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***BIRDS OF AMERICA: AUDUBON PRINTS FROM SHELBURNE MUSEUM ON VIEW AT THE GRAND RAPIDS ART MUSEUM APRIL 15 THROUGH AUGUST 14, 2011***

*Unique Interpretive Galleries, Collaborations and Programming Accompany the Highly Acclaimed Life-Size Images by John James Audubon*

**GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., March 22, 2011** – The Grand Rapids Art Museum (GRAM) presents *Birds of America: Audubon Prints from Shelburne Museum*, opening April 15 and remaining on view until August 14, 2011. The life-size images depict a colorful array of native birds as discovered and immortalized by the early nineteenth century great American woodsman, John James Audubon. *Birds of America* is widely recognized by art historians and naturalists alike as the most significant natural history publication of all time. An original bound edition of the prints recently sold at auction for the highest price ever paid for a book. Between 1819 and 1838, John James Audubon and his engraver Robert Havell produced 435 handcolored and engraved plates of a scope and standard never before seen in ornithological recording. Thirty prints have been selected from the collection at Shelburne Museum to demonstrate the duality of Audubon's work as both artistic compositions and scientific documentation. This exhibition features some of Audubon's most desirable illustrations, admired for their life-size scale, compelling backgrounds, and often dramatic compositions.

*Birds of America: Audubon Prints from Shelburne Museum* is expected to appeal to both local audiences and summer visitors to the region with an extended run through mid-August. In addition to the exhibition, an additional interpretive gallery includes contextual and informative installations and activities. A large 19<sup>th</sup> century map of the United States with the sites where Audubon found the birds, a biographical chart, etching technique display, and hand-coloring exercise enhance the exhibition experience. An audio tour is available and features commentary on several topics including habitat, birdcalls, conservation, and taxidermy. A video installation displays captioned original watercolors in sequential order. Also on view are publications by and about Audubon, including a rare edition of the bound *Bien Edition of Birds of America*. Both the video installation and *Bien Edition* are provided by Joel Oppenheimer Gallery of Chicago

Related programming and collaborations provide ongoing opportunities to explore and discover the many fascinating aspects regarding the techniques and aesthetic, subject matter, and charismatic personality of this great American artist and pioneer. GRAM partners with John Ball Zoo for a chance to appreciate and compare the natural beauty and essence captured in Audubon's artwork with several species live in their habitat at the Zoo. Maps and interpretive materials at both locations will guide and inform guests throughout the exhibition duration, and special family events are planned including a "trolley day." GRAM Theater Group performs during Friday Nights at GRAM in May, with a short play about Audubon created by local playwright and published author Tanya Eby. The Grand Rapids Audubon Club is included in a variety of programming, from lectures and gallery talks to evenings on the Museum Terrace searching the downtown skyline for peregrine falcons. Saturday All Day with the Arts features hands-on art-making activities for the whole family with a special visit in July by Dr. Bird Brain (aka Pete Stobie of Kalamazoo Nature Center), and Summer Art Camp focuses on Audubon and

other art depicting a wilderness theme. Each camp will have a bird visit, courtesy of John Ball Zoo staff. Local scholars of biology and printmaking are scheduled to lecture in May. See below for further details and check the website throughout the exhibition for added programming.

### At a glance highlights:

- Thirty life-size scale images from John James Audubon's *Birds of America*
- Exhibition installations include text and graphics of original prospectus of 1831 and biographical highlights
- Interpretive installations include bound Bien Edition of *Birds of America*, Richard Rhoades signed copy of his Pulitzer Prize winning biography *John James Audubon, The Making of an American*, and others
- Etching demonstration display and hand-coloring activities
- Video installation displaying captioned original watercolors for *Birds of America* in sequence, on loan from Joel Oppenheimer Gallery, Chicago
- Audio tour with topics including habitat, bird calls, conservation, and taxidermy
- Members Preview on **April 14** with lecture by Senior Curator of Prints and Photographs, Richard H. Axsom, "Shaping American Identity: John James Audubon's *Birds of America*"
- Opening Day **April 15: Friday Nights at GRAM** "Nature and Haiku" with Linda Nemec Foster and members of the Audubon Club.
- **Saturday All Day with the Arts** programming themes include *Birds and Blooms* in **May**, *Audubon's Birds of America* wilderness and watercolors in **June**, and *Dr. Bird Brain's "Birds in Art"* in **July**. Dr. Bird Brain (aka Pete Stobie) of Kalamazoo Nature Center visits on **July 9** and entertains with stories, music, humor and art.
- **Friday Nights at GRAM May 13 & 27:** Audubon on Stage at 7:00pm. A short play created by local playwright and published author Tanya Eby.
- John Ball Zoo and GRAM collaboration "Migrate Between Art and Animals for a Unique Experience" provides maps, guides, interpretive material, and discounts for the duration of the exhibition with a special "Trolley Day" planned for **June 25**.
- Grand Rapids Audubon Club presents lectures, gallery talks, and evening peregrine falcon viewing. Visit website for ongoing programming dates.
- Summer Art Camps focus on Audubon, featuring bird visits from John Ball Zoo,
- Lectures by local scholars include: "Audubon: American Naturalist, Artist, and Ornithologist" presented by Dr. Randall Van Dragt, Professor of Biology at Calvin College, on **May 15** at 2:00pm and "How Audubon Prints Were Made" presented by Chris Stoffel Overvoorde, Professor Emeritus of Art at Calvin College, on **May 22** at 2:00pm.

Group tours information is available.

Become a GRAM facebook fan and check the website often for added programming and events throughout the exhibition.

Images and interviews for media are available upon request.

### About the Grand Rapids Art Museum

The mission of the Grand Rapids Art Museum (GRAM) is: to inspire discovery, enjoyment, and learning about art; to serve as a welcoming and inclusive cultural resource; to collect, conserve, and interpret authentic works of art of the finest quality. Established in the heart of downtown Grand Rapids, the new art museum is internationally known for its distinguished design and LEED Gold certified status. Established in 1910 as the Grand Rapids Art Association, GRAM has grown to include more than 5,000 works of art, including American and European 19th and 20th century painting and sculpture and more than 3,500 works on paper. Embracing the city's legacy

as a leading center of design and manufacturing, GRAM has a growing collection in the area of design and modern craft.

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