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**Matthew Day Jackson**, artist

born 1974, Panorama City, California

**Collaborative Art Editions**, publisher

**Christopher T. Creyts**, printer

**colophon**, 2015–2016

from *There Will Come Soft Rains*

photogravure

Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund,

2016.0024.01

This title page, or colophon, for *There Will Come Soft Rains* details the sources and concepts that Jackson brings to each of the twelve representations of birds originally painted by John James Audubon in order to achieve a new artistic statement. These sources include a poem of the same name by Sara Teasdale and allusions to twelve different apocalyptic scenarios that would bring about an end to Earth as we know it. The notion of an end of days is part of all major religions, has been a preoccupation of humans for most, if not all, of human history, and has become a powerful motivator to anyone concerned by climate change.

Perhaps Jackson's correlation of these birds with apocalyptic scenarios is ultimately inspired by the art itself. Out of the more than 400 North American birds identified by Audubon in *The Birds of America*, a comparatively small number are now extinct. And yet, three of the twelve species highlighted in this particular set of Audubon reproductions are now either extinct or potentially extinct. The high extinction rate among this small selection naturally promotes associations with mortality and the intertwined fates of birds and humans who share this fragile ecosphere.

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**Matthew Day Jackson**, artist

born 1974, Panorama City, California

**Collaborative Art Editions**, publisher

**Christopher T. Creyts**, printer

***There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground***,

2015–2016

from *There Will Come Soft Rains*

color intaglio

Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund,

2016.0024.02

In 1829, Audubon described wild turkeys as abundant in the unsettled interior states such as Ohio and Indiana, but quite rare in the settled, eastern states. Across the United States, turkey populations declined into the 20th century due to over-hunting and habitat loss. Today, turkeys are comparatively abundant in states like Kansas because of their deliberate reintroduction throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Jackson pairs the wild turkey and first line of Sara Teasdale's poem with images of the sea level rise associated with global warming. This turkey's large size and long legs makes Jackson's introduction of flooding water to the composition easily visible and disconcerting.

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**Matthew Day Jackson**, artist

born 1974, Panorama City, California

**Collaborative Art Editions**, publisher

**Christopher T. Creyts**, printer

***And swallows circling with their shimmering sound***,

2015–2016

from *There Will Come Soft Rains*

color intaglio

Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund,

2016.0024.03

Cedar waxwings are an abundant species of bird that eat cedar cones, fruits, and insects. Since the 1960s, some cedar waxwings have developed a new orange coloration at the tip of their tails caused by their consumption of berries from an introduced species of honeysuckle.

Jackson pairs the cedar waxwing with the prospect of a catastrophic asteroid impact. Approximately 66 million years ago, an asteroid struck Earth in today's Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico and created such a sweeping global change in climate that about 75% of the planet's plants and animals, including dinosaurs, became extinct.

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**Matthew Day Jackson**, artist

born 1974, Panorama City, California

**Collaborative Art Editions**, publisher

**Christopher T. Creyts**, printer

***And frogs in the pools, singing at night***, 2015–2016

from *There Will Come Soft Rains*

color intaglio

Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund,  
2016.0024.04

Jackson situates a view of an amusement park in the abandoned city of Pripyat, Ukraine, in the distance behind Audubon's mallards. Pripyat was evacuated in the wake of the explosion at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in 1986. Mallard ducks are a highly adaptable species and would likely be found near a marsh or stream at this distance from a city like Pripyat, just as Jackson depicts them. Since the Chernobyl disaster, scientists have documented evidence of genetic changes and elevated mutation rates in mammals contaminated by radiation. Somewhat ironically, after more than thirty years without human interference in Chernobyl's exclusion zone, Ukrainian scientists now find wildlife populations have rebounded and are thriving.

