way out west or in the CBD. We barely notice them until we are travelling, homesick or unsteady, and suddenly these familiar forms pull us back to ourselves. They are the touchstones and hooks we hang our coats on in times of stress or confusion, the grounding forces that guide us home.

In this work I am standing still and straight, hands in my pockets. I am comfortable and stable, with a bird sitting safely on my head representing the peace I feel in my life. I am wearing my husband's shirt; it represents his love, big and easy to wear, nothing showy but completely reliable. Steve, you are my constant, I will always come home to you. There is no one else I could love as much.

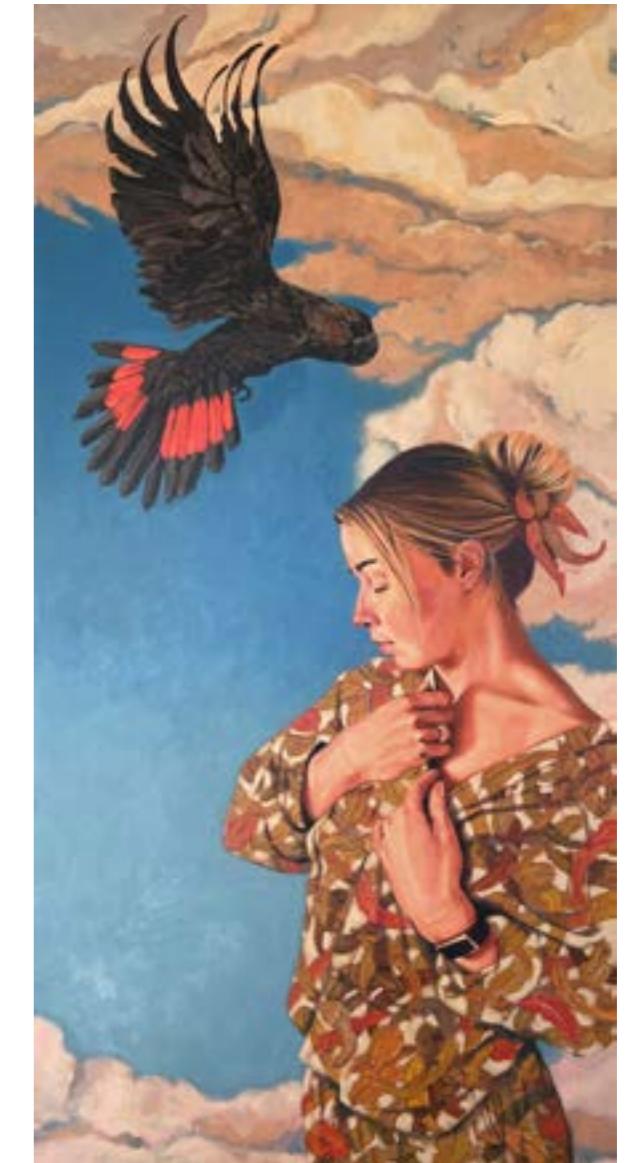
Ange is my son's beautiful girlfriend and the subject of my second painting in this series. She is a wonderful extension of our family. She is gentle and thoughtful with strong emotional intelligence and quiet confidence. She is certainly no pushover, and I deeply value the strength I see in her and the strength she gives my son. I hope you can see it in her portrait. Our future is in good hands with this young woman.

I did not understand the gift I was being given when I had my children. Becoming a mother reshaped my world in ways I could never have anticipated. The love is big and indescribable, a foundation that continues to deepen and steady me.

My eldest daughter is the subject of my third painting in this series. Bella, you are graceful, intelligent and funny. You are dedicated in a way that humbles me. You know my pain and, when I need it most, you understand how to hear me without judgment. I do not know how I survived without you.

My second daughter is the subject of my fourth and final painting in this series. Charlie carries a rare and bright kind of fire. Strong willed, playful, protective and shining, she brings both joy and spice in equal measure. She is a force in my world and lights up the darkness for me without even realising it. I could not love her more.

Kim Harding
Ange with Pink Cockatoo (detail) 2025
Oil on canvas
122 x 60 cm



Kim Harding
Kim with Black Cockatoo 2025
Ange with Pink Cockatoo 2025
Bella with White Cockatoo 2025
Charlie with Black Cockatoo 2025
Oil on canvas
122 x 60 cm each

Petrina Hicks



Petrina Hicks has provided three photographs for this exhibition: *Blue Bird*, *Bird's Eye* and her iconic 2005 work, *Shenae and Jade*. The three photographs reveal the artist's distinctive ability to pair immaculate beauty with a deep, unsettling quiet. Across these works, the artist creates luminous, hyper-refined images that appear calm on the surface yet pulse with psychological tension beneath.

In *Shenae and Jade*, a young woman faces us directly, yet her closed eyes withdraw from contact even as she remains fully visible. Her lowered eyelids form a gentle but decisive barrier, an intentional refusal that redirects our attention to the budgerigar held delicately in her mouth. The budgerigar – an iconic Australian bird long associated with domestic closeness and companionship – becomes both a tender presence and a loaded symbol. Its placement in the girl's mouth is intimate, strange and quietly provocative. Is the gesture one of trust, play, ritual, or something more unsettling? The photograph hovers in this ambiguous realm, inviting viewers to sit with its stillness and its unease. Beneath the flawless surfaces lies a subtle psychological tremor, a tension that deepens the longer we look.

Blue Bird extends Hicks' meditation on beauty, symbolism, and the fragile edges that exist beneath controlled perfection. Here the girl lies on her back, her face only partially revealed and her gaze not visible. Her pose suggests interiority, a retreat into her own world, and this withdrawing presence shifts our attention to the bird that shares the frame. The blue budgerigar interrupts the scene's sculptural calm with a sudden flare of motion, its wings frozen in a moment of expansion. This animation punctures

the stillness and introduces a dynamic that heightens the work's emotional register. Hicks often positions animals as metaphorical agents, figures that provoke reflection on freedom, fragility, and the layered complexities of human-animal relationships. In this image, the contrast between the girl's introspective calm and the bird's expressive vitality evokes a tension between distance and connection, containment and release.

With *Bird's Eye*, Hicks returns to the same pair to further explore the delicate interplay between human and bird. Shot in the artist's signature studio lights, the work is hyper-polished and glowing, yet charged with understated psychological depth. Here, the girl is seen in profile, her face partly obscured by her blonde hair. She is fully absorbed in a private moment with the budgerigar, disengaged from the viewer's gaze. The bird, by contrast, fixes its attention directly on her, its stillness echoing the intensity of their shared focus. The result is a charged and intimate exchange, ritualistic in its quietness.

Across these works, Hicks transforms the conventions of portraiture. Her images balance clarity with ambiguity, seduction with restraint. In the interplay between the girls and their companion birds, viewers encounter a world where beauty conceals emotional complexity and where a single gesture or fleeting movement can reverberate with meaning. Together, these photographs invite contemplation of vulnerability, presence, and the spaces where human and animal lives intersect.

