

NEWS RELEASE

National Gallery of Art  
Washington, D. C.

FOR RELEASE: Sunday papers of  
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WASHINGTON, May 25: Sixty-eight brilliant impressions of the prints from a superb set of the Elephant folio of the Birds of America, by the famous naturalist and artist, John James Audubon (1785-1851), will be placed on exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, David E. Finley, the Director, announced today. The exhibition will open on Sunday, May 26, and continue for two months.

This unique set, perhaps the finest in existence, was presented to the National Gallery of Art by Mrs. Walter B. James, of New York, in memory of her husband, Dr. Walter B. James, and his brother, Norman James, of Baltimore.

The history of this set is well known to collectors. It was given in 1836, by Audubon, to his friend the naturalist, David Eckley of Boston, whose marginal notes add interest to the volumes of Ornithological Biography which accompanied the set of prints. Later, it was acquired by Robert H. Sayre, of South Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, from whose estate it passed into the collection of Norman James. The prints, on large folio sheets, untrimmed and unbound, have been preserved in the same fresh state as when they were issued to subscribers. As these prints have never been exhibited, the colors are of unusual brilliance.

Audubon's monumental work was a result of a lifetime devoted to a single objective, the accurate description of all species of birds found in North America. The romantic legends of his birth and his adventurous life along the frontiers of America in the early nineteenth century often overshadow the fact that a creative, hard-working, natural scientist studied the birds of America for twenty-five years. He persistently sought them out in arduous journeys which took him through Kentucky, Louisiana, the swamps of Florida, and even as far north as Labrador. Audubon's careful watercolor sketches drawn from life were the originals from which William Lizers, of Edinburgh, and subsequently Robert Havell, of London, engraved the large folio plates for the Birds of America in aquatint, after which they were colored by hand. The Elephant folio, consisting of 435 plates, published between 1827 and 1838, established the fame of Audubon as an artist and scientist.