



'Ellis' Paradise 2011 – after Ellis Rowan, 1917'. Reclaimed needlework, lace pins, nylon tulle, 142 x 99cm, by Melbourne artist [Louise Saxton](#).



Detail from 'Ellis' Paradise', 2011 by [Louise Saxton](#).



'Queen Billie 2010 – after Sarah Stone, 1790'. Reclaimed needlework, lace pins, nylon tulle, 127 x 95 cm by [Louise Saxton](#).



Detail from 'Queen Billie' by [Louise Saxton](#).



Melbourne artist [Louise Saxton](#), with her work entitled 'Lucy's Kite 2011 – after John James Audubon, 1829'.

Sometimes I feel totally 100% across every clever creative person making beautiful things in the whole of Melbourne. And then, once in a while I am abruptly reminded that there is still so much left to uncover – 'tip of the iceberg', as they say! Case in point – Melbourne artist [Louise Saxton](#). For some inexplicable reason, I haven't come across Louise until now. How very vague of me, and so disappointing, because she actually had an exhibition in Melbourne in May / June, and of course, we've missed it. AH well. Better later than never I suppose!

I am so in awe of Louise's incredible mixed media artworks, described as 'reclaimed needlework'. Louise painstakingly creates each work solely from discarded needlework, which she collects, layers and pins meticulously to sheer tulle. The delicate materials Louise works with point to the vulnerability of her subject matter, as she states below – 'there is an innate fragility in the work which speaks to the imminent sense of loss of both creative domestic traditions, passed down from generation to generation, and of species in the natural world.' The result is a sort of 'reinvention' of traditional needlework, and also a nostalgic reference to 19th century natural history artists, upon whose paintings Louise's most recent works are based. Louise had the great honour of presenting her very first solo exhibition, entitled 'Sanctuary' at [Heide Museum of Modern Art](#) in 2012! Amazing. She was then invited to re-imagine this show in a slightly new format, entitled 'Sanctuary Too' for [Gould Galleries](#) in 2013. (The works you see here are from this show).

We were keen to learn a little more about Louise's story and her process, and she kindly responded to the following questions -

Tell us a little bit about yourself – what did you study and what led you to what you're doing today?

I have an undergraduate Fine Art degree in painting and printmaking, a post graduate degree in painting and a Masters degree in painting and installation. The Masters was undertaken eight years after I finished my post graduate diploma. In that time I had become a mother, and when my son was very young I was making art at home. This led to my interest in the domestic arts as a central point of inspiration and to moving my work off the canvas and directly onto the wall. I began experimenting with different materials from the home, such as the patterned lining of everyday business envelopes, vintage wallpapers and now to discarded needlework, which I've been using as my primary material for seven years.

How would you describe your work and what influences the type of art you produce?

The work I am currently engaged with embraces both art and craft, and references both painting and sculpture. I describe it as shallow-space installation, relief work, and/or assemblage. I also consider that I am painting with textile fragments. These unique materials, everyday needlework made in and for the home, are disappearing. I no longer stitch any of the textiles down but rather, they are held precariously in place on a translucent 'canvas' of bridal tulle, by delicate lace pins. There is an innate fragility in the work which speaks to the imminent sense of loss we are currently facing, of both creative domestic traditions, passed down from generation to generation and, of species in the natural world.

I grew up in a family where my parents were always making things with their hands and mum taught me to sew and knit my own clothes as a young teenager. My nanna was also an avid crocheter and so those domestic art traditions have been a constant throughout my life. My parents also encouraged my natural abilities in drawing. I've been influenced by a diverse range of artists from Maria Sibylla Merian of the 1600's to Elizabeth Gould of the 1800's to Elizabeth Gower of today.

How do you find the subject matter that features in your works – with the reclaimed embroidery, do you use a pre-existing image as your starting point?

Yes for the installation *Sanctuary* at [Heide Museum of Modern Art](#) in 2012 and its reiteration as *Sanctuary Too* at [Gould Galleries](#) in 2013, I immersed myself in a growing collection of natural history books and drew from them. It was the images of birds and insects which spoke to me personally, either aesthetically for their form and colour, or dramatically, for their arrangement by the original artist. Sometimes it occurs the other way around, and the materials will speak to me about which creature they want to become, for example four large sprays of *Calistemon* bottle brushes embroidered on a tea cloth I felt had to become part of a Bird of Paradise's tail feather display, which led me to Ellis Rowan's late adventures, painting these magnificent birds in Papua New Guinea. I have reinterpreted many natural history artists, from the most flamboyant and famous of 19th century bird painters, John James Audubon to Lilian Medland, one of the most prolific yet under appreciated 20th century Australian bird painters.

What creative processes are employed to bring your work to life?

It is a needlework assemblage process, rather than an embroidery process, as I am not making the embroidery and lace myself, but rather re-making that which was originally made by others and later disinherited.

After 'appropriating' the outline of the original natural history painting, using an overhead projector and large dress-makers pins, and gathering and extracting enough materials of the appropriate colours, I begin the painstaking process of pinning, unpinning and re-pinning the form. It is very similar to using paint, where I build up layers, textures and colours, moving back and forth between different areas of the body, until I am satisfied with the whole.

What are you looking forward to?

I am currently enjoying a well earned short break from the intensity of the process! But am looking forward to returning refreshed so that I can continue two new works which I began 'hot on the heels' of the successful *Sanctuary Too*. One work is destined for an exhibition which examines the vital but changing role of opportunity shops in regional towns, and various issues around consumption in a contemporary world, including a number of artists who find materials and/or inspiration in op shops. I was invited to be part of the exhibition by the curator, Fiona Davies, and along with two of my earlier works, I hope to include a new work of another large bird – a male King parrot that I am reinterpreting from a painting by Governor John Hunter c.1789. I am also experimenting with a new piece which takes my process much more fully into 3-dimensions. This is a playful piece which is comparatively light relief from the minutiae and painstakingly slow process of the *Sanctuary* works. You will need to stay tuned to see how that develops!

Louise works from a studio in Kew, in Melbourne's East. She's represented in Melbourne by [Gould Galleries](#).

See more images of Louise's textile reclamations below:



'Major Tom 2010 – After John & Elizabeth Gould, c.1848'. Reclaimed needlework, lace pins and nylon tulle 103 x 49 cm, by [Louise Saxton](#).



Detail from 'Major Tom' by [Louise Saxton](#).



'Flaming Flamingo 2011 – after John James Audubon, 1838'. Reclaimed needlework, lace pins, nylon tulle 116 x 98cm, by [Louise Saxton](#).