Petrina Hicks
Shenae and Jade 2008, reprinted 2025
pigment inkjet print
120 x 120 cm



Petrina Hicks
Blue Bird 2018
pigment inkjet print
120 x 120 cm



Petrina Hicks
Bird's Eye 2018
pigment inkjet print
120 x 120 cm



Anna-Wili Highfield

The Raven is sharp in mind and appearance.
Streetwise, they strut in satin and pick from
bins.

Many cultures have stories that place Ravens
where the material and spirit world meet.
Gothic messenger, carrier of souls or fire-
blackened trickster, these wily scavengers
inspire powerful narratives.

They are perhaps my favourite birds.

Anna-Wili Highfield
The Raven 2025
Painted brass
45 x 22 x 16 cm (raven)
210 x 10 x 10 (including mount)



Nicole Ison

The Shoalhaven River mouth is on Aboriginal country where Dharawal and Dhurga language continues to be spoken. It is home to a shorebird conservation area situated between the township of Shoalhaven Heads and Comerong Island. The course of the river was altered by Alexander Berry in 1822 when he directed a group of convicts to dig Berry's canal between the Crookhaven and Shoalhaven rivers, creating Comerong Island. The Shoalhaven River regularly meets the sea via this canal and Crookhaven river at Crookhaven Heads.

For many years artist, Nicole Ison has been visiting this place to participate in the south coast shorebird recovery program managed by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. Her artwork comprises hundreds of tiny, delicate sculptures of birds, other creatures and plant life that tells stories from these encounters. For example, when the red capped plover feels threatened, they perform a broken wing display as a decoy to lead their predator away from the nest. The beach stone curlew has only recently arrived in the river mouth but is more commonly found in North Queensland and other tropical regions. The little terns fly in from across the globe and fiercely defend nests by bombing anyone that invades their space. Nicole volunteers with a program that protects beach nesting birds, and her work explores the impact of colonisation, climate change and pollution on their tidal habitats.

Nicole says of the work: 'By making elements of the landscape, the birds and creatures that inhabit the Shoalhaven River mouth I am creating an immersive world, I am map making and capturing some of the unofficial stories of this natural place'.

The artwork is made of hundreds of porcelain pieces. Each piece was hand built and decorated with underglaze and glaze. As a group they create an interpretation of the Shoalhaven River mouth that includes a variety of birds, animals, plants, trees, water, sand and manmade items.

Nicole Ison
Shoalhaven river mouth birds and habitat (detail) 2024-25
Hand built, underglazed and glazed ceramic installation
Dimensions variable



Nicole Ison
Shoalhaven river mouth birds and habitat 2024-25
Hand built, underglazed and glazed ceramic installation
Dimensions variable



Leila Jeffreys

Rain and June comes from my *High Society* series, a culmination of work over five years. What began with a moment of noticing how a flock of parrots perched in a tree resembling leaves, grew into a visual inquiry into nature, society, and interdependence. The planning and preparation required to select and work with tame budgerigars in a studio took many years, as care was central to the process.

In this body of work, my focus shifted from individuals to the collective organism of the flock. Alongside the flock, I also created single portraits, as well as images of couples and small groups, to reveal the intimate societies that exist within the larger whole.

This was something I had not attempted in my earlier work and became a new evolution in learning how to capture family groups. This work is a reminder of reciprocity, that we depend on the more than human world as much as it depends on us. *High Society* invites us to reflect on what we owe and what we might preserve for other societies beyond our own.

Scratch forms part of the *Ornithurae* series, exhibited at Olsen Gruin Gallery in New York and opened by actress Brooke Shields. The exhibition featured large-scale portraits of doves, pigeons and cockatoos, each rendered with the gravity typically reserved for human subjects. It reframed how we perceive these birds.

Coral comes from my *High Society* series, a culmination of work over five years. What began with a moment of noticing how a flock of parrots perched in a tree resembling leaves, grew into a visual inquiry into nature, society, and interdependence. The planning and preparation required to select and work with tame budgerigars in a studio took many

years, as care was central to the process.

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'The wound is the place where the light enters', is a line from a Rumi poem. The poem speaks to the fact that pain reveals and helps us cherish what truly matters. We can only mourn what we deeply love.

The fires that tore through the east coast of Australia in the summer of 2019 gave rise to a moment of profound personal grief. I found myself turning inward. From this time on, I began dreaming up a new mythology, one in which living creatures develop mental wounds that appear as physical markings. I had photographed the bleeding heart dove as part as my *Ornithurae* series. I then set about creating an exhibition that focussed on other birds with markings that appear to the human eye as wounds. These birds – which I feature in portraits, on branches and bonsai – have natural red markings; they appear to bleed, as if their bodies are manifesting the collective pain that is felt by this planet. Yet at the same time, they embrace their wounds with a spirit of openness and beauty.

Leila Jeffreys

Bleeding heart (detail) 2022

The wound is the place where the light enters, Edition 1 of 8 + 2 AP
Photograph on archival fibre based cotton rag paper
140 x 90 cm



Leila Jeffreys
'Dexter' White Bellied Sea Eagle 2014
Edition 9 of 14
Photograph on archival fibre based cotton rag paper
112 x 89 cm

Moments of intense personal pain have shown me, time and time again, that our wounds can actually be gifts in disguise. I believe that if we face the pain head-on, if we resist the urge to run from it – we can access deep inner knowledge. Pain can awaken us to the kindness of people, as well as a sense of awe in nature. It can help us deeply savour the overwhelming beauty of the everyday.

There is so much insight and personal growth if we face and heal what hurts us the most. From that peaceful place we radiate kindness, generosity, and compassion, bravery and humour, attributes that can ripple out, and make the world better.

Dexter was a distinguished nine-year-old gentleman when I met him. He lived with Paul Mander from Broadwings on the Gold Coast, and had been given to Paul by someone who found him to be of "strong character" and consequently "difficult to handle". Paul went to work with him and his deportment lessons paid off. Dexter was so impeccably groomed and his behaviour so amiable that I found it hard to believe he once had wild ways.

Sea-Eagles reside throughout South-East Asia, from India and Sri Lanka all the way to Australia. They breed and hunt only near water, with fish making up half their diet. Little is known about their complete breeding cycle, from building their impressive giant nests to fledging their young, but BirdLife Australia is working to solve the mystery.

Since 2009, BirdLife Australia volunteers have run EagleCAM, a live video and bird diary. It's the best kind of reality TV - anyone can click on the remote feed to see what the eagles are doing. The stars are a pair of Parramatta River Sea-Eagles who can be followed through the highs and lows of life in the wetlands near Sydney Olympic Park.

Eggs are objects of profound beauty and symbolic power. They embody not just the possibility of rebirth and transformation, but also the fragility of life. Stillness explores this mysterious duality, capturing the perfection and wonder of eggs and offering a mediation on the extraordinary diversity and complexity of the non-human world. Each artwork includes a hand-written inscription of prose created in collaboration with James Bradley.

The series was developed in dialogue with the Australian Museum's zoology collection, drawing on the deep archival knowledge of its egg specimens. It was first exhibited at Sydney Contemporary in 2024, with selected works shown at the Aotearoa Art Fair in 2025 through Olsen Gallery.



