

DEAD BIRD DIARY

Dead Bird Diary is about loss. It has been an extension of me since 2012. I am a city dweller and I don't leave it often so it is the birds in my suburban life that bring me pleasure. I grew up with the birds and the trees. I have rescued birds and portrayed myself as a bird. Birds fly, are free, boisterous, and beautiful, and like us meet untimely ends. When they are still they are eerily calm and give me a chance to have a really good look at them.

There is a long tradition of depicting birds in art and dead birds particularly in still life painting. The paintings, drawings and sculptures in *Dead Bird Diary* do not seek to be morbid or shocking but their making has been guided by an abundant curiosity for the wildlife around me.

While searching to identify the birds of the *Dead Bird Diary* I have become interested in how science and birders have recorded specimens in illustrations and photographs and how they are preserved as skins in museums. However, I find that the way a bird falls at the moment of death, or how I find it some time later, is the more authentic experience. Art comes from lived experience so as the birds decompose my curiosity is piqued as anatomical secrets beneath the feathers and skin are gradually revealed. The Purple Swamphen has received my intense scrutiny resulting in six works included in the exhibition and still my studio beckons with the continued change in its form.

Working from the birds in charcoal, pastel, paint, ceramic, plaster, fabric, Perspex, photographs, computer parts and natural objects has been a reflective and cathartic process and has provided me with the chance to ponder their future, create a memorial to each, note their passing and in this exhibition provide them with a wake.

As the *Dead Bird Diary* project expanded to need more books the social aspect of the project gathered momentum. Beyond the amateur's challenge of identifying the birds I have developed an interest in categorising who had contributed, what had been found and found repeatedly, where they were found and the cause of death. The contributions have been physical, visual or as stories worth sharing.

Too often nature is viewed through a screen: *Dead Bird Diary* is a genuine lived experience encompassing the compulsion of the collector, the considered pace of making art and the shared experience with my collaborators.

Sally Duhig

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