Woodson Art Museum

in your classroom

Avian Encounters and Environmental Advocacy

*Birds in Art*

Fall 2014

Timothy David Mayhew, *Frontal Study of a Long-billed Curlew*, 2012, natural black, red, yellow, and white chalk on handmade gray wove paper
Introduction
September marks the start of a new school year and a fresh series of exhibitions at the Woodson Art Museum – beginning each fall with *Birds in Art*, on view through November 16, 2014. The Woodson’s annual flagship exhibition celebrates its thirty-ninth year with rich offerings of avian-themed paintings, prints, and sculpture selected from over 900 entries from around the world. Complementing *Birds in Art* are six Museum collection exhibitions, which highlight endangered and extinct bird species, recent additions to the collection, and the diversity of avian-inspired artwork both historic and contemporary. Collection exhibitions include: *The Art of Collection: Recent Acquisitions; Birdwatching: Selections from the Collection; and Carved & Cast* – on view through February 2015; *For the Birds: Rare and Extinct; Legacy Lost & Saved: Extinct and Endangered Species of North America; and The Great Marsh: Horicon Waterfowl* – on view through July 2015.

This fall, robust guest artist and author programming enlivens artwork on view and the stories of avian appreciation and advocacy they represent. October programs include two artist residencies with *Birds in Art* artists Karen Bondarchuk (Tuesday – Sunday, October 7 – 12) and George Bumann (Thursday – Sunday, October 23 – 26). For more information about October residencies, see program listings at the conclusion of these materials.

*Birds in Art*
With 112 artists featured in the Woodson’s 2014 *Birds in Art* exhibition, visitors are guaranteed dynamic interpretations of avian subjects from the familiar to the exotic in equally varied styles and mediums. *Birds in Art* artists depict their bird subjects through their distinct artistic lens and aesthetic, most relying on careful from-life observation and direct experiences with birds to inform their work. Whether traveling through the African savannah on safari, strolling the streets of Paris, or visiting a raptor education program at a local nature center, artists allow all avian encounters to serve as sources of information and inspiration.

*Kimberly Roush, Resting in the Wind, 2012, watercolor on paper*
Master Artist Barry Van Dusen

2014 Master Wildlife Artist Barry Van Dusen is recognized for the sophisticated and deceptively simple appearance of his watercolor paintings, which beautifully capture “birds being birds,” as the artist says. Van Dusen is steadfast in his belief that artists should spend considerable time studying their subject in the field and that, regardless of inherent challenges, it is through honing crucial observational skills that an artist is able to thoughtfully depict a subject with confidence and grace.

Van Dusen’s skills as a watercolorist, whose mastery of the medium allows him to complete entire paintings in the field – or en plein air, is the result of many years of dedicated practice and professional endeavors. Van Dusen received a degree in visual design and illustration from the University of Massachussetts, and North Darmouth, as well as a solid foundation in studio art. Barry worked for nearly a decade in commercial design and illustration on advertising campaigns and graphics, which played to his natural talent and keen eye for composition, color, and visual perception. Following his stint in graphic design, Van Dusen began his prolific and esteemed work as a natural history illustrator, creating plates for field guides and scientific publications depicting avian species with accuracy and elegance.

Consider Summer Gold a prime example of the artist’s skillful pairing of design and depiction; the watercolor features an array of bright sunflowers and lively goldfinches. The birds’ coloration and plumage patterns mimic the yellow petals and background palette.
Design considerations occur on large-and small-scale levels when artists work from life. Time in the field can be an exercise in capturing just the right cloudy sky, patch of vegetation, or object intended for a key role in a final composition. This was the case for Van Dusen as these images below demonstrate. A reference photo reveals Van Dusen’s location and perspective for his *Owl Box and Stonechat* watercolor – note what the artist chose to highlight, edit, and remove from his artwork: the owl box and tall grasses were key elements for the artist to capture in the field, while foreground foliage, the background, and field conditions were subject to interpretation and artistic license.

