

# IAN LAW “YOU’RE ADJUSTING”

Review by Sean Ashton  
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Three large canvases dominate Ian Law’s show, bright blue acrylic sketches of budgerigars with amorphous blotches of birdseed glued to the surface. Made to fit over the windows of the gallery, they all share the same title, *Reflections on absent others* (all works 2015), and suggest a no-nonsense painter in the gestural vein. But that impression is misleading, for the other works here evince an expanded approach to the discipline that is more representative of his practice as a whole.

*The wait is over* is made from a row of bench-seating from a waiting room, the upper part sliced off and presented on the floor. The object’s previous function is initially unclear, and further mystified by the removal of the fabric, the underlying foam pitted with holes. It takes a while to see that these holes are carefully fashioned into the silhouettes of flowers: one moment you are looking at a piece of salvaged junk, the next at a sort of *jardin trouvé*, the existing stains in the foam magically transformed into background scenery. The title alludes to some unspecified appointment, probably a medical one given the gist of Law’s exhibition text, which speaks of ‘nervously [picking] at chairs as we wait within the assigned spaces of care institutions’. Such spaces, we might infer, add significance to otherwise mundane fixtures, which acquire fresh intensity in the face of imminent diagnostic doom. The wait to see the specialist is indeed a long one, engendering an existential shift, and Law’s work is a low key monument to the ordeal. *There was a body, I was there, was a body* uses more boxfresh elements: a standing group of medical privacy screens draped in fake fur and curtain netting, the whole thing cocooned in shiny translucent giftwrap. Again, there’s a suggestion of corporeal unease in the title, and again a pictorial axis stops the appropriations from conveying it too didactically, the mass of objects blending into an indistinct purple-green blob that muddies their straightforward signification of a medical environment.

Though Law is at his best when working with readymades, the aim seems always to be to fish for the image in the object rather than focusing on its tactile qualities or on its mass: an image enmeshed within the particularity of a 'host' artefact that comes replete with its own cultural associations, as opposed to one inscribed on a specially prepared neutral surface. In fact, the more you look at his gallery portfolio, the more atypical those large budgie paintings seem, for most of his other work demonstrates a fascination with that area where image and object overlap, the bias constantly shifting and the balance beautifully struck in standout pieces like *The wait is over*. Evidently, the use of real bird seed to produce the blotches in the paintings (which look like bird shit, though from a much larger and hopefully now extinct species) is part of that overlap, but it's subordinate to their pictorial schema, albeit intended to complicate their representational fidelity. But this use of the real within a painting seems more indebted to a well-worn tradition than Law's ability to wring images from existing things – which seems to me exciting and unpredictable. The only unassisted readymade here is *Untitled*, a wall-mounted hygienic-hand-rub dispenser that emits fluid onto the floor every five minutes, conceptually bridging the gap between the paintings' avian subject matter and the rest of the show – for the mechanised squirt resembles a bird shitting. I like the way it dares you to dismiss it as a prosaic Duchampian nomination, before gradually leaching into your consciousness as an aural accompaniment to the viewing experience: an object not to be looked at but rather heard in view of the others.