

UN/NATURAL

S E L E C T I O N S

WILDLIFE IN CONTEMPORARY ART

by TAMMI HANAWALT, *Curator of Art*

with contributions by LISA SIMMONS
and ADAM DUNCAN HARRIS

Foreword by STEVE SEAMONS



NATIONAL MUSEUM
of WILDLIFE ART
OF THE UNITED STATES

The tour for *Un/Natural Selections: Wildlife in Contemporary Art* will begin in 2022 with assistance from Art Bridges. For dates, venues, and availability, please see <https://artbridgesfoundation.org>.

The following images appear
uncaptioned on the pages noted:

Frontispiece

PENELOPE GOTTLIEB (United States,
b. 1952), **Tibouchina urvilleana**, 2011.

Acrylic and ink over reproduction
Audubon print. 45 × 33½ inches.

Gift of the 2012 Collectors Circle, National Museum
of Wildlife Art. © Penelope Gottlieb. M2012.022

p. 9

PRESTON SINGLETARY (Tlingit, b.
United States, 1963), **White Raven**,

2018. Blown and sand carved glass.

19¼ × 9 × 14 inches. Gift of the 2019 Collectors
Circle, National Museum of Wildlife Art.

© Preston Singletary. M2019.020

p. 31

BERG AND MYERS. Timothy Berg
(United States, b. 1977) and Rebekah
Myers (United States, b. 1977),

Turn a Blind Eye, 2018. Glazed ceramic
and maple wood. 39 × 35 × 7 inches.

Gift of the 2019 Collectors Circle, National
Museum of Wildlife Art. © Timothy Berg and
Rebekah Myers. M2019.021

p. 51

ZOE KELLER (United States, b. 1989),

Prey, 2016. Graphite on paper.

30 × 42 inches. Purchased with funds

generously donated by Dick and Val Beck,

National Museum of Wildlife Art. © Zoe Keller.

M2017.005.002

p. 72

NICOLA HICKS (England, b. 1960),

Little Bear, 2015. Bronze.

47¼ × 19¾ × 19¾ inches. Purchased

with funds generously donated by Bettina M.

Whyte, National Museum of Wildlife Art.

© Nicola Hicks. M2015.117

SUPPORTED BY

 Art Bridges

Anne and Michael Moran

Thomas and Elizabeth Grainger Family Charitable Fund

Maggie and Dick Scarlett Endowment, in honor of Joffa and Bill Kerr

Mays Family Foundation



Library of Congress Control Number: 2021908903

Copyright © 2021 by the National Museum of Wildlife Art of the United States, Jackson, Wyoming.

All reproductions of artwork are copyright of each artist, unless otherwise indicated.

The works by Antoine-Louis Barye (p. 4) and Joseph Wolf (pp. 5, 100) are in the public domain.

ISBN: 978-0-9674644-3-5 (pbk)

Printed in Canada.

Foreword and Acknowledgments

The National Museum of Wildlife Art of the United States is one of the few museums in the nation to focus entirely on the art of wildlife, which when it comes to interpretation can be both fascinating and at the same time challenging. It is in our mission to impart knowledge about and appreciation for humanity's relationship with wildlife through art, but the definitions and understandings of wildlife art can vary greatly depending upon your perspective and level of engagement with nature. We are fortunate in our location just outside of Jackson, Wyoming, which allows us to daily experience wildlife up close and personal.

The core of our permanent collection, which has grown to more than five thousand artworks and archival materials over the past thirty years, is centered on the work of Carl Rungius, Richard Friese, Bruno Liljefores, and Wilhelm Kuhnert, all of whom studied wild animals and landscapes in nature and painted dynamic and realistic depictions of wildlife in their natural habitats. These artists followed the trend formed by earlier nineteenth-century European-trained artists, who were inspired by the writings and renderings of naturalists and scientists such as John James Audubon and Charles Darwin. Such depictions of wildlife continued into the twentieth century with the advent of western art as a genre. Today, there are still artists, including talented local artists, who depict wildlife realistically, and who have been influenced by a variety of artistic styles from impressionism to abstract expressionism. However, the definition, and look, of wildlife art is expanding.