On location in Agamon Lake Reserve, Israel for *Owl Box and Stonechat* painting

Barry Van Dusen, *Owl Box and Stonechat*, 2009, transparent watercolor on paper
Avian Encounters Great and Small

*Birds in Art* encourages visitors to not only revel in the beauty of avian-themed art and the creative diversity employed in executing this work, but also allows consideration of ways we interact with birds. For city dwellers, a pigeon perched on the façade of a building may be among the most familiar encounters with the avian world. Kevin Johnson captures such a scene in his drawing, *Less than Impressed*. While a bird on an urban structure might be expected, Michael Dumas offers his musing on a memory from a visit the Louvre in Paris, when a sparrow made its way into a pristine gallery of Old Master sculptures. Do the gestures and faces of the sculpture speak for the artist through recoiling body language and look of disdain, suggesting that birds are not always welcome “guests” at the Louvre?

Similarly, humans can be secretive and unwanted guests on avian turf, too, as evidenced by the thousands of birders and artists who retreat to voyeuristic blinds in the field to get a closer look at events such as migrations and rare bird nesting grounds. Artist’s often give form to these experiences in bright, subsequent paintings, watercolors, and drawings that are intended to communicate the exuberance of artists’ memories of powerful events. For example, Sue Gombus and Linda Besse capture the chaotic and brilliant avian displays of large group liftoffs that can overwhelm the senses.

Kevin Johnson, *Less than Impressed*, 2014, graphite on illustration board
Michael Dumas, *Influx: Sparrows in the Louvre*, 2013, oil on panel

Laurence Saunois, *The Sentinel*, 2013, oil on canvas
Sue Gombus, *Snow Storm*, 2013, pastel on sanded paper

Linda Besse, *Flight*, 2013, oil on gessoed hardboard
Environmental Advocacy in Art

Project Passenger Pigeon

September 1, 2014 marked the 100-year anniversary of the extinction of one of North America’s most abundant bird species – the passenger pigeon. At their peak in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, passenger pigeons numbered 3 to 5 billion, representing one in every four American birds. Despite their overwhelming abundance and nomadic, colony-driven populations, the plentiful pigeons’ numbers dropped from billions to none in under fifty years due to a lethal mix of social, biological, and geographic circumstances.

Dozens of American naturalists who encountered flocks of pigeons wrote passionately of the overwhelming experience of thousands, even millions, of birds moving through one town or ecosystem over the course of several days. Most famous is John James Audubon’s 1813 account of a flock passing overhead that darkened the skies for days: “The air was literally filled with Pigeons; the light of the noon-day was obscured as by an eclipse, the dung fell in spots, not unlike melting flakes of snow; and the continued buzz of wings had a tendency to lull my sense to repose.” Aldo Leopold referred to the species as “a biological storm” in his Sand County Almanac essay on the bird.

So, what happened?

The large and otherwise ecologically impenetrable flocks were subject to efficient and unrelenting slaughters by nineteenth and early-twentieth century market hunters, known as “pigeoners,” who perfected the art of trapping thousands of birds for sale to the masses of a rapidly industrializing America. The invention of the telegram and advent of transcontinental rail systems hastened the mass killings of nesting flocks, which were targeted for their docile and easily accessible squabs. Telegrams shot like lightening across the Midwest to the east coast serving as a hunters’ grapevine used to identify the movements of flocks, allowing pigeoners to swiftly hop a train and arrive at massive nesting sites in a day.

The passenger pigeons bred almost exclusively in eastern deciduous forests, favoring the masts of acorns and beechnuts needed to sustain the populations through challenging seasons in the nation’s snow belt and beyond. With hundreds of thousands of live, plump, young pigeons arriving by railcar on a daily basis, it wasn’t long before the species’ one-egg-per-clutch breeding behaviors proved a major weakness. An expanding urban landscape, the fortunes to be made by hunters selling fresh meat,
and the popular sport of shooting parties – in part why clay molds called “pigeons” are used for target practice today – led to the rapid decline of the population. By 1910, no wild birds existed and only four years later the last representative of the species, Martha – born and raised in captivity – died sick and alone at 1:00 pm. Just hours later, her body, frozen in a block of ice, was on its way to the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. The death of Martha signaled the first time the end of a species could be marked, down to the minute. What remains are written accounts, paintings, and drawings to remind us of man’s potential to thoroughly destroy a robust and adaptable species within decades.

