

AFTER AUDUBON:

ART, OBSERVATION, AND NATURAL SCIENCE

Scientific naturalists at the dawn of the heroic age of scientific exploration, in the late 1800s, observed and surveyed the farthest corners of the natural world. By necessity, they were artists as well as scientists, leveraging their skills in illustration, painting, poetry, and journaling to record their discoveries and share their passions. By examining the practices of historically significant naturalists, like John James Audubon (1785-1851), we can explore the ways in which these traditions influenced interdisciplinary thinking and learning in the generations that followed.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century Audubon created one of the greatest and most famous bodies of North American bird art known today. His more than fifty years of artistic production—consisting of paintings, drawings, prints, and writings—resulted in the collection of work for which he became most famous: *The Birds of America*. The series was Audubon's unparalleled effort to catalogue and describe, artistically and scientifically, the birds of the North American continent. The paintings from which the prints in this exhibition derive were renowned for their scale and for their inclusion of ornithological information about bird habitats and behaviors, a practice that was both controversial and revolutionary during Audubon's time.

Contemporary artists Donald Farnsworth, Carlee Fernandez, Penelope Gottlieb, Laurel Roth Hope, Kara Maria, Tom Uttech, and Madeline von Foerster pick up where Audubon left off—in new, celebratory, and sometimes critical ways. Their artworks are juxtaposed here with Audubon's prints. Whether paintings, works on paper, sculptures or photographs, their works respond to the trailblazer's

legacy either explicitly or implicitly. Often leveraging digital tools and technologies, these artists continue to explore the relationship between art, observation, and natural science.

*This exhibition is organized in conjunction with the 2019 NV STEAM Conference, a statewide education gathering focused on ideas and strategies that incorporate Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math education into classroom practices to foster student creativity and innovation. The NV STEAM Conference is presented in partnership with the Desert Research Institute's Science Alive program. It is supported by the Nevada Department of Education and the Governor's STEM Advisory Council.*