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**Matthew Day Jackson**, artist

born 1974, Panorama City, California

**Collaborative Art Editions**, publisher

**Christopher T. Creyts**, printer

***And wild plum trees in tremulous white***, 2015–2016

from *There Will Come Soft Rains*

color intaglio

Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund,  
2016.0024.05

In Jackson's imagined death of the sun, the familiar crimson feathers of the northern cardinal have been rendered in more subdued, warm tones as two of the birds bask in the intense light and heat of the sun as it becomes a red giant near the end of its lifecycle as a star. The cardinal is a territorial bird, and Jackson perhaps implies that these creatures will put up a good fight against a catastrophic event that is several billion years away.

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**Matthew Day Jackson**, artist

born 1974, Panorama City, California

**Collaborative Art Editions**, publisher

**Christopher T. Creyts**, printer

***Robins will wear their feathery fire***, 2015–2016

from *There Will Come Soft Rains*

color intaglio

Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund,

2016.0024.06

Jackson pairs this pandemonium of parrots, the most populous depiction of birds in this subset of Audubon's *Birds of America*, with a ghostly skull, evoking the threat of overpopulation. Although their coloring here is not indicative of their green bodies, yellow heads, and red-orange faces (see the study skin in the nearby case for comparison), these are Carolina parakeets, a bird that is now extinct. Scientists speculate their crowd mentality likely played some role in their extinction. Audubon describes how these birds would decimate fruit crops in their pursuit of seeds, making them an enemy to gardeners and growers. The birds possessed an unfortunate flocking behavior, returning to the location of a recent hunter's blast, enabling their slaughter in mass numbers.

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**Matthew Day Jackson**, artist

born 1974, Panorama City, California

**Collaborative Art Editions**, publisher

**Christopher T. Creyts**, printer

***Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire***, 2015–2016

from *There Will Come Soft Rains*

color intaglio

Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund,

2016.0024.07

Perhaps Jackson's most scornful apocalyptic possibility is his suggestion that humans may simply become too stupid to sustain our planet. One way this occurs, Jackson argues, is through the messages we learn from cartoons that oversimplify our understanding of the natural world, and assign human characteristics, motivations, and behaviors to animals. In the foreground of a fiery evocation of the Disney film *Bambi* are two blue jays, birds known for their noisy chatter and aggressive behavior, but also their intelligence and curiosity.

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**Matthew Day Jackson**, artist

born 1974, Panorama City, California

**Collaborative Art Editions**, publisher

**Christopher T. Creyts**, printer

***And not one will know of the war, not one***, 2015–2016

from *There Will Come Soft Rains*

color intaglio

Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund,  
2016.0024.08

When Sara Teasdale wrote “There Will Come Soft Rains,” the war she referenced was World War I, a conflict of apocalyptic magnitude and horror. The disastrous potential of war has only magnified since humans produced nuclear weapons during World War II. Distressingly, Jackson rhymes Audubon’s memorable composition and the flamingo’s bright pink coloration with the horrifying silhouette of a nuclear fireball, implying that the outcomes of nuclear war will be impossible to ignore.

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**Matthew Day Jackson**, artist

born 1974, Panorama City, California

**Collaborative Art Editions**, publisher

**Christopher T. Creyts**, printer

***Will care at last when it is done***, 2015–2016

from *There Will Come Soft Rains*

color intaglio

Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund,  
2016.0024.09

By the late 19th century, the population of snowy egrets had become dangerously low because their feathers were highly sought as decorations for women’s hats. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918—one of the first environmental laws passed in the United States—has protected the birds and caused their population to rebound. For this species, whose survival has been linked with the tastes of society, Jackson considers the potential for social collapse to overturn laws, economies, and other systems as we know them. As the snowy egret has more recently been valued by humans as a living creature rather than a commodity, Jackson speculates that a new society emerging from the collapse of our present system will learn from the past to become more humane.

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**Matthew Day Jackson**, artist  
born 1974, Panorama City, California  
**Collaborative Art Editions**, publisher  
**Christopher T. Creyts**, printer  
***Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree***, 2015–2016  
from *There Will Come Soft Rains*  
color intaglio  
Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund,  
2016.0024.10

Passenger pigeons were once the most abundant bird species in North America, and yet humans hunted them to extinction near the beginning of the 20th century. Audubon recounts both the astonishing quantity of pigeons he observed in 1813, so many as to blot out the sun, and the volume of birds shot and eaten, enough to feed the local population for days.

