

# AUDUBON BURCHFIELD

2 WHO LOVED NATURE

CHARLES BURCHFIELD CENTER

WESTERN NEW YORK FORUM FOR AMERICAN ART

STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE AT BUFFALO / 1300 ELMWOOD AVENUE, BUFFALO, NEW YORK, 14222

## D. K. Winebrenner

The modest exhibition of the art of John James Audubon (1785–1851) with that of Charles Burchfield (1893–1967) enables us to compare and contrast two of nature's greatest love stories of all time.

Born more than one hundred years apart, each had a passionate love for nature, quickened in its tempo with each new discovery, and a sense of urgency to record impressions revealed in intimate and wondrous visions to him alone.

For Audubon it was to record and transmit with absolute fidelity and accuracy the glories of nature in its primeval state before the onrush of civilization could diminish and even eliminate these creatures for all time. The "love notes of the woodland warbler," the trees and plants of the primeval forest; the flowers, textures, subtle shading and brilliant colors seen only in the virgin woods, along its streams, swamps and hills were images to be shared with the person not present or not attuned.

For Burchfield, it was his mission to set the scene to music, to seek beyond the surface differences the inner voices, to see relationships in all of nature and her creatures; to express moods and feelings not simply by representation of nature but by animation,—distorted and dramatized in the eyes of the non-believer but painted with absolute accuracy for those able to pretend.

Birds were Audubon's first love and he usually entrusted the lesser plants and other background details to assistants, utilizing unique combinations of watercolor, pencil, pastel, oil, crayon, ink and other media to secure the exact duplication of color, texture and tone.

His passion for fidelity in color and accuracy in measurements led him to spend a long time observing the living bird, making quick sketches, and finally shooting the bird so that it could be inspected closely, painted full size while wired into a selected position and measured with due allowance for foreshortening on a background of squared lines.

In order to study differences between species, Audubon shot as many as one hundred birds in a single day, compared them, dissected them to determine sex, opening their craws to determine what they ate, painted them before the natural colors could fade from their eyes and legs, and eventually ate many of them—often being able to detect by the taste what the bird lived on. Eventually, the skin and feathers of the bird were sold to collectors.

We would regard his methods as gruesome and inhumane today but the telephoto lens camera was not available and Audubon felt he was rushing against time to make his recordings for mankind.

On the other hand, Burchfield's approach to the painting of birds was not in the manner of the medical student dissecting a cadaver. He depicted more the bird as he is likely to be seen by the observer, in a flash of action, at a distance, surrounded by nature's props, and often indicating movement or sound emphasized by abstract forms and echoes. Here the artist emphasizes the relationship of all of nature to its creatures—the total of the bird in its flutter, movement, babble, song, and color with its impact upon the observer.

One was the realist in a primeval world of natural beauty, living away from his family for years at a time and equipped only with a gun, auburn hair to the shoulders, and sketching materials.

The other was a romanticist, living more than one hundred years later, subject to the realities of modern life, but able to leave it for brief journeys to his "woods" where fantasy and imagination would for a time guide his brush.

John James Audubon was born in Haiti in 1785, the son of a French sea captain and a local maid. His mother died during his first year and he was taken to France and accepted at the age of four by his father's lawful wife.

He was educated in France, including a time in the studio of Jacques Louis David, art czar under Napoleon, but came to America in 1803 at the age of eighteen to escape the draft in Napoleon's army. Five years later he was married and had two sons who were destined to assist him in his work in later years.

Like Burchfield, he was "middle aged" (35-36) when he gave up commercial and unhappy vocations to devote full time to his work and first love. From the beginning he envisioned publication of an illustrated treatise on the "Birds of America."

From 1808 to 1820 he lived with his family in Kentucky and tried to make a living doing portraits in pastels. It is said that a child was exhumed from the grave for one of his portraits. Like Burchfield, he tried oils but preferred watercolors (and pastels).

In 1821 he went by flatboat down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to Louisiana, following the migration of birds. His family joined him in the next year. Lucy secured a job as governess and tutor and was able to care for herself and sons while the father developed his interest in drawing birds.

He explored various areas of the country, including eighteen months in the forests along the Hudson River in New York. He tried unsuccessfully to interest a publisher in his projected book

but the work on a similar subject by Alexander Wilson was too much competition. In 1824 he traveled along the Erie Canal and visited Niagara Falls and Buffalo (then a city of two hundred homes). His impressions of the beauty of Niagara Falls must await another occasion; but should encourage us to appreciate what we take too casually and for granted.

Frustrated in America, Audubon went to England in 1826 to secure the backing necessary to publish his book on "Birds of America." The ambitious project eventually utilized 435 plates and was finally completed 11 years later. It required about 200 subscribers at \$1,000 each, and exhibitions in Liverpool, London and elsewhere; plus sales of his paintings to help keep him from bankruptcy. Three trips back to America provided additional sketches.

