

Dean Bowen

Sanctuary: Paintings and Sculpture by Dean Bowen

November 14 to November 28 2026 – Opening event Saturday 14th November 4 – 6 pm

In describing the title of his third exhibition with Anthea Polson Art, Dean Bowen imparts, “*Sanctuary* seemed to clarify and encompass the philosophy, concepts and imagery in my works. Anthropomorphic references abound in paintings and sculptures that come together imbuing a sanctuary from perhaps a more troubled outside world. Displaying a joy for the simple things in life, families of birds and animals nurture their young in paintings such as *Amongst the Flowers*, *Echidna With Baby* and *Forest Path With Echidna Family*. An empathy and support for nature and the environment informs the subject matter in much of my art”.



The Melbourne-based artist tells that his fascination with bird imagery stems from his love of archaeology and discerning avian portrayals throughout the history of art. “I began painting birds many years ago at first placing ‘suburban birds’ as small characters on the sidelines in my pictures. Soon the bird became a central component of the painting or even filling the entire surface.” The *Contented Parrot (Green)* is a prime example where a huge bird stands on top of a small building. Bowen discloses his stimulus for this work, “The structure is my studio and the idea began when birds started landing and hopping across its tin roof. They made an annoyingly loud tic-tac sound that disturbed my concentration. However, eventually the birds’ noisy landings and hopping motions seeded my imagination and the concept for such a painting was born.”

Many of the exhibition’s works are inhabited with ladybirds. Bowen elucidates, “I often like to place the immense and the miniature side by side in my pictures. An insect such as the ladybird was the perfect creature to juxtapose alongside my enormous avian friends. Giant feathered characters are placed over tiny ladybirds. Are they friends united or are the birds perhaps thinking of a quick dinner snack? Additionally, I am drawn to the spotted patterning on the ladybirds’ bodies and in particular, the cadmium red colour that frequently appears in my artwork”.

Describing his painterly oeuvre Bowen reveals, “It’s based very much on observation and an interpretive response to everyday life. The paintings imaginatively depict real things in quirky, optimistic ways. Creativity and experimentation are crucial elements of my art making. Most of the paintings in this exhibition employ an impasto technique where thick oil paint is applied with palette knives and brushes. A few of them use thinner glazes of semitransparent oil paint such in *Love Birds*, where two birds gaze admiringly at each other.”

Bowen’s artistry extends to three-dimensional visualisations cast in bronze. “Many of my concepts in painting have been echoed in bronze sculptures, particularly the echidnas and birds. I see both techniques as equally important and often ideas begun in one are expanded upon in another,” he explains. “I started sculptural works in the early 90’s and they have become a crucial part of my creativity. The exhibition includes a new development that is witnessed in the *Golden Echidna* where a bronze sculpture has for the first time been gold-plated. I was inspired to do this after seeing my bronzes being sand and water blasted at the foundry in preparation for adding the patina and noted they had taken on a temporary golden glow. After much experimentation I realised the best way to make this permanent was to gold-plate the bronze.” In 2021 a monograph entitled *Nitty Gritty: The Sculpture of Dean Bowen* by Andrew Stephens was published documenting many of the more than three hundred sculptures that Bowen has made. The book will be available at APA during the exhibition.

JACQUELINE HOUGHTON

Dean Bowen has exhibited widely in Australia and overseas, including Paris, London, Japan, Germany, Poland, Egypt, Switzerland, Spain, China and Slovenia. Bowen has received a number of significant sculpture commissions including: Point Leo Estate 2017; Deakin University Burwood Campus 2014; Hamilton Gallery 2014 and the ACT Government Gungahlin Commission 2011. In 2023 Bowen opened a major survey exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Gunma, Takasaki City, Japan. His works are held in many major collections including: Art Gallery of New South Wales; National Gallery of Australia; Australian War Memorial; Heidi Museum of Modern Art; Artbank; University of Sydney; Monash University; Queensland University of Technology; University of Melbourne; National Library of Australia; Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery. Bowen holds a PhD and MA from Monash University and a Diploma of Fine Art (Printmaking) from RMIT.

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