



to hear the language of birds

PAUL UHLMANN

26 september - 22 november 2009

FremantleArtsCentre:



Paul Uhlmann's extensive exhibition history includes the solo exhibitions, *this breathing world*, Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery (2008); *Without Words*, Gallery East (2007); and *Amnesia: Images of the Invisible*, Helen Maxwell Gallery (2005). Recent group exhibitions include *TarraWarra Biennale 2006: Parallel Lives – Australian Painting Today*, TarraWarra Museum of Art (2006); *Clouded Over*, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery (2005); and *Drift*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (2005). A recipient of an Anne and Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship (1994-5), his work is held in many collections including the National Gallery of Australia, the Australian National Library, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the National Gallery of Victoria, Wesfarmers, the City of Fremantle and Artbank. Uhlmann lectures in the School of Communications and Arts, Edith Cowan University, Perth, and is represented by Gallery East, Perth, and Helen Maxwell Gallery, Canberra.

Further Reading

Bergson, H. (1998), *Creative Evolution*, New York: Dover
 Birch, C. (1995), *Feeling*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press
 Capra, F. (1991), *The Tao of Physics*, London: Flamingo
 Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2004), *A Thousand Plateaus*, London, New York: Continuum – especially chapter 10, *Becoming-Intense*, *Becoming Animal*, *Becoming Imperceptible*
 Durrell, G. (1956), *My Family and Other Animals*, United Kingdom: Rupert Hart Davis Ltd
 Hamilton, C. (2008), *The freedom paradox: towards a post-secular ethics*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin

Visit

Upper Church, Assisi, Italy; *St Francis' Sermon to the Birds* by Giotto di Bondone (c. 1267-1337)
 Arena Chapel, Padua, Italy; Giotto frescos

Listen To

Messiaen, O. *Catalogue d'oiseaux (Catalogue of birds)*, Michael Kieran Harvey, piano; Peter Crundall, narrator; Move Records; 3 hours 30 minutes. Each of the 13 pieces explores the calls and environment of a single bird species. Live performance recorded in Hobart in April 2005.

**Published on the occasion of the residency and exhibition to hear the language of birds
 26 September – 22 November 2009**

The making of this exhibition is charted on the blog: pauluhlmann.wordpress.com

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Cover: *above* (detail), 2009, diptych, oil on canvas, each 35 x 50 cm, photograph: Justin Spiers
Clockwise from top left: *Photograph from the field 15.07.09*, 2009; *becoming imperceptible*, 2009, oil on canvas, 56 x 40 cm, photograph: Justin Spiers; *Studio wall*, 2009, photograph: Justin Spiers; *Garden Studio*, Fremantle Arts Centre, 2009, photograph: Justin Spiers; *Camera obscura 28.05.09*, 2009; Giotto di Bondone, *St Francis' Sermon to the Birds*, 1295-1300, fresco, Upper Church, Assisi, Italy

Speaking with Birds

I am sitting at my desk in the studio as the night edges towards its apex.

It is a goldfish bowl of an evening. The moon is half-full and throws its lunar-radiance over the world outside, and something of this luminous, unearthly glow spills into my room. Birds are still at work – I can hear them rustling in the trees – the branches seem to touch the tin roof of the shed, or at least the sound enters through surrounding walls and roof as I write. Around me are paintings, which are formed and half-formed. There are photographs

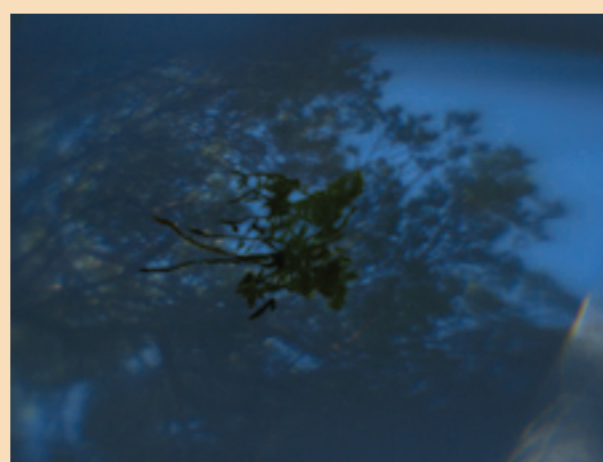
and enlarged photocopies also, drawings too – the on-going archive of my spatial explorations of the grounds and air space of the Fremantle Arts Centre. For the past few months I have been actively engaged in communing with the bird life that flows through the grounds. In order to observe these winged creatures I have had to widen my field of view. To do this I have worked outside finding myself climbing trees and ladders, constructing a portable camera obscura and madly photographing flashes of birds' wings high in the sky. It interests me that frequently, in trying to observe the birds, one senses rather than sees them. Their presence is often revealed through sound or movement. It occurs to me, however, that this kind of activity is a form of active meditation. I find that I have to engage all of my senses and work with my whole body. At times too, I find that I am so absorbed that it feels as if I merge with the sky to become the bird that flashes past my being.

During my residency, the image of Giotto's fresco of St Francis of Assisi communing with the birds has provided a touchstone for my project. I have been attracted to this painting for many years.

In many ways I have not stopped thinking about this work since I first encountered it as a small boy. Its influence is many faceted. I am intrigued by the rawness of its making, which would have involved speed and slowness of execution. The soft vibrant colour of the fresco also holds a fascination – with fragmented forms merging as one, carrying layered messages. Held within this work for me is the communication that we are all a part of the world, which ceaselessly unfolds within and without us, and that we must therefore pay all forms of life deep respect. To think in this way is to enact profound change on the mundane world around us. It is to bring wonder back into our everyday lives - such a view, is upheld by the Australian philosopher Charles Birch, who says that mind and matter are 'inseparable' and may be considered as one substance. He goes further and says that consciousness or feeling does not reside only within human beings but may also be found in the smallest known particles, atoms or protons. If we hold such a concept in suspense, it means that we, and everything around us, are part of a living process and, we are potentially part of a single unifying consciousness. We are in short, more profoundly interconnected than we can possibly imagine.

Sadly, in the next few weeks, my residency in the Garden Studio, will come to an end. This little studio, which sits on the hill, exposed to the mercy of the elements, has been a hermetic refuge of active contemplation. This investigation now transforms, and potentially continues, in new, multiple and diverse directions within the minds and hearts of the visitors flowing into the galleries and grounds.

Paul Uhlmann
 2 September 2009
 Fremantle



Artist's Dedication and Thanks:

This show, this exploration, is dedicated to my wife, Jules, who is full of grace; Gabriella Eve who has her mother's fine fingers; and to my son Theo, who provides us with our daily lessons

And to the birds

Curator/Exhibitions Manager: Jasmin Stephens

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