



Bird Garden

If we get their mummy bird back the egg will hatch.
We have to ride on a seagull flight up in the sky. We have got to go with it. Annabel (4-5)

Bird language

In September 2015, when the three and four year old children at Reflections Nursery moved next door to Tudor Court, we wondered what ideas would come with them. James had been working on a construction called 'puppet world' which featured a life-size plastic crow. When he moved buildings, James flew the crow through both gardens and into the Atelier, speaking as the crow in 'bird language'. Other children responded and an interest grew in bird sounds.

We introduced a second bird, a taxidermy herring gull in a case. The children wondered whether the bird was alive or dead. They used stethoscopes to 'heartbeat it' through the glass, and became concerned that the bird might be in jail. They drew windows on the glass to help it escape, and their concern spread to the plastic crow who became completely 'bandaged' in tape.

Bird Doctors

When the children discovered a pair of large leather gloves they used them to become 'Bird Doctors'. Wearing the gloves, they handled and cared for the crow, and tried to make the gull better by putting plasters on its glass case. As their empathy deepened the children made gifts for both birds; drawings, paintings, music compositions, clay bird sculptures and stories.

The herring gull had to stay in his case, but the children really wanted to get closer to birds. We found two taxidermy pieces which were less valuable - a smaller gull, with a 'poorly' neck, and a partridge. The children immediately wanted to make nests, houses and a 'Bird Garden' for them. After a great deal of handling the birds' heads came loose and were 'bandaged' onto each other's bodies. Fantastical birds appeared from this metamorphosis, species that couldn't be found in any of the children's reference books. And other transformations were beginning too...

Nest, garden, theatre, studio

Like birds building nests, the children used found materials to extend the Bird Garden. With new layers of clay, rope, seeds, collaged paper, sticks, wool and plastic, the Garden became more like a theatre set. Shadow screens were added and the children used the taxidermy birds and puppets made from cut-out birds to tell stories of magical bird and human transformations. Annabel was inspired by a painting of a woman musician with a bird's head, to tell her extraordinary story of 'The lady who vanished to a duck'.



Next to the bird theatre we made a research space where a laptop played David Attenborough documentaries (the children called him 'the old man') alongside recording and sound mixing equipment, headphones and a turntable. Rex made the space his own and started to call himself the 'Birdie DJ'. He gave live commentary of what he was seeing, explaining how birds came from dinosaurs, repeating some of the scientific terminology, a different kind of 'bird language'. The other children listened to recordings of his translations and commentaries and Rex became a reference point for bird expertise.



We can draw an egg. It takes forever to hatch.....Acton (4-1)

