

A chance to branch out

SOME STORIES ARE WORTH
TELLING
Helen Wright
Bett Gallery
Until December 14
Price range: \$1800-\$11,500

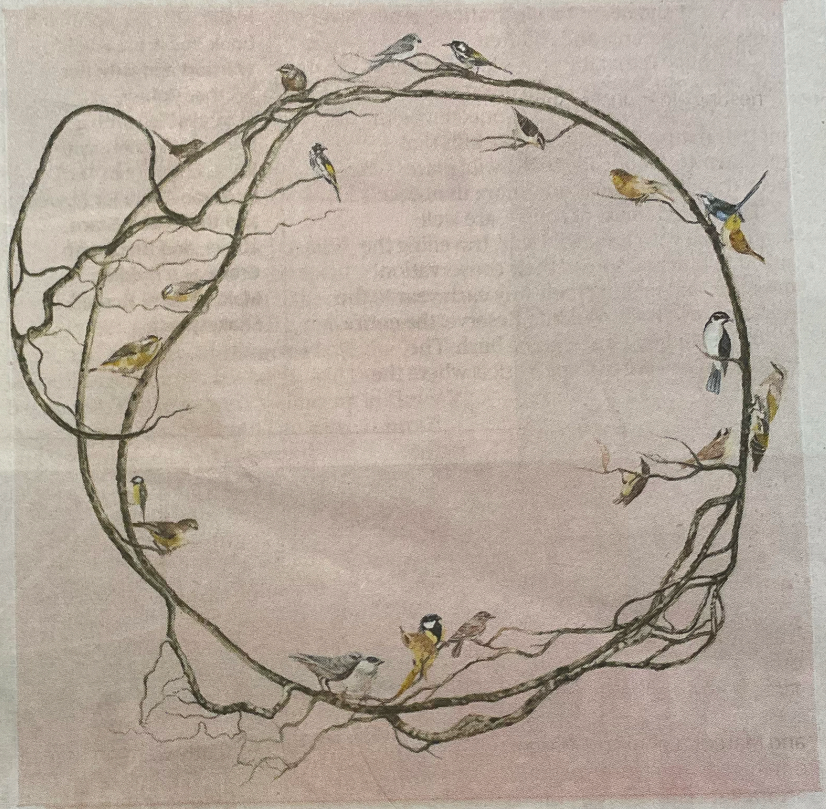
It's possible to see Helen Wright as having some disparate strands to her art, but there's an overlap and a subtle formal lexicon to be found in her work that's really pleasing to encounter. You can start anywhere with the imagery Wright is using but I'm going to begin with the birds.

Wright is a very gifted artist. She has that ability to invoke a sense of the real. Her images of birds have a sprightly energy to them – as if what we see here is how Wright herself experiences them – carrying about their lives in native gardens that Wright lives in and visits. Wright sees them, and just as importantly, hears them – birds create a subtle soundscape in a garden as they establish and vie for territory and compete for food, hanging upside down gathering pollen and catching tiny insects.

She is not just giving us the view out the window though, as her birds are gathered in small clumps and arrays on bare, twisted branches devoid of leaves, with faint pastel backgrounds of large space.

In one image, *Climate Cluster*, there is but one branch bisecting the image, with three distinct clumps of birds, all representatives of differing species hanging together. It's slightly odd, and definitely not meant to be representative of realism. The title of the work implies that this might be the only branch available, and that precarity in a challenging world might now be part of the existence of these fragile, precious creatures. I'm tempted though to think of the sound birds make and see the vaguest hint of musical notation in the varying images of birds on thin staves. It might be a stretch but given that birdsong is so intrinsic to how we experience these creatures, a subtle allusion to a bright, chaotic soundscape seems at least reasonable. It seems Wright is sharing her experience of the birds in her world and – the birds in her world never stop moving for long – her works strongly suggest this chaotic, busy existence.

Alongside this there's a magnificent



Aurora - morning life, by Helen Wright



World view. Flirting with fragments. How lucky am I (detail) by Helen Wright

sculptural work titled 'World View. Flirting with Fragments, how lucky am I?' This is quite a work and it seems very different from Wright's birds and features chunks of concrete detritus. This piece – which is mostly painted in oils with swirling, queasy

design work that suggest movement and chaos – is a big installation dripping down a wall in bright chunks. The sculpture looks nothing like bird life, but has a strange formal parallel in how the gaps between solid lumps resemble the branches found in the selection of bird works, and how there's a potent feeling of rushing movement and even sound. Wright does conjure an idea of sound, and even in a much more abstracted work like *World View*, that sense of aural intensity is suggested. There's also some terrific combinations of birds and concrete, including a sensational owl image that does exactly what it claims – flies out of the night.

Wright captures lively chaotic motion and does something quite amazing by making still images that fly, peep, crash and sing. This is a beautiful show made rich by a developed aesthetic sense that gives subtly satisfying complexity.

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