



BIRDS
IN ART
2024

Claire Duncan, *Uncertain Journey*, 2023, acrylic on handcrafted board

About the Exhibition

Three simple words – birds in art – took on a life of their own when they became a Woodson Art Museum exhibition title. Approaching its milestone 50th anniversary, *Birds in Art* is recognized globally as the exhibition setting the standard for avian art.

Since 1976, the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum has organized *Birds in Art* annually, seeking to present the best contemporary artistic interpretations of birds and related subject matter. Two- and three-dimensional artworks in all media other than crafts and photography are eligible. Approximately 100 works are selected by a three-person jury; see [Birds in Art Prospectus](#) for details. Artwork for the annual *Birds in Art* exhibition is selected in May and opens to the public on the first Saturday following Labor Day.

Birds in Art 2024 Exhibition Fast Facts

Total entries: Over 1,100 entries submitted by over 650 artists around the world

Master Wildlife Artists featured: 22 Master Wildlife Artists (including 2024 Master Gunnar Tryggmo)

Total juried artists featured: 83 artists

Total number of artists featured: 105 artists

Jurors:

- Cameron Shay: Director, Graham/Shay 1857, New York City
- Laura Fiser: Curator of Collections and Exhibitions, Paine Art Center and Gardens, Oshkosh, Wisconsin
- Rachel Poliquin: Author and Naturalist, Vancouver, Canada

Eight Wisconsin Artists

- Shelley Breitzmann, Foxboro, fourth year
- Gary Eigenberger, Green Bay, nineteenth year
- Rebecca Korth, Marshfield, fifth year
- S.V. Medaris, Mount Horeb, fourteenth year
- Robert Martin, Appleton, third year
- Katie Musolff, Fredonia, seventh year
- Don Rambadt, Milwaukee, twenty-fourth year
- Jan Stommes, Owen, fifteenth year

International Artists Representing 11 Countries (*determined by artist's current residence*)

- Australia (Carla Grace, Vida Pearson, Tony Pridham, William Ritchie, Pam Slattery)
- Belgium (Carl Brenders)
- Canada (Chris Bacon, Robert Bateman, Calvin Nicholls, Don Alemany, Lori Dunn, Shannon Reynolds)
- England (Robert Cook, Kirsty May Hall, Andrew Halsen, Alan Woollett, Darrell Warner)
- Germany (Ute Bartels, Eugen Kisselmann, Harro Maass)
- Italy (Federico Gemma)
- Japan (Jim Hay, Nobuko Kumasaka)
- Netherlands (Eric van der Aa, Elwin van der Kolk, Marcel Witte, Alexandra Klimas)
- Scotland (Chris Rose, Derek Robertson)
- South Africa (Peter Gray)
- Sweden (Peter Nilsson, Lennart Sand, Gunnar Tryggmo)

15 First Time Artists

- Lori Dunn (scratchboard)
- Jennifer Felton (wood, bronze, and oil)
- Carla Grace (oil)
- Corinne Geertsen (digital photcollage)
- Sonja Jones (scratchboard)
- Alexandra Klimas (oil)
- Rebekah Knight (oil)

- Matt Patterson (acrylic)
- Rebecca Pugh (acrylic, colored pencil)
- James Rataczak (oil)
- Shannon Reynolds (oil)
- Josh Tobey (bronze)
- Shae Warnick (acrylic)
- Julie Willan (fumage and acrylic)
- Sally Vannoy (oil)

21 Past Master Artists & 2024 Master Artist

Gunnar Tryggmo

- Tony Angell, 2001
- Chris Bacon, 2004
- Robert Bateman, 1982
- Karen Bondarchuk, 2016
- Carl Brenders, 2002
- James Coe, 2001
- Guy Coheleach, 1983
- Cindy House, 2018
- Nancy Howe, 2005
- Walter T. Matia, 2007

- Timothy David Mayhew, 2020
- Terry Miller, 2013
- James L. Morgan, 2008
- Dino Paravano, 1993
- Don Rambadt, 2017
- Andrea Rich, 2006
- Paul Rhymer, 2023
- John T. Sharp, 1996
- Gunnar Tryggmo, 2024
- Kent Ullberg, 1987
- Barry W. Van Dusen, 2014
- Alan Woollett, 2019



Teaching Master Wildlife Artist Gunnar Tryggmo

“I continue to be inspired by nature and in particular by animals and birds in their natural environment. The artwork is characterized to a large part of my natural interest. The values, the mood, and the movement are the most important things in my paintings.”

