

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

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Explore the World of John James Audubon in New Exhibit *The Image Hunter*

BEND, OR — Kindred spirits can find each other across the centuries. In a new exhibition at the High Desert Museum, a contemporary muralist and artist explores the work of a renowned 19th century naturalist, ornithologist and painter in *The Image Hunter: On the Trail of John James Audubon*.

Opening on Saturday, October 17, 2020, *The Image Hunter* touches on North America as seen by John James Audubon (1785 – 1851). Indigenous people knew the rich flora and fauna of the continent. In the early 1800s, Audubon traveled the country for over a decade to create his opus, *The Birds of America* (1827 – 1839). He described a number of North American birds to Euro-Americans, including the Bell's vireo and Western meadowlark. This color-plate book of 435 watercolors reproduced from hand-engraved plates has been considered among the finest ornithological works of its time.

In 2011, Italian muralist and freelance illustrator Hitnes viewed Audubon's artwork at the New York Historical Society. Inspired, he embarked on a three-month journey to retrace the steps of Audubon and see what remained of the wildlife he encountered in the making of his masterpiece. Along the way, Hitnes created a variety of works, from large-scale, vibrant murals to miniture etchings.

“The connection between a modern artist and a naturalist from almost 200 years ago is an engaging way to examine our own connection to the natural world,” said High Desert Museum Executive Director Dana Whitelaw, Ph.D. “Viewing Audubon's journey through Hitnes' eyes reminds us of our ongoing responsibility as stewards of the environment and its wildlife.”

As Hitnes traveled across 15 states, he painted public murals of some of the birds he encountered. Like his inspiration, the artist wished to capture the essence of birds through his work, with a bird's behavior central to each piece.

In addition to the towering murals, Hitnes created other works reflecting what he saw as he traveled along Audubon's trail. He noted the effects of industrialization on Audubon's birds, which some of his tableaus reflect. *The Image Hunter* features shadow boxes, sketchbooks, miniature etchings and ephemera from Hitnes' expedition.

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To complement the exhibition, the Museum will host a virtual Smithsonian guest lecture, “Unraveling the Mysteries of Migration” with Dr. Autumn-Lynn Harrison, program manager of the Migratory Connectivity Project and research scientist at the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. The event will take place on Wednesday, October 28 at 6:00 pm. Register at highdesertmuseum.org/smithsonian-guest-lecture.

The Image Hunter: On the Trail of John James Audubon (highdesertmuseum.org/image-hunter) was organized by the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, College of Charleston School of the Arts. It will be on display through January 31, 2021.

The exhibit is possible with support from Cascade A&E and the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM:

THE HIGH DESERT MUSEUM opened in Bend, Oregon in 1982. It brings together wildlife, cultures, art, history and the natural world to convey the wonder of North America’s High Desert. The Museum uses indoor and outdoor exhibits, wildlife in natural habitats and living history demonstrations to help people discover and appreciate this diverse region. The Museum is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, is a Smithsonian Affiliate, was a 2018 finalist for the National Medal for Museum and Library Services and is the 2019 recipient of the Western Museums Association’s Charles Redd Award for Exhibition Excellence. highdesertmuseum.org

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