Increasingly, museums are using their permanent collections in the creation of exhibitions that relevantly address our ever-changing society and environment. *Un/Natural Selections: Wildlife in Contemporary Art* is an exhibition created from recent acquisitions added to our permanent collection that speaks to current topics and viewpoints in order to explore how artists are employing wildlife to address the issues and ideas concerning humanity's relationship with the natural world. The creation of such an exhibition was challenging. It took the expertise, tenacity, and desire of many individuals over the course of several years to bring this exhibition together, and the support of the museum's staff, its board, and Jackson Hole community members. We are thankful for the initial work of former Chief Curator, now Grainger/Kerr Director of the Carl Rungius Catalogue Raisonné, Adam Harris and former Associate Curator of Art Bronwyn Minton, who sought to find and secure the unique artwork in this exhibition. Curator Tammi Hanawalt added her own level of expertise in contemporary Native art and took over and finalized the development of this exhibition, which will travel nationally due in large part to the support of the Art Bridges Foundation. Tammi also contributed greatly to the writing and organizing of this catalog, with the help of Associate Curator of Art Lisa Simmons, who recently became a part of the curatorial team. We are grateful that catalog designer Julie Rushing and editor Emily Jerman Schuster could once again offer their expertise in editing and catalog design. We acknowledge our Registrar Emily Winters and Preparator Elizabeth Frates, who adeptly assisted with the photography, securing permissions, the installation of the exhibition, and subsequent preparation and shipping of the tour. Carrie Schwartz designed the wonderful graphics for the

exhibition and assisted with editing labels and the catalog, and Luis Diaz helped with Spanish label edits. Sugden Chief Curator of Education Jane Lavino and her educational team created and directed the educational components for this exhibition.

Along with expressing our sincerest appreciation to the supporters of the Blacktail Gala and Collectors Circle members, I would also like to acknowledge and thank the following primary donors for their support of this exhibition: Anne and Michael Morgan, the Thomas and Elizabeth Grainger Family Charitable Fund, the Maggie and Dick Scarlett Endowment in honor of Joffa and Bill Kerr, the Mays Family Foundation, Long Reimer Winegar, the Art Bridges Foundation, and the Wyoming Cultural Trust Fund. We are most appreciative of the ongoing support of our donors, board, and community members, who have helped us to reach a greater audience. Lastly, I recognize and thank each of the forty-one artists whose work is included in this exhibition for their creative contributions to contemporary wildlife art.

STEVE SEAMONS

Director of the National Museum of Wildlife Art

PETER GERAKARIS

(United States, b. 1981)

Caravan (Owl), 2012.

Oil on canvas. 84 × 84 inches. Purchased with funds generously donated by Adrienne and John Mars, National Museum of Wildlife Art.

© Peter Gerakaris. M2016.042.

Multimedia artist Peter Gerakaris grew up listening to the calls of animals and birds. In particular he remembers the time he heard the call and response of a family of owls in New Hampshire: “The call was beautiful and mesmerizing and it triggered something—I found myself wanting to make this larger-than-life evocation of a barred owl.” From this propulsive inspiration, he created the enigmatic kaleidoscopic painting *Caravan (Owl)*.

The painting’s grand size (seven feet by seven feet) and brilliant palette draw viewers in and invite them to take a more intimate look at its complexities. The bluish and reddish concentric circles that funnel inward lead to the haloed central owl figure, which sits stoically on a gnarled branch. Surrounding the owl, Gerakaris has placed colored autumn leaves, the silhouettes of falcons, and floating bluish orbs.

In creating such a sizeable representation, Gerakaris hoped to convey a mythic aura, or more specifically, “a shamanistic visitation,”² in which the owl perhaps suggests a human-to-animal transformation. The owl, he explains, is not so much the ominous creature defined in many cultures as a portent of death, but instead is associated here with his Greek heritage, in which the bird is viewed as a symbol of wisdom. Vivid colors, which contribute to the painting’s vibrancy, relate to sound, like the reverberations of owls, or the artist’s favored jazz music. The work’s title, *Caravan*, comes from the Duke Ellington tune of the same name. The spiral bands that lead to the owl, meanwhile, represent an ancient and divine form that Gerakaris says he keeps returning to.³

Altogether, the collage-like, allegorical painting might be described as a dreamscape. Gerakaris, however, says that underlying the painting’s mystic ambiance is its connection to and celebration of wildlife and the environment:

I think that most everyone’s experience of nature is mediated through lenses of culture, whether we have to take in sights through television shows or social media. . . . I genuinely want viewers to feel the excitement that I feel every time I set foot in nature, or see an owl or any kind of animal that inspires connectedness with the nature—that we are a part of it and not apart from it. . . . There are two sides to the work. On the one side there is this kind of ecstatic feeling of . . . the color and dynamic movement of the imagery, which I hope seduces the viewer, but I also hope it might bring them to contemplate their own relationship to the natural world.⁴

The collage aspect of Gerakaris’s paintings is his commentary on our fragmented relationship with what we, as humans, consider “wild.” Through his own fascination with wildlife and environment he has developed a keen awareness of the survival issues that surround a multitude of species. Thus, recognizing that the animals he is so familiar with are in urgent need of our attention, Gerakaris has set out to honor them in the most thought-provoking depictions he can imagine.

—TH

1. Peter Gerakaris, in conversation with the author, December 2020.

2. Ibid.

3. Gerakaris is also a jazz guitarist. Peter Gerakaris, in conversation with the author, December 2020.

4. Ibid.