Jackson places the passenger pigeons before a Tower of Silence, a place where—according to the religion Zoroastrianism—unclean dead bodies are placed so that scavenging birds and sunlight can purify them. Jackson’s reference to Towers of Silence evokes the prospect of divine intervention as apocalypse, but the end of days has already come for the passenger pigeon.

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**Matthew Day Jackson**, artist  
born 1974, Panorama City, California  
**Collaborative Art Editions**, publisher  
**Christopher T. Creyts**, printer  
***If mankind perished utterly***, 2015–2016  
from *There Will Come Soft Rains*  
color intaglio  
Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund,  
2016.0024.11

Like many of these bird species, wood duck populations declined in the 19th century due to habitat loss and the exploitation of their feathers for fashion. Wood ducks rebounded in the 20th century largely thanks to human intervention, this time partially through the invention of nesting boxes these ducks use as habitats. In another ironic pairing, Jackson presents a species with a fondness for manmade habitats alongside the specter of over-development as a destructive force where all creation is artificial and no natural life remains.

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**Matthew Day Jackson**, artist

born 1974, Panorama City, California

**Collaborative Art Editions**, publisher

**Christopher T. Creyts**, printer

***And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn***, 2015–2016

from *There Will Come Soft Rains*

color intaglio

Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund,  
2016.0024.12

Audubon proclaimed the meat of the ruffed grouse to be particularly delicious, but this species can be difficult to hunt as the birds camouflage well and prefer to inhabit densely thicketed areas. For this elusive bird potentially lurking directly in a hunter's midst, Jackson brightens his composition's skies with irregular streaks of light signifying an alien invasion. Aliens remain a popular theme of science fiction and speculative possibility. Without sentient aliens, earthlings are alone in the universe. Alien invasion scenarios can serve as allegories for the ways human civilizations have responded and might respond to strangers, friends, and foes.

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**Matthew Day Jackson**, artist

born 1974, Panorama City, California

**Collaborative Art Editions**, publisher

**Christopher T. Creyts**, printer

***Would scarcely know that we were gone***, 2015–2016

from *There Will Come Soft Rains*

color intaglio

Museum purchase: Peter T. Bohan Art Acquisition Fund,  
2016.0024.13

The ivory-billed woodpecker is either extinct or so critically endangered that the species has not been definitively identified in the wild for decades. Possible sightings have motivated the establishment of wildlife refuges in Arkansas and Louisiana.

Audubon's woodpeckers are depicted stripping bark from dead tree limbs to find the beetles and larvae. Beyond our view of this flaky bark, Jackson appropriates a portion of 16th-century Dutch artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting, *The Triumph of Death*. The painting acknowledges the Dance of Death, an allegory of death's universality, and evokes the precarious nature of life during the many plague epidemics beginning with the Black Death in the 14th century and reoccurring periodically throughout Eurasia until the 19th century. *There Will Come Soft Rains* closes its own dance with death by gently reminding us that, like the nursery rhyme concludes, we all fall down.



Tap the Web icon in the Spencer App to view Bruegel's  
*The Triumph of Death*

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**John James Audubon** (1785–1851), artist  
born Les Cayes, Santo Domingo (present-day Haiti);  
died New York, New York

**John T. Bowen**, lithographer

**Cardinal Grosbeak, *Fringilla cardinalis* [*Cardinalis cardinalis*]**

**Carolina Parrot, *Psittacus carolinensis* [*Conuropsis carolinensis*]**

**Wild Turkey, *Meleagris gallopavo***

**American Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus ruber***

from *The Birds of America from Drawings Made in the United States and Their Territories*, 1840–1844

lithographs, hand coloring

Courtesy of Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering and Technology, Kansas City, MO, EL2020.003, EL2020.004, EL2020.005, EL2020.006

Audubon continued to profit from his series *The Birds of America* by publishing them at a significantly reduced scale in bound volumes accompanied by his written descriptions of the birds in the *Ornithological Biography*. The excellent condition of this set, combined with the way any bound book protects each page from prolonged exposure to light, allows viewers to appreciate the hand-coloring in these four examples that still look as much as is possible like they did when first printed. These prints can be compared to Jackson's images to reveal the many ways he departs from Audubon in coloration and alterations to the blank backgrounds. For more about this Royal Octavo Edition, see the nearby label, "What is an 'Audubon'?"