Leila Jeffreys

Wandering Albatross egg [Large], 2024

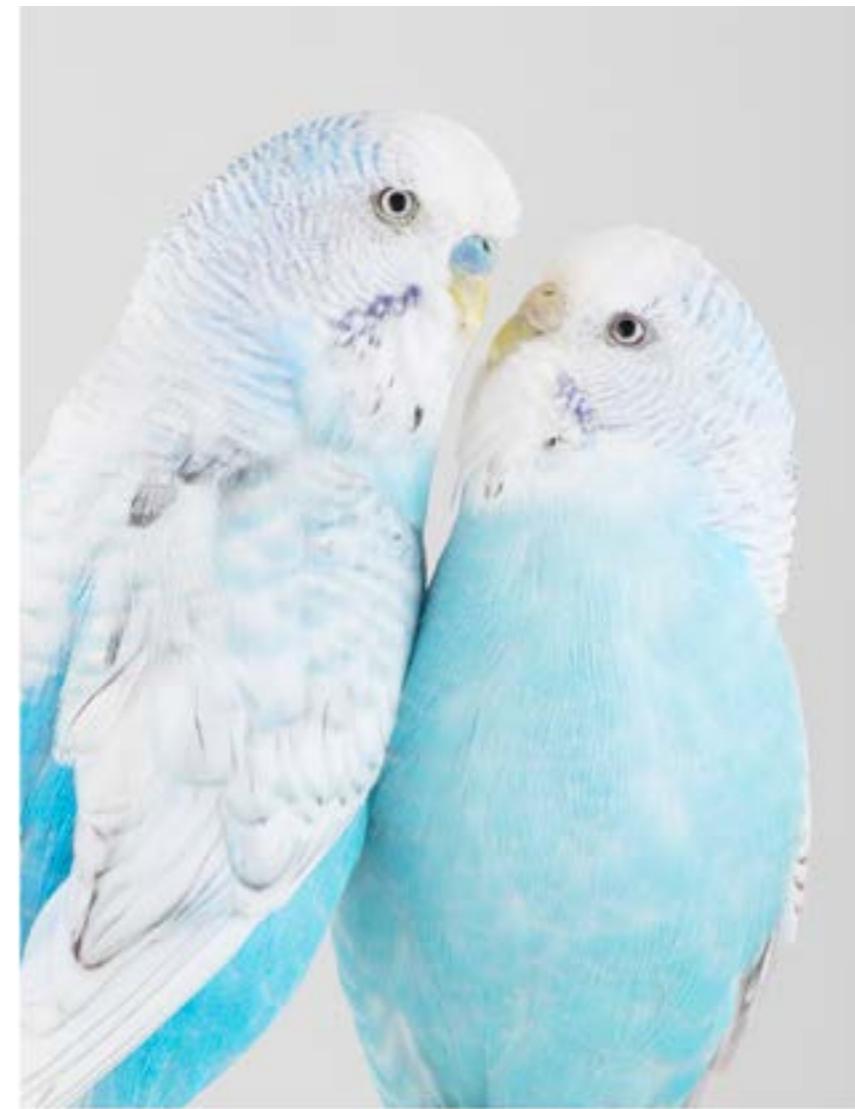
Emu egg no. 2 [Large] 2024

Spotted bowerbird egg no. 2 [Large] 2024

From the series *Stillness*, Edition 2 of 4 + 2 AP

photograph on archival fibre based cotton rag paper

140 x 110 cm each



Leila Jeffreys

Scratch Sulphur Crested Cockatoo 2017, Edition 26 of 50
Rain and June 2019, Edition 9 of 30
Coral 2019, Edition 11 of 30
photographic print on archival fibre based cotton rag paper
112 x 89 cm each

Fleur MacDonald



The work *Blue Monday* depicts my first encounter with the Blue-faced Honeyeater. I was minding my own business walking up the street when suddenly the most amazing bird appears in front of me, perched on a branch not far from where I stopped. I was taken aback; my gaze was glued to this bird. It sat on the small branch for a short time, but it felt like an eternity. Its blue eye surrounds were luminous and iridescent, with olive green plumage and a white breast. Magnificent bird, you have stolen my heart.

Its head is a similar in shape to a Noisy Friarbird and some have called it a Bananabird, as they love the banana blossom. Researching them further, I discovered they behave like the magpie. During their breeding season, they swoop and can become aggressive to protect their nests.

While visiting the local golf club, three Honeyeaters appeared on the side landing outside the clubhouse, and once again, I was awestruck. This moment inspired the new work, capturing the encounter with these strikingly beautiful birds - its vibrant colours and magnificent plumage. Feeding on nectar-rich Callistemon and presented with a doily, they are given the attention and care they truly deserve.

Living on a hill with views of the Great Dividing Range, I'm directly under the flight path of the Yellow-Tailed Black Cockatoo. I've watched them travel in pairs or sometimes threes, their bellowing, haunting cries warning of approaching storms. Their long, elongated bodies sail gracefully on the wind above. Legend has it that if you see three, clouds may follow; if you see more – perhaps twelve – the chance of rain increases. One

morning, under a clear blue sky, I counted 36 Black Cockatoos flying overhead – I kid you not! That afternoon, storm clouds rolled in, bringing torrential rain and even a touch of hail. They are living weather radars but more than that, they are symbols of change. Pairs often mate for life, and fledged young may stay with their parents until the next breeding season.

The work *Looks Like Rain* features three birds a family in flight across a linen sky. A needle and thread is attached to the larger piece, symbolising a work in progress: the ongoing story of the Doily and the Monkey Pod.

Swan Song represents the connection of family, the doily that this work is based on was originally created by my sister-in-law and her mother. The doily then passed into my hands several years ago. This is a set of three doilies, one large centre piece with the mother swan and two cygnets, and two smaller ones with a mother and one cygnet. Both show the same image but mirrored.

On my search for the perfect bowls to use for this work. I chose a collection of bowls in the shape of fish. To showcase a water bird from the area where I live, in this case a family of Black Swans, when you ask the universe for fish bowls and then find four together, it is a sign it was meant to be. There is only one parent represented here with a collection of cygnets in varying ages. Black Swans are nomadic, travelling long distances to find water when their wetlands dry up. The parents mate for life and raise their offspring together. The large lily pad depicted in the work, plays as the nest: a small island floating in the water.

Fleur MacDonald

Swoopy Bois 2024

Gouache and conservation varnish on wood
78cm x 94cm



Making friends with the wildlife can be thwart with danger as there are numerous attacks during the year's breeding season from swooping Magpies, which brings back childhood nightmares for everyone. It also conjures up images from Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*. The local council places warning signs 'Swooping Magpie' on the footpath near the areas where the swooping occurs.

Research has found that the breeding season runs from August through to November. For a pedestrian, it is best not to walk with your arms waving above your head, or thrusting a stick or umbrella in the air around you. The bird sees this as an act of aggression and will continue to swoop. When you do see the bird, it is best to stop and face it and continue to make eye contact, while walking. In some cases, you may have to walk backwards to get to your destination. Talking in a calm voice to them can help but try not to scream.

