

PLATE EIGHTEEN *Birds I*

Indeed, the need to get our bearings is a natural response to any painting, but in this case the problem of knowing where we are goes beyond the conventional orientation. Here, shape, color and stroke are all in motion. Everything seems ready to burst apart or collapse together. Chandler implies that as time cuts us off from our past, and external pressures shape our lives, we become alienated from some part of ourselves as well. Allegory and magic have often been transformative models for the human condition. Icons of freedom and spirits of the air, birds have always served as images of expedience and liberation. Yet our world is witnessing the extinction of whole species, the collapsing numbers of remaining ones. “Birds make statements about the environment,” Chandler says. “They are message carriers—on one level, the signs tell us that the dying birds are the canaries in the coal mine. There is the constant threat of a global pandemic, the avian flu.”¹ Chandler suggests there’s poison in the air, and we’ll be next. On another level, the killing of birds is the killing of the spirit. She summons forth the

fear that lurks behind every discussion of population—that one set of humans will one day decide who is superfluous and who is not. In *What should be done with the bird drawings? Farnley Hall, Yorkshire* and *Birds I*, Chandler blends a seemingly cacophony of exotic aviary, seeds, fruits and fauna that distill the essence of respective habitats. Just as in nature, some birds and plants are banal, others ravishingly beautiful. Throughout, Chandler creates unexpected juxtapositions of scale, form and color. Her private visions, however, are rendered in the direct style associated with the skilled journeyman—art applied to the practical tasks of instructing and recording. As a result, the two panels present viewers not so much with unalterable realities as with imagined possibilities or hypothetical arrangements. Indeed, the concept of “mapping” seems an appropriate metaphor to the group for the way our experience of the world is implicated in a complex web of partial structures and open-ended systems. Mapping refers to related modes of charting, diagramming, of taking measure of the world. Mapping