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**Carolina Parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*) skin**, KU 4554  
Collected in Brevard County, Florida, 12 March 1893  
Courtesy of the KU Biodiversity Institute, Division of Ornithology,  
EL2020.007

**Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) skin**, KU 134016  
Collected in Lone Star, Douglas County, Kansas, 25 April 1964  
Courtesy of the KU Biodiversity Institute, Division of Ornithology,  
EL2020.008

**Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) skin**, KU 100504  
Collected in Lawrence, Douglas County, Kansas, 1 June 2018  
Courtesy of the KU Biodiversity Institute, Division of Ornithology,  
EL2020.009

**Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*)**  
Courtesy of the KU Biodiversity Institute, Exhibits, EL2020.010

These bird specimens represent four of the species depicted in Jackson's portfolio. Additional species from the series—including the extinct passenger pigeon—are currently on display at KU's Natural History Museum. While this ruffed grouse has been prepared and mounted in a lifelike manner for visitors to experience, most specimens in scientific bird collections are study skins, as seen in the specimens of the Carolina parakeet, northern cardinal, and blue jay. A study skin preserves a bird's skin and feathers and allows scientists to compare specimens from the same or other species. By studying specimens, sometimes of species that are now extinct where DNA can be extracted, ornithologists can better understand bird taxonomy, ecology, and evolutionary biology.

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**John James Audubon** (1785–1851), author  
born Les Cayes, Santo Domingo (present-day Haiti);  
died New York, New York  
**Julius Bien**, lithographer  
**Roe Lockwood & Son**, publisher  
**Summer or Wood Duck, *Anas sponsa* [*Aix sponsa*]**, 1860  
*The Birds of America, from Drawings by John James Audubon ...*  
*Re-Issued by J.W. Audubon. Vol. 1.*  
chromolithograph  
Courtesy of Special Collections, Kenneth Spencer Research  
Library, EL2020.011

The Bien Edition of Audubon's *Birds of America* recreates the scale of the first, life-size edition Audubon published between 1827 and 1838. For more about the Bien Edition and other versions of Audubon's *Birds of America*, see the nearby label "What is an 'Audubon'?"

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# Audubon in the Anthropocene: Works by Matthew Day Jackson

*Audubon in the Anthropocene* highlights a portfolio of prints by contemporary artist Matthew Day Jackson titled *There Will Come Soft Rains*. In this portfolio, Jackson dramatically reworks a late edition of etchings from John James Audubon's iconic series *The Birds of America*. Each Audubon bird rests amidst potential apocalyptic settings interpreted by Jackson, often referencing final scenarios of the Anthropocene.

Scholars have proposed the "Anthropocene" as a term for our current geological period, characterized by the significance of human intervention in our ecosphere. Although the term has not been formally adopted by the geologic community, interest in and debate about the Anthropocene coincides with scholarly discussions concerning Earth, its life, and our collective future.

The twelve birds featured in Jackson's portfolio reflect the intertwined relationships of humans and other life on Earth. Two birds, the passenger pigeon and Carolina parakeet, are now extinct, and a third, the ivory-billed woodpecker, is critically endangered. The others, including the wild turkey, cedar waxwing, mallard duck, blue jay, flamingo, snowy egret, wood duck, and ruffed grouse, have populations that have either remained stable or increased since the 1970s, sometimes due to human action and sometimes due to bird adaptation.

