



# Little Room

Kylie Stillman

For artist Kylie Stillman, the exhibition *Little Room* is the culmination of seven years of work since she left art school and began her series of ‘bird books’ in 2000. The exhibition title belies the expansiveness of the project, a sort of high country from which to review past development, present conceptions and contemplate future directions. The importance of the two residencies undertaken during the conception and realisation of the ambitious works for this exhibition cannot be overstated.

Following on from her successful exhibition *The Informal Garden* in 2005, Stillman was granted a three-month residency in the Australia Council’s Milan studio. That this residency offered her the chance to think and create on a grand scale is ironic. From a studio that consisted of a trestle table in a bedroom she conceived of works that would require realisation in an industrial sized studio. Fortuitously, Melbourne’s contemporary art space, Meat Market, offered her the use of a large studio space for six months on her return from Milan. For the artist, the final challenge remains in the installation of the works and the reading of their spatial relation with each other and the viewer, within the exhibition spaces.

The current pieces extrapolate elements from previous work. Scale rules. Her earlier works are of the scale of her hand, things that can be picked up and manipulated whereas these new works are of the scale that a body could inhabit. The delicate tracery of her carving continues, but the works move from an intimate scale of wall and plinth pieces to the scale of major sculptural interventions, whilst never losing the lightness of touch and subtle play that is emblematic of Stillman’s oeuvre. Her use of raw materials with standard sizing, whether encyclopaedic volumes, sheets of building plywood or stacks of traditional drawing sheets, continues. From this quotidian stuff, she ‘steals beauty’ and invests the carved reliefs with a delicate and shifting presence.

*Red Maple*, a three-metre-high sculpture of sedimentary layers of standard building plywood sheets, is a full-scale realisation of the prototype, *Trident Maple*, which was shown at the Melbourne Art Fair in 2006. It is the fruition of the big, bold ideas that grew out of the tiny trestle studio in Milan. The very scale of the project – the size and weight of each board and the resultant mass and density of the whole – means that every board must be individually cutaway following her freehand drawing on each sheet; a laborious and courageous process, the result of which cannot be known until all the sheets are assembled.

*Flock* is a four-and-a-half metre long bookshelf filled with obsolete Encyclopaedia Britannica series and legal library tomes. This floor based architectural intervention is full of delightful contradiction. On first encounter, one is confronted with the

orderliness and implacable authority of leather and cloth-bound volumes with gilded lettering on the spines, yet this is a taxonomy of obsolete knowledge. The verso reveals a reclamation aesthetic, as these books are inscribed with the flight path of migratory geese; read from left to right, the carved geese literally ascend the stack like thoughts or aspirations.

*The Bird Poster* series consists of six framed works dedicated to bird studies. As in all Stillman's works, everything is not as it seems. The bird studies reveal detailed observation akin to a natural history painter; *Wrens* in 16 positions, nine *Flight* configurations, a profusion of *Ground Dwelling* and *Introduced* species, *Open Forest* and *Water* birds. Excess abounds not only in the details but also in the use of paper. Each framed exhibit consists of 200 sheets of cartridge drawing paper (the standard bulk package). Each sheet is cut in contour to reveal the impressions of avian forms, freeze-framed in various positions of life-like movement. The shading created by the narrow, deeply carved crevices creates an illusion of convex relief, impressed rather than excised. This body of works has a density and solemnity that challenges the usual notion of a free-floating framed work on paper.

A further challenge realised in this exhibition is a series of photographic prints of each of *The Bird Poster* works, in editions of 25, using colour pigmented inks on hahnemuhle paper. Having established that with new digital technologies it was possible to create archival prints on matt etching paper, with similar qualities to cartridge drawing paper, Stillman worked with a photographer to ensure that the photographic print was of the same scale, detail and likeness as the original sculptural work. She then collaborated with a master printer to create a bon à tirer print of each work and oversaw the editioning of the series. These new works continue her abiding concern with creating representations true to scale and as close in likeness or equivalence to the carved absences of bird forms.

