

METROPOLITAN BIRDS (Part 1)

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In Aristophanes' *Birds* Peisthetaerus exclaims:

"O Poseidon, what the mischief!

See the birds are everywhere."

Later on, his guide, the Hoopoe, says:

"Come. Go we in."

To which Peisthetaerus replies:

"Lead on, and luck go with us."

"Birdwatching is not only an intense aesthetic experience, but also a stimulus to the mind and to the imagination," writes H. G. Alexander in his memoir *Seventy Years of Birdwatching*. Thus it is unsurprising that we went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to see how artists have perceived birds. And indeed we found the "birds are everywhere," in countless examples – more than we can cover in one article (so there will be more to come).

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Greek and Roman Galleries

[1972.118.54](#), Gallery 150: Bronze Head of a Griffin (third quarter of the 7th cent. B.C.E.). Some large species of Old World vultures are called griffins, including the Griffin Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*). The scientific name for the Andean Condor is *Vultur gryphus* (griffin-vulture).

[47.100.1](#), Gallery 151: Marble Seated Harp Player (2800-2700 B.C.E.). On the harp is a duck's head. This ancient piece may remind us of Matthew Arnold's poem *Poor Matthias*:

*Was it, as the Grecian sings
Birds were born the first of things
Before the sun, before the wind,
Before the gods, before mankind. . . .*

[1922 \(27:45\)](#), Gallery 156: Grave Stele of a Little Girl: We might ask, "What of the dove?" as did Wallace Stevens in his poem "Sonatina to Hans Christian," but this would lead us, as it does later, into the symbolic meaning of the Dove (*Columba livia*). This marble sculpture (450-449 B.C.E.) with the whispering dove is full of pathos. Keats asked, "Why would you leave me, sweet dove? Why?"

[50.11.1](#), Gallery 156: Bronze Statuette of Athena Flying Her Owl (460 B.C.E.). Known as Minerva by the Romans, Athena represented the entire range of intellectual and moral virtues to the ancient Greeks. Hegel remarked, "When philosophy paints its gloomy picture then a form of life has grown old. It cannot be rejuvenated by

the gloomy picture, but only understood. Only when the dusk starts to fall does the owl of Minerva spread its wings and fly.”

[26.49](#), Gallery 156: Aryballos (ca. 570 B.C.E.). Archaic oil flask, around whose rim Cranes attack Pygmies. The signature of the potter, Nearchos, appears under the handle. As Stanley Lombardo translates from the *Iliad* Book 3:

*The Trojans advancing across the plain
Like cranes beating their metallic wings
In the stormy sky at winter's onset,
Unspeakeable rain at their backs, their necks
stretched
Toward Oceanic streams and down
To strafe the brown Pygmy race,
Bringing strife and bloodshed from the sky at dawn.*

[L.1999.25.7](#), Gallery 156: Terracotta Oinochoe, or wine jug (450-440 B.C.E.), showing the departure of the over-confident Parthenopaios, one of the seven champions who fought against Thebes. The Mannheim Potter, to whom this pitcher is attributed, may have introduced the Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) here because, as rulers of the dark, owls came to be regarded as guardians of the underworld and protectors of the dead. Parthenopaios was slain in battle. The association, also in the Athena statuette in this gallery, persisted in Western culture across the centuries: “It was the owl that shrieked, the fatal bellman, / Which gives the stern'st good-night,” cries out Lady Macbeth, for whom the owl is a portent of the murder of Duncan (2.2.).

[1981.11.10](#), Gallery 157: Attic Terracotta Plate: A boy energetically rides a Cock in this erotic scene, his toes braced against the framing lines. The signature of the potter, Epiketos (ca. 520-510 B.C.E.), appears above the boy's right elbow.

[43.11.6](#), Gallery 153: Limestone statue of a sphinx (550-525 B.C.E.), who seems ready to rise in defense of an Archaic tomb. She was originally colored red and black; her breast feathers contrast sharply with her raptor-like flight feathers. See [1938 \(11.185d\)](#) in Gallery 154 for another stunning example (ca. 530 B.C.E.).

*The Sphinx is drowsy,
Her wings are furled:
Her ear is heavy,
She broods on the world.*

Who'll tell me my secret,

The ages have kept? – Ralph Waldo Emerson.

[1912 \(12.159\)](#), Gallery 158: Marble Funerary Lekythos (oil jug; ca. 375-350 B.C.E.). The mother of the deceased young woman presents a Dove to her younger daughter.