*Audubon in the Anthropocene* explores the intertwined relationship between birds and humans since the publication of *The Birds of America* in 1827, as well as what may become of these birds, humans, and Earth itself.

This exhibition is supported by KU Student Senate and the Linda Inman Bailey Exhibitions Fund, and includes generous loans from the Linda Hall Library, the Kenneth Spencer Research Library, and the KU Biodiversity Institute & Natural History Museum.

# What is an “Audubon?”

John James Audubon was an artist and naturalist best known for creating an extravagant set of prints depicting North American birds at life size in naturalistic poses and habitats titled *The Birds of America*. Audubon killed, collected, posed, and painted most of the birds depicted in the series, and then an artist named Robert Havell Jr. copied and translated his paintings to become etchings. These prints were hand-painted in watercolor and published between 1827 and 1838. This edition is popularly known as the Havell Edition or the Double Elephant Folio because of the large size of each printed sheet.

The Havell Edition *Birds of America* was so prized yet also often prohibitively large and expensive that many subsequent editions have been created. By the 1840s, lithography had replaced etching as the most marketable printmaking technology. To create the Royal Octavo Edition exhibited in the nearby case—so named because the leaves are about an eighth the size of a full sheet of paper—Audubon’s son John Woodhouse Audubon reduced the Havell prints to the desired scale to produce a tracing that was then adapted for lithography by John T. Bowen. These lithographs were also hand-colored, often by women.

The Bien Edition is another full-sized recreation of Audubon’s paintings, this time executed in chromolithography by Julius Bien and published between 1858 and 1860. This edition was never finished, partly due to the outbreak of the American Civil War, and is rarer than the Havell Edition. A print of Audubon’s wood duck from the Bien Edition is included in this exhibition.

Editions of *Birds of America* continue to be produced, but by the 20th century, the prints were made through photomechanical and digital reproduction methods. Matthew Day Jackson made use of one such set of reproductive prints to create his series, *There Will Come Soft Rains*. Audubon’s original paintings and sketches are now in the collection of the New York Historical Society.

# How Are These Prints Made?

Matthew Day Jackson's prints and the first edition of Audubon's *Birds of America* are prints created using **intaglio** (pronounced in-TAL-ee-oh) techniques. The word intaglio comes from the Italian *intagliare*, "to engrave," and is an umbrella term for any printmaking technique in which an image is carved into a printmaking matrix, usually a metal plate. The most common intaglio techniques used in Jackson's prints are **etching** and **aquatint**.

To make an **etching**, an artist paints a metal plate with an acid-resistant coating through which they scratch a design with a stylus or needle, revealing the bare metal below. This plate is then immersed in an acid bath that etches the exposed lines into the plate. The coating is removed from the plate, ink is pushed into the etched lines, the surface of the plate is cleaned, and the plate is printed in a press.

To make an **aquatint**, an artist creates areas of tone by using a powdered resin that is sprinkled on the plate before being bitten by an acid. The result is a finely textured tonal area whose darkness is determined by how long the plate is in contact with the acid.

Jackson and master printer Christopher Creyts created each print in *There Will Come Soft Rains* by combining one of the plates reproducing an Audubon bird—printed in black ink—with three other plates containing an astonishing variety of intaglio techniques, each of which is printed with shades of yellow, blue, and red ink. The four plates are carefully aligned and printed on a single sheet of paper.

The Royal Octavo and Bien Editions of Audubon's *Birds of America* exhibited here were created using lithographic techniques. **Lithography** is a printing technique in which an image is drawn on a very flat slab of limestone—or a specially treated metal plate—with a greasy substance. This stone is treated chemically so that ink rolled on to the stone adheres only where the greasy marks were made. This inked image can then be transferred to a piece of paper using a press. The large Bien Edition print was created using **chromolithography**, a technique popular in the 19th century that uses the same process as lithography, except in this instance, many different stones or plates are used to allow a complex separation of colors to be printed on one sheet of paper.



Tap the Web icon in the Spencer App to learn more about the printing techniques of intaglio, etching, aquatint, and lithography.

