

James Guppy

Sculptures and Birds

08 July – 01 August 2026

I am a painter. From eight-storey murals to miniatures, for more than half a century my practice has centered on paint. Yet as a teenager, it was sculpture that first captured my imagination. I was drawn to its physicality and possibility and imagined it would become the focus of my artistic life.

At university, however, a tutor recognised that while I had strong visual ideas, I lacked the engineering skills needed to realise them as sculpture. He encouraged me back towards painting, and in time I discovered that he was right. What began as reluctant acceptance grew into a lifelong love affair with paint.

This exhibition returns to the sculptors who shaped my early thinking and whose work has remained with me throughout my life. In earlier times, artists would often include admired Greek and Roman sculptures within landscape and still life paintings. I spend much of my time painting things I find beautiful, whether flowers, cloudscapes or the natural world around me, so it seemed only natural to paint artworks that have inspired me as well.

The native birds needed to be there. Perhaps this exhibition is another kind of homage to them. My life on the land is filled with birds of all kinds. Jabirus and spoonbills visit the dam, swallows flit through the studio, and my partner spreads my hair clippings through her rose garden where birds gather them for their nests. Last year she found a delicate silver nest woven with my hair.

As pigeons often adorn public sculptures, swallows leave their traces on my paintings. Most of the birds in these works are local to my part of the world and became companions in the making of the exhibition. Finding the right bird for each sculpture became a fascination, guided by observation, memory and association. Together, bird and sculpture create stories neither could tell alone. With both present, the paintings feel complete. – James Guppy, 2026

ABOUT THE ARTIST

James Guppy gained a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Literature from Lancaster University and spent several years in the United States as Adjunct Professor of Arts and Media at Long Island University. In England, he was noted for his large-scale murals, while in Australia he has become known for his intimate and evocative paintings. Guppy has been a finalist in numerous awards including the Archibald Prize (2005), Sulman Prize (2008), the Gold Coast Art Prize and the Paddington Art Prize. His work is held in major public collections including QAGOMA, Artbank, Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Griffith University, the Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra, and Lancaster University in England.