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Web of Life: New Prints by Kevin Petrie
27 September – 12 December 2024



Kingston University Archives and Special Collections
Town House, second floor
Penrhyn Road
Kingston upon Thames, KT1 2EE

Welcome to ‘Web of Life’

‘Let us know when you are COMING. There will be a parade of spiders.’ (Iris Murdoch, c. 1980s)

Bruno Greensleave, the protagonist of Iris Murdoch’s twelfth novel *Bruno’s Dream*, had a few things in common with his creator. They both loved spiders, they both collected stamps, London played an important role in their lives and the Thames was ever-present in their stories. Through the materials on display in this exhibition we see these real connections between Bruno and Murdoch. In poetry, letters and journals Murdoch described spiders as gentle and sacred and compared the entrapment of their prey to a love scene. It may be unsurprising then that Bruno (and therefore Murdoch) called them ‘the aristocrats of the creepy-crawly world.’¹

Their shared fascination for stamps is also evident through Murdoch’s childhood collection and the many observations she later made about stamps in letters to Brigid Brophy. Where Murdoch kept her stamps in mint condition inside a Japanese box, Bruno’s were in a large wooden box on a table in his room.

Murdoch incorporated real life into the novel. She visited Lots Road power station in London and a printing works in Dorchester to give authenticity to Bruno’s world.

¹ Murdoch, Iris, *Bruno’s Dream* (Vintage, 2001), p. 14.

Kevin Petrie's prints, meanwhile, feature elements of the real world, such as the power station and postage stamps, but these are combined with images and techniques that together conjure the dreamlike state that Bruno experiences as a man whose life and memories are passing before him.

While *Bruno's Dream* is the recurring theme of the exhibition, Kevin's Bruno-like figure is also the means by which echoes of some of Murdoch's other novels materialise - *Under the Net*, *The Bell* and *The Time of the Angels* all appearing in some way. So too does Murdoch's 1995 radio play *The One Alone*; its prisoner offering a link to Murdoch's past and a lino-cut print that she created at the age of 17.

Birds and nature too had a persistent presence in Murdoch's life and work. Her poetry collection *A Year of Birds* features engravings by Reynolds Stone, who also helped Murdoch with her research for *Bruno's Dream*. The book sits on display not far from some of the stone animal carvings Murdoch picked upon her travels, and letters in which she describes excursions to see seals and penguins. Murdoch's passion for the beauty, comfort and mystery of the natural world is also reflected in Kevin's art and returns us to where we began, with those eight-legged aristocrats which, in the web of life, represented a kind of love - according to Murdoch and Bruno at least.

Dayna Miller, Kingston University Archivist

The Artist

Kevin Petrie is Professor of Creative Practice at University of Sunderland. He studied a BA(Hons) Illustration at the University of Westminster, Harrow. Here he discovered printing onto ceramics and played with ideas about decoration through applying drawn images to ceramic objects. This led to an MA in Ceramics and Glass at the Royal College of Art in London. Here he explored glass and combined printed drawings with glass sculpture in a series of self-portrait heads. This led to a practice-based PhD in ceramics and printmaking at the Centre for Fine Print Research, University of the West of England in Bristol. Through this research he helped to develop and refine a patented water-based method of printing onto ceramics. Kevin completed his PhD in 1999 and started an academic career at the turn of the millennium at University of Sunderland. He taught in the glass and ceramics department and was Programme Leader for the Masters programme in Glass and Ceramics for nine years and later Head of the School of Art and Design for six years. He also supervised many practice-based PhDs.

The Exhibition

'Web of Life' is the idea that everything, living and non-living, has a connection to everything else. This is sometimes expressed as a diagram showing the relationships between different parts of an ecosystem by a series of interconnected lines. The title of this exhibition borrows this idea and presents a new body of my prints alongside materials from the Iris Murdoch Collections at Kingston University Archives. The aim being that the artwork and archive materials create dialogues, connections and relationships between each other. The hope is that this might offer viewers lines of connection for considering both the artwork and archive materials. The exhibition is divided into named sections: 'I will not wander', 'End of a night', 'The one alone', 'What lies beneath', 'Who is the boy', 'Stamps', 'Spiders', and 'Birds'. The titles refer to imagery in the prints and/or reference the content of the associated archive materials. The titles also offer possible 'lenses' for considering what is on display.

