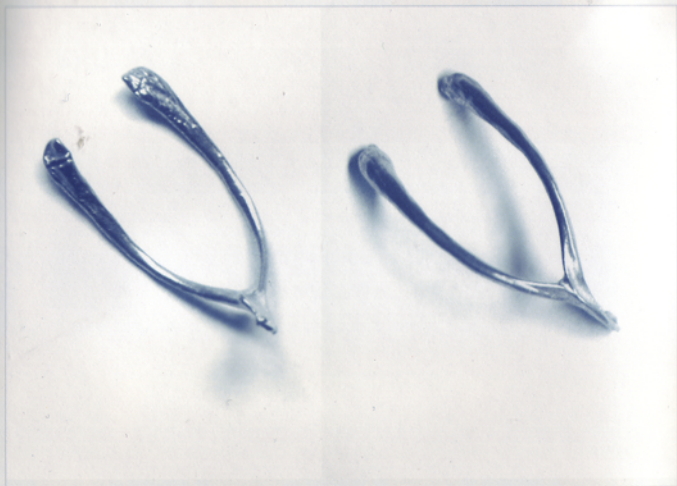




John James Audubon

collected objects & ephemera



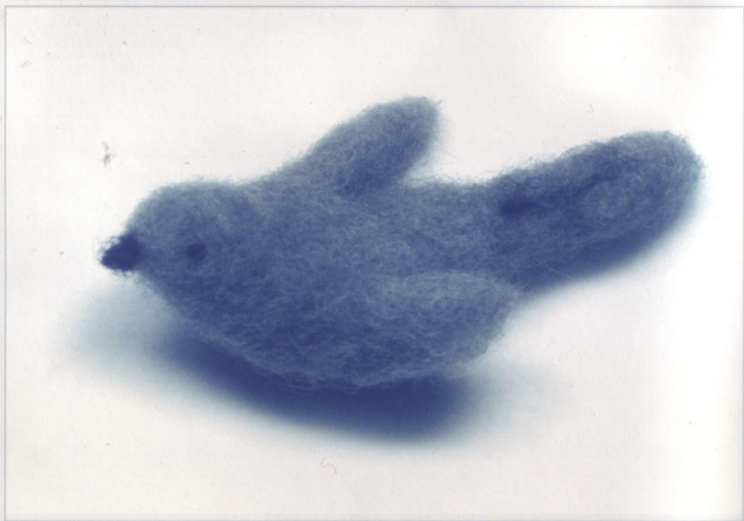
0212. Pewter wish bone

On a riverboat to New Orleans, Audubon challenged a famous gambler to split a wishbone with him. The young and unknown Audubon staked his inheritance, a fortune in French francs, on who would come away with the bigger piece. There were no windows in the boat's dining room, but Audubon could see the subtle movements of the river reflected in his wine glass. When he arrived in Louisiana, Audubon was rich. He had this pewter wishbone made as a reminder that there is no such thing as luck. That truth *does* not lie in miracles or random acts of fate, but in the laws of living things, in bones and rocks.



0311. Eastern Bluebird

Audubon's final scientific ocean voyage lasted a year. He was never lonely, as he was accompanied by his dog, two tail-less cats, and three hundred Eastern Bluebird chicks. Audubon raised them in his cabin with the time and patience that only the sea can afford. One morning, to the amazement of the crew, he brought the birds up onto the deck and opened their cages. The birds circled the boat until Audubon whistled sharply, and they returned to him as if pulled by invisible strings. Some of the birds did not survive the expedition. Seymour, the older of the two tail-less cats, was notorious for his poaching.



0410. Felted Bluebird

This felt toy was given to Audubon by his mother when he was a child. He liked to place it side-by-side with taxidermy specimens, to demonstrate a point.



0608. *Threads, red and silver*

Audubon once shot an antler-less deer and discovered a tiny key inside its stomach. He had no way of knowing where the key had come from, or what it might unlock, but he kept it anyway. It was strange to find this piece of another man's life so deep in the woods. After Audubon's death his sons received a box of valued possessions including this key, which came with no explanation. Audubon's children tried to find the meaning of this mysterious key, with the hope that it might reveal some insight into their father. After searching for months they discovered that it opened the drawer of a desk in his attic, but to their utter disappointment all they found inside was this knot of red and silver strings.



0806. Tube of watercolor paint

Far from home, broke, hungry, and with nothing but his art supplies and a gun, John James Audubon arrived in Oxford, Mississippi. To make a little money, he advertised himself as a portraitist. The city's new mayor called Audubon to his office, and commissioned a dramatic oil painting. But the moment Audubon put brush to paper, he froze. He'd drawn birds exclusively for so long, and forgotten how to draw humans. At the end of the afternoon, Audubon had no choice but to present the mayor with a detailed rendition of a pelican sporting a top hat and cane. Though Audubon was forced to skip town to avoid arrest, he received a kind note from the mayor years later. It seems that after the success of *Birds of America*, the mayor's portrait increased in value ten-fold.



1004. Pewter teeth (replicas)

Audubon did not consider himself to be conceited, but he also thought of himself as a beautiful man. He was tracking an eagle near his home in Pennsylvania when his horse stumbled on some loose rocks, and sent him tumbling from his mount. Audubon lay there, stunned and bleeding, listening to the sound of the dirt. When he realized that he was missing two teeth on the right front side of his mouth, he became furious and was spurred into action. He dragged himself home five miles. The horse was later killed and eaten.



1103. *Compass*

On a freezing morning in December, John James Audubon went for a hike. He chose to trudge South-East, in the direction of his birthplace. Before long he came upon a man half-frozen in the snow. The man's entire body had turned the pale blue color of an Araucana egg. Audubon tossed this stranger handily over his shoulder, and returned to his warm cabin. When the man regained consciousness he tried to offer a reward, but Audubon refused. Though his compass had led him in the direction of the stranger, the choice had somehow not fully been his. It was some other compass that he could not take credit for.