The bird in my *Swoopy Bois* work, swooped and followed me home. My best defence

was to dig up worms from the garden, and offer them to the large male, which worked well. He looked at me with his piercing steely eyes, tearing at my inner core and giving me goose bumps. Now thankfully he sees me as a friendly person, and visits regularly with his family.



Fleur MacDonald

Blue Monday 2025

Gouache and Conservation varnish on wood
3.5 x21 x 63.5cm

Swan Song 2025

Gouache and Conservation Varnish on wood, with Ultra Saturate Blue
60 x 90 cm (Cluster of 4)

Next page: *Looks Like Rain* (Cluster of 3) 2024
Gouache and Conservation varnish on wood
45 x 70cm (cluster of 3)





Kim V. Goldsmith

Ecofeminist and philosopher, Val Plumwood wrote that 'In re-animating (matter), we become open to hearing sound as voice, seeing movement as action, adaptation as intelligence and dialogue, coincidence and chaos as the creativity of matter.' What if we heard the ubiquitous Australian Raven's iconic call not as noise but dialogue in an overdue and much needed conversation – between them and with us?

The hero of *An Unkindness* is the Australian Raven, who make quiet, croaky murmuring sounds when giving each other attention on the roost, yet whose territorial call is the familiar slow, high ah-ah-aaaah – the last drawn-out note reverberating through soundscapes across Australia. The volume, pitch, tempo and order of notes changes depending on the message – it's how they communicate with other birds. When foraging, ravens also make a call and answer sequence when out of sight of one another, and when birds in flocks fly across the territory of other ravens, they make a single high-pitched 'caa' to say: 'We're just passing through!'

Often collectively called 'crows', the evolution of the highly intelligent Corvid family that includes ravens and crows is intimately entwined with ours. Ravens of all species have been credited as way-finders, messengers, keepers of secrets, and talisman, also associated with bad luck, death and the dark arts. Despite or because of this, ravens and crows are one of the most persecuted birds in human history. The raven's collective name includes an unkindness, a conspiracy, and a treachery, while a group of crows is commonly called a murder. It is indeed an unkindness.

Kim V. Goldsmith
An Unkindness 2025
field recorded soundscape composition in stereo
duration: 7 minutes
Image: Kim V. Golsmith Eye of the Corvus 2019



Deborah Kelly

Early this century I started collecting animal names for women; metaphors, endearments, insults. So many of them are avian!

- bird
- ladybird
- dollybird
- chick
- chickadee
- chickybabe
- duckie
- duckface
- old duck
- old chook
- old boiler
- old crow
- mother hen
- silly old goose

Some of them suggest infantilisation, some conjure loving pet names. Many manifest cultural disdain for ageing women (and think of their counterpart, 'silver fox').

I've always admired the Egyptian bird-headed deities: Nekhbet, Mut, Isis, Nephthys; their severe beauty, their solemn, inscrutable purpose. As a lifelong corrective to the narratives shaping my upbringing, I've sought old tales in which women lead, imagine, hope, adventure, quest, transform, or indeed, have story arcs at all. Applying the Bechdel test to folktales is a mug's game!

Most of my work begins as paper collage, made of abandoned books. It's a thinking exercise for me, and a way to acknowledge the vast material and historical weight of obsolete knowledge as it passes from this world. Then, it's a springboard, into various forms and processes: animated films;

performance backdrops; costumes; a crowd-sourced religion... and here, as cozy jacquard weavings, electronic emulations of certain forms of nest-making. They're embellished and embroidered, too – I didn't want the machines to have all the fun.

The images invoke some of my perennial motifs: eggs, the future, custodianship and its failure. The woman who leads, a river of birds, an Estonian origin story for the Milky Way. A raptor Daphne in grief, diverted from her trajectory. Escaped from the rapacious god (Apollo, in the old tale) transformed into a tree, or at least its bloom. But there's no fleeing what's become of the future, so the petals catch alight. Finally, a Fiona figure in a flowery forest, scaly and ridged, inscribed in silk with a fine and fated femur.

