



Avicultural Society of New South Wales Inc. (ASNSW)

(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)

Bird Art and Aviculture

By Paul Solomon



For thousands of years humans have been fascinated by birds. When one gets a glimpse of a bird in the wild for a short few seconds before it flies away the passionate bird fancier wants that moment to last longer. Maybe that is why I became an aviculturist because I never wanted to lose sight of that amazing creature. As a bird artist I try to replicate some of those moments yet nothing can ever come close to the real thing. However through 25 years of keeping birds and painting them the key to both good art and aviculture is observation and understanding.

Similarities between art and aviculture

Both bird art and aviculture share many similarities for those people who are passionate about their birds. Both pastimes involve predominately the use of visual senses, observation, experience and techniques learned over time.

As an aviculturist I spend at least two hours a day feeding, cleaning, and observing my birds and their behaviour. I have found over the years that I have learnt a number of techniques for keeping birds through reading books, speaking to fellow aviculturists and understanding my birds through closer observation. Through feeding, handling and understanding how they reproduce has given me a deeper insight into the birds I keep and understanding of birds in general. I feel that I am always refining my bird keeping and learning new methods all the time.

As a painter of birds I believe you must have a passion for birds and understand their behaviour, their environment and their physiology. All birds have adapted to an environment over time and this is as important as their environment is to them. A bird's behaviour is observed through its body language whether it is excited and displaying to its partner or cold and fluffed up on a branch. Understanding these types of behaviour gives a bird "life" when portraying it in a picture.

Being an aviculturist I handle my birds all the time and see how their feathers and wings and body parts are made up and constructed. This allows me as a painter to accurately consider all parts of a bird before I put brush to paper. It is the artist that takes their understanding and knowledge of a bird and transforms the three dimensional reality to a two dimensional interpretation.

What makes a good bird painting and a good aviculturist?

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" however there is good and there is great. A good bird artist will be able to not only capture a birds colour and feathers, a good artist will be able to show the birds personality, behaviour and how it relates to its environment regardless of being abstract or realistic. A painting should not only display an artist's interpretation of a bird it should also give a closer insight into the world of that fascinating creature we rarely have the opportunity to observe close up.

Many aviculturists or bird fanciers strive to reach a particular bird standard; in particular budgie, finch and canary breeders. They have pictures and certain dimensions of the perfect show bird. While these fanciers strive to breed a bird similar to an artist's impression; artists in my opinion should try to capture more than this, they need to capture the essence of the bird.

So many times when you see poor bird art the beak is too long, the bird looks stiff the feet and legs are out of proportion, the colours are wrong and the eyes are too big. A good bird artist like a good aviculturist will be able to construct a picture that not only should have the correct body position of a bird, but has all parts of the bird's body in proportion in a naturally occurring behavioural body position. While technique and artistic skills are vital to making a good painting, understanding of the subject matter is just as important to convey the correct subject matter to the viewer.

The collector

Why do people purchase a painting and our birds?

There are probably many and varied reasons, but predominately you would hope it is because they are passionate and interested in them.

In art there is a visual attraction between the artwork and the viewer; this is also true in aviculture. Like when you go into someone's backyard and observe their aviaries for the first time you get a certain impression of the birds and a different insight into the person and the birds they keep.

This can also be said for people who buy artwork as an investment hoping to make a profit similar to some in aviculture. But for the most part as we all know it should never be about the money but about the enjoyment. Like when purchasing a bird from a breeder you are not only buying a bird you are buying a bird and its history, how it was kept, what it was feed and the type of environment it came from. The same can be said when buying art, not only are you buying a person's impression for your enjoyment but your investing in an artist's understanding of a bird and the processes that led the artist to paint that particular artwork at a particular point in time.

Bird art and aviculture hold a special meaning for me. So often when I visit fellow aviculturists in their homes their walls are adorned with a large variety of bird art. Is it because they are passionate about birds or are aviculturists more visually aware? Perhaps we are all still trying to capture that perfect few second visual image of that bird.

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