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Pictures on Stone: American Color Lithography

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PICTURES ON STONE:

William Sharp, VIEW OF THE OPENING FLOWER, 1854, chromolithograph, 15 x 21 in.

AMERICAN COLOR LITHOGRAPHY, 1836-1913

from the

SHELDON MEMORIAL ART GALLERY
AND SCULPTURE GARDEN
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

SEVENTH ANNUAL SHELDON STATEWIDE TOURING EXHIBITION
This hand-colored lithograph produced under Audubon's supervision by J.T. Bowen of Philadelphia was among the first American lithographs from the artist's extraordinary folio of life-sized watercolors entitled *The Birds of America*. Audubon began to collect and draw birds as a child in France. Sent to his father's plantation near Philadelphia at age 18 "to develop a sense of seriousness and responsibility," young Audubon instead found limitless opportunities to observe and explore the natural world that so enchanted him. The famous illustrations resulting from his travels document hundreds of species that abounded in North America. Notice the artist's admirable resourcefulness in deploying the long neck of the Whooping Crane through the picture space.

*American Elk* is among seventy-six drawings produced in watercolor by John James Audubon for *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*, a publication completed during the later period of Audubon's twenty-five years in the United States and its territories. Determined to pursue this project, Audubon wrote, "My hairs are gray, and I am growing old, but what of this? My spirits are as enthusiastic as ever..." In drawing mammals Audubon was expert at rendering the appearance and texture of fur, using pencil, watercolor, ink and scratching. Reproduced from the artist's watercolor by lithographer J.T. Bowen of Philadelphia, these *American Elk* are depicted at 1/7 natural size, in sensitive relationship to their habitat.

Published in London, this hand-colored lithograph provides a record of unusual natural formations painted by Karl Bodmer, Swiss painter-explorer, during an expedition to the American West. In 1832, Bodmer was engaged as an artist by Prussian Prince Maximilian, with whom he traveled nearly 2,000 miles on the Missouri River from St. Louis to Ft. McKenzie, at that time a lonely new outpost in Montana. Maximilian noted in his journal, "The most strange forms are seen, and you may imagine that you see colonnades...little towers, pulpits, organs with their pipes, old ruins, fortresses, castles, churches with pointed towers."

Produced after Bodmer's watercolor, this hand-colored lithograph depicts a Yankton Sioux chief called Big Soldier in battle. Around his neck hangs a large silver peace medal from the President of the United States. Bodmer's portrait captures the sense of pride and dignity of the Sioux at the height of his power.
PICTURES ON STONE: AMERICAN COLOR LITHOGRAPHY, 1836-1913

Art is often defined as the mirror of society. Chromolithography fulfills that definition because it was invented in response to the changing demographics of post-Civil War America. During the period 1860-1900 a variety of social changes transformed America from a small agrarian society to a giant industrial nation poised on the brink of joining the modern international world. Many aspects of American life were imbued with an egalitarian spirit. The new democracy was especially evident in the reformed educational system. For the first time in U.S. history, public schools were mandated for all U.S. children, and land-grant universities (including the University of Nebraska), were established. This broad dissemination of knowledge formerly reserved for the privileged class was now made available to the masses through the increased publication of newspapers, books and posters, and chromolithographs.

The chromolithograph is a printed-color lithograph in which the image is composed of at least three colors, and often more than a dozen, each applied to the print from a separate stone. Unlike tinted lithographs, with their second and third colors casting hues across the print, chromolithography is technically very complex, because it requires perfect registration and a sophisticated understanding of color. Though chromolithography was invented in Germany in 1796, the proliferation of this printed medium in the U.S. occurred during the last decades of the nineteenth century, when reproductions of paintings satisfied the public’s new appetite for culture. Thus chromolithography represents a bridge between artists, intellectuals and the common people. It symbolized the American pursuit of democracy -- the democratization of culture as well as of government. With this rush for culture came the demand for art, and the color lithograph and chromolithograph were major elements in the movement to make the aesthetic available to everyone. Fine art reproductions could now hang in every home, to the dismay of elite social observers who were convinced that culture -- packaged and ready for purchase -- was destined to lead to mental and moral chaos, and the birth of a "smug society of ignoramuses." The escalating demand for original fine art and the resulting development of museums and art galleries can be traced in part to the wide availability of chromolithographs by the turn of the century. Though commercial lithography is today distinguished from fine art lithographs, in the mid-nineteenth-century printing world, the two could not be completely separated. By the turn of the century, the demand for art reproductions waned and the chromolithographic process was applied to commerce. The distinction between fine and commercial art became more explicit, relegating chromolithography to the level of greeting cards and bookmarks. Long before Andy Warhol and Pop Art, chromolithography fused advertising with art reproduction, creating a new hybrid that eventually became the advertising art so fundamental to the twentieth-century mindset.

