

AVIAN ASSEMBLY

Fernando do Campo
Madeleine Kelly
Raquel Ormella



COVER IMAGE

MADELEINE KELLY,

CANBERRA BIRDS: CUTE

CRAFT FOR THE ARCHIVE OF

PAINTING (detail), 2018-19.

Encaustic on cardboard with

paper and text. 17 parts, 8 x 11

x 11cm to 27 x 9 x 9cm approx.

Installed dimensions variable.



Singleton Council and Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre acknowledges the Wanaruah, Wonnarua people and their custodianship of the land in the Singleton Local Government Area. We also acknowledge all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who live within the Singleton Local Government Area and pay our respect to elders past, present and future.

AVIAN ASSEMBLY

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Madeleine Kelly
Raquel Ormella

Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre
17 May 2025 – 3 Aug 2025

W singletonartsandculturalcentre.com.au



RAQUEL ORMELLA,
LIST KEEPER, 2011.
Video still.



FERNANDO DO CAMPO,
PISHING IN THE ARCHIVE
(detail), 2021. Single channel
video installation.

INTRODUCTION

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FERNANDO DO CAMPO, *KOUNELLIS MUST HAVE USED COAL RIVER COAL*, 2018. Acrylic on canvas. 120 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert, Sydney

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RAQUEL ORMELLA, 340 AND COUNTING – 21
SPECIES: 3 PARROTS, 5 THORNBILLS, SOME
HONEYEATERS, WRENS AND FLYCATCHERS (detail),
2021. Cotton and silk embroidery and applique on
cotton, 150 x 90cm. Photographer: David Paterson
Dorian Photographics

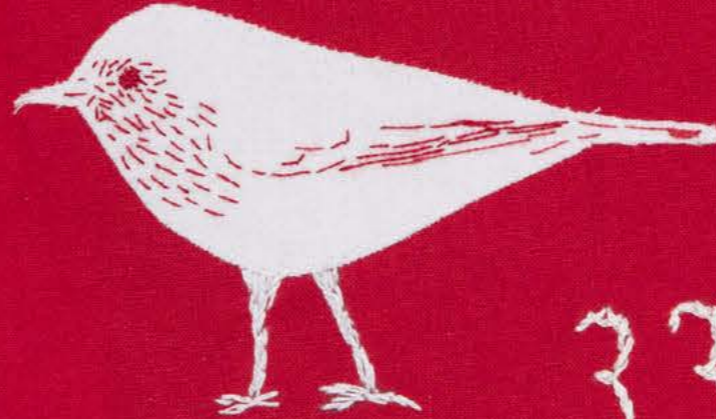


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Who are you?
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33