The prints have been inspired by reading Iris Murdoch's novels. I am a long-standing Murdoch enthusiast and in the last two years I have been reading her twenty-six novels in order. Certain aspects of the books started to stand out for potential visual interpretation and I made quick drawings of these ideas in a sketchbook. These initial ideas were often later developed into paintings, drawings and the prints we see here. This coincided with my re-engagement with etching – a process I first explored over 30 years ago as a young art student.

This work is also investigating some of the creative possibilities of printmaking. For example, printmaking allows for an image to be reproduced and so variations on a theme can be explored. This is seen in the pieces inspired by Murdoch's 1969 novel *Bruno's Dream* where an elderly man, reflects on his life and enthusiasms, like stamps, spiders and champagne, while trying to reconcile aspects of his life and to reconnect with his estranged son. Along the way various people connect with and support him. I made two etchings of a recumbent 'Bruno-like' figure with various combinations and collaged (Chine Collé) additions. Some pieces are over printed to create a layered image. I also explored lithography at this time - a method which involves drawing on a special stone from which the print is taken. Lithography is especially known for its ability to reproduce fine painterly effects.

As I was making this body of work I visited the Archive and with the help of Archivist Dayna Miller I selected items from the Iris Murdoch Collections to show alongside the prints. The archival materials highlight some aspects of Murdoch's life including friendships, letter writing, and a love of spiders and stamps. The materials also showcase a range of Murdoch's creative outputs spanning her life including novels, poetry, notebooks, letters, plays and even printmaking.

Kevin Petrie

I will not wander

Begin

2023

Etching with Chine Collé

This image has a cutout fragment of a book illustration of Lots Rd power station in London from *Countries of the World Vol 4 c 1920*. In the image we see the banks of the river Thames with Bruno looking down (perhaps he has passed away and is revisiting his home as a ghost?).

Wait

2024

Etching with Chine Collé

It's night time and Bruno lies awake by the light of the moon.

Look

2023

Etching with Chine Collé

Bruno lives on Stadium Street in Chelsea close to Lots Rd Power Station. Here he looks out of his window at the station and tries to reach it with his hand. Perhaps wishing he could go outside. The image of the power station is from the same page as used in *Begin*.

Iris Murdoch, 'I will not wander', 28.1.38.

In this early poem about death, Murdoch describes watching the day dawn from a desolate shore. (KUAS202/3/4)

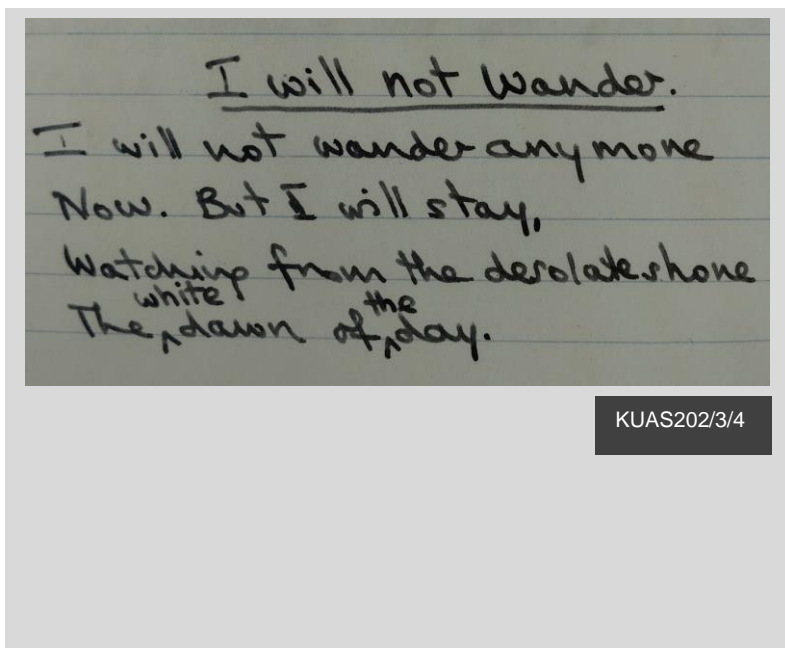
Letters from Iris Murdoch to Rachel Fenner, 1967-1968.

These letters show the progression of *Bruno's Dream*.

In 1967 Murdoch writes 'The novel I am just starting has a chap in it who is owner-manager of a small printing works...'

She mentions that her friend, the engraving artist Reynolds Stone, 'knows all about printing' and will be taking her to a printing works in Dorchester.