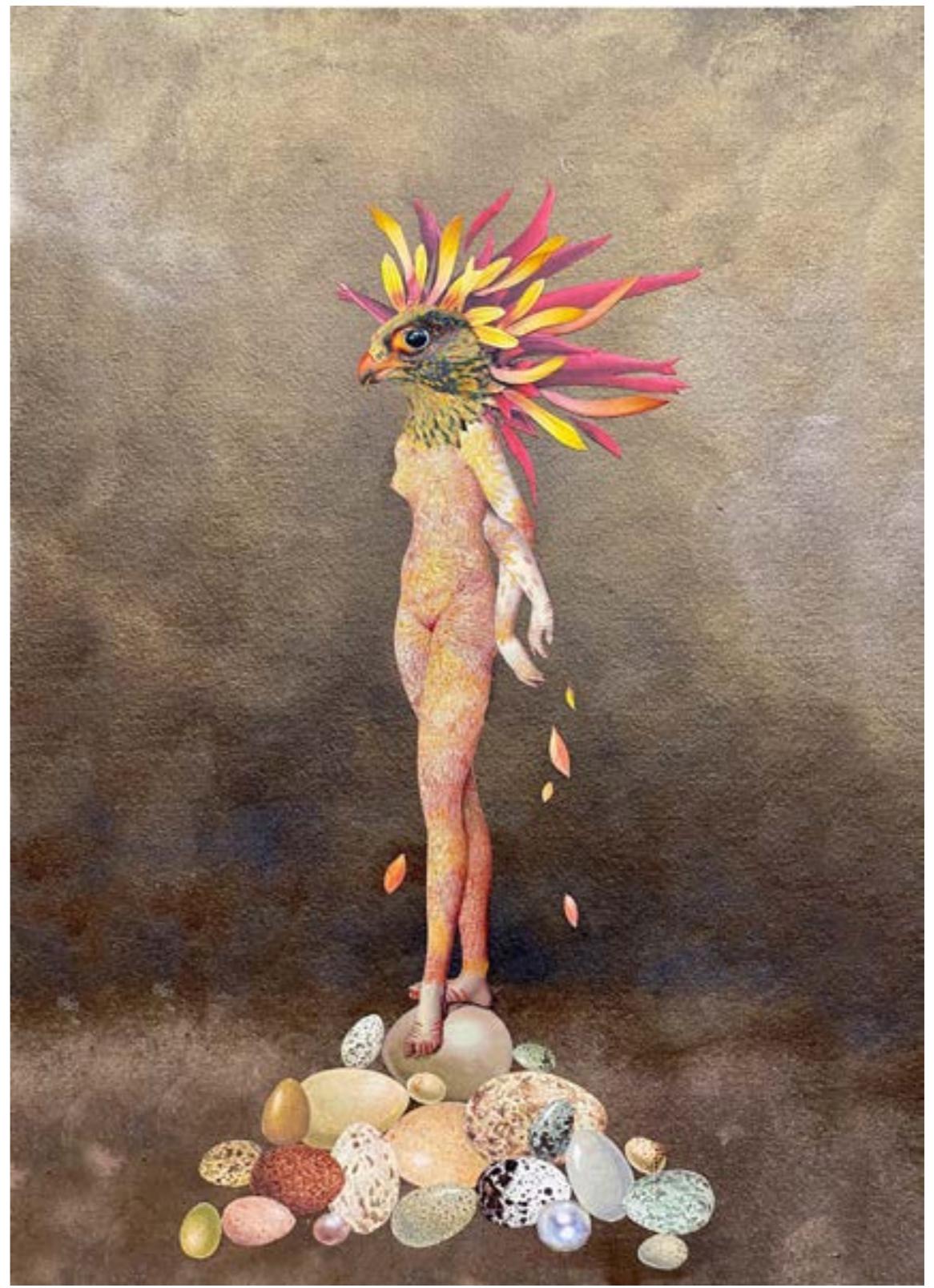
Deborah Kelly

River of Birds 2025

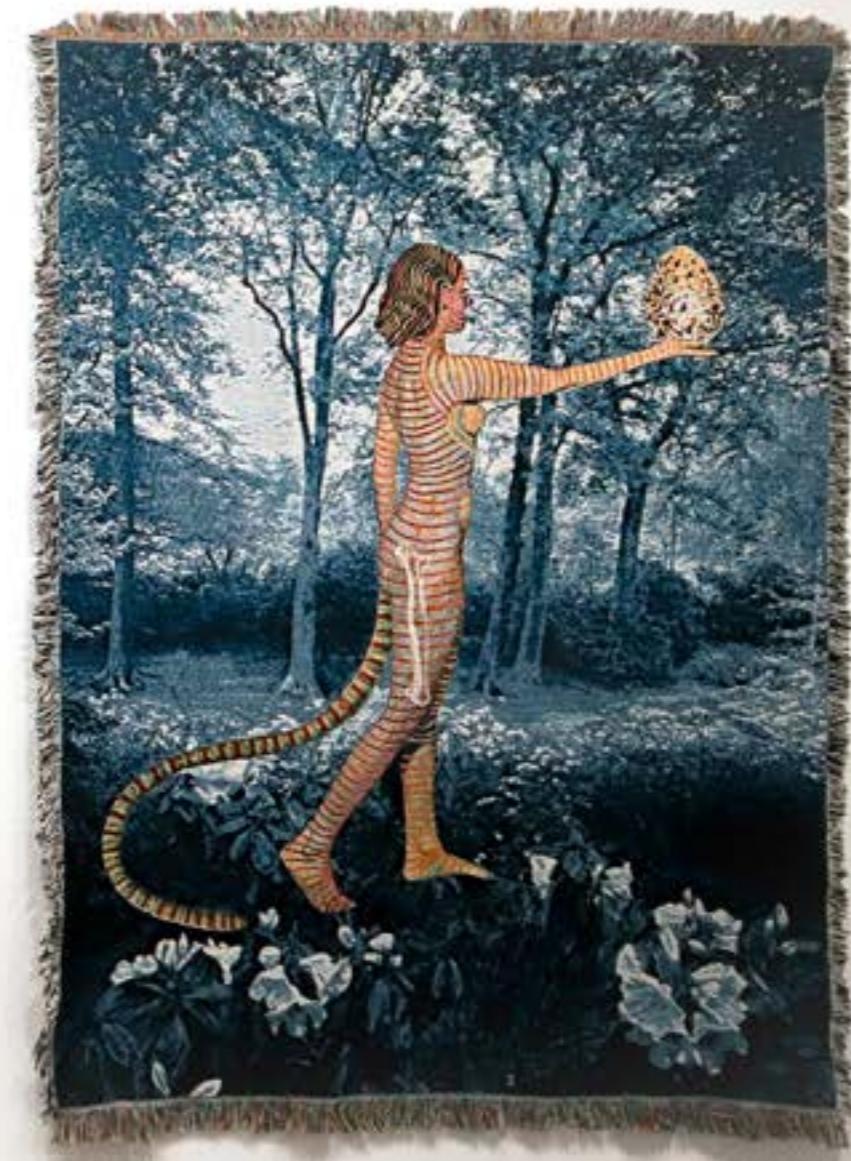
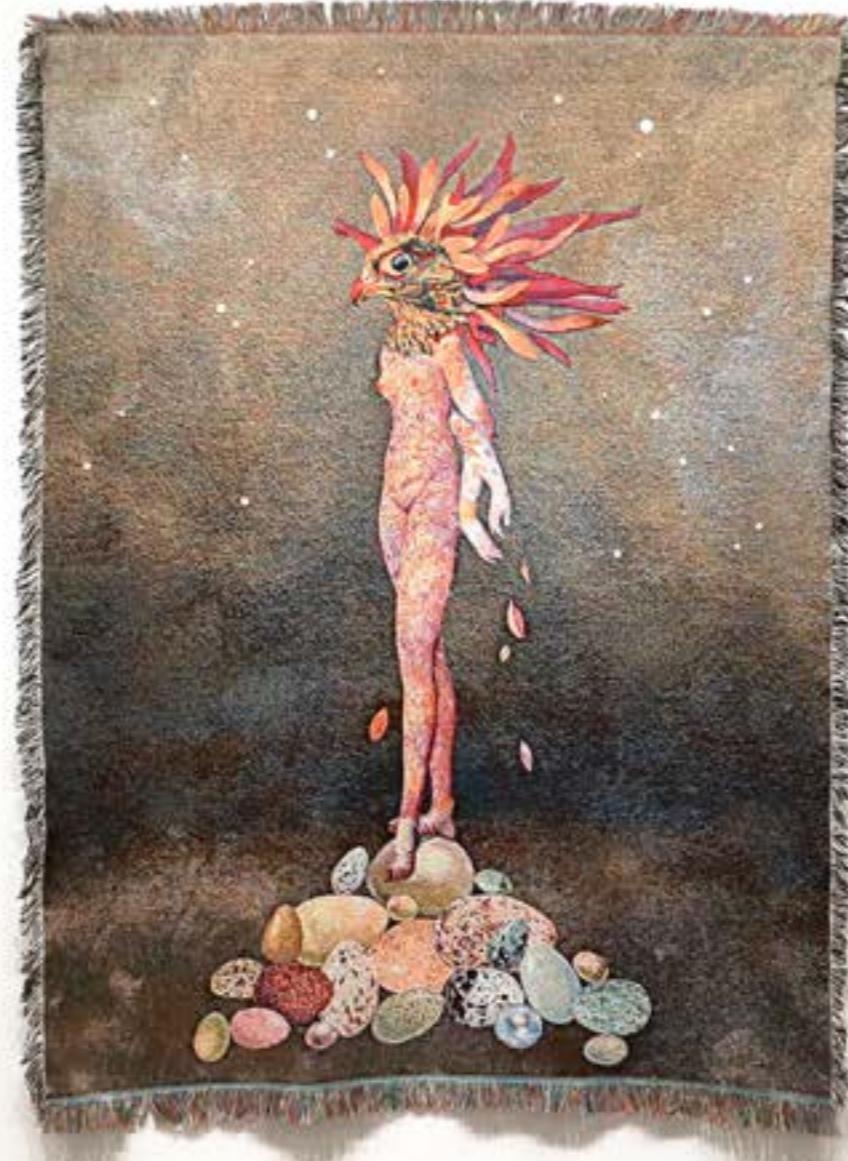
source collage for 2025 work hand-embroidered, machine-woven cotton jacquard tapestry with silk and cotton threads



Deborah Kelly
Early Bird source collage for 2025
hand-embroidered, machine-woven cotton jacquard
tapestry with silk and cotton threads



Deborah Kelly
A Daphnie; A Goodness source collage for 2025
hand-embroidered, machine-woven cotton jacquard
tapestry with silk and cotton threads





Aleshia Lonsdale

The Regent Honeyeater, once a 'rich patch nomad', moved through Country along ancient songlines in harmony with seasons and resources, much like its human *miyagandhi*.