[37.11.817](#), Gallery 158: Ganymede Jewelry (330-300 B.C.E.). The gold earrings depict Zeus, in the guise of an Eagle, abducting the handsome young shepherd Ganymede.

[L.2914.38.3a, b](#), Gallery 162: Bronze Statues of Girls Chasing Pigeons and Partridges (1st cent. B.C.E.- 1st cent. C.E.). “I thought to send a message by the homing birds; / But they flew so fast and high that I could not reach them,” wrote a Chinese poet in the Sui dynasty. (“Pigeons on the grass alas,” sang St. Ignatus in Virgil Thomson's “Four Saints in Three Acts,” with libretto by Gertrude Stein.)

[Mosaic floor](#). This fragment, by Neikias (2nd cent. C.E.), is now hanging on the east wall of Gallery 162: Ganymede offers nectar to Zeus, who is in the form as an Eagle. Around the central picture are a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops supercilliosus*), Peacock (*Pavo cristatus*), Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), and what appears to be a Purple Gallinule or Purple Swamp-hen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*). According to Pliny the Elder, rich Romans did not eat the latter but kept them as ornamental birds. The bird at the bottom center is of unknown species.

[03.14.13 a-g](#), Gallery 167: Fresco Wall Paintings in a *Cubiculum*, bedroom. To the right of the window in a trompe-l'oeil painting are some birds: Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*); Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*). From the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale (ca. 40-30 B.C.E.).

[20.192.3](#), Gallery 167: Wall painting of whimsical Swans from the villa at Boscotrecase (last decade of 1st cent. B.C.E.).

[17.190.2076](#), Gallery 168: Couch and footstool with birds' heads on the finials. (1st-2nd cent. C.E.)

[03.23.1](#), Gallery 170: Etruscan Bronze Chariot Inlaid with Ivory. An Eagle tops the pole of this magnificently preserved conveyance from the late sixth century B.C.E. There are two diving Eagles at the top of the chariot's central panel. It seems that the Etruscans copied the sport of

racing chariots from the Greeks; the Romans from the Etruscans.

Egyptian Galleries

In the preface to his book about the birds of ancient Egypt Patrick F. Houlihan writes that as observed by te Velde “nowhere in the world have animals been drawn, painted or otherwise represented so frequently and in such variety as in Egypt.”

[08.201.1](#), Gallery 102: We may enter the Tomb Chapel of Raemkai (ca. 2381 B.C.E.) with the verse by John Clare:

*Lost in such ecstasies, in this old spot
I feel that rapture which the world hath not,
That joy like health that flushes in my face
Amid the branches of this ancient place.*

John Gaudet, in his book *Papyrus*, explains the importance of it as we see in this tomb: “In ancient days in the Nile Valley, aquatic birds swam or waded along the edges in search of the plentiful aquatic life.... Papyrus swamps, in ancient days as well as today, provide refuge for twenty-two species of Palaearctic and Afro-tropical migrant birds. They are also the preferred breeding grounds and habitat for the Papyrus Gonolek (*Laniarius mufumbiri*) and Papyrus Yellow Warbler (*Chloropeta gracilrostris*), and the feeding grounds for wading birds, including the globally vulnerable Shoebill known in scientific circles as *Balaeniceps rex*.”

On the west wall inside the tomb, the realm of the dead in Egyptian mythology, in the bottom register there is a painting of a large net containing a multitude of birds. An official is signaling to five others to pull shut the net. Egyptians caught vast numbers of birds for food and as pets. These captured birds would probably be mummified and buried as offerings with the dead.

Peter Capainolo, ornithologist at the American Museum of Natural History, has identified the inscribed procession of the birds on the east wall:

Large birds at right: female Gray Crane (*Grus grus*), male Demoiselle Crane (*Anthropoides virgo*), young male Gray Crane, female Gray Crane.

Upper line of birds, from right to left: Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*), White-fronted

Goose (*Anser albifrons*), species unknown, species unknown, male Pintail (*Anas acuta*), female Pintail, species unknown.

Lower line: Teal (*Anser crecca*), Teal, species unknown, species unknown, species unknown, pair of Egyptian Geese (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*), Coot (*Fulica atra*), Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*).

[31.6.8](#), Gallery 103: Facsimile Painting of Egyptian Geese for the Tomb of Neffermaat and Itet (ca. 2075-2551 B.C.E) by Charles K. Wilkinson (1920-21).