Further research for the novel involved a visit to Lots Road Power Station in London. (KUAS118/5/42; 20; 43; 50; KUAS118/6/19)



Who is the boy

Remember

2023

Etching from two plates

An image made from two etching plates printed on top of each other. The green image of the young male figure is inspired by the scene in Murdoch's novel *The Bell* where young Toby goes swimming and is observed by two characters passing by. The red image is the Bruno-like figure, perhaps remembering when he was young? He also becomes a troll-like figure. The two figures unexpectedly connected at the hands when overprinted.

Accept

2024

Etching with Chine Collé drawing

Accept is made from two elements: a drawing of a figure holding a bowl or vessel that was used to develop the etching *Flowers!* and the Bruno figure. Perhaps an image of connection and help.

Iris Murdoch's notebook, c. 1990s.

Reading almost as a stream of consciousness, the notebook appears to combine novel ideas, philosophical thoughts and personal memories...

'Who is the boy? He has cold eyes.'

'A girl tending an old man.'

A selection of stamps was also found inside the notebook.

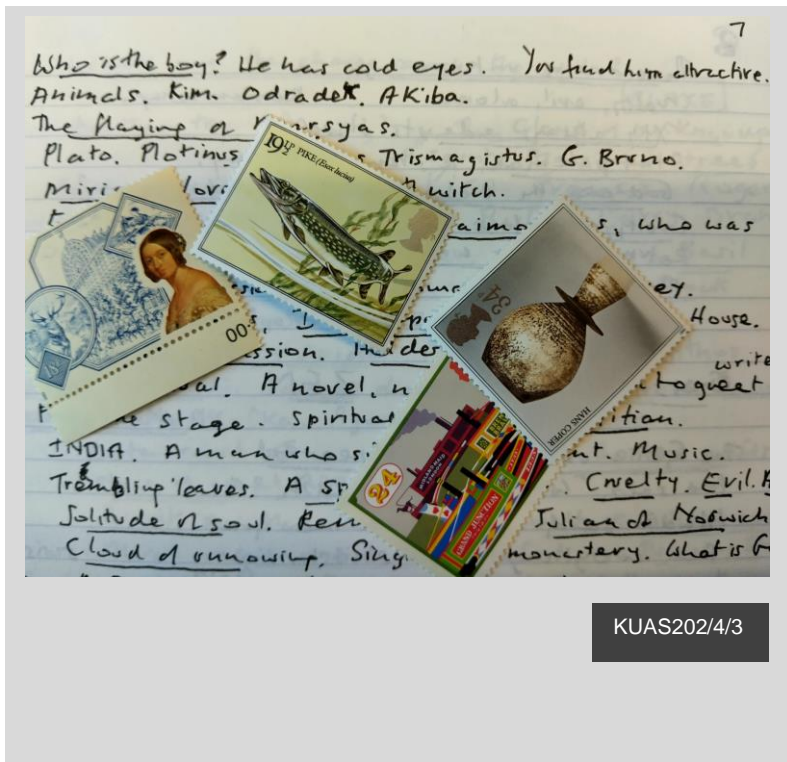
(KUAS202/4/3)

Jessica Gwynne, *Lublin*, 1985 (etching and aquatint).

Created by the artist and writer better known as Jessica Douglas-Home.

Murdoch visited Poland in 1974 and later owned this etching of an unknown figure in a doorway in Lublin. (KUAS202/12/8)

Kevin Petrie, The copper etching plates use to make the prints. Also shown are proofed prints and Chine Collé paper used to add colour and collaged elements.



KUAS202/4/3

End of a night

Try

2024

Etching with Chine Collé

These three images perhaps relate to anxiety for the future, struggle and human connection. The image in this print is made from two etching plates each with a Bruno-like figure (one older one younger). When printed on top of each other we see an image of confusion, worry or struggle. The black 'void' is created with black tissue like thin paper laid onto the plate during printing (Chine Collé). The soft edges of this blackness are formed by the fibrous strands at the edge of the sheet. The pink colour on the figures are made in the same way. A sheet of pink thin paper was carefully cut to shape and laid on the plate during printing.

Untangle

2024

Etching from two plates with Chine Collé

In this image two plates, each with a Bruno-like figure, are printed on top of each other four times to create a kind of palimpsest of struggle. But the struggle is leading to human touch and connection which is highlighted by the yellow (sun?) made from thin chine collé paper.