Hard to

blind spot



234

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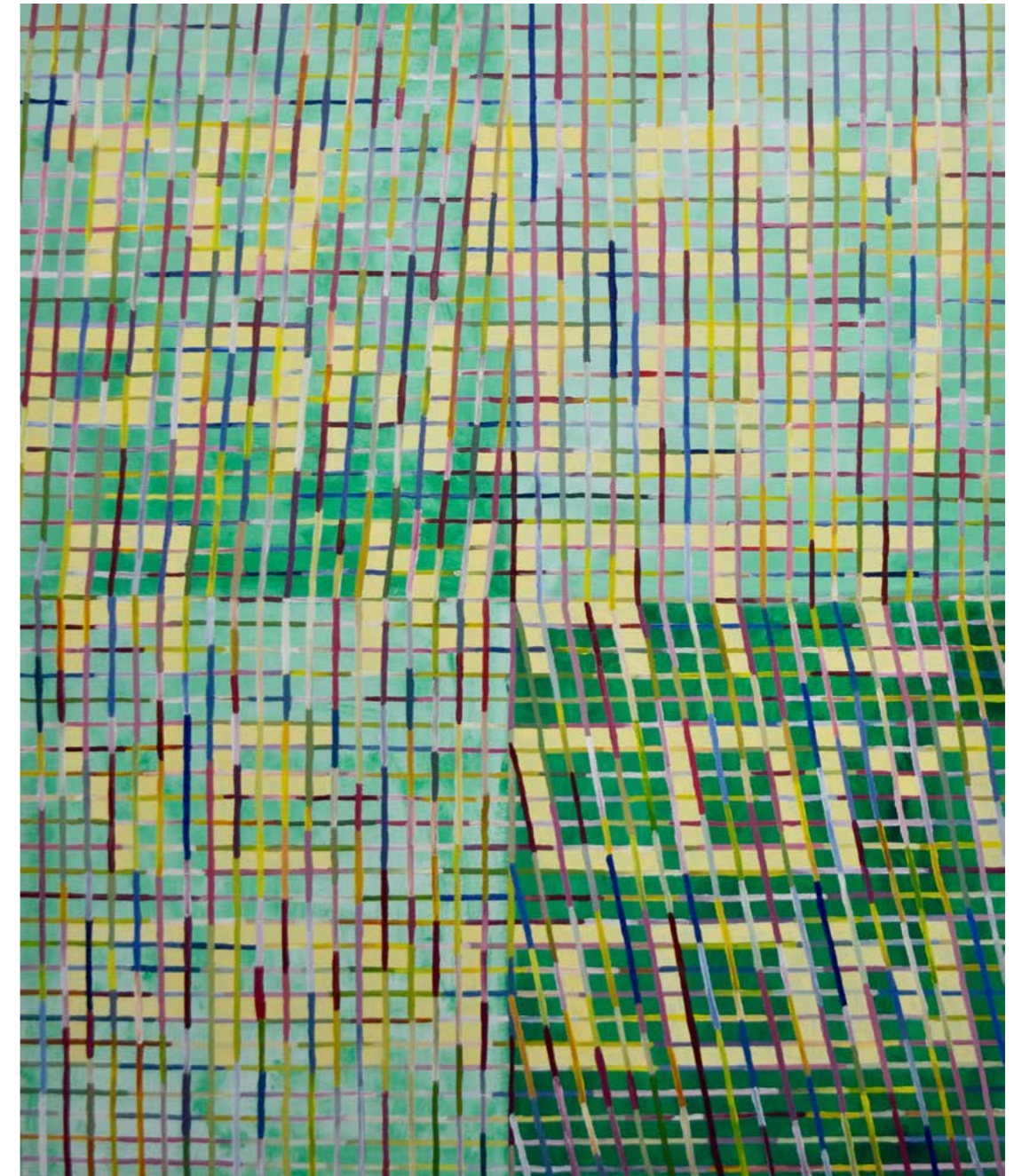
FERNANDO DO CAMPO, *TO
COMPANION A NATIVE COMPANION*,
2018. Acrylic on linen. 120 x 100 cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Sally
Dan-Cuthbert, Sydney

‘WHO ARE YOU?’ AVIAN ASSEMBLAGES

Laura Jean McKay

I lived in a caravan in a wildlife park in the Northern Territory for three months in 2015. The caravan was a dated and filthy place, mostly rented to travellers for horse racing. I grew up around people who bred and raised horses so the musky smell and the decor were very familiar to me. Everything outside the van wasn't. A wild olive python blocked my path to the bathroom. Dingos in a distant enclosure howled the dusk and dawn. And at night a barking owl, who sat in a cage not far from the caravan, woofed towards the sky. The owl was calling out to another – their free counterpart – who would fly in overhead and make woofing sounds to the cage below. I lay in my caravan and wondered, what do two barking owls – one incarcerated, one free – say to each other?

The sound of a free bird visiting a caged bird, and the door that this opens to concepts of kinship, kindness, waiting, curiosity, anger, grief, frustration, boredom, depression, anxiety, inevitability, and anticipation, along with the very ability to make a noise and have another of your kind respond, is where I enter *AVIAN ASSEMBLY*. This exhibition, held at Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre 17 May – 3 August 3, 2025, features the work of Madeleine Kelly, Fernando do Campo, and Raquel Ormella. Through visual encounters, explorations and experiments, these





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 WRENS AND FLYCATCHERS, 2021.
 Cotton and silk embroidery and applique
 on cotton, 150 x 90cm. Photographer:
 David Paterson Dorian Photographics

artists wonder and worry at bird lives and the impression of human contact, asking 'difficult questions about the colonial project'¹ that permeates many interactions. When I experience the pieces in this exhibition, I also hear the barking owls.

