

Roland Nancarrow



Aves Exóticas

Exhibition Catalogue 2018

## ROLAND NANCARROW'S AVES EXÓTICAS

Roland Nancarrow's international travels have escalated in the past 10 years, with multiple artist residencies at resorts in the Maldives and frequent trips to Sri Lanka and Japan. He recently went to South America where he spent most of June travelling in Colombia. Now he is in India until the start of this exhibition. Meanwhile, to his own surprise as much as anyone's, his home studio has not been ignored. On return from Colombia he faced a long postponed job of sorting out and cleaning up the back shed of his Cairns studio - a cluster of spaces starting under his house and spreading out under an awning to the lofty backyard shed surrounded by a thicket of palm trees.

"To think that, in the past, if I walked into the shed, I felt most *uninspired* and retreated," he says, "yet when I got back from that totally different country and faced it, I saw the sculptural possibility amongst all the jagged offcuts and unfinished, half painted, broken bits of material which had piled up in there!" The latent vitality of his stockpile took him straight back to the proliferate visual clutter and animation of Colombia. In the cast off handiwork of his own abandoned wooden and plastic art puzzles, he saw a potential series of works [already half made] which could rise Phoenix-like from his junk pile to express a new vision formed during the excitement, sensuous surprises, apprehension and fears experienced in the Colombian cities, villages and jungles. His mental recall of surrendering into his tenuous, alien status hit more clutter in the trip's soundtrack. Never in his years of travel had he been where so little English was spoken. The beauty of Spanish was as incomprehensible to him as the birdcalls. Hence, with no verbal references to distract him, he sought his path of creative escape in nature's universal symbols. And, like the Phoenix, birds would be the visual metaphor for his new flights of imagination.



*Hovering Bird, El Tempo 2018*  
Acrylic on PVC and wood, 67 x 28 cm

He has used birds before in his art to break free [or take a break] from the clinging foliage of his lifelong, knowledgeable interest in palms, heliconias and other botanical structures which have always dominated his art's subject matter. His love of palms prompted this trip. He planned it with and was accompanied by a North Queensland mate who runs a palm nursery. While other travel adventures have focused on his other obsessions - classic cars, rhythm'n' blues music and, of course, art - his later life voyages really started with a solo palm trip in Brazil. In 1999 for his 50th birthday he gave himself a paddle steamer trip on the Amazon with a botanist from the New York Botanical Gardens and other palm enthusiasts. If North Queensland had not already stolen the boy from Warwick, he was really gone now. Where there are palms there are birds. The visual dynamics of palms and birds evolved together to be intrinsically related and interchangeable. But while plants

change appearance gradually through growth and decay, birds can explode instantly and at will, expanding outward, from their modest forms in repose, to become amazing, intricate displays and flying machines. For an artist seeking flux and formal metamorphosis towards abstraction, birds are Eldorado! Even Frank Stella, the most abstract of artists in thought, word and deed, relented and titled a particularly curly, colourful series with tropical bird names. It was me, not Roland, who recalled this during our long lunch [in a Spanish restaurant I suggested] the day after his return from Colombia. Roland was still too enthralled by the superlative natural wonders of another continent to be thinking about the comparative trivialities of New York Art.

I first met Roland when we were +/- 20 years old at my brothers pre-marital bucks' party in the backyard of my Cairns boyhood home. Roland was up from Brisbane working at the Bank of New South Wales [later Westpac] as a relieving staffer; a job which took him all over North Queensland. He fell in love with the place, discovered palm trees and resolved to live there later in life. I was a University drop-out and aspiring artist about to flee the Yobbo pragmatism of NQ society - however beautiful the natural environment - and hitchhike to art school in Melbourne. Roland knew he would not stay in the bank and claims meeting me at this point in our lives forged his nascent determination to pursue a life in art himself. It did not occur to me I'd ever see him again, but 5 years later [1975] he walked into my staff room at Queensland College of Art where I was then lecturing and reintroduced himself. Later he was in my painting and drawing classes, we became friends and I've seen his work first-hand ever since. By the 1980s he'd moved from 2D rectilinear paintings via handcrafted 3D attachments to open perimetered wall and floor sculptures. The format of his work adapted well to public art of which he has completed many commissions.

No matter how much the outer edges of his works change and expand, it usually happens from a central core. Even the spreading wings of these new works are anchored at a life force centre, in some cases by literal bird figures. Nancarrow's work never overtly resembles the human figure, yet they often take me directly and undeniably to the spine and central erotic focus of woman and man. The deadly serious cheeky title of my essay for his 2003 Survey show was: 'Nancarrow says they're plants, we know they're women'. I believe the same 'alert' still applies as Roland travels among people all over the world. I know my lifelong friend. He is the most proper yet passionate man. These new exotic sculptures, although born from cast-offs, and brought to maturity in a short period of creative fever, possess all the refined beauty of his best work. "Ola, señoritas exóticas!!"



*Pink Tailed Bird, Utria 2018*  
Acrylic on PVC and wood, 77 x 36 cm



*Hovering Bird, Amazon River 2018, Acrylic on PVC and wood, 104 x 40 cm*

front image:

*Frigate Bird, Nuqui 2018, Acrylic on PVC and wood, 45 x 80 cmm*

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**Woolloongabba Art Gallery**

613 Stanley Street Woolloongabba Qld 4102 Australia

+61 7 3891 5551 ~ email@wag.com.au