Touch

2023

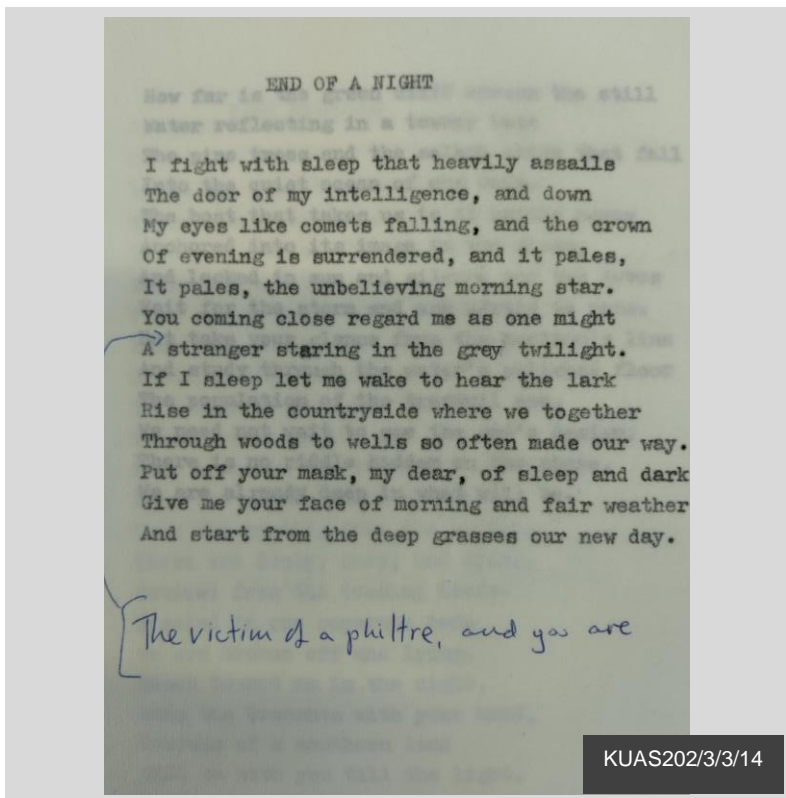
Etching from two plates with Chine Collé

Here two plates each with a Bruno-like figure are printed on top of each other to create a moment of human connection.

Perhaps this is the same person at different life stage connecting with themselves or different people making connect. Maybe this is Bruno and his estranged son Miles connecting? An example of 'a just and loving gaze'?

Iris Murdoch, 'End of a Night', c. 1958.

Taken from a collection entitled 'Conversations with a Prince', this poem evokes a feeling of wishing for a new beginning with an old love. (KUAS202/3/2/15)



Stamps

Dream

2024

Etching with Chine Collé lithograph and stamps

Dream is made from two prints. Firstly an underwater type scene which was a test lithograph made prior to *What lies beneath*. This shows a swimmer like figure and a jelly fish/ghost? On top of this is printed the Bruno figure in brown. Antique Cape of Good Hope stamps are also applied. This image might be seen to relate to the flood and loss of precious stamps scene in *Bruno's Dream*.

Hope

2023

Etching with Chine Collé and stamps

Bruno lets go or tries to grab his stamps. This image actually contains a number of printed elements. There is the etching but also the printed stamps and the printed postage marks.

Release

2023

Etching with Chine Collé and stamps

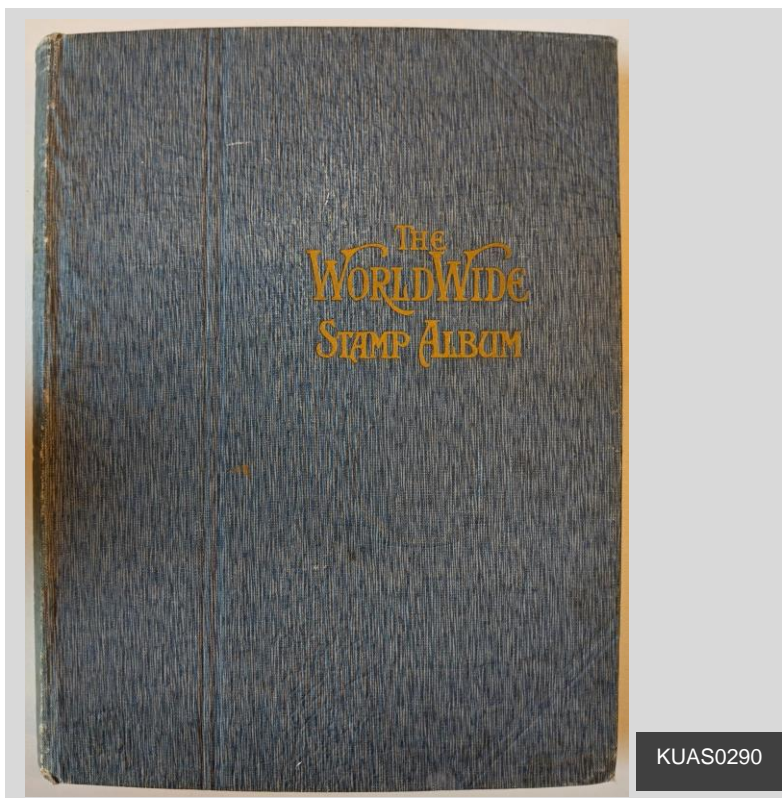
The green water is made from thin tissue which applied to the etching plate. The soft edges of the tissue create the waves. Bruno loses his stamps in the flood.

