

ART310

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**Hemerocallis fulva by Penelope Gottlieb**



**J.J. Audubon, Carolina Parrot, plate 26,**

**Birds of America, 1827**

Artist Penelope Gottlieb created a series of acrylic and ink art pieces based on painter James Audubon's *Birds of America* published in 1827. This series is so revolutionary because Gottlieb is reclassifying Audubon's own work. Gottlieb uses invasive species to "invade" Audubon's illustrations and re-define Audubon's work to represent the way nature functions

today. Through her series of paintings, Gottlieb represents the consequences of the extinction of species and the effects of invasive species. This is especially significant in this painting in the series because the Carolina parakeets pictured in both pieces above were officially declared extinct in 1939.

The two pieces pictured above are “*Hemerocallis Fulva*” and “Carolina Parrot”. Gottlieb’s piece, “*Hemerocallis Fulva*”, focuses on its name-sake—orange day lilies. These lilies are an invasive species that has disturbed ecosystems across the United States. They were first brought to the continent in the 1800s by early immigrants. From a quick glance, it looks as if the birds are simply living in the lilies, elegantly existing in them. But if the viewer looks closer, the lilies are practically choking the parrots. The leaves and flowers are wrapped around the birds’ wings and necks—constricting and binding them. The orange day lilies are personifying their classification as an invasive species in which they are quite literally invading Audubon’s painting and engulfing the birds. Not only are the lilies overrunning the piece, but they are also infiltrating the parrots themselves as the birds eat the flowers and leaves. The intertwining of the two pieces is even commented on by Gottlieb. She states that she wanted to, “turn nature against nature. I wanted to make it difficult for the viewer to tell what was his and what was mine.” This conveys an evolution of nature that was occurring during the same time Audubon painted his *Birds of America*, namely all the invasive plant and animal species that were being brought to North America during the time period.

Audubon’s *Birds of America* classified many species of birds. This was so attractive to viewers in the 1800s because these were all undiscovered species (at least to the Europeans). Art was used to document new scientific discoveries because people in Europe had no idea what these new species looked like, or what habitat they would live in. They had no photographs, so

accurate scientific illustrations were the only way to see what these new species looked like. At least, unless they were preserved through taxidermy and transported to Europe. Art became a way to present the New World to Europe, and to even organize and document it for scientific purposes. Gottlieb's piece also classifies, but in a different method. To viewers today, the Carolina parakeet is not some new species but instead an extinct one. Through art, Gottlieb can almost revive it. She uses the invasive species not only to comment on the effect they have on conservation efforts of both native plants and animals, but to present how Carolina parakeets might have existed had they not gone extinct. Namely, they would likely still be endangered like many other species today.

This is especially satirical and ironic since the original painting, *Carolina Parrot*, was done by James Audubon. While he was a talented painter and ornithologist, Audubon also killed every bird he painted, and is famously quoted for saying that "a day without killing at least a hundred birds is a day wasted." The Carolina parakeets in "*Carolina Parrot*" were almost certainly dead when they were painted by Audubon. But in Gottlieb's work, the parrots are instead in the process of being killed—the way many other species today are being killed and quickly dying out.

Throughout her project *Invasive Species*, and specifically "*Hemerocallis Fulva*", Gottlieb can convey information about not only a long-gone species, but about current invasive species today and how they put native fauna and flora at risk. In her multi-faceted painting, Gottlieb manages to comment on both the destruction of native species in Audubon's time and her own.