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STYLE



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“Living in such built-up cities, we can also see birds can be a symbol of freedom.”

LEILA JEFFREYS

Artist



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A fine-feathered fascination

Lella Jeffreys gets up close and personal with birds; the resulting photographic portraits are works of art. *By ELICIA MURRAY*

Q: Tell us about your incredible bird portraits.

A: I was obsessed with animals, including birds, from childhood. As an artist, I want to showcase the magic, beauty and individual characters of Australian birdlife. I photograph human-style portraits of birds and I print the works at human size. I hold exhibitions every couple of years through my different galleries but I haven't exhibited in Australia for five years.

Q: How did you hone your photography skills?

A: I studied photography at university and TAFE but the skills really only got sharpened by doing. I've always noticed that many birds had expressions. It was a process of figuring out how to photograph them in a way that drew out all their character.

Artist Lella Jeffreys aims to capture the beauty and expression of Australian birdlife with her 'human scale' photographic portraits.

Q: What goes on behind the scenes?

A: It starts with me speaking to a vast range of people who rescue or look after wildlife. Once I've established that I have a connection with a bird or the bird has a connection with their wildlife rehabilitator, I can then assess if they would be good to work with. My favourite way to photograph them is to set up a portrait studio in a place they're familiar with. I talk to them while I work to get them to interact with me.

Q: You've exhibited in London, Hong Kong and New York – what do you think is behind your work's widespread appeal?

A: I hope that they connect to our hearts. Humans can be incredibly kind and playful – look at how we love dogs and cats and horses. It is

not hard for compassionate humans to extend the idea that all animals feel pain, like to play and simply live. Living in such built-up cities, we can also see birds can be a symbol of freedom.

Q: Where can we see your art?

A: I have a book called *Birdland* that includes 10 years of my portraiture work. I also have a major exhibition at Olsen Gallery, Paddington in Sydney in October.

Q: The ibis: feral pest or just misunderstood?

A: Misunderstood! Of course they can be annoying but humans have taken away so much of the natural environment. There are very few places for wildlife to live. To me, they are a reminder of a problem that we have created and then we blame the victim.

Q: Can you name your favourite bird – or is that a bit like asking you to choose your favourite child?

A: Yes, it's absolutely like asking me to choose a favourite child! They all have something about them that makes them extraordinary. 🐦