

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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BIRDS OF AMERICA

AT NATIONAL GALLERY

Washington, D. C. January 23, 1969. Seventy engravings from a rare unbound folio of The Birds of America by John James Audubon (1785-1851) will be shown at the National Gallery of Art, it was announced by Director John Walker. The exhibition opens Saturday (January 25) and will continue through February 16.

The Gallery's double-elephant folio (the plates measure 39-1/2" x 26-1/2"), one of the earliest and finest in existence, is one which may have been presented by Audubon in 1836 to the naturalist David Eckley of Boston. More certain is the presentation from Audubon to Eckley of the five companion books of text, Ornithological Biography or An Account of the Habits of the Birds of the United States of America, which will be exhibited with volume I opened to Audubon's inscription:

To
My Worthy friend
D^d Eckley Esq. of Boston
This volume is given with heart
felt sincerity and good wishes

John J. Audubon

The National Gallery's set of engravings consists of all 435 life-sized renderings, including the first plate,

Great American Cock, scarcest of those original plates which were supervised by the artist. The folio and the books were given to the National Gallery, in 1946, by Mrs. Walter B. James of New York.

Audubon issued The Birds of America in Scotland and England between 1826 and 1838 for a price per set of \$1,000. Listed in the fifth volume of the Ornithological Biography are 79 European 82 American subscribers, including members of French royalty, Queen Adelaide of England, the 13th Earl of Derby, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, Jr., and the Library of Congress.

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 Lizars, of Edinburgh, and subsequently Robert Havell, of London, engraved the large folio plates for The Birds of America, after which they were colored by hand.

Black-and-white photographs and color transparencies on loan for purposes of publication are available from William W. Morrison, Assistant to the Director, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565, Area Code 202, 737-4215, ext. 225.