Exhibitions Drawn from the Museum’s Collection

Six collection exhibitions opened this fall, showcasing the diversity and breadth of the Woodson Art Museum’s holdings. Legacy Lost & Saved: Extinct and Endangered Birds of North America recognizes the centennial of the passenger pigeon’s extinction while taking a proactive and hopeful look at lessons squandered and learned. Artists’ portrayals of extinct and endangered birds include the passenger pigeon, great auk, Carolina parakeet, Labrador duck, and ivory-billed woodpecker. Legacy Lost & Saved features a significant piece of avian conservation history – the original field notes and sketches of Don Richard Eckelberry during his 1944 encounter with the ivory-billed woodpecker in a northern Louisiana swamp. Eckelberry’s observations of this ivory-billed woodpecker are universally accepted as the last sighting of the bird.

Adjacent to Legacy Lost & Saved is The Great Marsh: Horicon Waterfowl, an exhibition celebrating Owen J. Gromme’s lifelong commitment to the restoration of the Horicon Marsh – a crucial stopover on migratory flyways for thousands of birds headed south each year. Gromme’s steadfast support of the Horicon Marsh, led the artist to create paintings, which were reproduced and sold to raise money to support habitat restoration as well as species conservation. Artworks in The Great Marsh depict waterfowl by Gromme and other artists, including, such as Frank Benson and Don Henson.

For the Birds: Rare and Extinct continues the theme of lost or threatened species and the power of art to elicit empathy for these birds through the talents and passions of environmentally minded artists.


On view through February 2015 are: Carved & Cast featuring small-to-medium-scale sculptures acquired by the Museum, highlighting a range of subjects, styles, and sculptor skills; Birdwatching: Selections from the Collection, demonstrates the strength of the Woodson’s historic paintings and drawings; and The Art of Collecting: Recent Acquisitions, complements the historic works through more contemporary interpretations of avian-themed artwork by twentieth-century American artists, including such as Jim Dine, Milton Avery, and Joseph Stella.
Before Your Visit

Casting Corvids

“Corvidae” refers to a family of birds that includes both popular and dramatic species such as crows, ravens, and magpies. Known for their intelligence, curiosity, and bold personalities, corvids are favorite subjects for Birds in Art artists.

Compare the pair of common ravens in Paul Rhymer’s *Rant and Skeptic* and the American crows in Vicki Banks’ *Hunt and Peck*. Ask students if they think the artists captured the nature of these birds. What do the titles of these sculptures tell us about how the artist has portrayed the subject?

Owl Opulence

The thirty-ninth edition of *Birds in Art* is filled with owls – including snowy, great horned, barn, short eared, screech, and boreal – depicted in a range of mediums and aesthetic treatments. Most striking, is the variation of owl subjects in three-dimensional works, including carved wood, stone, bronze, and steel. Owl sculptures allow wonderful explorations of artists’ interpretations of these beloved subjects. Share the images of owl sculptures and invite students to engage in small group discussions using the following prompts:

- **Which of the owl species is most iconic or recognizable to you?** Is that due to an artist’s execution of the subject or telltale physical feature – like erect ear tufts on the great horned owl?

- **If you were to put these sculptures in order using a scale from most detailed or realistic to most minimal or abstract, what would your list look like?** Discuss as a group which depictions and handling you prefer, supporting your opinions with visual evidence and details.

- **What is it about owls that make them a mainstay in *Birds in Art* exhibitions?** Conclude with a brief conversation about owls; consider the following prompts and try to identify what draws artists to owl subjects.
  
  - **Cultural significance** – Owls are elusive, predominately nocturnal birds, with a range of eerie calls and characteristics (like the ability to turn their heads around nearly 360°!), making them perfect subjects for imaginative storytelling in popular culture. Owls are prominently featured in literature, art, and film (think “Harry Potter”); does this universal appeal and variety of cultural contexts influence how or why owls are portrayed by artists?