Once occurring in its thousands along the eastern seaboard, this *budyaan* is now critically endangered, with fewer than 500 remaining due to habitat loss and competition. Efforts to save the species focus on breeding and rewilding, returning birds to their historic range.

This story mirrors our own *mayiny*. Over the past 236 years, profound impacts have disrupted kinship and connection, yet work continues to strengthen relationships through relearning song, restoring kinship, and Caring for Country.

Custodians across Wonnarua and Wiradjuri *ngurambang* are leading this renewal, ensuring the Regent Honeyeater returns to *ngurang*.

The *budyaan* are more than birds – they are our messengers and guides, linking us to *mayiny*, *ngurang*, *maradhal*, *dhalanbul*, and *giira*.

Through kinship, Lore, story, and *bangalbuwurayi*, we remain inextricably connected to our feathered *miyagandhi*, carried by *wir* across *ngurumbang*.

Translations:

Miyagandhi – family
Budyaan – birds
Mayiny – people
Ngurumbang – Country
Ngurang – place
Maradhal – past
Dhalanbul – present
Giira – future
Bangalbuwurayi – the country all over the earth
Wir – air, sky, the heavens



Michele Steven

The work *Joy Flight* celebrates the quiet poetry of nature, the rhythm of life and the deep connections that sustain us. Willie Wagtails are often found in pairs that stay together for life. They are chatty, joyful birds that are also very protective and will fearlessly defend their territory. They are seen by some to be symbols of joy, protection and good fortune, and in some cultures can even be spirit messengers and bringers of good and bad news. The blossoms represent the Hawthorn Tree which we have in our garden. It has also been linked to the spirit world and is considered a symbol of renewal, fertility and protection. The scattered nature of the blossoms in the background mirror represent the randomness and unpredictability of life and my busy mind.

I see motherhood as a quest for harmony, a continuous journey to balance love, responsibility and self - trying to create balance between chaos and calm, giving and receiving, guiding and letting go. I depict a hope of finding beauty and balance in the imperfection of everyday life. The Superb Lyrebird, heralded for its amazing mimicry, has been called 'The speaker of all languages', symbolising balance, harmony and creative voice. Also known for its introspective nature, it represents my inner voice, the quiet, creative pulse that thrives in solitude. The Olive Tree branches, ancient and enduring, embodying peace, resilience and the cyclical beauty and generosity of Mother Nature.

The Superb Fairy Wren is often seen as a symbol of freedom, adaptability and loyalty. These birds live in small groups with complex social structures signifying the importance of social bonds and community. Their adventurous and loyal nature embodies the quiet confidence that comes from exploring life's options before settling and embracing

one's authentic self, something I am trying to do more and more. The magnolia flower represents strength, self-respect and is often associated with yin, female energy. The grid of twelve blooms represents a wish for order, which often fails for me, to be a quiet anchor for the whirlwind of my ideas, dreams and responsibilities. Together they are a reminder of the importance of self-love, that beauty is not defined by perfection, but by presence and self-acceptance of the imperfect.

There is a life force that moves quietly yet powerfully through us and nature, the same energy that fuels imagination and artistic creation. Creativity is something I seek out every day, whether in one hour or many. Whether it's art, gardening or making a home, it is ever-present in my make up. The Eastern Spinebill, with its swift movements and ability to find nourishment in tricky places embodies vitality and the Kangaroo Paw with its quirky sculptural flowers stands as a symbol of creativity and resilience. I wanted to capture not just the forms of nature, but their spirit, that vital energy that inspires us all to create and grow.

Michelle Steven
Joy Flight 2025
Ink and charcoal on wood panel
102 x 76 cm



Michelle Steven
Inner Harmony 2025
Embracing Self 2025
Life Force 2025
Ink and charcoal on wood panel
102 x 76 cm



Pamela Welsh

I enjoy investigating human foibles and exploring the bizarre and amusing inconsistencies in people's behaviour. For this exhibition, I have tried to match the personalities of Australian birds to female behaviours. The anthropomorphic sculptures are loosely based on me and members of my family.

Auntie Tammy is based on my sister who tends to talk over everyone when she's anxious. Auntie Dora is based on a great aunt who was poor as a church mouse but spent every penny she had on clothes.

Aunties Diana and Diaspora appear as galahs who, after consuming too much wine, are typically over excited and squawking noisily.

Auntie Winifred wears black when she's having a manic episode – her dark clothes matching her mood.

Auntie Edna spends most of her time watching television and eating lollies. Lollies make her happy, but she's especially fond of baklava.

Auntie Margaret wears a lot of Marimekko (the Finnish label) as she likes the designs. They're like the magpie: bold and confident, and so is she.

Finally, 'Granma' (which is what my grandchildren call me) is me when I'm speeding in the car – I get in trouble from my brother-in-law about cutting across corners and driving too fast on the country roads.

Pamela Welsh
Auntie Tammy Talks A Lot 2025
Multi-fired, hand painted, glazed earthenware
51 x 28 x 17 cm



Pamela Welsh
Aunties Diana and Diaspora Drunk 2025
Multi-fired, hand painted, glazed earthenware
1.32 x 22 x 21 cm 2.30 x 19 x 27 cm



Pamela Welsh
Auntie Edna Eats Sweets (A Lot) 2025
Multi-fired, hand painted, glazed earthenware
33 x 50 x 20 cm



Pamela Welsh
Auntie Margaret Wears Marimekko 2025
Multi-fired, hand painted, glazed earthenware
33 x 44 x 22 cm



Pamela Welsh
Auntie Winifred Wears Black When She Feels Mental 2025
Multi-fired, hand painted, glazed earthenware
20 x 21 x 21 cm



Pamela Welsh
Auntie Dora Adores Drapery 2025
Multi-fired, hand painted, glazed earthenware
43 x 19 x 27 cm



Pamela Welsh
Granma Gains Momentum 2025
Multi-fired, hand painted, glazed earthenware
43 x 28 x 31.5 cm

Full List of Works

Michelle Cawthorn

Superb Fairy-Wren 2025
pigment print, Sakura Pigma Micron pen, and acrylic on archival cotton rag
110 x 80 cm