The twenty pieces in this exhibition include two works from William Sharp’s landmark chromolithograph series of 1854, Victoria Regia: The Great Water Lily of America, a rare complete portfolio, considered one of the most technically and visually beautiful examples of the artistry of chromolithography. Also included is The Old Violin, 1887, a chromolithograph by Frank Tuchfarber after the well-known painting by William Harnett. Several color lithographs by John James Audubon and his son, John Woodhouse Audubon, are seen here, as well as examples by well-known artists Albert Bierstadt, Karl Bodmer and George Catlin. The exhibition includes landscapes, nature studies, portraits, still lifes, and journalistic scenes of battles and buffalo hunts that served to inform, instruct and otherwise enrich the lives of the common American in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Sheldon Statewide succeeds in large part due to the continuing support of the Nebraska Art Association, a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of the visual arts in Nebraska through educational and cultural enrichment opportunities. Of particular importance is Chancellor Graham Spanier's support of the Community Programs Coordinator position. Equally invaluable are the many local sponsors who support the exhibition in their respective communities. Their appreciation of both the immediate and long-range goals of Sheldon Statewide is especially meaningful. Their generosity has enabled tens of thousands of fellow citizens to encounter works of art of the highest quality.

Perhaps the most important component of this collaborative venture is the dauntless effort of the many volunteer docents at each venue. Their willingness to receive new and often complex information and disseminate it to the school children and adults of Nebraska is the vital link that binds together the Sheldon staff, the supporters, and viewers of each Sheldon Statewide exhibition.

Daphne Anderson Deeds
Curator/Assistant Director

Unknown American
19th century
THE NEW DELMONICO HOTEL,
T. GIACOMINI & BRO.
PROPRIETORS
n.d., hand-colored
lithograph
8 x 12 in.
UNL-F.M. Hall Collection
1972.H.1669

Printed for commercial purposes, this hand-colored lithograph advertises The New Delmonico Hotel in Leavenworth, Kansas. The hotel was founded in the late 1860s by Italian immigrants Thomas and Antonia Giacomini and was promoted as a hotel, boarding house, restaurant, saloon and reading room, centrally located across the street from "Market House" where City Hall was housed. Records indicate that several family members were active in the operation of the hotel as clerks and housekeepers as well as residents. Important as a trade center in the 1870s, Leavenworth "drew a constant stream of the famous and the infamous." In 1894 the Giacomini family sold the hotel, and the building is no longer standing.

In 1845, the artist, Lt. Henry James Warre of the Royal Engineers, 14th Buckinghamshire Regiment, accompanied a survey party ordered by the British Government to determine the defensibility of the Oregon region. Warre's scenic watercolor sketches of that journey have been reproduced as lithographic "Sketches in North America and the Oregon Territory." Describing the falls shown here the artist wrote, "...Kamanis-taquoi...is particularly beautiful, tumbling in a narrow gorge, the silent forest alone re-echoing the roar of the cataract."
Educated as a lawyer, George Catlin abandoned his practice after several years to devote himself to portrait painting. After viewing a delegation of Indians passing through Philadelphia, Catlin resolved to "use my art and so much of the labor of my future life as might be required in rescuing from oblivion the looks and customs of the vanishing races of native man in America." Essentially a documentary painter, Catlin produced about 600 Indian portraits and sketches, recording in a primitive style the Native American civilization he encountered west of the Missouri in the 1830s. His scenes of village life, hunts and ceremonies such as Winter Dance, were sketched quickly, intending to convey action, spirit and feeling.

This hand-colored lithograph, after Catlin's painting, portrays the extraordinary drama of the buffalo hunt, a subject of special interest for the artist, a pioneer student of American wildlife. Catlin's written account of the hunt, and the scene depicted here, describe the upper Missouri River Indians' method of attack with bow and lance. Catlin, the scientist, noted every detail of the importance of the buffalo for food, shelter and other aspects of daily life for these people of the Plains. He described the activities of the hunt as "spirited and thrilling in the extreme."

These illustrations, "colored from nature" and lithographed by an unknown artist, were included in a leather-bound booklet distributed by D.M. Dewey, Horticultural Bookseller of Rochester, New York, in 1875. Nursery representatives promoted sales of ornamental trees, shrubs, and flowers grown in the ideal climate of upstate New York with lithographs of this kind. A gift from Olga N. Sheldon, the booklet was once the property of her husband, Adams Bromley Sheldon of Lexington, Nebraska, who with his sister, Mary Frances Sheldon, bequeathed funds for construction of a University of Nebraska art museum, now named in their memory.

Duplicated in "faithful and colorful lithograph" after an oil on panel painting of the "Powerful Chief of the Potawatomies [sic]," this portrait was among a group commissioned by the Superintendent of Indian Trade to record important tribal leaders brought to the nation's capital in the 1820s and 30s. Though the artist's father had been killed by Indians when he was a child, and he had never visited an Indian settlement, he portrayed his Indian subjects with a sense of wonder and profound sympathy. King's portrait of Wa-bauw-see is a sensitive character study, capturing the white man's fascination with the red man's colorful regalia. The headdress is beautifully represented, and the chief is shown wearing a peace medal from President James Monroe.

