

Minerva,

“A collective lens with an individual attitude ii”

Trent Crawford

21 March - 18 April 2026

Before aviation, the bird’s-eye view was perhaps the most enduring conceptual model — outside the divine realm of gods and angels — for representing the world from above, shaping centuries of cartography, landscape painting, and military survey.

The aeronautics revolution of the 1920s and 1930s marked a decisive break with this tradition, granting humans the widespread ability to access rather than infer aerial perspectives at a velocity and altitude previously unattainable. What has since been canonised as the ‘Golden Age of Aviation’ not only reconfigured humanity’s relationship to terrestrial space, but transformed the very conditions of being in the world itself.

Using contemporary methods of synthetic image production, Trent Crawford’s series, *Velocities* (2023–2026), traces throughlines between developments in imaging practices that arose during the Golden Age of Aviation and those taking place today in the so-called ‘golden age of artificial intelligence’.

Drawing on the history of Italian Futurist aeropainting (aeropittura), each image in this series re-renders the painterly visions of twentieth-century Futurist aeropainters whose idealised, fragmented and, at times, violent landscapes were a direct response to an accelerated age of verticality, speed, and propulsion contorted by the mechanical mediation of flight.

One could read the birds in these works as an extension of this perspectival shift from aves to avionics, a response to a distinctly Marinettian provocation in the *Manifesto of Aeropittura* (1931): that ‘traditional painted eagles, far from glorifying aviation, seem today like miserable chickens when set beside the torrid mechanical splendour of a flying motor which would certainly disdain even roasting them.’

Another reading might centre on questions of animism: the belief that all things possess an entangled spiritual essence. As with previous episodes of technological upheaval, the current discourse surrounding synthetic intelligence — in both its accelerationist fervour and degrowth-minded scepticism — carries a significant animistic charge, tending either toward the omnipotent power of a future super-intelligence or the innate spiritual wisdom of the ‘natural world’.

More acutely perhaps, the bird could be read as a vessel. Both a lens through which to see a landscape and a subject through which a landscape is seen. Re-rendered by the accelerating velocity of new machines, every image produced in this series exists latently within the model that generated it. In this sense, these images are not created but rather located — obsessively tracked down and captured through a practice analogous to artificial twitching.

In truth, such framings are a handwave in relation to the new modalities of synthetic image production. The images displayed in this exhibition could be of anything. Birds, however compelling a subject, are of no significant importance to the underlying technology that generated them. Unlike other imaging practices, the nature of image diffusion models is that there is very little difference in the production of an image of a bird, a plane, or a cyberpunk Lovecraftian hellscape; as a producer of said images, one’s practice is virtually the same.

Minerva, 14 Vine St, Redfern
Thursday - Saturday, 12-5PM
gallery@minervasydney.com
minervasydney.com
@minervasydney



This opens the door to a concept Crawford has come to call ‘the veil’: the distance between the content of an image and the underlying forces of the technology that created it.

This distinction was well understood by the Futurist aeropainters, who insisted that aeropittura was never about depicting aircraft or their constituent parts — propellers, fuselages, atmospheric scenery — as new figurative subjects. Prominent figures like Tullio Crali maintained that aeropittura was not the representation of aeroplanes and aerial landscapes, but ‘the painting of air, painting of space’. Fillia wrote in 1931 that the shapes of aeroplanes, skies, and sidereal worlds were organised beyond all visual logic — constructed to convey the idea of humanity before the spirit of mechanical nature. And in the catalogue of the 1930 Venice Biennale, F. T. Marinetti declared that the aesthetics of this new Futurist painting were ‘based on the spirit of the machine and not on the machine itself’.

When the *Velocities* series began three years ago, image diffusion models had only just entered the mainstream. Prior to the renaming of the ‘Department of Defence’ as the ‘Department of War’, the revival of Futurist rhetoric had been best encapsulated by venture capitalist Marc Andreessen in his *‘Techno-Optimist Manifesto’* (2023). Andreessen — whose venture firm, a16z, became the most active investor in the defence industry over the past decade — explicitly employed twentieth-century Futurist rhetoric to justify and frame ideological decisions around the development of artificial intelligence, quoting the Futurist Manifesto (1909) directly: ‘To paraphrase a manifesto of a different time and place: “Beauty exists only in struggle. There is no masterpiece that has not an aggressive character. Technology must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man.”’

The cyclical reterritorialisation of imaging technologies is perhaps no better embodied than in Crawford’s alteration of the photograph *Fighting Finches* (1936) by the American photographer Harold Edgerton. Produced concurrently with the aeropaintings referenced in the *Velocities* series, this image is an early example of Edgerton’s pioneering method of high-speed stroboscopic photography — a technique that inverts the Futurist vantage point, locating the speed of the image no longer in the depicted motion of the subject, but in the split-second precision of the photographic apparatus itself.

Three years after this image was taken, Edgerton’s work caught the eye of the United States Army, who commissioned him to adapt his stroboscopic method into a system powerful enough to photograph landscapes at night from the air. The same fundamental techniques of timing, firing, and exposing that underpinned his photographic practice came to redefine aerial reconnaissance, superseding the previous method of dropping single-use explosive flash bombs from aircraft.

Brought into the orbit of the Manhattan Project, following the success of his aerial surveillance system, Edgerton’s team were later tasked with repurposing the high-voltage firing systems behind their aerial flash units into the precision triggering mechanism for the first generation of American nuclear weapons — an adaptation so seamless that the factory workers producing the components believed they were simply building an advanced version of their aerial photography equipment. After the war, Edgerton and his collaborators were contracted to build and operate the integrated detonation and photographic systems for virtually every subsequent American nuclear test. The result was an elaborate synchronous machine in which the same circuit that ignited the weapon simultaneously triggered the cameras documenting it, producing the atomic images that came to define the transition from an aerial to a nuclear age — a focus of Crawford’s earlier photographic series, *Newclear* (2017).

In a contemporary moment marked by the reanimation of accelerationist fervour, Crawford’s images carry beneath their surface a persistent conceit: the forces behind the veil of one medium are often the latent spirit of another.

Minerva, 14 Vine St, Redfern
Thursday - Saturday, 12-5PM
gallery@minervasydney.com
minervasydney.com
@minervasydney