Iris Murdoch's childhood stamp album.

Filled with stamps from around the globe. (KUAS0290)

Letters from Iris Murdoch to Brigid Brophy, 1960s/80s.

Despite denying that she is a collector, these letters demonstrate Murdoch's ongoing interest in stamps, from their design and price to their contribution to the democratic state... (KUAS142/2/36; 64; KUAS142/3/14; 58; 59; 63; 65; KUAS142/5/246; 268)



The one alone

Listen

2024

Etching with Chine Collé

This image is made from two prints. A section of *Friends* printed onto thin newsprint paper is cut out and collaged alongside the 'Bruno' print. Here the 'Bruno' character becomes the angel or consoling figure.

Friends

2023

Etching with Chine Collé

Friends is in part inspired by a line in the novel *The Time of the Angels* about a prisoner dreaming of being a bird and flying away. It might also be about nature comforting somebody in difficult circumstances. The image was made before Kevin knew about Murdoch's lino cut of a prisoner or her play *The One Alone*. But *Listen* and *Connect* were made later and might be seen to relate to the angel and prisoner in *The One Alone*.

Connect

2024

Etching with Chine Collé

As above but 'Bruno' is printed with a different colour ink.

Iris Murdoch, 'The Prisoner', 1936.

Originally created in lino cut, this image was published in the Autumn term edition of the Badminton School magazine. (KUAS6/10/3/71)

Iris Murdoch, *The One Alone*, 1987.

First broadcast as a radio play, the story tells of a prisoner, an interrogator and an angel who visits the prisoner while 'on the way to somewhere else'.

There follows a conversation about regret, redemption, truth, courage and love. (KUAS25/1)

Iris Murdoch, *A Year of Birds*, (Compton Press,1978).

A collection of short poems marking the passage of time by associating each month with a different bird. Every verse sits alongside an engraving by Reynolds Stone and on display we see July's mechanical blackbird 'Glancing about with an eye of glass...'. (KUAS25/2)



KUAS25/2; KUAS6/10/3/71; KUAS25/1

Spiders

Love

2023

Etching with Chine Collé

This is potentially an image of terror but Bruno actually loves spiders so perhaps an image of acceptance and love? The spider is made from cut out black tissue paper. The red spots are from an envelope.

Iris Murdoch, *Bruno's Dream* (Chatto & Windus, 1969).

As Bruno faces his mortality can he find reconciliation and forgiveness before it's too late? (MLL 2)

Letters from Iris Murdoch to Borys Villers, c. 1980s.

Like Bruno, Murdoch had a love of spiders... (KUAS191/1/82; 93)

'The gentle spider spinning in the sun', c. 1953.

