

Lies and Camouflage



Denise de Cordova and James Fisher

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An Eagle Gallery Project for the 2015 London Art Fair

"1912," Thayer said to me, once again ignoring Rockwell's remarks, "well before the outbreak of the war, I invited Mr. T. Roosevelt to witness the disappearance of the blue jay in the shadowed snow of Central Park. Three or four of the birds had concealed themselves beautifully there in full view of the fifty witnesses who had accompanied me to the spot the week before. The blue feathers are for the shadows, and the white feathers are, of course for the snow. The smaller, darker markings are there precisely so that you will confuse them with twigs – the markings, of course, not the jay – though there *are* birds that look exactly like twigs all over and that conceal themselves in dead bushes and the like."
[from *The Underpainter* by Jane Urquhart]

It is axiomatic to say that all artists deal with illusion. Whether it is the fashioning of base materials into sculpture or painting, or the appropriation of found objects to represent ideas – all art is an arrangement of things brought together to reveal other things. It is an imaginative exchange.

Front: DENISE DE CORDOVA *Bella Bird* 2014 mixed media (detail)

Back: JAMES FISHER *Isabella Bird* 2014 oil on linen (detail)

Denise de Cordova and James Fisher work in the disciplines of sculpture and painting, respectively. The formal parameters of their work are dictated by these, in as much as sculpture must deal with actual space while painting is a play with an illusory space, yet both artists explore a number of shared concerns and similar imagery. Both use the female subject as a recurring metaphor – as cipher, signifier, or *nom de plume*, and both employ intricately decorated surfaces to allude to the ambiguities inherent in using material to speak of ideas.

Together, they have created a fiction around a factual subject. Isabella Bird (1831–1904) was a 19th-century English explorer who travelled to Australia, the US and China. What she represents as far as the artists are concerned is left open. She is manifestly concrete, yet also a ghost – we discern what she looks like from her delicately carved features, and discover her in afterimages, camouflaged by birds.

Emma Hill 2015

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