[11.154.3](#), Gallery 137: Cornice Block with Relief Showing the Baptism of Pharaoh (41-68 C.E.) by the god Thoth who, as was the custom, has the head of an Ibis (*Threskiornis aethiopicus*). Thoth was often a messenger for the gods, keeper of records; he was credited with inventing writing. It has been suggested that Egyptians saw the curve of the ibis’s beak as a symbol of the crescent moon. James Joyce writes in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, about Stephen Dedalus, “A sense of fear of the unknown moved in the heart of his weariness, a fear of symbols and portents, of the hawklike man whose name he bore soaring out of his captivity on osierwoven wings, of Thoth, the god of writers, writing with a reed upon a tablet and bearing on his narrow ibis head the cusped moon.”

[33.8.18](#), Gallery 135: Netting birds in the tomb of Khnumhotep (1897-1878 B.C.E) exactly reproduced by Nina de Garis Davies (1881-1965) over the south entrance. The official, who is sitting in a papyrus reed blind, is about to close his clap-net of birds. In the center a mimosa tree grows at the edge of the papyrus swamp; it represents the tree of life, for in its branches are perched representatives (beginning at the lower right and going anti-clockwise) of infancy, childhood, adulthood, old age. The three birds on the right face east, associated in Egyptian mythology with being alive. One of them appears to be a Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*), which, according to Houlihan, is extremely rare in Egypt. The adult Masked Shrike (*Lanius nubicus*) at top left spreads its wings. The wise Hoopoe faces west toward the place of the dead. He knows that the sun sets in the west at night and resurrects itself next day in the east.

Above the north doorway are impressive stylized Eagles. “He who seeth the abyss, but

with eagle's eyes – he who seizes the abyss with eagle's talons graspeth the abyss, he hath courage" (Nietzsche). And we are reminded in Exodus (19.4) that God delivered his people out of Egypt and bore them upon Eagles' wings.

[30.4.48](#), Gallery 135: Menna and Family Hunting in the Marches (ca. 1400-1352 B.C.E.). Facsimile by Nina de Garis Davies, dated 30.4.48. Menna, who held the important title of "Scribe of the Fields of Upper and Lower Egypt," holds two Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) as decoys. Above him, and in the water beneath his papyrus skiff, are Egyptian Geese and Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*). The Falcon of Horus, which replaced the supremacy of the Eagle in Egypt, and a Great White Egret (*Egretta alba*) are shown on the northeast wall.

Gallery 134: Faience inlay of the [Sacred Ibis](#) (664-332 B.C.E.) whose beak is supported by a feather. The Ibis is the symbol of Maat, goddess of justice and closely associated with Thoth. According to Houlihan, the bird was last documented in Egypt in 1877. He links its absence to the loss of swampland (papyrus) and human disturbance of its habitat.

[26.7.995](#), Gallery 134: Dynamic faience inlays statuettes in the form of the Horus Falcon (4th cent. B.C.E.), patron god of the kings and son of Osiris. Horus was the precursor of the pharaohs.

[34.2.1](#), Gallery 128: Statue of Horus protecting King Nectanebo 11 (360-340 B.C.E.). The pharaoh is subsumed by the falcon-god, thus enhancing the pharaoh's prowess.

[1985.328.2](#), Gallery 121: Akhenaton Sacrificing a Pintail Duck, carved in sunk relief on a painted limestone block from a temple (1358-1336 B.C.E.).

[20.3.6](#), Gallery 105: Sporting Boat (ca. 1981-1975 B.C.E.). Coots and a Duck are being presented to a noble Egyptian aboard this model of a ship.

[22.1.95](#), Gallery 111: Migrating Geese on the breathtaking "Dolphin Vase" (ca. 1750-1550 B.C.E.).

Islamic Galleries

[63.210.11](#), Gallery 455: The Conference of the Birds (ca. 1600). This wonderful page of a

Sufi tale painted by the Persian Habiballah is not always on view. In it the wise Hoopoe attempts to galvanize his companions to follow the Sufi path by flying in search of the mythical Simurgh and anoint him king of the birds. By tradition Hoopoes act as messengers of the gods.

[46.128](#), Gallery 462: On the unusual yellow field of the huge Anhalt medallion carpet (first half of the 16th cent.) strut 12 glorious Peacocks. In Sufi legend the original spirit was a peacock. When he saw his reflection in a pool of water he was so overcome by his own beauty that beads of perspiration fell from him. From these beads other creatures were created. Surely this carpet was not made to be walked upon.