The sound is particularly loud in Raquel Ormella's textile work, of white stitched birds on a bloody background alongside the sewn words, 'Who are you?' Thinking back to the caravan: if all three of us – caged owl, free owl and human – called 'Who? Who are you?' what would the response be? Ludwig Wittgenstein famously proposed that, 'If a lion could speak, we could not understand him'.² And what possible responses if we did understand?³ Response and the daily observation of birds is the contemplation of Ormella's drawing practice, some of which is shown for *AVIAN ASSEMBLY*. Ormella notes that, 'through text and gesture of the work I am trying to capture some of the feelings and moment of encounter, rather than representing in a pictorial manner'.⁴ *LIST KEEPER*, Ormella video installation, pushes the idea of encounter further by attempting to resist categorisation, both of artist and birds, in the Tasmanian bushland. In this piece, pink robin and human flit between trees, as separately bodied but similarly curious creatures, each observing the other.

I also hear the barking in Fernando do Campo's 'cross-species listening',⁵ undertaken by the artist in his video installation *PISHING IN THE ARCHIVE*. Complimenting Ormella's bushland wandering, do Campo walks the archive, making the 'pishing' noises usually used to draw birds out in the field to instead draw out the archives. Do Campo attempts to 'lure the bird and its



FERNANDO DO CAMPO,
PISHING IN THE ARCHIVE
(detail), 2021. Single channel
video installation.

MADELEINE KELLY, *STAIR GHOST*, 2019.
Oil on polyester. 137 x 101cm.
Photographer: Carl Warner

history, consciously failing, and making my audiences aware of their own anthropocentrism in the process'.⁶ In the spaces that do Campo finds between human call and archival stillness, there is humour, and also loss. It recalls for me the plight of scientists who, in 2009, recorded the last call of a micro bat – the Christmas Island pipistrelle – arriving in time to record a series of sonar bleeps, and then the moment of extinction: silence.

Madeleine Kelly is deeply engaged with bird presence. Her work *CANBERRA BIRDS: CUTE CRAFT FOR THE ARCHIVE OF PAINTING* is reshowed for *AVIAN ASSEMBLY* and creates flocks of bright sculptures to populate the stark white spaces of the gallery. A cacophony! Far beyond the semi-private dialogue of two owls, Kelly's figures (in both *CANBERRA BIRDS* and the abstract *STAIR GHOST*) are reminiscent of a visual dawn chorus. In conversation with do Compo and Ormella's video installations, Kelly's work is at once a celebration of abundant bird life as well as a grave contemplation of avian witnessing. The muted tones of Kelly's *LISTEN TO THE GROUND* decentre the familiarity of the interspecies gaze. Kelly describes how 'the birds are based on drawings of a Paphos Kestrel I saw gliding above me but instead of celestial, they are positioned at a terrestrial level, one horizontal, and one vertical'.⁷

The way that birds are positioned throughout *AVIAN ASSEMBLY* goes beyond the concept of recognising agency and becomes a powerful centring of animals in visual culture. This raises questions about how we (as humans) look at, listen to and live alongside birdlife, and how birds look back. I am reminded that, although I listened to the barking owl at the wildlife park over



MADELEINE KELLY,
LISTEN TO THE GROUND (diptych),
2024. Oil on polyester. 76 x 92cm (left)
and 92 x 76cm (right)



FERNANDO DO CAMPO,
PISHING IN THE ARCHIVE
(detail), 2021. Single channel
video installation.

