

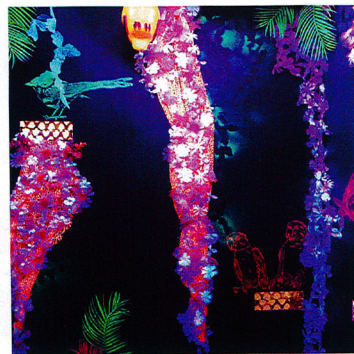
REVIEW: *New Hampshire*

WELCOME TO BIRD LAND: MICHELE L'HEUREUX

Lamont Gallery, Phillips Exeter Academy • Exeter, NH • exeter.edu/lamontgallery • Through October 13, 2018

According to Audubon, there are more than 50 million birders in America. In *Welcome to Bird Land*, Michele L'Heureux cleverly turns the tables on this popular hobby by observing not only birds but the bird lovers themselves.

In L'Heureux's fantastical parallel universe (created with the help of Helen Popinchalk) an inflatable toucan and flamingo peer down from a gallery ledge while the game Bird-Opoly sits on a table ready to play. There are whimsical human-sized bird costumes including a spoonbill and a secretary bird. Instax photos humorously document these "birds" in the wild. A custom-made bird blind not only camouflages but also surprises the viewer with its glowing, magical interior. L'Heureux's assemblage *Wild & Domesticated* combines



Michele L'Heureux, *Bird Blind* (detail), 2018, wood, camouflage netting, artificial foliage, paint, found objects, black light, 8 x 6 x 8'. Photo: Michele L'Heureux. Courtesy of the artist.

cocktail umbrellas, birds and cigar boxes into an exploding riff on Joseph Cornell.

In the installation *Bird Salon*, curation and artistic practice merge as viewers are invited to "sit down and relax" by a glowing, fake fireplace. This bird-lover's den artfully juxtaposes bird kitsch—ceramic owls and flamingos, taxidermy and throw pillows—with a bird library and lithographs by artists such as John Gould and John James Audubon (culled from the Lamont collection). It's a fascinating glimpse into the ways humans have memorialized and consumerized our feathered friends and evokes *Portlandia*'s hilarious sketch *Put a Bird on It!*,

which satirizes the notion that slapping a bird on any object immediately elevates it to art.

The *Hall of Unnatural History* playfully unravels the archival impulse—how nature has been catalogued, documented and publicly presented. L'Heureux activates the space with taxidermy, nests and bird figurines juxtaposed beside a Bwa owl mask from the gallery's collection and a comical assortment of bird-shaped driftwood. Bird specimens made of vibrant artificial flower petals are exhibited with tags revealing the species and cause of death: the Magna Tweet "choked on a McDonald's french fry," while the Sono Surdus Cantor was killed by "BB gun fire," for which "Timmy expresses deep regret."

By balancing humor, insight, and a keen curatorial eye, this dynamic, thought-provoking exhibit blurs truth and fiction and reminds us that the myriad ways humans preserve, portray and display the natural world reveal as much about us as they do the subject.

—Michelle Aldredge