

# Objects & Ornithology

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**Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Art Centre Friday 8th August - Sunday 12th October 2014**



## | Birds

At my home studio on the border of Ipswich and Brisbane, I am surrounded by bird life. Having lived in our bush setting for some 27 years, we are very familiar with our feathered neighbors, and enjoy sharing our lives with them. We have watched successive generations of magpies, kookaburras, currawongs, frogmouths, parrots, honeyeaters, wrens, scrub turkeys and kingfishers sing, mate, hunt, squabble over territory, and interact with each other and us.



# | Objects

This body of work is a light hearted, whimsical look at birds interacting with collectible objects. I have found this whole ongoing investigation into objects and their allure much more personal this time around.

Most of the collectibles I've teamed with the birds belong to myself, family or fellow collectors and it's been a chance to ask some stern questions of myself as to why exactly I have all these collections of 'stuff' and do I really need them. Recently renovating and moving my studio made it very evident I have a lot of stuff.

I can justify my magpie habits, if I use William Morris as my guide, 'having nothing I do not know to be useful or think to be beautiful'. However, recalling Christ's words 'look at the birds of the air, they do not labour or spin or gather in barns' should I curb my urges to gather and hoard?

Is collecting only a slightly more civilized method of hoarding, by way of organisation?

By projecting the human foible of possession and collection onto birds, it may throw up questions about what we value and why.



I've painted a series of works looking at what objects different species of bird might collect. The natural progression then seemed to be to make the bird and their objects into an object themselves by modelling and then casting them.



When researching these enchanting birds I discovered that not only do they collect different coloured objects, depending on the type of bowerbird they may be, but they also steal from each other.

It's a good conversation starter- Satin Bowerbird  
2013  
40 x 76 cm  
oil on linen



They employ forced perspective to arrange their objects with a very deliberate use of optical illusion.

It's a good conversation starter!- Spotted Bowerbird

2013

40 x 76 cm

oil on linen



To find a bird species that collects, covets and has a clear aesthetic was a fascinating discovery. So, I thought like a bowerbird, curating my own objects in their preferred colour schemes.

'It's a good conversation starter'- Regent Bowerbird

2013

40 x 76 cm

oil on linen



Maybe I made a nest out of left over pencil stubs, perhaps I gathered a fallen nest and just possibly a magpie stalked into the studio.

No really, it happened.

Sometimes it's hard to decide which ones to keep'  
Magpie - Nests

2013

34 x 96 cm  
oil on canvas







This little Tawny Frogmouth baby flew down out of his nest and watched by his doting parents, learnt to fly around the studio for a few days before heading off on his own. I teamed him up with one of my many aluminum teapots, the orange one, to match his eyes.

‘They connect me to my past’ Frogmouth

2013

35 x 35 cm  
oil on linen



I found this little whistle in a friend's antique store. It reminded me of happy childhood memories sitting warbling and burbling along on a toy whistle fondly believing myself to be in conversation with the surrounding birds. And there just happens to be a gorgeous yellow bird called the Golden Whistler whom I've decided will collect these.

“They make me feel happy” Golden Whistler -  
Toy Whistle

2013

30 x 30 cm  
oil on linen



Magpies sing beautifully and readily endear themselves to us again and again with their warbling song, so I figured they might collect 45's.

But only the classics.

'I only collect the classics' -Magpie 45's collection

2014

36 x 36 cm

oil on linen



Noisy Minors are sometimes called Soldier Birds so it seemed logical to have them collect toy soldiers.

'It started with just a few' - Miner Bird and Toy Soldiers

2013

41 x 41 cm

oil on linen



Cereal toys were the highlight of my childhood breakfasts. I think these were from the Nabisco 'Wings of Flight' series. They had small holes in the wings so you could hang them up as a mobile. These were donated to me by a very kind, prolific collector who wishes to remain anonymous.

'I had these as a kid' - Swallow Plastic Cereal  
Toy Birds

2014

oil on linen

41 x 41x 4 cm



Batman, Robin. It's pretty obvious.

'These are my favourite ones' Robin Batman

2014

36 x 36 cm

oil on linen



Californian artists Judith and Richard Long have curated one mile of Kehoe Beach since 1999 and make beautiful artworks using the beach plastic they collect. I received their permission to allow me to use their work *Wreath Barrettes* in this work as I wanted my Crested Tern to collect beach plastic and figured he could use a hair slide to tame his unruly locks.

For more info on them visit [www.beachplastic.com](http://www.beachplastic.com)

They are useful as well as pretty'  
Crested Tern Wreath Barrettes

2014  
41 x 41 cm  
oil on linen





Collectors often start gathering objects they have a professional interest in. Fish knives would surely be useful?

'I guess I'll never be satisfied because there are always more out there' Kingfisher and Fish Knife 2

2014

41 x 41 cm

oil on linen



The world is enamoured by celebrity and what if Budgies were not immune? Trading cards are the perennial collectible.

I can't rest until I get the whole set'  
Budgerigar Celebrity Birds Trading cards

2014  
38 x 38 cm  
oil on linen



It seems the Reed Warbler weaves his nests around the reeds along river banks. What if he wove his home around his collection?

'I've always been a collector' Reed Warbler  
Woodwind Instruments

2014

40.5 x 40.5 cm  
oil on linen



The Dollar bird was destined to collect currency but I thought if he was a little more discerning collector he might covet the Australian contemporary artist, Fiona Hall's beautiful installation of nests, exquisitely made from shredded dollar bills.

'I'm not finished collecting yet' Dollar Bird -  
Fiona Hall 'Tender' series

2014

41 x 41 cm  
oil on linen



This flamboyantly colourful dove could only be an astute art collector with an eye for Australian art featuring birds. Each of the artists featured here (or their estate) kindly gave their permission for me to use their artwork within mine. They are from left to right Arthur Boyd, Julie Keating, Sam Leach, John Wolseley, Thornton Walker, Michael Zavros, Erika Grofton, Norman Lindsay and Marian Drew.

'I like to surround myself with beautiful things'  
Superb Fruit Dove Australian Art

2014

70 x 120 cm  
oil on canvas

Through the modelling and casting process, the birds and their collected objects become a collectible themselves.

They are cast in resin, plastic being a popular collectible material of the last century.

Scroll through images using arrows.

37.5 x 37.5 cm

resin, wallpaper, fabric,  
huon pine





11 birds on a branch, cast in white resin. There are collections painted on the backs of each bird. The absurdity of a bird burdening itself with collected objects asks the question 'why do I?'

'Collecting is a kind of security against uncertainty and loss'

2014

dimensions variable  
resin, oil paint and driftwood



By casting and displaying all the birds and their collectibles as a collection I am able to complete the whole set. Surely the desire of every collector?

It's both a relief and a sadness to have a complete set'

2014

1200x900x60 cm

resin, pine





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