

Press Release

January 13th
March 9th, 2024

Opening
January, Saturday 13th
from 11am to 8pm

Doing Time Abigail Lane

The series Doing Time, exhibited in Semiose's Project Room, is made up of embroidered birds set in boxes closed off by bars. Previously, your works have featured all kinds of animals—cats, dogs, insects, pandas, snails...—that have variously been molded, filmed, photographed, inserted into photomontages, impersonated using costumes and even mummified. What significance do animals have in your work?

We are also animals—the most widespread primate living among all the other species—but we have assumed superiority over the rest as we employ, farm, manipulate and dictate territories. We have forever depicted them with wonder, awe and gratitude but as our subjects somehow. Animals are caught between forces: their natural behavioral instincts and the will of Homo sapiens to dominate and control them. Domestication is an interesting, complex agreement. Almost all the animals depicted in my works are trapped in some way: by the bondage of harness or wraps, weight of cover, the limitations of screen or frame. They are caught in the light and in the web of their structures. I think we are similarly torn; between our own base instincts and the frameworks, agreements—the armor we develop to navigate workable relationships and societies. It's complicated and the layers of spirit seem to be tangled in all of us, but perhaps we get an oblique view of ourselves when we consider other animals; they present a glimpse out of our window to a state more pure and innocent than our own but they also prompt a kind of mirror in which their appearance, behaviors and circumstances can offer a glance at our own physiological nuances, dilemmas and situations.

These embroidered birds are represented without eyes, yet with numerous dangling threads. Your meticulous attention to the details of their plumage conveys an air of naturalistic precision. You are clearly a perfectionist—what particular meaning do you give to these details?

My *Doing Time* birds were mostly embroidered during the period of our own lockdown, ironically brought about by the pandemic that was assumed by many to have been spawned in wet markets where the horrendous containment and abuse of wild beings takes place at the dictate of humans.

We noticed and delighted at the re proliferation of wildlife and the calls of birds in that warm spring, their song amplified in the silence of our suspended activity. At the same time, we received reports that people were singing from the balconies of their homes in Rome, and elsewhere. Then people were clapping and banging on the perches of their own doorsteps across the world in support of their essential workers (who were in more danger yet less confined). But more than this, the new ritualistic behavior revealed that people needed to be heard if they could not see their world as normal life would have allowed.

My birds have no eyes (or legs) and have been framed in structures that are both cages and windows whichever way you wish to position yourself. The birds can be both 'them' and 'us.' I like to show the boxes nestled into walls lined with felted wool carpet underlay, which is made from recycled fragments of our material waste. My intention is that the gallery space becomes something of a nest or a padded cell in itself so allowing further confusion as to our own position. I took as much care as I could manage to control the threads in which the embroidered colorful bodies were stitched and embedded into small pieces of

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fabric—fragments of old pillowcases or pajamas. But I left the cotton extensions to run wild from these roots, to give life, movement, voice, potential and freedom as some stray between the bars. Once settled in their boxed worlds, I later fancied that these unpredictable threads became the bird's own nests as they balled up and tangled of their own accord.

You have always used a considerable number of different techniques—sometimes in collaboration with other artists—grouped together within an installation, an art form in which you excel. Embroidery is a more recent addition to your practice. How does it fit in with the other aspects of your work?

Actually the embroidery was born out of practicality. It's a process that needs very little in the way of materials or space, it can be done anywhere and at any time—the works hang stored on a rail or can be folded up. Finally, I have an aspect of my work that doesn't require waiting on anything or anybody else. I love working with others that have expertise—and I always will—but the embroidery is at my own pace; it's labor intensive but I usually have something on the go. I like the self-reliance and it's mostly enjoyable. I have no background in sewing, or particular ability, but I found my own way. I have often, since art school, used fabric in one way or another in any case.

As you say I have worked with so many different materials and I don't give one material greater status than any other. It's sometimes chance and ultimately it's the thought process that counts. I use what I have access to and what is around me. If that's Hoover dust, some old pajamas and the hair out of my brush then so-be-it while I wait for the opportunity to have something constructed or to cast with someone more capable in that department.

Similarities present themselves however much you think you have opened a new material door. The beauty of being an artist that adopts multiple medias is that the work talks back by channeling investigation into new areas that are specializations for others. A process of cross referencing begins as something new is brought into the fold which ignites links between things so that you continue to construct a web of the particular thinking that defines you.

I try to make works that have something to offer in their own right but as they develop I usually have possible relationships to other works in my mind—maybe multiple scenarios. I always assume they will be part of what surrounds them and so all should be considered. And this is the enjoyment of constructing the installations that are exhibitions. Individual works, even if they are the best ingredients, still have to be cooked to make an interesting supper!