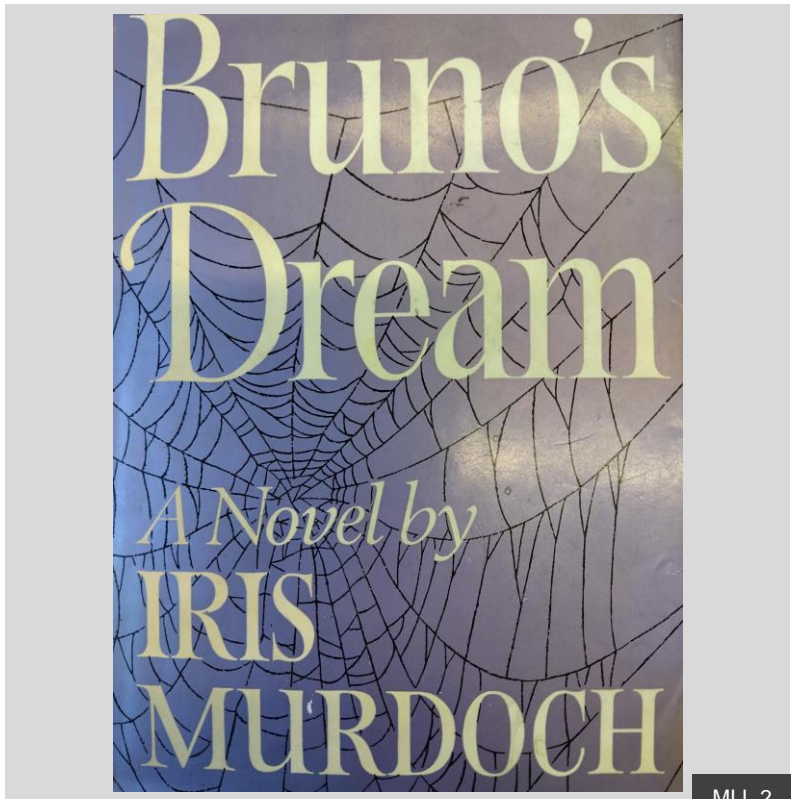
Murdoch composed this sonnet with artist and friend Jean Jones. (KUAS202/3/6)

Valentine's postcard, c. 1983.

With love from John Bayley to Iris Murdoch. (KUAS202/1/14)

there) and 'the SPIDER POEM' which
I like very much. Spiders are sacred
in this house, which must contain
more than any other house in

'Spiders are sacred in this house which must contain
more than any other house...' KUAS191/1/93



MLL 2

What lies beneath

Explore

2024

Etching with Chine Collé lithograph

Explore is made from two prints. The underwater scene is a section from the lithograph *What lies beneath*. Over the top of this the 'Bruno' figure is printed in blue. This image perhaps shows a journey in the mind or might be seen to reference the flood scene in *Bruno's Dream*.

What lies beneath

2024

Lithograph

Printed by Lee Turner at Hole Editions Newcastle.

What lies beneath emerged in part from the 'Iris Murdoch and Swimming' podcast and Hannah Marije Altorf's comment that 'if you go swimming in really dark and muddy water you're always wondering what might be underneath and it might be a monster or it might be a clock or it might just be a lot of bikes rusting away'. It also stems from Kevin's own experience of open water swimming (and seeing seals) and mud larking on the shore of the Thames. The scene also references Jake's drunken night time swim in Murdoch's first novel *Under the Net*.

Talk

2024

Etching with Chine Collé lithograph

Talk is made from two prints. The seal is a section from the lithograph *What lies beneath*. Over the top of this the 'Bruno'

figure is printed in blue. This image perhaps shows a journey in the mind or might be seen to reference the flood scene in *Bruno's Dream*. Also an image of connecting with nature?

Stone carvings of animals.

In letters to Rachel Fenner Murdoch talks about swimming off the rocky coast of Maine 'infested with cormorants and seals' and going on a jaunt in New Zealand to see seals and penguins. She describes both experiences as 'Good' and later acquired these Inuit carvings while in Canada.

(KUAS191/2/20; KUAS202/13/11; 12)

Postcard from Iris Murdoch to Brigid Brophy, c. 1970s/80s.

Elephant seals fighting for control of a harem.

Murdoch suggests Brophy 'should be introduced to these chaps.' (KUAS142/7/219)



KUAS191/2/20

Birds

Orchard Avenue 1980

2022

Acrylic, oil and collage on wooden panel

This painting is inspired by a childhood memory and shows the joy at seeing a bullfinch for the first time. Over 40 years later this is still an undiminished pleasure for Kevin.

Unknown artist, *A Year of Birds*, c. 1970s (collage)

A visual representation of Murdoch's avian calendar.

(KUAS202/12/10)



KUAS202/12/10

‘Your dreaming splendour, wakened, is not gone.’ (Iris Murdoch, c. 1953)

Thank you for visiting ‘Web of Life.’

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For more information about Kevin Petrie’s work:

<https://kevinpetrieart.com/>

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Front cover image: Kevin Petrie, *Love*, 2023.

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