  - **Biology and physiology** – Owls have several striking features and biological behaviors making them appealing subjects for artist interpretation: huge round eyes for superior vision at night; whisper-soft wings allowing for silent flight; and impressive ears paired with round, disk-like faces enabling even the tiniest sounds to be collected, magnified, and pinpointed – leading to successful stealth nighttime hunts.

  - **Perceived personalities** – For some, owls are humorous and friendly as portrayed throughout children’s literature. Others see owls as observant and wise as depicted in folklore and literature. Owls are also perceived as a sign of darker, more ominous environments... think of a full moon on a movie screen and the lone “hoots” heard through the clouds.
Tim Cherry, *Forest Ghost*, 2014, bronze


Gary Eigenberger, *Silent Hunter*, 2013, oil on tupelo

Don Rambadt, *Scarlet*, 2013, stainless steel
Hélène Arfi, *Two Barn Owls*, 2013, bronze

Clarence Cameron, *Not in My Backyard!*, 2014, Montana dendritic soapstone

Lucy McEachern, *Barn Owl 2*, 2013, bronze

George Bumann, *The Critic*, 2014, bronze
Passenger Pigeon Resources

Utilize this teachable moment to discuss and consider with students the importance of habitat conservation, upholding environmental laws that protect today’s endangered species, and the sustainable use of natural resources. Check out these links to articles and media resources for information about the passenger pigeon and what we can do now to ensure other important species aren’t lost to greed or careless neglect. Don’t miss the opportunity to attend extinction-and-conservation-related programs at the Museum this fall with guest author Joel Greenberg and artist George Bumann; their programs highlighted at the conclusion of these materials.

• The “Project Passenger Pigeon” website (http://passengerpigeon.org/) is filled with useful resources for educators and students interested in learning more about the story of the bird’s extinction and efforts to pay tribute to the loss of a great North American species.

• On September 4, 2014, WPR’S Route 51 Program (http://www.wpr.org/shows/sept-4-2014-project-passenger-pigeon), hosted by Wausau’s Glen Moberg, explored the extinction story of the passenger pigeon, how the loss of this keystone species forever changed the eastern deciduous forest ecosystem, and today’s opportunities for environmental education and awareness through “Project Passenger Pigeon.” Program guests included Dr. Stan Temple, UW-Madison Professor Emeritus in Conservation and Senior Fellow at the Aldo Leopold Foundation; Ray Reser, Director of the UW-Stevens Point Natural History Museum; and Kathy Foley, Director of the Woodson Art Museum.

• A Wisconsin State Journal article entitled “Wisconsin witnessed, should learn from extinction” by Dr. Stan Temple was published on the centennial of the passenger pigeon’s extinction (http://host.madison.com/wsj/news/opinion/column/guest/wisconsin-witnessed-should-learn-from-extinction----stanley/article_b30de594-d85f-536f-b4f3-ced012aea1f1.html). Temple’s brief opinion piece offers a Wisconsin-relevant narrative of the bird’s demise, identifies the role our state played, and credits noted Wisconsin naturalists who bore witness to this extinction.

• A brief, ecological profile of the passenger pigeon can be accessed through the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s online database North American birds (http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/611/articles/introduction).

• The documentary film From Billions to None (http://passengerpigeon.org/thefilm.html) recounts America’s devastation of the passenger pigeon in under fifty years and the parallels found on today’s endangered species lists. From Billions to None will be screened at the Woodson Art Museum on Sunday, October 19, at 2 and 4 pm with introductions and Q&A sessions by co-producer and author Joel Greenberg.

• The Lost Bird Project (http://www.lostbirdfilm.org/) is a documentary film and artistic undertaking by sculptor Todd McGrain and his mission to pay tribute to five extinct North American bird species: Labrador duck, great auk, Carolina parakeet, heath hen, and passenger pigeon. McGrain has created five monumental bronzes commemorating these species, which have been installed at the sites where each of the last of these wild birds was recorded. The film accounts the challenges and successes associated with diligent historic research, transporting and installing the sculptures, and the initiatives of the artist to inspire and educate through his art. The public installations of McGrain’s sculptures serve as unofficial memorials to the birds and other casts of these extinct birds are currently on view in museums and parks – including the National Mall in Washington DC – across the country. The Woodson Art
Museum has three mid-sized casts on view and a complete set of small-scale maquettes featured in the *Legacy Lost & Saved* exhibition. The Museum will screen *The Lost Bird Project* later this year to complement McGrain’s work on view through July 2014.