Red-browed Finch 2025
pigment print, Sakura Pigma Micron pen, and acrylic on archival cotton rag
110 x 80 cm

Brown Treecreeper 2025
pigment print, Sakura Pigma Micron pen, and acrylic on archival cotton rag
110 x 80 cm

Lorraine Connelly-Northey

Our Spiritual Connection to the Willie Wagtail 2025
Rusted mesh wire, iron, corrugated tin and cable wire
300 x 290 cm

Lucy Culliton

Bibbenluke Guinea Fowl 2025
Oil on canvas
130 x 130 cm

Ekka Pigeons 2024

Oil on board
40 x 40 cm
Image courtesy Michael Bradfield Photography

Ekka Pigeon 2024

Oil on board
40 x 40 cm
Image courtesy Michael Bradfield Photography

Pigeon I 2024

Oil on board
40 x 40 cm
Image courtesy Michael Bradfield Photography

Pigeon V 2022

Gouche on paper
19 x 17.5 cm

Ekka Two White Ducks 2025

60cm x 60cm
Oil on board
Image courtesy Michael Bradfield Photography

Ekka Black Duck 2024

60cm x 60cm
Oil on board
Image courtesy Michael Bradfield Photography

Ekka Two Roosters 2024

50 x 35 cm
Oil on canvas
Image courtesy Michael Bradfield Photography

Blond Cock 2002

Oil on board
75 x 50 cm
Image courtesy the artist

Brunette Cock 2002

Oil on board
75 x 50 cm
Image courtesy the artist

Cock I 2023

Gouche on paper
38 x 38 cm
Image courtesy Michael Bradfield Photography

Hen 2022

Gouache on paper
25.5 x 38 cm
Image courtesy Michael Bradfield Photography

Drake any Breed Duck 2022

Gouache on paper
36 x 28.5 cm
Image courtesy Michael Bradfield Photography

Hamburg Silver Spangled Cock 2022

Gouache on paper
38 x 28.5 cm
Image courtesy Michael Bradfield Photography

Goose 2023

Gouache on paper
38 x 28.5 cm
Image courtesy Michael Bradfield Photography

Balancing Act 2025

Watercolour on handmade paper
80cm x 56cm

Hanging in the Balance 2025

Watercolour on handmade paper
80cm x 56cm

Cup Shaped Nest 2025

Watercolour on handmade paper
80cm x 56cm

Precarious Pardalotes 2025

Watercolour on handmade paper
80cm x 56cm

Dianne Fogwell

Aves – Missing 2025
Artist book (unique copy), linocut and stamps, concertina format, hardcover.
31 x 21.5 x 4 cm (closed)
31 x 735 cm (open)

Hindsight 2024

Linocut, woodcut and pigmented inks
145 x 150 cm

Tempest 2023

Linocut, woodcut, and pigmented inks
145 x 150 cm

Kim Harding

Kim with Black Cockatoo 2025
Oil on canvas
60 x 122 cm
Image courtesy Michael Bradfield Photography

Charlie with Black Cockatoo 2025

Oil on canvas
60 x 122cm

Ange with Pink Cockatoo 2025

Oil on canvas
60 x 122 cm

Bella with White Cockatoo 2025

Oil on canvas
60 x 122cm

Petrina Hicks

Shenea and Jade 2005
pigment inkjet print
120 x 120 cm

Blue Bird 2018

pigment inkjet print
120 x 120 cm

Bird's Eye 2018

pigment inkjet print
120 x 120 cm

Anna-Wili Highfield

The Raven 2025
Painted brass
45 x 22 x 16 cm (raven)
210 x 10 x 10 (including mount)

Nicole Ison

Shoalhaven river mouth birds and habitat 2024-25
Hand built, underglazed and glazed ceramic installation
Dimensions variable
Image courtesy Ainslie Co.
Courtesy Shoalhaven Regional Gallery Collection

Leila Jeffreys

Rain and June 2019,
Edition 9 of 30
photographic print on fibre based cotton rag
112 x 89 cm

'Scratch' Sulphur Crested Cockatoo

2017
Edition 26 of 50
fine art inkjet print on cotton rag archival paper
112 x 89 cm

Coral 2019

Edition 11 of 30
Photographic print on fibre based cotton rag
112 x 89 cm

'Dexter' White Bellied Sea Eagle

2014
Photographic print on fibre based cotton rag
Edition 9 of 14 photograph
112 x 89 cm

Bleeding heart 2022

The wound is the place where the light enters,
Edition 1 of 8 + 2 AP
Photograph on archival fibre based cotton rag paper
140 x 90 cm

Spotted bowerbird egg no. 2 [Large] 2024

From the series *Stillness*
Edition 2 of 4 + 2 AP
AP photograph on archival fibre based cotton rag paper
140 x 110 cm

Emu egg no. 2 [Large] 2024

From the series *Stillness*
Edition 1 of 4 + 2 AP
photograph on archival fibre based cotton rag paper
140 x 110 cm

Wandering Albertross egg [Large] 2024

Edition 1 of 4 + 2 AP photograph on archival fibre based cotton rag paper
140 x 110 cm

Deborah Kelly

River of Birds 2025
Machine-woven cotton jacquard tapestry with silk / cotton embroidery threads and antique mother-of-pearl buttons
Additional embroidery by Eddie Bosnic
183 x 137 cm

A Custodian; A Daphne 2025

Machine-woven cotton jacquard tapestry with silk / cotton embroidery threads and antique mother-of-pearl buttons
Additional embroidery by Eddie Bosnic
183 x 137 cm

Early Bird 2025

Machine-woven cotton jacquard tapestry with silk / cotton embroidery threads and antique mother-of-pearl buttons
Additional embroidery by Eddie Bosnic
183 x 137 cm

Fleur MacDonald

Blue Monday 2025
Gouache and conservation varnish on wood
3.5 x21 x 63.5cm

Looks Like Rain (Cluster of 3) 2024

Gouache and conservation varnish on wood
45 x 70 cm

Swan Song (Cluster of 4) 2025

Gouache and conservation varnish on wood, with ultra saturate blue.
60 x 90cm

Swoopy Bois (Cluster of 7 pieces) 2024

Gouache and conservation varnish on wood
78 x 94 cm

Kim V. Goldsmith

An Unkindness, 2025
field recorded soundscape composition in stereo,
Duration: 7 minutes

