

PRESS RELEASE
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A Parliament of Owls Roosting at SB Museum of Natural History

Fall/Winter Exhibit Features 300 Years of Owl Illustration

- Exhibit open October 7, 2022–February 5, 2023
- Included in Museum admission
- More information at sbnature.org/owls

SANTA BARBARA, CA: A captivating display of original antique prints—opening October 7 at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History—traces the history of illustration of the owl family. A group of owls is called a “parliament,” hence the name of this selection in the Museum’s John and Peggy Maximus Gallery. In this exhibition, every bird of prey projects a distinctive personality and presence.

Instantly recognizable and widely occurring everywhere, owls have been popular subjects throughout the recorded history of many cultures. Prominent members of the avian family, owls have been thought to possess wisdom, a sense of mystery, and solitude. Their striking features lend themselves to a variety of interpretations. The prints on exhibit represent 300 years of illustration of owls by important French, English, German, Dutch, Italian, and American artists.

“These were done over a vast span, some by self-taught amateurs,” explains Maximus Gallery Curator Linda Miller. Many of the artists relied on taxidermy models rather than live birds, a circumstance that shows in some of the renderings. From the majestic Great Horned and Snowy Owls to the smaller Short-eared, Burrowing, and Flammulated Owls, these images fascinate with their range and diversity, from crude and eccentric to fully realized and naturalistic. Seeing them displayed together invites comparison of how these charismatic birds have been portrayed over the centuries.

Some artists worked in cottage industry, with different people in the family working together on different parts of the printmaking process. Others came from backgrounds of power and privilege. Together, they contributed to the study of birds.

“The evolution of the science of ornithology relied on the visual language of illustration,” says Miller. “As printing techniques improved and more talented artists became involved in producing works on natural history, the images became more sophisticated.”



Great Horned Owl
by Johann Leonhard Fris

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These visual records of wildlife—produced in an era before photography—helped document and spread information about owl anatomy, and even behavior and ecology. A skilled artist was able to manifest a bird’s special character in a way that a verbal description alone could not.

The exhibition is open October 7, 2022 through February 5, 2023 and is included in Museum admission. Members are always admitted free.

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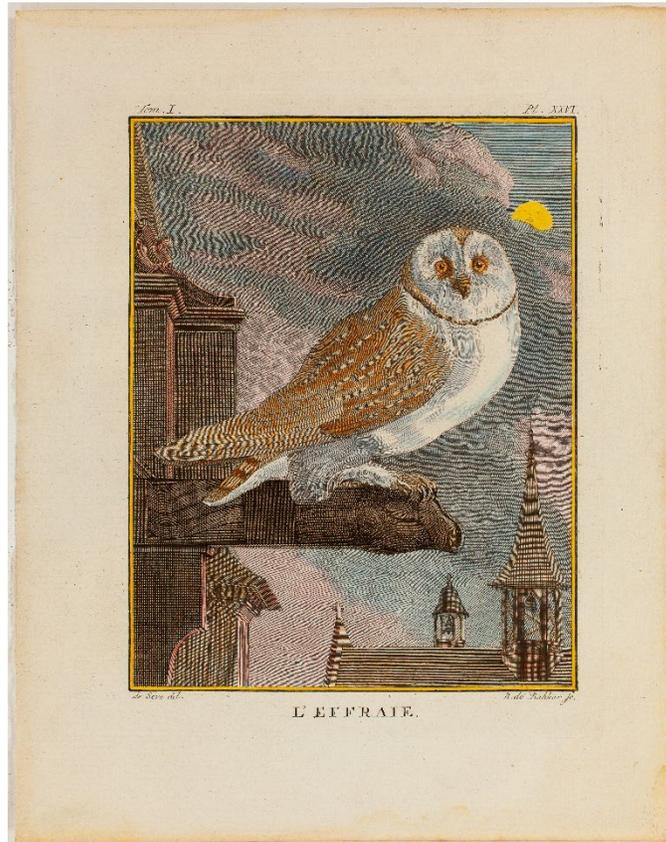
About the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Powered by Science. Inspired by Nature. Founded in 1916, the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History inspires a thirst for discovery and a passion for the natural world. The Museum seeks to connect people to nature for the betterment of both, and prides itself on being *naturally different*. For more information, visit sbnature.org.



Aluco Bianco by Xaviero Manetti

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Barn Owl by George Leclerc Le Comte de Buffon