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An Engineer Cantonment Bestiary: The Art of Titian Ramsay Peale [Part 6]

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Part 6

An Engineer Cantonment Bestiary: The Art of Titian Ramsay Peale

HUGH H. GENOWAYS AND THOMAS E. LABEDZ

All images in Part 6 appear courtesy of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia

Beginning in the mid-1950s many of Long Expedition artist Titian Ramsay Peale's images have come into institutional holdings, particularly the American Philosophical Society, American Museum of Natural History, and Library of Congress, where they have been made freely available to researchers and for exhibitions.¹ This has allowed a rediscovery and reevaluation of Peale's works by art historians,² historians of science,³ and scientists.⁴ Art historian Barbara Novak listed Peale among the artist-scientists that reached "heroic' status" because of the risks and hardships that he and others undertook in the exploration of the American continent.⁵ Haltman credited Peale and his fellow artist on the Long Expedition, Samuel Seymour, with innovating "such hybrid pictorial forms as wilderness landscape . . . , natural history illustration featuring specimens in representative environments . . . , ethnographic portraiture . . . , and genre painting"⁶

Art historian Amy Meyers placed Peale's landscapes within the convention of the picturesque, which was popular in Britain and America during this time period. In the picturesque convention the artist takes the unfamiliar and renders it to be comprehensible and accessible so that it encourages the entry of the spectator.⁷ As Meyers observed:

Right Above: This beautiful little mammal is the eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*), which occurs in the forests and woodlots of the eastern United States. Nebraska lies at the very western edge of the geographic range of the species and the record from Engineer Cantonment is the northern-most along the Missouri River. This species is still a member of the Nebraska fauna, inhabiting the bluffs and woodlands bordering the Missouri River and its larger tributaries, but no populations are known north of Omaha. (APSimg5729)

By blending the full-fledged landscape with the specimen drawing Peale defines the organism more specifically The emphasis on place in Peale's studies from the Long expedition reveals an interest not only in classification of species but in their geographical distribution.⁸

In fact, from a scientific viewpoint, Peale's images present information on the identifying characteristics of the organism, its geographic distribution, and its ecology. Gall believed that Peale "should be counted as one of America's early lithographers and the first to use the new technique for a zoological publication."⁹ Some of Peale's early animal lithographs were based on work from the Long Expedition.

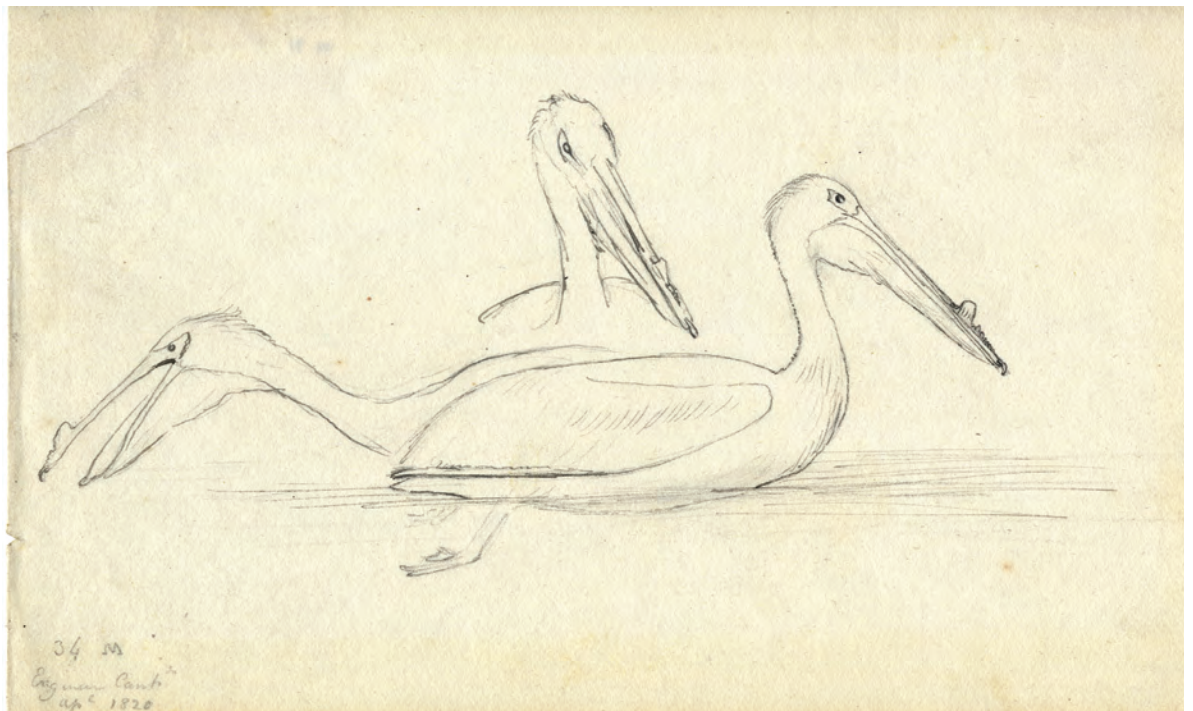
Peale's influence is probably most noticeable among the other, more-widely known artist-naturalists—John James Audubon, Karl Bodmer, and George Catlin. Each of these men had passed through Philadelphia and visited the Peale Museum examining specimens, sketches, and completed paintings resulting from the Long Expedition, prior to their own passages into the west and the territory of the Louisiana Purchase.¹⁰ Charlotte Porter, a historian of science, noted: "These

