



FIONA SMITH

# Dream Weavers

SARAH BIRTLES  
ART + ADVICE



## In praise of the makers

I make, therefore I am. If seventeenth-century French philosopher Rene Descartes had been an artist rather than a mathematician, he might have entertained some doubts about his supposedly bullet-proof dictum: “I think, therefore I am”.

After all, who among us does not make things? From the time we can control our baby fingers, we build towers from blocks, decorate scraps of paper with crayon, and arrange seashells on the beach into pleasing designs. We create, decorate and beautify. We can't help ourselves.

If a definition of art is that it has a primarily aesthetic character, rather than a utilitarian one, then surely, we are all artists. For what practical purpose is a topiary tree or a chocolate souffle? We all create things to please the senses, striving to achieve excellence for the pure pleasure of it.

But what about those creative pursuits that also have a practical purpose? Does the fact that a beautifully embroidered bedspread warms sleepers on winter nights mean that the needlewoman is not an artist? If the same object was hung on a wall, would it still be craft? Lately, I have been thinking about the arbitrary-seeming distinctions between art and craft, which appear to be more about social status than the mastery and magic that combine to create objects of beauty.

The paintings in this collection are not just about the birds that take centre stage, but also celebrate the extraordinary skills and creativity of the designers and makers of the objects that make up the settings. Theirs are the expert hands that carve, gilt, weave, sew and draw. They imagine and then turn their dreams into artifacts that have inspired wonder and delight.

That these objects often serve some practical purpose adds to my sense of appreciation. Why not choose beauty, if you can?

**Fiona Smith 2024**





### **Plumassier 2023**

oil on canvas, 90 x 60cm, oak frame  
\$3600 or \$360 a month with Art Money

This Sarus Crane is elegantly posing on a floor of Victorian encaustic tiles and is set against a background, loosely based on 1970s wallpaper found in a house in Cheltenham, Sydney. A plumassier is someone who works with feathers.





### **Tapissier 2023**

Oil on canvas, 90 x 60cm, oak frame  
\$3600 or \$360 a month with Art Money

Our friendly maggie is at home on this 19th Century French giltwood fauteuil, once owned by the French branch of the Rothschild family. The wallpaper is based on a design by the UK-based Silver Studio in 1880. Tapissier is French for "upholsterer".







### **Jungle King – Macaw 2023**

Oil on canvas, 90 x 60cm, oak frame

\$3600 or \$360 a month with Art Money

This is a green-winged Macaw, native to South America, appropriately set against part of a historic scenic wallpaper, Les Incas, by the French manufacturer Dufour et Leroy in 1826.





### **Fabricant 2023**

Oil canvas , 60 x 50cm, oak frame

\$2400 or \$240 a month with Art Money

Our lady magpie perches on my sewing basket. The background is based on a design by Charlotte Horne Spiers, an English ceramic artist and landscape painter of the late 1800s. In French, a Fabricant is a maker of things.



### **Trousseau 2023**

Oil on canvas, 60 x 50cm, oak frame  
\$2400 or \$240 a month with Art Money

Our kookaburra sits on my mother's old Elna - a superb machine that she bought secondhand when she became engaged to my father in the 1950s. My father says it was the "Rolls Royce" of sewing machines in its day.

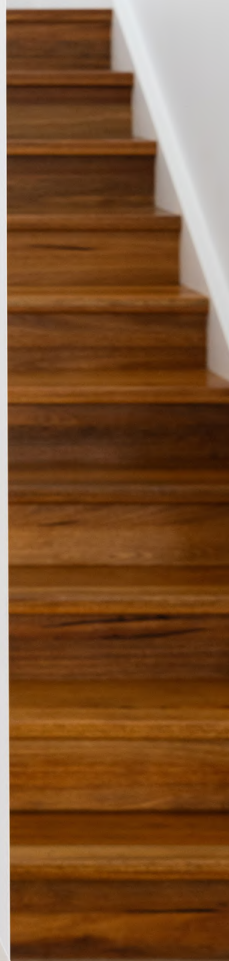


**Duet - The Greater Racket-tailed Drongo 2023**

Oil canvas , 60 x 50cm, oak frame

\$2400 or \$240 a month with Art Money

These two Drongos are perched atop a giltwood open armchair, by Henry Williams for Hampton Court (the Queen's withdrawing room) in 1737. The background paisley patterns are based on fabric for a sari.





### **Le Menuisier 2023**

Oil canvas , 60 x 50cm, oak frame

\$2400 or \$240 a month with Art Money

This gorgeous gang gang cockatoo, with its creaky-gate call, is shyly looking over its shoulder, having taken possession of this Louis XV carved giltwood bergère. A menuisier is a French joiner or chairmaker.





It shouldn't surprise anyone that Fiona Smith paints birds. She was raised on the fringes of a national park in Sydney, where the wildlife was far more plentiful than willing human playmates.

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.

Fiona's bird works are highly sought-after, with sell-out exhibitions in Australia, and are also held in collections in the US, Singapore, Britain and Europe.



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