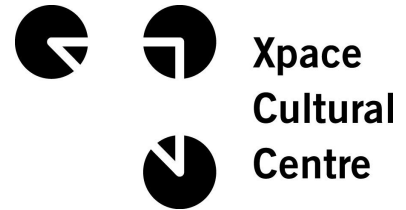


MAIN SPACE (EAST)



Budgie Heaven

Hayeon Song

September 12 – October 17, 2026

*On a flight bound for budgie heaven
and the reading lights don't work.
There are no seatbelts nor seats,
and unfortunately no beverage service.*

*On a flight bound for budgie heaven
and I'd stick my arm out the window
if I could.
I'd surf the clouds with my fingertips,
a wish that found a way to fly.*

*On a flight bound for budgie heaven
and the views out there are stunning.
An expanse of white to the left
and a sunrise on the right.*

*If pet budgies go to heaven,
that's where I'd like to be.*

*Can people become like birds?
Do airplanes dream of heaven too?*

Hayeon Song's cardboard installation, *Budgie Heaven*, is evocative of both a place and a journey. Situated along the back walls of the Main Space at Xspace Cultural Centre, the site-specific installation takes the form of a partial replica of an Air Canada Boeing 787 Dreamliner interior. Hand-cut pieces of cardboard join together in an overlapping and disjunctive fashion. Tape and glue fix the pieces into a playful imitation of the solid metal frame of an aircraft.

As viewers make their way down the hall, the gallery becomes part of the Dreamliner's fuselage. Cabin windows look out onto bare white walls as the installation arches gently over an imagined row of seats. On the opposite wall, multiple printer paper sized sheets construct the image of a morning sun peaking through the clouds.

From afar the image appears cohesive yet strange. Inside the walls of the gallery, the photographed sun becomes part of the plane's interior, thereby breaking the realism of the replica/installation. Up close, the sunrise is revealed to be a clever trick—fabricated through the close placement of individual sheets—further undermining the illusion of the Dreamliner's integrity. By employing construction and deconstruction as a way of 'playing-pretend' (or playing at pretending), Song transforms the decoy airplane interior into a premise for situational humor.

The punchline is that the installation was never meant to faithfully replicate an airplane in the first place. Song takes the Dreamliner apart and turns it into an absurd space: part gallery, part machine. Through her reconstructive gesture, the airplane becomes inert, its journey suspended and manipulated. Simulation offers a space for the artist to relax the boundaries between the real and illusory. In short, the airplane is a trick played by a crafty creator.

Humour and playfulness are essential strategies for Song in her approach to the construction of replicas. Rather than enacting an exact reproduction, Song's deconstructive method approaches the airplane as a simulation of space. In *Budgie Heaven*, that space is also aspirational and relational.

Through the construction of the airplane, Song explores mimicry as an evolutionary strategy and form of longing. In *Budgie Heaven*, airplanes embody the human desire to fly. The plane in turn borrows from the form of a bird to make this possible. While planes mimic birds to move freely through the skies, the plane cannot feel what it is like to experience flying as the bird can.

Between birds and humans, humans wish for the bird's ability to take flight, and birds may wish to be the size of humans, easing their passage through the world. Since birds are unable to grow larger than humans, they instead use camouflage to survive. A plane wants to be a bird so it can experience the sky. The bird wants to be as powerful as the plane. Song points to these reciprocal acts of imitation as proof of the human, bird, and machine's mutual desire for transcendence: the human wishes to fly; the plane wishes to be alive; the bird wishes to be a machine. In their shared preoccupation with flight, the human, bird, and plane enter a complex system of relations.

Budgie Heaven's longing also contains a quietly sentimental core: the longing for an afterlife for a dearly beloved pet. Pet grief is an experience that millions of pet owners can relate to. The loss of a pet can feel like the loss of a family member. Since the life of a human tends to be much longer than that of a domesticated animal, pet owners often project desires for immortality onto their pet's souls.

Budgie Heaven was created in memory of Song's pet budgie, Wilbur. However, the work also offers a broader aspirational appeal to pet owners in general. We name our pets and believe they have souls. Their personalities are unique and place in our lives singular. The human desire for heaven is propagated through our relationships to birds and planes. Heaven is an ideal as much as it is a place for souls to rest. *Budgie Heaven* therefore embodies a kind of self-deprecating longing for an afterlife. Regardless of whether such a place exists, we can at least hope and imagine one does. If nothing else, flying is already a kind of budgie heaven.

– Madalyn Shaw