– Gunnar Tryggmo

Raised in the middle of a forest in Småland, Sweden, surrounded by over 5,000 lakes and rivers, roughly 124 miles of coastline, and 400 nature reserves, its no wonder Gunnar Tryggmo fell in love with the natural world. The forest’s diverse wildlife caught Gunnar’s interest at an early age, becoming a natural source of inspiration. His uncle, Kyosti, who was a skilled landscape painter, took him to his first art show and continued to foster Gunnar’s love of art throughout his life.

As an adult, Gunnar is a lifelong learner, taking inspiration from fellow Swedish artists, Bruno Liljefors, Lars Jonsson, and Anders Zorn, to hone his skills. When people think of wildlife art or art of the natural world, vibrant and realistic images often come to mind. Gunnar breaks this tradition, proving that even watercolor – delicate and soft – can capture powerful scenes.

When creating, Gunnar, like many artists and naturalists, starts with a sketch, photograph, notes, or memories of moments observed in the field. Each of his artworks brings memories to life, acting like a visual diary, to help the viewer to experience nature alongside Gunnar.

Quick Facts About Gunnar Tryggmo

Born: 1969 – Växjö, Sweden

Education: Sundsgårdens College in Rydebäck, Sweden

Years in *Birds in Art*: 2010-11, 2013-17, 2019-23, 2024

Themes: Landscape, wildlife, natural world

Gunnar Tryggmo - View and Discuss



Gunnar Tryggmo, *The Messenger*, 2024, watercolor on Saunders Waterford paper

Calligram (Shaped Poem)

Calligrams have words that are not arranged in horizontal lines like normal writing. They take on interesting shapes and forms that relate to their content.

As a class, take time to discuss *The Messenger* and write down shared ideas, words and phrases. Then, in a small group, use what you brainstormed to create a poem to describe the artwork. Arrange the lines of your poem to outline the raven and create a calligram of your own!

Watercolor Words to Know:

bead: excess moisture that collects when adding paint to a wet area

blotting: using a brush, cloth, or paper towel to control the moisture level or lift small sections of watercolor off the surface

value (tone): the lightness or darkness of a color that defines shapes, often contributing to the realistic depiction of subject matter

Raven Folktales from Around the World

In many cultures around the world, common ravens are associated with folktales, myths, or superstitions. Groups of ravens are often referred to as an “unkindness” or “conspiracy” highlighting how folktales often show them as tricksters, bad omens, messengers, or even creators. Look at Gunnar’s painting *The Messenger* and create a list of character traits that represent the raven. Then, with a partner, listen to one of the folktales below. After listening, work together to make a list of character traits you think describe the raven in the story. Then use markers, colored pencils, crayons, or watercolors to create your own portrait of a raven.

[Why Are Ravens Black? - Sitka Legend](#)

[Raven and Octopus - Told by Tlingit Artist Patrick Price](#)

[Raven: A Trickster Tale from the Pacific Northwest - Told by Gerald McDermott](#)

Teaching S.V. Medaris

“...the purpose of making artwork is to visually educate, show the different species and breeds (dogs, cats, chickens, peafowl, turkeys, and pigs [I have] raised on this farm in the Driftless area of Wisconsin since 1998), and tell visual stories that often expose the drama and/or humor inherent in raising the various livestock for meat or as pets.”

– S.V. Medaris



S.V. Medaris discovered her love of chickens went all the way back to her childhood when she found a photo of herself enamored with the chickens at the L.A. County Zoo. In a 2022 virtual Guest Artist Talk with the Museum, Medaris shared that the two staples of creating art are observation and education, regardless of what form that education comes in. In 1988, she moved onto a farm with her husband and son where she built herself a house, chicken coop, pig hut, and mostly importantly, an artist studio.

S.V. Medaris’ work focuses on animal husbandry, the relationships humans have with livestock, and the unique characteristics of the livestock she interacts with on a daily basis. Her first show in 2004, *A One Chick Show*, emphasized her experience with oil pastel which was the medium that she had the most experience with at the time. Today, however, almost all her works are reduction woodcut prints.

Medaris’ process requires several steps before the work is considered finished. First, she draws the design she plans to cut on the wood block. Once happy with the design, she overlays it with a Sharpie to make it easier to see before sealing the block with shellac to protect the design. Once the wood block is coated in the first layer of ink, a piece of Mulberry paper is added on top of the block and run through a printing press to print the background color. Next, she begins using chisels to chip away portions of the block that she wants to remain the background color and begins adding in small details of the design. The wood block is inked with the next color, sent through the press, and the process is repeated until she is happy with the finished print. This process of carving and printing is repeated and is known as reduction.