The engravings were traced from his original paintings and drawings, most of them completed by Robert Havell, Jr., and included adaptations of etching, aquatint and dry point to add color. Many individuals were employed to "daub" the color on the plates, with varying success. During the later stages of production his wife and sons joined him in various responsibilities. By 1839 the project was finished, the final plates hastily prepared to meet demands of subscribers.

The excessive size of the folios required in making the birds actual size, created a demand for a smaller set which was shortly published using some photographic techniques in connection with lithography—to reduce from the engravings. The work of copying was done by his son, John. An improved edition was published in 1966 by photo-offset with the plates produced direct from the original paintings, now in the care of the New York Historical Soci-

ety. We are deeply indebted to the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library for lending us Volume III of its valuable original Audubon Elephant Folio series as well as 8 additional Elephant Folio pages. They are a basic part of the exhibition.

While this exhibit contrasts the original work of Burchfield mainly with reproductions of Audubon, it should be recalled that Audubon intended his work to be reproduced for the widest coverage and that in fact the engravings of the first issue are often referred to as originals. Included in the exhibition, however, are two fine original oil portraits (c. 1825) attributed to John James Audubon and in the permanent collection of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. We are grateful to them for this important loan.

A work on the mammals of North America was largely completed by the two sons, Victor and John, with the father providing chiefly the original inspiration. In the exhibition we are fortunate to have 5 of the mammal lithographs drawn by John James Audubon and 5 drawn by his son John. They are on loan to the Burchfield Center for this exhibition from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Z. Urban.

The Charles Burchfield Center is indebted to all lenders to the exhibition including John Clancy, Director of the Rehn Gallery, New York City, faithful supporter and friend, to Doctors Joseph and Lillian Pothier Barlow, Miss Hilda Baxter, Miss Jane Van Arsdale, Dr. and Mrs. Paul G. Bulger, Mrs. Elizabeth and Miss Beth Parisi, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Olmsted, Mr. Tony Sisti, The Buffalo Museum of Science and two anonymous lenders. We also wish to thank the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, the SUNY at Buffalo Arts Library Staff and Miss Jane Van Arsdale of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library for assistance with research.

## FIELD EXHIBITION

8. CARDINAL (VOLUME IV, PLATE 147)  
Engraving 38 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
9. WOOD THRUSH (VOLUME I, PLATE 74)  
Engraving 34 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
10. BLUE BIRD (VOLUME II, PLATE 112)  
Engraving 34 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
11. AMERICAN CROW (VOLUME II, PLATE 154)  
Engraving 34 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
12. AMERICAN SWIFT (VOLUME II, PLATE 120)  
Engraving 35 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
13. AMERICAN ROBIN (VOLUME II, PLATE 131)  
Engraving 35 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
14. AMERICAN BISON--BOS AMERICANUS  
Lithograph 25 X 30  
Buffalo, New York  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Z. Urban

## AUDUBON/BURCHFIELD EXHIBITION

### WORKS BY JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

1. **PORTRAIT OF EUNICE HUBBARD BLOSSOM**  
Oil on canvas 38 X 32 c. 1825  
Albright-Knox Art Gallery  
Buffalo, New York
2. **PORTRAIT OF COLONEL IRA ALLEN BLOSSOM**  
Oil on canvas 38 X 32 c. 1825  
Albright-Knox Art Gallery  
Buffalo, New York
3. **GREAT BLUE HERON**  
Engraving  
Doctors Joseph and Lillian Pothier Barlow  
Orchard Park, New York
4. **BLACK THROATED BLUE WARBLER**  
Lithograph c. 9 X 12  
Miss Hilda Baxter  
Buffalo, New York
5. **VOLUME III AUDUBON ELEPHANT FOLIO**  
Engraving 38 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
6. **SNOWY OWL (VOLUME II, PLATE 121)**  
Engraving 38 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
7. **GOLDEN WINGED WOODPECKER (VOLUME I, PLATE 37)**  
Engraving 38 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
8. **CARDINAL (VOLUME II, PLATE 159)**  
Engraving 38 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
9. **WOOD THRUSH (VOLUME I, PLATE 73)**  
Engraving 38 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
10. **BLUE BIRD (VOLUME II, PLATE 113)**  
Engraving 38 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
11. **AMERICAN CROW (VOLUME II, PLATE 156)**  
Engraving 38 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
12. **AMERICAN SWIFT (VOLUME II, PLATE 158)**  
Engraving 38 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
13. **AMERICAN ROBIN (VOLUME II, PLATE 131)**  
Engraving 38 X 25  
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library  
Buffalo, New York
14. **AMERICAN BISON—BOS AMERICANUS**  
Lithograph 25 X 30  
Buffalo, New York  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Z. Urban

WORKS BY JOHN JAMES AUDUBON (continued)