# Sara Teasdale's "There Will Come Soft Rains"

Sara Teasdale (1884–1933) was a poet from St. Louis, Missouri, who settled in New York after marrying. She won a precursor to the Pulitzer Prize for her 1917 poetry collection titled *Love Songs*. Teasdale is likely best known for "There Will Come Soft Rains," a poem written during World War I and published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1918. The poem lulls the reader into a false sense of pastoral calm, only to discover that the natural world Teasdale describes so tenderly has no need for humanity. Teasdale's poem has inspired and influenced other artists from Ray Bradbury to Matthew Day Jackson.

*There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,  
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;  
And frogs in the pools, singing at night,  
And wild plum trees in tremulous white,  
Robins will wear their feathery fire,  
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;  
And not one will know of the war, not one  
Will care at last when it is done.  
Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,  
If mankind perished utterly;  
And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,  
Would scarcely know that we were gone.*

# Ray Bradbury's "There Will Come Soft Rains"

Science fiction author Ray Bradbury (1920–2012) first published his short story "There Will Come Soft Rains" in *Collier's* magazine in 1950 and included it in *The Martian Chronicles* later that year. The story imagines a post-apocalyptic future in which homes continue to be run by machines although humans have not survived. A robot recites Sara Teasdale's poem for an absent owner. While Teasdale's work can be considered a response to World War I, Bradbury struggles with the implications of nuclear war that concluded World War II. Each author imagines a world without humans.

Bradbury's story, as printed in 1950, is available to read below. When originally published, the story was dated in the future year of 1985. More recent printings date the story in the year 2026.

# Related Programs

Join us at these events to further explore the themes in *Audubon in the Anthropocene*.

**Saturday, March 21, 1:00PM–3:30PM**

***Art Cart: Born-Again Birds***

Create your own imaginary bird species that has gone extinct by using materials that will outlive us all. Staff from KU's Natural History Museum join us to share bird specimens and examples of their nests. The Art Cart is a drop-in activity station where children and grown-ups enjoy hands-on art projects together, taking inspiration from works of art on view.

**Thursday, April 9, 10:15AM–11:15AM**

***Senior Session: Audubon through the Ages***

Join Spencer Curator Kate Meyer to explore the three different variations of John James Audubon's iconic series *The Birds of America* exhibited here. Senior Sessions are designed for senior citizens but open to everyone.

**Friday, April 17, 10:00AM–4:00PM**

***Walk-Ins Welcome in the Study Center with Featured Guest Christopher Creyts***

Every Friday, all visitors are welcome in the Stephen H. Goddard Study Center to request prints, drawings, and photographs not currently on view. Christopher Creyts, master printer for the series *There Will Come Soft Rains*, joins us on this day to request and share his favorite works in the Spencer's collection and offer insights on visitor requests.

**Saturday, April 18, 11:00AM–12:00PM**

***The Making of a Master Print, Audubon Edition***

Master Printer Christopher Creyts discusses his collaboration with Matthew Day Jackson, from the discovery and re-etching of John James Audubon's copper plates to the adaptation of poet Sara Teasdale's text.

**Sunday, April 26, 1:00PM–2:00PM**

***The Art of Birdwatching***

Field guide author and wildlife illustrator David Sibley leads a birdwatching tour through the galleries to identify birds in art and share insights from his newest book *What It's Like to Be A Bird* (2020). This talk is part of the Paper Plains Literary Festival in Lawrence April 23–26. Visit [paperplains.org](http://paperplains.org) for the full schedule.

**Saturday, May 2, 10:30AM–11:45AM**

***The Flipside: Birding without Borders***

The Flipside takes you behind the scenes with Mark Robbins, ornithology collection manager at KU's Biodiversity Institute and Natural History Museum, and Kate Meyer, Spencer curator, to examine bird specimens mounted for research and display, historic illustrations, and reimagined interpretations for what they reveal about changes in and threats to avian populations. We will perch at the Spencer, then migrate to the KU Natural History Museum.