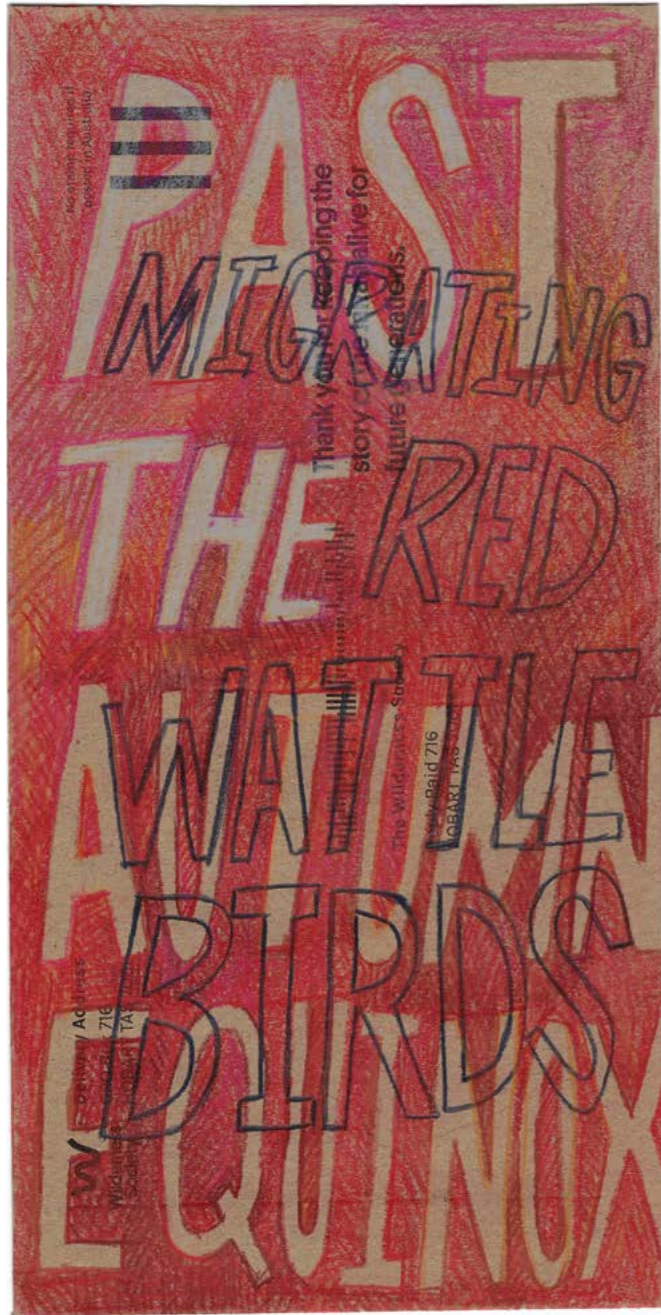
many nights, I only visited the cage once. In the daytime heat, the animal's startled yellow eyes were narrowed, smooth feathered neck crouched protectively, quiet. It was only at night when it was cool enough to turn off the grinding air conditioner in the caravan that I could listen in on the devastating conversation this owl was having with another. Conversations are abundant in *AVIAN ASSEMBLY*, depicted through the startling presence of birds (and, at times, the shocking absence). To Ormella's 'Who are you?' the birds represented in these powerful artworks may well be answering 'I am here.'

END NOTES

- ¹ do Campo, Fernando. 'Artist statement'. The 1818 Project, Newcastle Art Gallery, NSW, 2018
- ² Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Rev. 4th ed. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- ³ Despret, Vinciane. *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?* University of Minnesota Press, 2016.
- ⁴ Ormella, Raquel. 'Correspondence with the artist'. Received by Laura Jean McKay, March 2025
- ⁵ do Campo, Fernando. 'Museum label'. *Pishing in the Archive*. Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2022-23
- ⁶ do Campo, Fernando. 'Correspondence with the artist'. Received by Laura Jean McKay, March 2025
- ⁷ Kelly, Madeleine. 'Correspondence with the artist'. Received by Laura Jean McKay, March 2025

