

# Bird

A collection of images by Andrew Zuckerman

Review by Phil Tripp

I was lucky to stay in the house in New Orleans French Quarter a month ago where the most famous illustrator of birds, John James Audubon, created a large body of work in the early 1800s. His drawings of great precision were done with dead specimens, propped up in their native habitat, and he used watercolours, coloured chalk or pastels and they became the benchmark of bird illustrations. Audubon would often put several birds in a painting to present all views of anatomy and wings with painstaking detail of feathers and other features. He might include eggs in the nest and even predators.

He showed the birds in their own environment and each drawing had its own narrative story. He was both scientific and romantic in his views of birds and his style was perfect for its time. Since then, birds have been drawn or painted in still life, captured in photographs, but no one really reached the purity of Audubon's drawings or watercolours.

Andrew Zuckerman, in the book simply titled *Bird*, comes as close as anyone but without any backgrounds, nature shots, or other birds. Each shot has been done in a studio of pure white which accentuates the rich colours in the birds' plumage, the subtlety of movement, the intensity of expression in their eyes and faces, the geometry of feathers as well as the language of their bodies.

There are no props to take the eye away from the bird, no perches or anything for them to stand on. In many shots they are snapped in flight within the massive studio with only the backdrop of searing white as contrast. Each bird has an immense personality and every

detail of their bodies are in sharp focus. The owls' expressions can range from intensely startling to sleepily nodding. There are a couple of birds fighting and parrots flying away from each other in symmetry.

Standouts are his studies of the riotously coloured scarlet macaws while the sulfur crested cockatoos and amazons are arrestingly magnificent in their frozen state of expression. There are no descriptions on each page, which adds to the starkness, but the rear of the book has each image with the common name, genus, species, family and order of each bird. I was hypnotised by each image and gasped many times turning the page to the same or a new bird. It was riveting all the way through and I've gone back to it when I had no noise, music or other distractions to drink in the pictures again and again.

Especially mesmerising are the photos of birds in flight with incredible detail of wings and feathers as well as body position. The vivid colours and lush textures come to life in his painstakingly crafted shots. The white background allows the diversity and complexity of colour and texture to shine through.

Each page is 30 centimetres square and matte paper which accentuates the gloss of each subject. There are more than 75 types of birds in 160 photographs captured by his lens. He also has two previous books: *Creature* which is a portrait series of animals and *Wisdom* which captures great minds and their visages with quotes of genius.

From *BIRD* by Andrew Zuckerman, published by Hachette Australia, RRP: \$90



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