

# Flutter Susan Jowsey

7 – 29 November

My earliest childhood memories are set to the backdrop of the cute and quaint farmyard scenes that made up my first bedroom's wallpaper.

The farmers with their wheelbarrows, the geese and pigs were all my little friends, who happily lent themselves as characters in stories as I fell asleep each night. Later on, in new bedrooms, my mother indulged her girlish Laura Ashley fantasies, with wallpaper, curtains, quilts and pillows all adorned in patterns of tiny flowers in complimentary shades of pink and peach.

*Flutter*, by Susan Jowsey, evokes such childhood nostalgia and thoughts of motherly influence.

The medium of pale face powder pressed onto the wall is designed to invoke memory by triggering the senses. The pale pink and subtle scent of the feminine is familiar and comforting, domestic and maternal. With the use of cosmetic face powder Jowsey hints towards the learnt/limited aspects of female identity.

The pleasure for little girls (and some boys of course!) that's found in playing dress-ups with their mother's make-up, jewellery and high heels gives shape to our expectations of the feminine and all the cosmetic and illusory trappings of womanhood.

Jowsey extends the sense of surface illusion further, as the screenprinted birds appear to recede into the white of the gallery walls.

The birds are repetitively printed throughout the enclosed, quiet gallery space – some in full flight, others apparently resting on a perch that is not quite seen. The muted fleshy tones of these mute birds are so delicate as to disintegrate under the gentle touch of any seduced viewer. Even without any physical disturbance, time alone fades the birds further and further into the distance of vision and memory, leaving just a trace of the images – themselves a trace to begin with.

This temporality is unsettling – the fleeting moment in which a sight is seen or a hidden memory brought to mind, cannot be captured or contained in any pure way. Hence the inherent touch of sadness that comes with reminiscence. The impermanence and subtlety of the birds in *Flutter* also makes us question our trust in the infallibility of seeing. The almost there/ almost not, medium of the face powder allows the subjects to be deliberately printed by the artist to varying degrees of visibility. Some birds are printed strongly, creating a pictorial surface on the gallery wall, while allowing other paler or partially smudged images to recede in our visual perspective. At a cursory glance the birds may remain invisible, if we look further they appear gradually a few at a time, and may eventually surround us. But it would be easy to miss one or two: perhaps smudged beyond recognition or placed below our accustomed viewpoint. This incomplete and varying impression we have of the work reflects the personal experience of seeing.

Jowsey may have captured these birds for us, but they cannot be permanently held by the walls of the gallery, or even be entirely held in our vision. The subjectivity of vision and viewing, the fragile nature of memory and the inevitable loss of childish-wonder are all eloquently echoed in the oh-so-delicate flutter of the pale and powdery birds across the gallery walls.

## Rosemary Forde