**Passenger Pigeon-Inspired Activities**

- “Fold the Flock” ([http://foldtheflock.org/](http://foldtheflock.org/)) is a passenger pigeon origami project, part of a national, interactive education campaign to rebuild the lost species through art and spread the word about the passenger pigeon’s extinction in a creative and engaging way. A free pdf download, including folding instructions and paper design can be found online ([http://foldtheflock.org/download/](http://foldtheflock.org/download/)). Visitors to the Museum can fold and add a passenger pigeon to the Woodson’s flock, which is roosting in Art Park – the Museum’s lower level interactive family gallery. At the end of the project, our community-folded pigeons will be counted and the total submitted online to join the larger digital flock.

- Creative writing and historic accounts (samples and downloads, here: [http://passengerpigeon.org/flights.html](http://passengerpigeon.org/flights.html)) on the passenger pigeon offer another entry point for students and educators to experience the powerful story of extinction based on the bird that once was one of America’s most abundant. A creative writing response to a piece such as Aldo Leopold’s “On a Monument to the Pigeon,” for example, can provide an opportunity for students to express their reaction to the story and its relevancy to their lives today.

@ *The Woodson*

During your visit to the Woodson Art Museum, a docent will lead your group through the galleries offering insights and encouraging thoughtful dialogue inspired by artwork on view. All docent-led Art Museum Experiences involve opportunities for hands-on art making for students eager to replicate a favorite artwork on view or an idea discussed. Students will work in the *Birds in Art* galleries using watercolor pencils, water-filled brushes, and watercolor paper on Masonite boards and experiment with watercolor techniques employed by artists who work in the field from direct experiences with nature. Students may look to artists such as Barry Van Dusen, Thomas Quinn, Gunnar Tryggmo, or Kris Parins.

Activity Guides

Each student receives an Activity Guide to extend learning in the classroom and at home. When students leave the Museum with an Activity Guide in hand, they are able to share their Museum visit with friends and family outside the gallery walls, along with their newfound expertise and enthusiasm.

Woodson Art Museum Information

Please encourage your students to visit the Museum with their families and share what they’ve learned. Admission is ALWAYS FREE! The Museum is open 9 am – 4 pm, Tuesday – Friday, and Noon – 5 pm on Saturday and Sunday. Every Thursday during Birds in Art the Museum stays open until 7:30 pm. On the first Thursday of every month – Night Out @ the Woodson – the Museum offers hands-on art for all ages from 5:30 – 7 pm. Call the Museum or visit the website for more information: 715.845.7010 or www.lywam.org.

Visiting Author Joel Greenberg

Friday – Sunday, October 17 – 19

Author, avid birder, and environmental advocate Joel Greenberg combines his passions for natural history and conservation through books, blogs, and teaching. Greenberg’s recent, highly acclaimed book A Feathered River Across the Sky: The Passenger Pigeon’s Flight to Extinction tells how nineteenth-century Americans caused a bountiful bird species to disappear. Meet the author and learn what lessons can be gleaned from the passenger pigeon’s demise.

October 18 Saturday 1 – 2 pm
Lecture & Book Signing
Passenger Pigeon Messages
In “The Echoes of Their Wings: The Life and Legacy of the Passenger Pigeon,” Joel Greenberg examines the historic and environmental circumstances leading to the extinction of the passenger pigeon.

October 19 Sunday 2 & 4 pm
From Billions to None
Documentary Preview
Co-producer of the film From Billions to None: The Passenger Pigeon’s Flight to Extinction, Joel Greenberg hosts two screenings, followed by audience Q&A sessions.

