

FIONA SMITH

A Fabulist's Collection



SARAH**BIRTLES**
ART + ADVICE



Many years ago, when I was responsible for little else but my pursuit of happiness, I climbed a wooded hillside to reach the ruined columns of the oracle at Delphi. There, out of breath in the wintery afternoon light, I gazed over the cliffs where the legendary story weaver Aesop took his last – and fatal – flight of fancy.

As a representative of King Croesus, Aesop had been tasked to distribute gold to the citizens of Delphi. However, when he found the people not to his liking, he announced (in what appears to have been a fit of pique) he would be taking the riches back to the king and the greedy, irreligious Delphinians would get nothing. In response, they threw him from the clifftop.

These events are said to have occurred more than 2,500 years ago in Ancient Greece. But they may not have. No one knows for sure if Aesop existed at all. Many things written about him over the millennia have been found to be false or, at least, highly questionable. Even the fables, which have been recited to children throughout history to guide their behaviour may, or may not, have been invented by Aesop.

Aesop was a fabulist – a teller of tall tales – but he also has become a work of fiction. Those stories attributed to him, while little bits of nonsense, have nonetheless had a lasting legacy.

The 'Hare and the Tortoise' led me to believe that I didn't have to exert myself at the school carnival. 'The Goose that Laid the Golden Egg' taught me to look after people who brought me presents. I didn't know 'The Dog in a Manger', but my mother would reference it whenever I had a sulk.

Now that I have had enough years behind me to find perspective, I can see my own work as the inheritance of a lifetime of storytelling. I once used my skills to entice an audience to read about a reality that could be important, but was also often banal. In my former incarnation as a journalist, I used words to make factual information palatable, relatable, and digestible. But now, as a visual artist, I am free to untether from reality to create new worlds from the ether.

The pieces in this collection are confections, spun from my freewheeling imagination. The birds seem to be mislaid. They appear where they do not belong, in fantastical environments, perching on antique furniture, in heavily ornamented rooms, regarding the observer with the unblinking stare of an owl. I present these paintings to elicit a response from you, the viewer, so you can use them as touchstones to create your own stories.

Fiona Smith 2023





Lost Flamingo 2023

oil on canvas, 90 x 60cm, oak frame

\$3200 or \$320 a month with Art Money

Australia once had flamingos, but they died out about one million years ago when the outback dried out. This fantasy bird is on harlequin tiles and against an adaptation of a vintage textile design by US designer Lanette Scheeline (1910-2001).



Pelican Primping 2022

oil on canvas, 90 x 60cm, oak frame
\$3200 or \$320 a month with Art Money

This gorgeous pelican is perched on some borrowed towels and has a nautical-themed background (Clarke+Clarke Skipper Marine upholstery fabric).



Blossom 2022

oil on canvas, 90 x 60cm, oak frame
\$3200 or \$320 a month with Art Money

This is our lady magpie, on an adapted pedestal c.1770, which was presented to King George V and Queen Mary for the Royal Collection, 1936. The background is from a 1925 wallpaper sample



Sweeties 2023, oil on canvas, 60 x 50cm, oak frame
\$2200 or \$220 a month with Art Money

These rainbow lorikeets are perched on an antique ginger jar, made in China in around 1700.



High Tea 2022, oil canvas , 60 x 50cm, oak frame
\$2200 or \$220 a month with Art Money

I picked up these cakes from our local bakery - including a bread and butter pudding because I liked its marbled appearance. The cake stand is based on one designed by Miranda Kerr and made by Royal Albert.







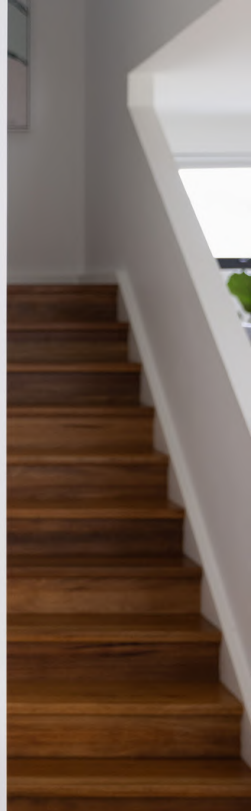
Knitwit 2023, oil on canvas, 60 x 50cm, oak frame
\$2200 or \$220 a month with Art Money

Our Kookaburra on knitting borrowed from my friend Susie. The background is an adaptation of 'Elvas' wallpaper by Lewis Foreman Day (England) in the late 1800s.



Redhead 2022, oil on canvas, 60 x 50cm, oak frame
\$2200 or \$220 a month with Art Money

This Gang Gang is an homage to another redhead – the UK designer Vivienne Westwood, who passed away just before the painting was started. I have used one of her wallpaper designs (Insects) to inspire that background. The bird sits on an adaptation of a crazy antique armchair.





Wisteria Magpie 2022

oil on canvas, 60 x 50cm, oak frame
\$2200 or \$220 a month with Art Money

Our magpie on a George II armchair designed by John Vardy, circa 1758. The background is an adaptation of a design by Lewis Foreman Day, the Magnolia, 1891 (England)



Glaukopsis the Barn Owl 2023

oil on canvas, 60 x 50cm, oak frame

\$2200 or \$220 a month with [Art Money](#)

Glaukopsis is the name of the owl companion of Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and patron of crafts and weaving. The bird perches on the handle of an antique spinning wheel (Period Louis XV). The wallpaper in the background is based on a 1950s Jacobean-style print by Schumacher & Co in the US.

Fiona Smith is a Sydney-based painter whose work explores connection, love and memory. Smith plays with pattern and design in her interiors with birds.

A journalist by background, Smith took classes at the Julian Ashton art school as a young woman and continued her art education under the tutelage of some of Australia's finest artists. She exhibits in galleries around Australia and her work can be found in private collections around the world.





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Scans by Standish & Co

Photographs by Jordan Wheatley