Audubon's Aviary: Parts Unknown (Part II of The Complete Flock)


Parts Unknown will consider Audubon as an established artist-naturalist, a world citizen, and a celebrity in an expanding nation—no longer the young Frenchman who created the "early birds" displayed in the first installment. This once-in-a-lifetime exhibition follows Audubon into unchartered territories—geographic, artistic, and scientific—as he encountered and mapped new species and grappled with the disappearing illusion of America's infinite wilderness. It galvanized his awareness about the necessity of conserving species and habitats. Most of the watercolors in Parts Unknown (studies for Havell plates 176-305) depict water birds, many of which are among Audubon's most spectacular and largest birds, with numerous studies began during his southeastern explorations and on his Labrador Expedition.

The exhibition is accompanied by the lavish book Audubon's Aviary: The Original Watercolors for “The Birds of America” (published by New-York Historical Society and Skira/Rizzoli), which sheds new light on the artist. It has garnered many awards, among them: Outstanding Permanent Collection Catalogue Prize of 2013 (by the Association of Art Museum Curators) and the 2013 Henry Allen Moe Prize for Catalog of Distinction in the Arts. This once-in-a-lifetime trilogy explores Audubon’s dazzling watercolors in the order in which they were engraved, affording visitors the unique opportunity to view them sequentially, like his original subscribers, and in their entirety. Audubon organized The Birds of America not by traditional taxonomic order, but according to his aesthetic and practical judgments. He believed this manner of presentation was closer to Nature's own. Calls and songs of each species provided by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, together with video footage, will demonstrate the importance of birdsong for species identification and underscore Audubon’s extensive field observations that animated his great work, The Birds of America.

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