Title	*Mother Bird*
Artist's dates	b. 1990 36 y.o.
Gallery/source	Mary Cherry Contemporary
Date of purchase	11/11/26
Buying Circle	Fiona Brockhoff, Fiona Edwards, Phillipa Williams, Jacky Hupert, Susan Jones
Dimensions (H X W)	135 x 93cm Ed 5 + 1 AP
Medium	Archival inkjet print

CONTENT/SUBJECT/AESTHETIC QUALITIES

- This large scale black and white photograph depicts the artist posing behind a cut-out mask of a dove holding an olive branch. The only element of Ruth O'Leary we can clearly see is her eye at the centre of the composition.
- The work is bold and simple with a solid black background and the bird mask creates a large expanse of white. Subtle glimpses of the artist can be detected on close inspection, including her hand holding the olive branch on the top right. Ruth told us in person that she chooses to preserve 'errors' in each work to reveal the analogue nature of her practice.
- The dove image may feel familiar as the form references the iconic *Dove of Peace* line drawing created by Picasso in 1949 as an emblem for the First International Peace Congress in Paris. (Picasso modelled this drawing on a realistic pigeon given to him by his friend and rival, the artist Henri Matisse. Picasso named his fourth child Paloma, the Spanish word for dove.)

TECHNIQUE

- This work continues the unique practice O'Leary has developed over a number of years, working in the photo booth at Flinders Street station. In this series *The birds and the bees*, she created masks of a range of birds and insects, posing behind the masks.
- The process is entirely analogue, thus the results are open to chance. She enlarges the small frames outputted by the machine to a maximum scale tolerable without sacrificing the quality of the image.

CONTEXT

- Ruth uses her own body to explore motherhood, sexuality and the many ways a woman's body and identity change over time. Her intimate and playful images invite us to look beyond familiar ideas of motherhood and see the mother as a whole person, with desires, experiences and a life of her own. O'Leary considers the language through which we learn to understand sex, desire and reproduction. The title *The birds and the bees* borrows a familiar expression used to explain reproduction to children: a metaphor that draws on the natural world while avoiding direct discussion of the human body. Its apparent innocence raises questions. Why do we need a euphemism to speak about sexuality?

COLLECTION STATEMENT

- This acquisition represents the first time the Circle Collective have acquired a second work by an artist already in the collection, which confirms our high esteem for the artist and her practice.
- This work was presented by the artist to the group on our Saturday Art Walk in September with 17 members and partners present! We were collectively immediately enamoured with the work and were the first to see it, being the initial work in a new series of fourteen. The Buying Circle were subsequently given the opportunity to see the catalogue of all fourteen works in November. We had difficulty choosing which image to acquire as so many in the series resonated strongly. Ultimately we decided to select *Mother Bird* due to the personal experience so many of us had with the artist and this work at Mary Cherry Contemporary when we visited.