Oct 17 Friday 4 – 6 pm
Lecture, Book Signing, & Gallery Walk
Birds on the Brink
Joel Greenberg’s “Hope Is the Thing with Feathers: Americans and Three Birds” examines three case studies: passenger pigeon, Kirtland’s warbler, and whooping crane. Following Joel’s lecture, Museum staff lead Birds in Art and Legacy Lost & Saved gallery walks. Greenberg’s book will be available for purchase.

Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum
Franklin & 12th St.
Wausau, WI 54403
715.845.7010
www.lywam.org

Weekly Blog Woodson Wanderings
Tuesday – Friday 9 am – 4 pm
First Thursday of each month 9 am – 7:30 pm
Thursdays during Birds in Art 9 am – 7:30 pm
Saturday – Sunday Noon – 5 pm
Always FREE Admission
Distinguished by her striking, large-scale portraits of ravens, crows, and owls, Karen Bondarchuk uses charcoal to create these expressive and thought-provoking drawings. Karen also works in sculpture, video, and bookmaking. She is an associate professor and foundation area coordinator in the Gwen Frostic School of Art at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo.

October 9  Thursday  5:30 – 7 pm

Art 101  Avian Inspiration
Karen Bondarchuk talks about her artwork and inspiration and then demonstrates various charcoal techniques.

October 10  Friday  6 – 8 pm

Teen Event  Charcoal Creations
Area teens join Birds in Art artist Karen Bondarchuk for an evening of experimentation with charcoal. Learn how Karen creates depth and drama in her black-and-white work. Consider bringing examples of your artwork for review and guidance from Karen.

October 11  Saturday  1 – 5 pm

Charcoal Workshop
Adults and art students hone their drawing and design skills with instruction from Karen Bondarchuk and engage in an in-depth exploration of charcoal techniques. Fee: $25 for Museum members; $35 for non-members; materials provided.

October 12  Sunday  12:30 – 2 pm

Family Fingerprinting
Join Karen Bondarchuk to try your hand at one of her favorite drawing techniques – fingerprinting – using stencils or simply your imagination during this drop-in intergenerational program.

October 12  Sunday  2:30 – 3:30 pm

Gallery Walk & Demo
Gain insights into Birds in Art from the perspective of an artist. Karen Bondarchuk highlights selected artworks and then demonstrates her drawing techniques.


Call 715.845.7010 to register

Support for the Karen Bondarchuk artist residency is provided by the B.A. & Esther Greenheck Foundation.

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Always FREE Admission
Naturalist, environmental educator, and sculptor George Bumann believes the visual arts can aid in advocacy for environmental stewardship and conservation. George shares his keen understanding of birds, love of nature, and artistic talents during presentations, demonstrations, and workshops.

**October 24**  Friday  10 am – 3 pm  
**Adult Workshop**  
**Sketching Excursion**  
Adult participants join George Bumann for a day of observing and sketching birds at the Raptor Education Group in Antigo. Learn how to effectively observe and document nature through drawing, en plein air, too, weather permitting. Fee: $35 for Museum members; $50 for non-members; materials and lunch provided.

**October 25**  Saturday  2 – 3:30 pm  
**Family Program**  
**The Science of Sculpting**  
Closely observe birds from Minocqua’s Northwoods Wildlife Center and then create simple, small-scale, avian-inspired sculptures with guidance from George Bumann.

**October 26**  Sunday  1 – 2 pm  
**The Art of Conservation**  
George Bumann begins with acute field observations to develop a deep understanding of birds and animals. Discover how he uses his love of nature and his artistic abilities to sculpt and teach.

**October 23**  Thursday  4:30 – 6 pm  
**Little Masters & Young Artists**  
**Clay Day**  
Youngsters, 5-12 years, mold clay and learn the basics from George Bumann whose sculptures begin with careful observation of bird and animal subjects. Fee: $5

**October 23**  Thursday  6:30 – 7:30 pm  
**Understanding the Bird**  
How does a sculptor manipulate a subject to achieve a desired aesthetic? Join George Bumann as he discusses his process, using the observation skills of a scientist and the lens of an artist.

Call 715.845.7010 to register

Support for the George Bumann artist residency is provided by the B.A. & Esther Greenheck Foundation.