Right Below: In this watercolor Peale presents the head of a male Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*). Peale gives us a life-like rendering of the head of this beautiful duck with a boldly marked head including white stripes and a pattern of green and purplish extending into its crest. (APSimg5668)




Sciurus striatus L





similarities need not be considered coincidental, for before he went west, [Alfred Jacob] Miller, like George Catlin and Karl Bodmer, visited Peale's museum."¹¹ Porter continued to comment: "Peale's drawing abilities, however, were outstanding, and his studies of mammals collected on the Long Expedition from 1819 to 1820 comprise a large group of illustrations of high quality."¹² Indeed, it is our opinion that the quality of Peale's images of mammals from the Long Expedition are superior to those of any of the other artist-naturalists mentioned here. His images have scientific accuracy as well as an artistic appeal.

The following pages present a 'bestiary' of Peale's zoological illustrations. These works include completed watercolors, works in ink and pencil, field sketches, and detailed studies for later development into completed works. There are also landscapes shown earlier in this volume of Engineer Cantonment and its environs. These landscapes, as well as drawings with backgrounds come to us as 200-year-old "photographs" of the appearance of eastern Nebraska. These are probably the oldest images available for this region and it is fortunate that a person with both a scientific and an artistic eye created them. 

Left Above: In this watercolor Peale records a male and female Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*). Written in a very small handwriting at about "ground level" under the male's tail is the note: "killed near the Ottoe village 14th May 1820." According to the Expedition journal, the permanent village of the Oto nation was: "composed of large dirt lodges, similar to those of the Konzas and Omawhaws, and is situated on the left bank of the river Platte, or Nebraska, about forty miles above its confluence with the Missouri." (APSimg5673)

Left Below: This pencil sketch by Peale is of three American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) providing a study of the posture of the birds while feeding. The nuptial tubercle seen on the top of the bills of Peale's pelicans is a fibrous plate that drops off when the mating season is completed. (APSimg5670)

NOTES

¹ American Philosophical Society "Titian Ramsay Peale Sketches, 1817-1875," Mss.B.P31.15d (Philadelphia: Archives of the American Philosophical Society, 2001), 550.0 items; Delores M. Gall, "Titian Ramsay Peale: An American Naturalist and Lithographer," *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* 38, no. 3 (winter 1983): 6-13; Kenneth Haltman, *Figures in a Western Landscape: Reading the Art of Titian Ramsay Peale from the Long Expedition to the Rocky Mountains, 1819-1820* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1992); Kenneth Haltman, *Looking Close and Seeing Far: Samuel Seymour, Titian Ramsay Peale, and the Art of the Long Expedition, 1818-1823* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008); Robert C. Murphy, "The Sketches of Titian Ramsay Peale (1799-1885)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 101, no. 6 (December 1957): 523-531; Charlotte M. Porter, "The Lifework of Titian Ramsay Peale," *Proceeding of the American Philosophical Society* 129, no. 3 (September 1985): 300-312.

² Gall, "Titian Ramsay Peale: An American Naturalist and Lithographer"; Haltman, *Figures*; Haltman, *Looking Close*; Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007, 3rd ed.); Edward J. Nygren, ed., *Views and Visions: American Landscape Before 1830* (Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986).

³ Charlotte M. Porter, "Bibliography and Natural History: New Sources for the Contributions of the American Naturalist, Titian Ramsay Peale," in *Contributions to the History of North American Natural History*, ed. Alwyne C. Wheeler (London, UK: Society for the Bibliography of Natural History, 1983), 2: 73-84; Porter, "The Lifework of Titian Ramsay Peale," 300-312.

⁴ Hugh H. Genoways and Brett C. Ratcliffe, "Engineer Cantonment, Missouri Territory, 1819-1820: America's First Biodiversity Inventory," *Great Plains Research* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 2-31; Neal Woodman, "The Stephen H. Long Expedition (1819-1820), Titian R. Peale's field illustrations, and the lost holotypes of the North American shrews *Sorex brevicaudus* Say and *Sorex parvus* Say (Mammalia: Soricidae) from the Philadelphia Museum," *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington* 122, no. 1 (January 2009): 117-29.

⁵ Novak, *Nature*.

⁶ Haltman, *Looking Close*.

⁷ Amy R. W. Meyers, "Imposing Order on the Wilderness: Natural History Illustration and Landscape Portrayal," in *Views and Visions: American Landscape Before 1830*, ed. Edward J. Nygren (Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986), 105-131.

