The Daily Bird

Why birds? It all started when I kept finding dead birds on the ground in front of my studio window, fooled by the reflections in the glass. I started drawing them, then photographing them, then painting them with wax, which eventually led to The Daily Bird.

I find birds quite appealing as subject matter. I like their shapes: sleek and bullet-like, or pudgy and round. I like their jerky movements. They are both familiar and unknowable to me at the same time, with their beady eyes and reptilian claws. They're one of the few wild animals with whom we come in regular, close contact...so close, in fact, that we sometimes don't see them at all. And, of course, they fly, but they're much more interesting to me when they're not flying.

I am not a birder, and I don't always know the species that I've photographed, though many birders see my work and have been generous in their explanations of particular species. I'm generally looking at them for their color or form, or for the way they carry themselves and the 'personality' that they project.

I make these pieces with encaustic and oil paint over a photograph. Encaustic, at its most basic, is the process of painting with molten wax; it has been around for centuries and is considered to be one of the most stable mediums.

I start by taking a photograph of a bird, living or non-living. I have a small collection of frozen birds that I use, and I also haunt natural history museums for subjects.

I print the photos with an archival inkjet printer and glue them to wood panels. I protect the photograph with a clear coat of encaustic wax before proceeding to paint with pigmented wax.
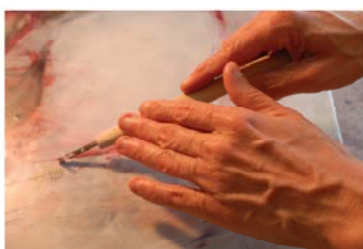
I layer wax and color, and I scrape and gouge the surface. I often rub oil paint into the scratched surface, leaving a mark that is similar to ink rubbed onto an engraving plate. I decide to finish the piece with either a glossy or a matte surface.

Please see my blog, www.bdowns.com/blog, for more information about The Daily Bird and for many more photos of this project as well as my other work.