Aleshia Lonsdale

Re-knitting 2025

Dimensions variable
mixed media

Michele Steven

Joy Flight 2025
Ink and charcoal on wood panel
102 x 76 cm

Inner Harmony 2025

Ink and charcoal on wood panel
102 x 76 cm

Embracing Self 2025

Ink and charcoal on wood panel
102 x 76 cm

Life Force 2025

Ink and charcoal on wood panel
102 x 76 cm

Pamela Welsh

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Multi-fired, hand painted, glazed earthenware
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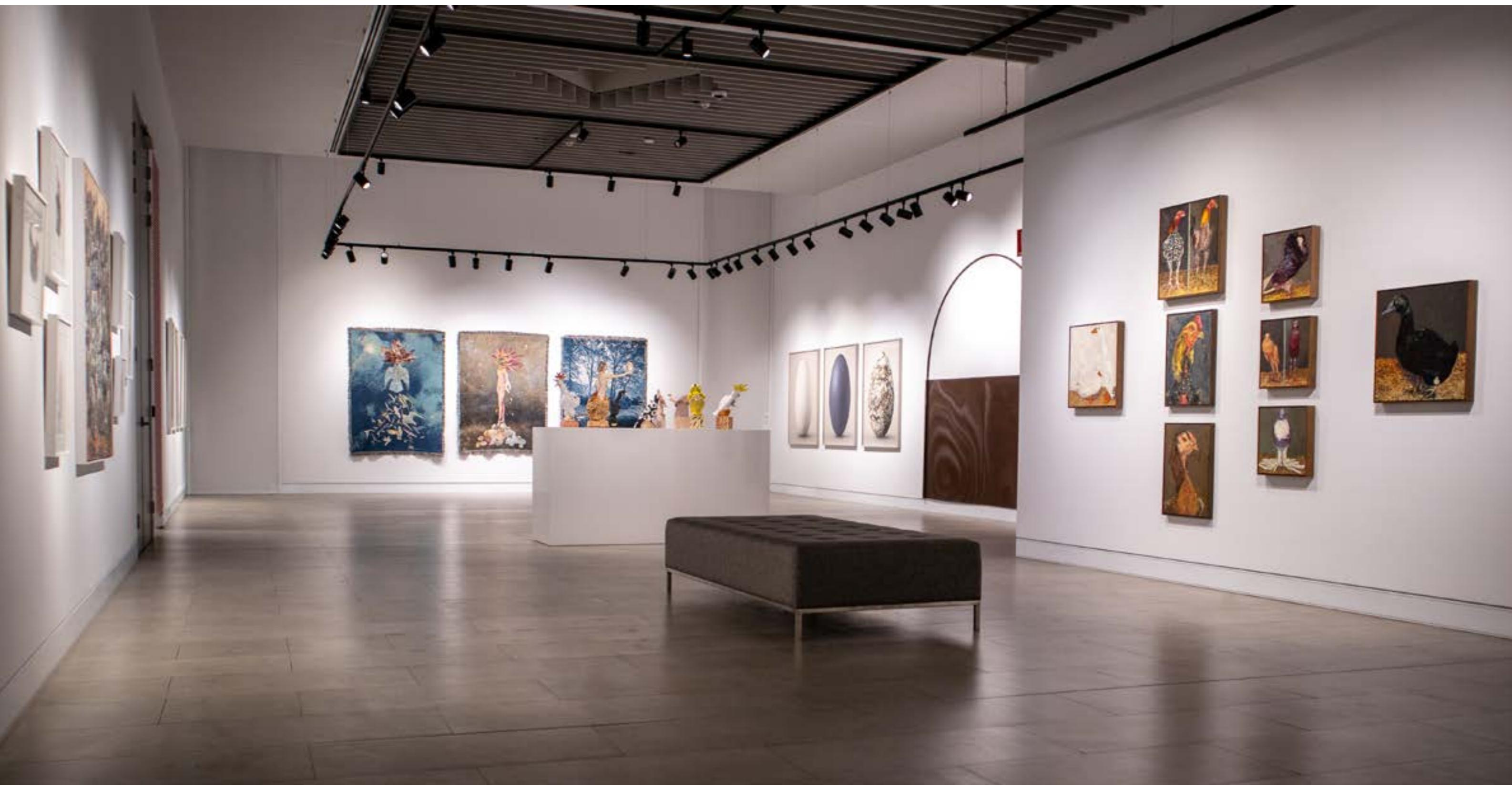
Auntie Tammy Talks A Lot 2025
Multi-fired, hand painted, glazed earthenware
51 x 28 x 17 cm

Aunties Diana and Diaspora Drink Wine 2025
Multi-fired, hand painted, glazed earthenware
2 pieces
1.32 x 22 x 21 cm
2.30 x 19 x 27 cm

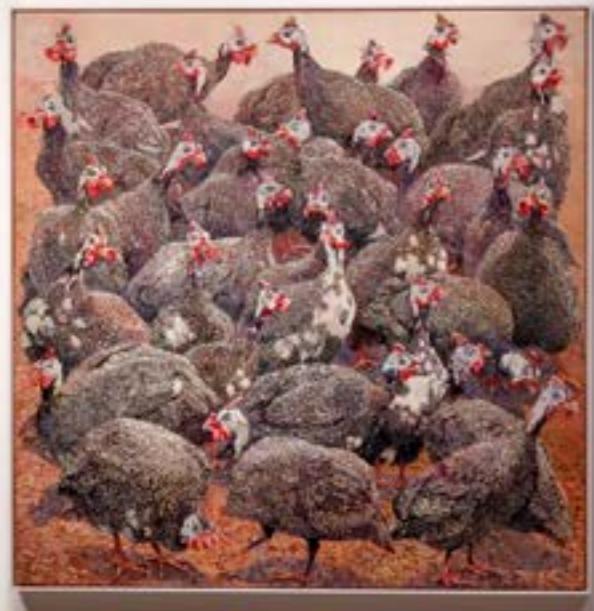
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All images courtesy the artist and Olsen Gallery



A Nest in the Hills Installation view at Mudgee Arts Precinct



Acknowledgements

Michelle Cawthorn photographs page 20, 22 and 23 courtesy High Res Digital, the artist and Olsen Gallery.

Dianne Fogwell images page 50, 54 and 55 courtesy the artist and Australian Galleries.

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Lucy Culliton images page 28, 30 – 39 and 41 – 43 courtesy Michael Bradfield Photography, the artist and King Street Gallery on William.

Nicole Ison image page 68 and 69 courtesy Ainsley Co., the artist and Shoalhaven Regional Gallery.

Petrina Hicks images page 60, 62 and 63 courtesy the artist and Michael Reid Sydney + Berlin.

Exhibition installation photographs: Adelle Minahan and Lizzy Galloway.

Exhibition Curator: Lizzy Galloway

Exhibition branding, exhibition decals and catalogue design: Adelle Minahan

Exhibition installation: Leo Cremonese and Michael Bourke

Education and Audience Engagement: Denise Jackson and Michael Bourke

Exhibition Administration: Gillian Brengle

A *Nest in the Hills* Installation views at Mudgee Arts Precinct
Left: featuring Dianne Fogwell *Aves Missing* 2025 and
above: works by Lucy Culliton



Mudgee Arts Precinct
90 Market Street MUDGEES NSW, 2850
Open 7 days 9am – 5pm

mudgeeartsprecinct.com.au



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A NEST IN THE HILLS: *The Symbiosis of Women and Birds in Contemporary Australian Art*

12 December 2025 – 15 March 2026

Front cover image: Deborah Kelly *A Custodian; A Daphne*
(detail from source collage), 2025

Inside front cover: Anna-Wili Highfield *The raven* 2024

Back cover image: Denise Faulkner *Hanging in the Balance* (detail) 2025



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