15. **AMERICAN RED FOX—VULPUS FULVUS**  
Lithograph 25 X 30  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Z. Urban  
Buffalo, New York
16. **AMERICAN BEAVER—CASTOR FIBER AMERICANUS**  
Lithograph 25 X 30  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Z. Urban  
Buffalo, New York
17. **RACCOON—PROCYON LOTOR**  
Lithograph 25 X 30  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Z. Urban  
Buffalo, New York
18. **COMMON AMERICAN SKUNK—MEPHITUS AMERICANA**  
Lithograph 25 X 30  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Z. Urban  
Buffalo, New York
19. **AMERICAN PELLICAN**  
Lithograph c. 9 X 12  
Miss Jane Van Arsdale

WORKS BY J. W. AUDUBON

Son of John James Audubon

20. **GRIZZLY BEAR—URSUS FEROX**  
Lithograph 25 X 30  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Z. Urban  
Buffalo, New York
21. **ARCTIC FOX—VULPES LACOPUS**  
Lithograph 25 X 30  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Z. Urban  
Buffalo, New York

WORKS BY J. W. AUDUBON (continued)

22. **CANADA OTTER—MALE—LUTRA CANADENSIS**  
Lithograph 25 X 30  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Z. Urban  
Buffalo, New York
23. **CARIBOU—TARANDUS FURCIFER**  
Lithograph 25 X 30  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Z. Urban  
Buffalo, New York
24. **RING TAILED BASSARIS—BASSARIS ASTOTA**  
Lithograph 25 X 30  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Z. Urban  
Buffalo, New York

WORKS BY CHARLES E. BURCHFIELD

25. **BACKYARDS IN SPRING, 1951**  
Brush and ink, conte crayon 9¼ X 12½  
Albright-Knox Art Gallery  
Buffalo, New York
26. **THE WOODPECKER 1955—1964**  
Ink, conte crayon and watercolor 20 X 11  
Dr. and Mrs. Paul G. Bulger  
Watervliet, New York
27. **MOON IN MIDWINTER 1960**  
Watercolor 13 X 18½  
Private Collection
28. **BLUE BIRD AND COTTONWOODS 1917**  
Watercolor  
From the Collection of  
Elizabeth M. Parisi  
Clarence, New York

WORKS BY CHARLES E. BURCHFIELD (cont'd.)

29. **SPRING 1916**  
Drawing, 6 X 4  
From the Collection of Beth Parisi  
Clarence, New York
30. **DECEMBER STORM 1941-1960**  
Watercolor 39¼ X 55½  
Permanent Collection  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Peter C. Andrews
31. **ORION IN WINTER 1962**  
Permanent Collection  
Watercolor 48 X 54  
Placed in the Charles Burchfield Center on extended loan  
By Charles and Bertha Burchfield
32. **WOODTHRUSH AND SETTING SUN 1950**  
Watercolor 19 X 40  
Rehn Gallery  
New York City  
John Clancy, Director
33. **THE BIG TREE 1934**  
Watercolor 19½ X 26½  
Rehn Gallery  
New York City
34. **ARCTIC OWL AND WINTER MOON 1960**  
Watercolor 40 X 30  
Rehn Gallery
35. **STUDIES OF CHIMNEY SWIFT 1921**  
Pencil 22¾ X 17¾  
Rehn Gallery
36. **CROWS AND PUSSY WILLOW 1960**  
Conte crayon 11 X 17  
Rehn Gallery
37. **SONG OF THE MOURNING DOVE 1952-56**  
Watercolor 29½ X 39¼  
Rehn Gallery
38. **RED BIRD AT TEEGARTEN**  
Watercolor  
Rehn Gallery
39. **ONCOMING SPRING 1954**  
Watercolor 30 X 40  
Mr. and Mrs. Harold L. Olmsted  
Springville, New York
40. **WAGON WHEELS**  
Drawing  
Sisti Galleries  
Buffalo, New York  
Tony Sisti, Director

**NOTE:** We are indebted to an anonymous lender for the mounted crow and owl which belonged to Charles Burchfield, and to the Buffalo Museum of Science for the loan of six mounted specimens included in this exhibition.

## CHARLES BURCHFIELD CENTER

The Charles Burchfield Center, located in Rockwell Hall of the State University College at Buffalo, features continuous exhibitions of significant works by Charles E. Burchfield including paintings, drawings and sketches. It houses his journals, other writings and publications concerning him. Special exhibitions and related programs are presented several times each year featuring the works of selected guest artists, juried regional exhibitions, aspects of American art related to the Buffalo area and significant collections.

Paintings and drawings in the permanent Center collection are available for viewing at all time. The Center's permanent collection is owned by the Buffalo State College Alumni Foundation, Inc., a non-profit tax-exempt organization. It is hoped that the Foundation's collection will be increased by gifts and bequests so that a comprehensive, representative collection covering many aspects and details of the work of Charles E. Burchfield will be made accessible for viewing, study and research in the artist's home community.

### THE BURCHFIELD CENTER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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