Charles Bird King's original portrait of Ong-pa-ton-ga, painted circa 1822, and titled Big Elk, or Great Orator, Omawhaw Chief, was reproduced in a hand-colored lithograph by Lehman & Duval in Philadelphia in 1836. King's portraits of nearly 143 Indian leaders were displayed in the Smithsonian Institution where this unique and irreplaceable record was almost entirely destroyed by fire in 1865. Fortunately, most of the artist's portraits had been preserved in lithographic reproductions such as this one. Wearing a buffalo robe and silver peace medal, Ong-pa-ton-ga's downcast gaze seems pensive and somber.

A reproduction of Moran's romantic watercolor vision of the greatest geological evolution of the West, this large chromolithograph depicts a spectacular canyon view. The Grand Canyon was a source of inspiration for the artist for nearly forty years, and his work helped ensure the existence of the federal national park system that protects it today. Moran's painting technique was ideal for chromolithography, a result of his experience with a broad range of works ranging from designs for wood engravings to large, dramatic oil paintings and delicate etchings. He was also an accomplished lithographer who understood the peculiar problems of reproducing original paintings.
This richly-colored illustration by Louis Prang & Co. of Boston, was included in a three-volume set titled, *Animate Creation, Popular Edition of Our Living World, A Natural History* by the Rev. J.G. Wood, published in New York in 1885. Prang came to America from his native Germany, eventually becoming a lithographic printer and publisher employing artists who "worked to his orders." His business grew from one hand-operated press and a few lithographic stones to a "printory" built in 1867 containing fifty presses. As one of America's most famous and financially successful chromolithographers, Prang "devoted his life, in his work and writings, to the concept of art for all, as embodied by the chromolithograph."

Considered one of the outstanding achievements of botanical art depicted in the lithographic medium, Sharp's *Victoria Regia* illustrations were conceived to commemorate the successful cultivation of this water plant in America. First spotted by European explorers in South America, the giant water lily was considered a botanical wonder, with saucer-like leaves measuring six to eight feet spanning the surface of the water. The artist, English immigrant William Sharp, printed the first American chromolithograph in Boston in 1840, prior to the completion of the water lily series in 1854.

Imagine the stunning sight of this night-blooming flower appearing on the water's surface around sunset. As the inner, creamy white leaves appear from within the prickly outer covering of the bud, a heavy scent reminiscent of butterscotch and pineapple fills the air. During the first nocturnal heat, the plant begins to generate heat, a rare plant trait, and the odor becomes almost oppressive. Once started, *Victoria* blooms almost continuously, producing blossoms that may reach twelve to eighteen inches in diameter. Chromolithographer William Sharp's remarkable illustrations reveal a talent for combining factual representation with an aesthetically appealing design.

This rare Tuchfarber chromolithograph, printed on glass, is after William Harnett's popular oil painting purchased by Tuchfarber "as soon as it was unpacked," at the 13th Cincinnati Industrial Exposition in 1886. *The Old Violin* was important to Tuchfarber because the chromo to be made from it could be used both as a sign and as a profitable fine-art reproduction; and the subject matter was personally intriguing because Tuchfarber had worked to found the Cincinnati Grand Orchestral Company (later the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra). A gift of Nebraska Art Association board member Bess Walt in memory of her husband, this chromo hung for many years in Walt's Music Store in downtown Lincoln.

This hand-colored lithograph is an unknown artist's depiction of the town of Decorah, Iowa, as viewed from a bluff over the ice cave (a geological phenomenon where ice deposits form in the summer and melt in the winter) overlooking the upper Iowa River in 1875. The scene portrays the well-ordered tranquility of a rural midwestern community, delineated and lithographed in response to the public's demand for images in color. Lithographs of this sort, printed by the millions, and depicting every subject imaginable, made their way into nearly every home in America in the latter half of the 19th century.

State Historical Society records indicate that German immigrant Rev. Conrad H. Heckman owned his residence close to the present town of Hickman. By mandate of the Federal Railroad Act of 1869, the Burlington and Missouri Railroad was constructed through some of Heckman's land. In 1872, Heckman and another landowner dedicated land to establish a town, named "by unanimous election of the people," in Heckman's honor, "although he entered a protest, and did not desire any such action..." Several blocks of land were given by Heckman to the railroad to establish a station. Railroad maps later showed the name of the town to be "Hickman," as it is now known.
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Sheldon Statewide Program Schedule

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North Platte • October, 1993: The Mall
Local Sponsors: First National Bank, North Platte National
Bank, United Nebraska Bank, North Platte Telegraph,
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McCook • November, 1993: Museum of the High Plains
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Marr Insurance-Ohio National Life Insurance Agency,
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Holdrege • December, 1993: The Phelps County Museum
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Aurora • January, 1994: Alice M. Farr Library
Local Sponsor: Hamilton County Foundation

Grand Island • February, 1994: Grand Island City Library
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Beatrice • March, 1994: Gage County Historical Museum
Local Sponsor: Beatrice National Bank

Columbus • April, 1994: Columbus Art Gallery
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Fremont • May, 1994: Fremont Area Art Association
Local Sponsor: Fremont National Bank and Trust

Cozad • June, 1994: Robert Henri Museum
Local Sponsors: Cozad Arts Council,
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Cambridge • July, 1994: Cambridge Museum
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