⁸ Myers, "Imposing Order on the Wilderness: Natural History Illustration and Landscape Portrayal."

⁹ Gall, "Titian Ramsay Peale: An American Naturalist and Lithographer."

¹⁰ Haltman, *Looking Close*.

¹¹ Porter, "The Lifework of Titian Ramsay Peale."

¹² Porter, "The Lifework of Titian Ramsay Peale."



birds
N^o 1.
Engines Cant^o



Left: This image of a hanging bird by Peale is of a Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*). This illustration also includes a study of the eye of the hawk. The overall appearance of the hawk in the drawing is that of an immature bird, when the eye color is much paler than in the adult. (APSimg2028)

Above: This watercolor shows Greater Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis tabida*) near the Bowyer (=Boyer) River along the eastern side of the Missouri River across from Engineer Cantonment on April 13, 1820. This is the Greater Sandhill Crane based upon the longer bill in proportion the length of the head, which is easily determined based on Peale's drawing. (APSimg2035)

Above: One of Peale's sketches and partial watercolor, which may serve as a study of the species for a later painting, is of a male Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*). Thomas Say described and named this bird in 1823 as new to science based on specimens from Engineer Cantonment as *Pelidna pectoralis*. (APSimg5672)

Below: It is interesting that Peale chose this death pose for his adult male Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*). It tells us some interesting things about the collecting methods being used by members of the Long Expedition. (APSimg5396)



Top: This sketch and beginning of a watercolor by Peale is of an American Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*). The completed characters that are immediately evident are those that undoubtedly identify the bird as an American Tree Sparrow. (APSimg5665)



Below: The muskrats (*Ondatra zibethicus*) shown here are common inhabitants of wetlands, marshes, lakes, streams, and rivers of Nebraska and are distributed widely throughout all of the United States. Peale has depicted this pair of muskrats in a riverine situation, probably the Missouri River or one of its tributaries, oxbows, or slough. (APSimg5722)





Above: This watercolor by Peale is of long-tailed weasels (*Mustela frenata*) demonstrating both summer and winter pelage colors. The background animal is a long-tailed weasel in summer pelage, with a bicolored coat, reddish brown on the back and a very light buff color on the belly. The white animal in the foreground is a long-tailed weasel in winter pelage. (APSimg5730)

Right: This beautiful little rodent is the meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius*). It is easily recognized by its coloration including the dark brown back, yellowish buff sides, and white belly. The hind feet are disproportionately large and are used to make kangaroo-like hops that measure up to three feet. (APSimg5506)





Engineer Campⁿ



Above: Peale's watercolor is of a bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) in repose. The Expedition journal records the following upon the departure of a group from the Omaha Tribe on 7 April 1820: "Before they went, they presented to us a wild cat, which they had shot, but we advised them to keep it to eat on the way home, upon which they thanked us for it . . ." (APSimg5711)

Below: Peale's pencil drawing depicts a North American river otter (*Lontra canadensis*) at an ice hole with a fish as a prey item. The notation in the lower left corner is "Rivière aux Bowyer (=Boyer River), Feb 1820." (APSimg5395)



Above: The American bison (*Bison bison*) is one of the iconic animals of the American west where it formed great herds on the grasslands of the Great Plains. The journal of the trip states: "22nd (Feb). Messrs. Dougherty and Peale returned from a hunt, having killed twelve bison, out of a herd of several hundreds . . ." (APSimg2031)

Right Above: This watercolor presents two American badgers (*Taxidea taxus*). This species occurred throughout the western two-thirds of the United States and adjacent parts of southern Canada and northern Mexico. (APSimg2026)

Right Below: This illustration of two shrews with only limited background is one of Peale's most scientifically valuable works from the Long Expedition. The upper shrew is the holotype of the northern short-tailed shrew, *Blarina brevicauda*, and the lower is the holotype of the North American least shrew, *Cryptotis parva*. These two shrews were described as new to science by Thomas Say based specimens from Engineer Cantonment. (APSimg5387)





AMERICAN ANTELOPE.
Antilocapra Americana Ord.



1/3 Ant. 113.

Left Above: Peale presents a “family portrait” for the pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) showing an adult male and female and a pair of fawns. This is one of the earliest portrayals of the pronghorn and certainly of a family group. The Lewis and Clark Expedition made the pronghorn known to American science when they shot an individual in what is today southeastern South Dakota. (APSimg2039)

Left Below: Peale’s depiction of the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) is probably his least successful execution of a mammal from Engineer Cantonment. It is interesting that color and color patterns are perfect, but the pose with stiff legs lacks the nimble, inquisitive nature of “the fox.” (APSimg5721)

Below: This is the Great Plains wolf (*Canis lupus nubilus*) of western lore, known for hunting and killing bison. Peale has left us the first image of this magnificent animal and it certainly ranks as one of the best illustrations yet available. Peale depicts the wolf feeding on the remains of a male white-tailed deer and it is joined by three Black-billed Magpies. (APSimg5397)