Quick Facts About S.V. Medaris

Born: 1962 – United States

Education: University of California, Santa Barbara, Bachelor of Fine Arts (Ceramics); Madison Area Technical College, Graphic Design; University of Wisconsin – Madison, Master of Fine Arts

Years in *Birds in Art*: 2005, 2010-11, 2014-23, 2024

Themes: animal husbandry, farm life, consumption

S.V. Medaris - View and Discuss



Above: S.V. Medaris, *Cockfight In the Henyard*, 2024, hand-colored woodcut on Arches paper

Right: Eastern Han Terracotta Sculpture of a Chicken, 23 CE - 220 CE

Let's Go to the Movies

Movie posters and trailers use graphic, intriguing images to capture attention, just like S.V. Medaris.

Take One: Look at the woodcut, and quickly give your movie a title.

Take Two: What do you see? Think about the characters, setting, and plot. Is your movie an action film? Comedy? Thriller?

Write a 30-second trailer (3-5 sentences.) Persuade others to see your movie by creating the perfect trailer. Pitch your movie to a partner or group.

Words to Know:

woodcut: a type of print made from a design cut into a block of wood

earthenware: ceramic object made from clay fired at low heat

texture: the physical appearance or feel of an object

The Silkie Chicken

Silkie chickens are one of the oldest purebred chickens in the world. Marco Polo wrote in his documentation of his 13th century journeys, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, "[the bird has] no feathers, but hair only, like a cat's fur." During the Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE), emperors were often buried with sculpted earthenware animals, including chickens, to help sustain them in the afterlife. Investigate the Eastern Han terracotta sculpture of a chicken and compare it to the silkie chickens in Medaris' artwork. What do they have in common? Is the texture in Medaris' print similar or different than the texture of the earthenware chicken? What personality traits would you use to describe each of the birds?



Teaching Matt Patterson

“As far back as I can remember, I’ve loved both wildlife and art. As a boy I was always either out fishing, searching for turtles and snakes, or I was painting.”

– Matt Patterson



It’s a unique experience for first time artist Matt Patterson to be painting birds, as many patrons know him as ‘the turtle artist.’ Growing up in rural New Hampshire with a father who was a biology teacher, Patterson was immersed in nature from a very young age. He and his father would often bring different creatures home, becoming a host to a wide variety of animals, including a turtle named Heathcliff and two pigeons named Mel and Leroy. Today, he and his wife continue the tradition of living in a home brimming with natural inspiration, welcoming two snakes and thirteen turtles and tortoises, including a snapping turtle named Fire Chief.

As an adult, this love of wildlife is a key component in Matt Patterson’s life. Patterson’s studio space, called “The Schoolyard”, is a repurposed school building. His studio is actually his former third grade classroom – some of his childhood art even adorns the walls. His art focuses on a single mission of documenting the magnificent animal species throughout the world, raising awareness, and working to help save critically endangered species from extinction.

When working on a new painting, you will find him gathering reference photos knee deep in swampy water or wandering through marsh grass in search of diverse wildlife. Patterson takes inspiration from naturalists like John James Audubon, whose illustrations depicted birds in their natural habitats. After gathering inspiration, he uses coffee to stain the surface of the paper or canvas, emulating the look of an aged map, a callback to the art created by naturalists of the past. He begins drawing, before finally transitioning to paint, building up layers of acrylics and gouache to create his finished artwork.

Quick Facts About Matt Patterson

Born: United States

Education: Art Institute of Boston, Illustration

Years in *Birds in Art*: 2024

Themes: Reptiles, endangered species, conservation

Matt Patterson - View and Discuss



Matt Patterson, *Roseate-Spoonbill*, 2023, acrylic

The Artists Point of View

Become the artist and describe what is happening as you are making *Roseate-Spoonbill*. What did you want to capture? Why did you choose this subject, material, composition, or color? What does this artwork mean to you?

Use the prompts below to help guide you as you write about your experience creating this work.

“I was out walking when...”
“Today I saw something incredible...”

Words to Know:

gouache: type of paint that uses opaque pigments ground in water and thickened with a glue-like substance

illustration: picture or diagram that helps explain an idea, concept, or process

conservation: preventing the wasteful use of a resource

Naturalists and Illustration

The Book of Turtles written by Sy Montgomery and illustrated by Matt Patterson, features the wide world of turtles. As a class, take time to watch the introduction video from Sy Montgomery and Matt Patterson, then scan the QR Code to learn more about the turtle species featured in the video. Make a turtle illustration of your own by picking your favorite species from the list! Just like Matt Patterson, journaling his observations in nature, write down or share observations of the species you picked. Then, create your own scientific illustration including the turtle you chose, its habitat, and two interesting facts you learned about the turtle along the way. When you are finished, present your artwork to a small group or your class!

[HarperKids - The Book of Turtles Introduction](#)