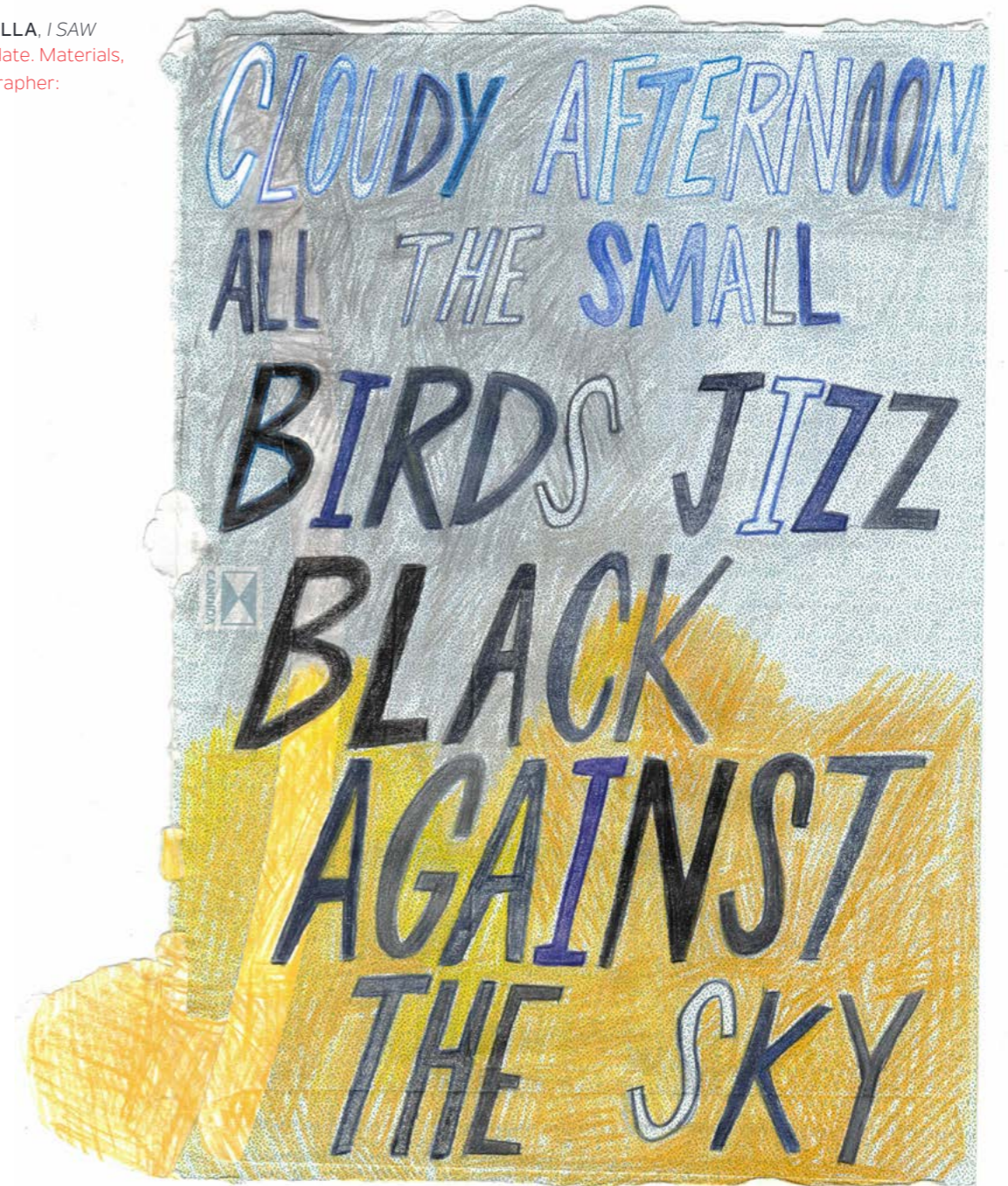
Despret, Vinciane. 'The Becomings of Subjectivity in Animal Worlds.' *Subjectivity*, vol. 23, 2008, pp. 123-139. (not sure where this reference is in the text?)





RAQUEL ORMELLA, / SAW
 WATTLEBIRD, date. Materials,
 Size cm. Photographer:

RAQUEL ORMELLA, / SAW
 SMALLBIRDS, date. Materials,
 Size cm. Photographer:





MADELEINE KELLY, CANBERRA
*BIRDS: CUTE CRAFT FOR THE
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