



STEPHEN BOWERS

Conference of Birds

26 October – 7 December 2024

LAURINE · DIGGINS · FINE · ART

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Gallery & Exhibition Hours:
Tues – Friday 10 am – 6 pm
other hours by appointment



Paradise Parrot (last seen November 1927) 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour,
 clear glaze
 diam.: 33 cm



Cockatiel 2 Brown Sunburst 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour,
 clear glaze
 diam.: 33 cm



Adelaide Rosella 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour,
 clear glaze
 diam.: 33 cm

STEPHEN BOWERS: Conference of Birds

I live in a small rural town settled in the 1700s by English colonists on the land of the Indigenous people, the Norwottucks. Located at the Western end of Hampshire County in the foothills of the Berkshires, an area known as the Hilltowns, we are about 110 miles west of Boston and 180 miles North of New York City. As director of Ferrin Contemporary, from where I sit in my office, Australia is half a world away. Yet, as I look at images of works in this exhibition, I vividly recall my own residency and research in the place where these pieces have their genesis – Adelaide, South Australia.

The journey that brought me to Adelaide began in the summer of 2006, the year we established Project Art, a ceramic focused residency initiative located in an old historic river mill we had renovated on Main Street in Cummington, a small New England village. Stephen was well known to us through his exhibitions at art fairs, museums and galleries in the US – and he was one of the first guests at Project Art.

On a lovely summer evening before a gathering of sculptors, potters and painters, Stephen

talked about his work. Projecting images onto a makeshift screen on the wall of our barn, he inspired us with his knowledge of ceramic history, decorative arts and ornithology. He predicted we would meet again and in 2012, I arrived in Adelaide to speak at the Clay Triennale Conference – a visit arranged by Stephen and assisted by ArtSA.

Aside from marsupials and poisonous reptiles, my knowledge of Australia - culture and history - was rather minimal. However, with every studio and museum visit, while walking in the city and the central markets, the similarities were striking. I was welcomed into artists' homes and studios and met curators and gallery directors. I learned about the culture from them and through collections of decorative and utilitarian objects, ceramics and paintings. Lulled by music, fed locally grown food and enjoying the wine, experiencing humour and hospitality - I thought I'd arrived back where I started, surrounded by the familiar and sharing a mutual appreciation for good things and the fragile beauty of our common world.

This exhibition also celebrates a kind of fragile beauty. It is full of vivid images portraying birds in colour-saturated settings where they overlap complex fragmentary backgrounds, many derived from engravings and textiles. This rich



Blue Budgie Lamington Plate 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour,
 clear glaze
 diam.: 21 cm

COVER: Cockatiel Gothic Asia 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour, clear glaze
 diam.: 33 cm



mash-up of visual ideas is playfully and skilfully rendered using meticulous brushstrokes that are imitative of industrial process.

Environmental destruction alarmed Stephen as a child and it has only gotten worse. Fragmentation, segmentation, atomisation and disjuncture find sharp focus within his work. Bowers is not alone in his use of visual references to the beauty of decay to speak about impact on, and consequences for the natural world.

But unlike those who use digital technology to deliver their visual messages, Bowers uses extraordinary hand painting techniques to create *trompe l'oeil* effects. His shards and fragments being compositional devices that speak of broken and perhaps ultimately irreparable relationships and disconnections within a natural environment we largely take for granted.

These works explore pattern-in-nature and nature-in-pattern and reflect on the tensions of how we appropriate and incorporate the natural world for our own use. Though deliberately presented as a large massed group (or flock) the works speak as individual portraits, with clarity and precision, inviting engagement with the ideas and themes that underlie each.

Conference of birds functions as a metaphor for human impact, reminding us of environmental connections which, by habitat destruction and unmanaged use of fossil fuels, we undermine.

– Leslie Ferrin, September 2024

Leslie Ferrin is the founding Director of Ferrin Contemporary in Cummington, Massachusetts and Project Art USA
<https://ferrincontemporary.com/portfolio/stephen-bowers/>



Sulphur Crested Cockatoo RH 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour,
 clear glaze
 diam.: 33 cm

The Dodo - The Cloud has a Silver Lining 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour, clear glaze,
 silver lustre
 diam.: 33 cm



Crimson Rosella 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour,
 clear glaze
 diam.: 33 cm



Pardalote Lamington Plate 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour,
 clear glaze
 diam.: 20 cm



Red-tailed Black Cockatoo 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour,
 clear glaze
 diam.: 33 cm



Spotted Pardalote B 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour,
 clear glaze
 diam.: 20 cm



Sulphur Crested Cockatoo LH 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour,
 clear glaze
 diam.: 33 cm



Kookaburra 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour,
 clear glaze
 diam.: 33 cm



Stubbs' Roo meets Spode 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour,
 clear glaze
 diam.: 33 cm



Small Sulphur Crested Cockatoo QR code 2024
 earthenware, underglaze colour, clear glaze
 diam.: 21 cm