For Stillman, humour, a particular delight in the absurd and paradox remains a central thread throughout her work. The luxury of three months dedicated to her art practice and the consequent chance to think more deeply through spatial problems and concepts that the Milan residency provided, combined with the space at the Meat Market to realise these concepts, allowed Stillman to both complete a seven-year cycle of work and to suggest a new beginning and new directions.

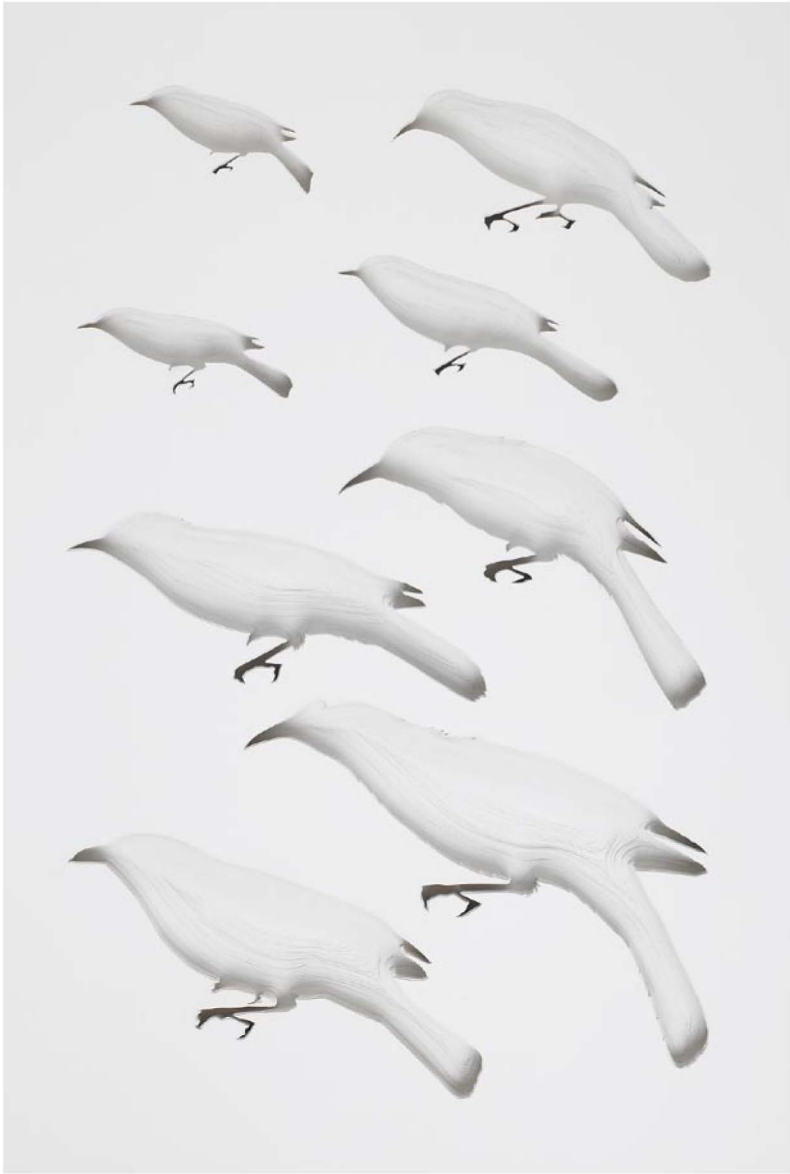
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Little Room

22 – 25 August 2007

**Arts House Meat Market**

5 Blackwood Street North Melbourne

1 – 29 September 2007

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**Images**

- Cover: *Water* 2007, paper carving. Photography by Maikka Trupp  
III: *Little Room* 2007, Installation – Meat Market. Photography by David Marks  
V: *Flight* 2007, paper carving. Photography by Maikka Trupp  
VI: *Open Forest* 2007, paper carving. Photography by Maikka Trupp

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In memory of Les Dellar.

Kylie Stillman is represented by Utopia Art Sydney



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