

# NY Historical Society Launches 'Audubon's Aviary' Celebration

NEW YORK CITY — The New-York Historical Society (NYHS) has launched Part I of a sweeping, three-part series of exhibitions to celebrate the sesquicentennial of the acquisition of the society's unparalleled collection of John James Audubon's preparatory watercolors for the double-elfant-folio print edition of *The Birds of America* (1827–38), engraved by Robert Havell Jr.

Over three years (2013–2015), "Audubon's Aviary: The Complete Flock" (Parts I–III) will feature all of the society's 474 original avian watercolors by Audubon, including all 435 watercolor models for *The Birds of America*, all but one acquired by New-York Historical in 1863 from the artist's widow Lucy Bakewell Audubon. "The Complete Flock" Part I will be on view through May 19.

This once-in-a-lifetime trilogy of shows will mine the depths of the New-York Historical Society's Audubon collection, and display a wide variety of watercolors and compelling objects to heighten the visitor's understanding of Audubon as an artist, naturalist and significant historical figure — he became a conservationist and the namesake of the National Audubon Society.

Curated by Roberta J.M. Olson, curator of drawings at

the NYHS, this extraordinary trio of landmark exhibitions will explore the evolution of Audubon's dazzling watercolors in the order in which they were engraved. Visitors will have the opportunity to view them sequentially and in their entirety for the first time — the same way Audubon's original subscribers received the Havell prints.

Audubon organized his watercolor models and the corresponding Havell plates not by taxonomy, as was the tradition, but according to his judgments, including which watercolors he considered ready for engraving. He believed this order was more like that of nature, and it was arguably more interesting for his subscribers because they received their prints in groups of five (usually one large, one medium, and three small). Viewed in this manner, "The Complete Flock" will examine the struggles and decisions the artist made in order to bring his "great work" to fruition and to successfully market it.

Part I highlights Audubon's unique role in the history of American art and science, opening with a look at the self-taught Audubon's development of his signature tableaux and experimental media. To elucidate this early chapter in Audubon's life, New-York His-

torical is supplementing its own rich holdings, dating from 1808, with a selection of the artist's rare earliest pastels, borrowed from Houghton Library of Harvard University and the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, La Rochelle, in France. The La Rochelle pastels were discovered in 1995 and have never been seen outside of that city.

These "early birds" capture Audubon's youthful excitement about drawing birds while in France and during his first years in America, illuminating the artist-naturalist's methods.

Following this introductory installation, Part I then features more than 200 Audubon avian watercolors, including the first 175 models that were engraved for *The Birds of America*.

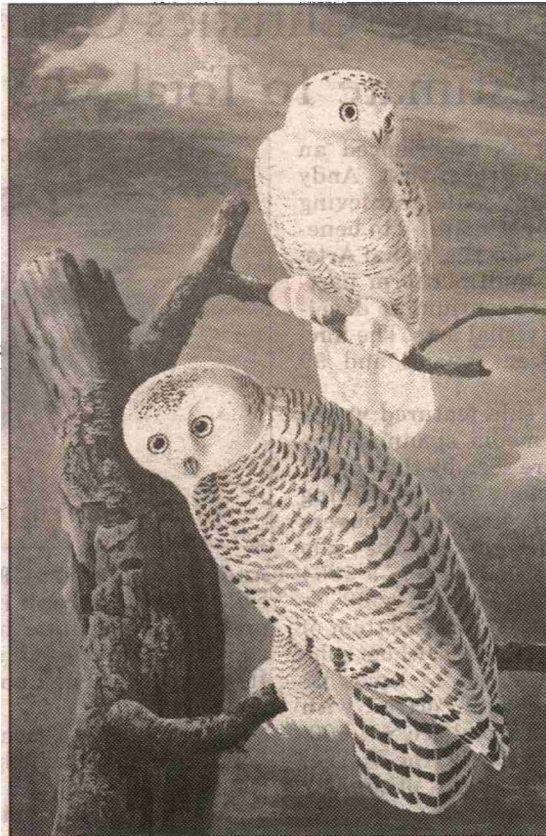
The exhibition is also a celebration of the illustrated book, *Audubon's Aviary: The Original Watercolors for "The Birds of America"* by Roberta J.M. Olson. Published by the New-York Historical Society and Skira/Rizzoli, *Audubon's Aviary* won the 2013 New York Book Show Award in the category of Fine Art.

The New-York Historical Society Museum and Library is at 170 Central Park West. For information, 212-873-3400 or [www.nyhistory.org](http://www.nyhistory.org).





**John James Audubon (1785–1851), “House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*),” study for Havell plate no. 83, circa 1824–29, watercolor, graphite, pastel, gouache, black chalk and touches of black ink on paper, laid on card; 19<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> by 11<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches. New-York Historical Society, purchased for the society by public subscription from Mrs John J. Audubon, 1863.17.83**



**John James Audubon (1785–1851), “Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus*),” study for Havell plate no. 121, 1829, watercolor, graphite, pastel and black ink with touches of glazing on paper, laid on card; 38 by 25<sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches. New-York Historical Society, purchased for the society by public subscription from Mrs John J. Audubon, 1863.17.121.**