[49.32.99](#), Gallery 462: Silk Fragment with Rosebush, Bird, and Deer Pattern. (17-18th cent.) A Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) perches in the flowering bush. A Nightingale (*Lucinia megarhynchos*), the national bird of Iran, flies toward the oversized roses.

[1972.189](#), Gallery 462: Tent panel with hunting scene showing a Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) and Duck made in Tabriz (ca. 1540) in northwest Iran. It was left behind inside a Turkish tent at the seizure of Vienna in 1683.

[52.20.12](#), Gallery 426: Silk panel of Safavid courtiers leading Georgian captives (mid. 16th cent.), while from a tree the mythical Simurgh bird observes. A propaganda piece to encourage faith in the Sufi Safavid hierarchy, which ruled Persia from 1502 to 1736.

[46.156.5](#), Gallery 462: Silk fragment depicting a young man attending to a Falcon (early 17th cent.) and suggesting the intensity of the training of the Lanner Falcon (*Falco biarmicus*).

South Asia Galleries

[1974.2909](#), Gallery 463: In this folio by Abn'l Qasim Firdausi (935-1020) Kai Kavus falls from the sky after attempting to fly up to heaven with the help of Eagles. The shah's fall will be cushioned by a bed of flowers. This folio is not always on view.

[2006.259](#), Gallery 463: Ivory Panel from a Cabinet with Flowers and Birds (late 17th cent.). This exquisite Islamic piece comes from India or Sri Lanka.

[1971.263.3](#), Gallery 453: Fragment of an Animal Carpet (16th cent.) from northern India showing Parakeets, which Indians sometimes regarded as storytellers and the keeper of secrets. In *The Bird with the Coppery Keen Flams* Wallace Stevens wrote:

*Above the forest of the parakeets,
A parakeet of parakeets prevails,
A pip of life amid a mort of tails.*

[17.190.858](#), Gallery 463: Carpet with Palm Trees, Ibexes, and Birds (late 16th cent.-early 17th cent.). Although this carpet was made in Lahore, Pakistan, the animals and the birds were ones seen in Persia: European Roller (*Coracias garrulus*), Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*), and perhaps White-crowned Penduline Tit (*Remiz coronatus*).

[55.121.10.12](#), Gallery 463: Red-headed Vulture (*Sarcogyps calvus*) and Long-billed Vulture (*Gyps indicus*) watercolor (ca. 1615-20) by Mansur who was the leading nature painter at the court of the Mughal emperor Jahangir. Both of these species are critically endangered today.

Cypriot Galleries

[74.51.2766](#), Gallery 176: Limestone statuette of a Temple Girl with Dove (3rd cent. B.C.E.-1st cent. C.E.). It is rare to see a girl as opposed to a temple boy; see next entry.

[74.51.2756](#), Gallery 176: Limestone Temple Boy (1st quarter of the 4th cent. B.C.E.).

[74.51.2461](#), Gallery 175: Limestone statue of a bearded man (ca. 475-450 B.C.E.), who is about to offer a Dove to a deity. The dove was often connected with fertility.

[74.51.2848](#), Gallery 174: Limestone head of a man (last quarter of the 6th cent. B.C.E.), who, mysteriously, wears a Dove on his helmet-shaped cap. An aside: Legend has it that foam-born Aphrodite arose from the sea and walked ashore at Paphos onto the island of Cyprus. In the *Metamorphoses* Ovid writes, "Aphrodite carried by her doves across the sky, reached the Laurentian coast."

[74.51.2453](#), Gallery 174: The once colorful Sarcophagus from Amathus (2nd quarter of the 5th cent. B.C.E.) is adorned by four sphinxes. It is, arguably, the single most important object in the famed Cesnola Collection of Cypriot antiquities.

[74.51.509](#), Gallery 174: Terracotta Jug with two figures turning to look at birds behind them (750-600 B.C.E.).

[74.51.517](#), Gallery 174: Terracotta Barrel with Strainer (750-600 B.C.E.) displays a large bird in flight with talons drawn up.

[74.51.527](#), Gallery 174: Terracotta Jug (ca. 750-600 B.C.E.) with a remarkable design upon it of a bird catching a fish.

[74.51.511](#), Gallery 174: Terracotta Jug with a Ship (750-699 B.C.E.). This elegant ship has a bird's head at its stern.

[74.51.1548](#), Gallery 173: Terracotta Statuette of a Woman with the Face of a Bird (ca. 1450-1200 B.C.E.).

[74.51.1435](#), Gallery 171 in the Leon Levy and Shelby White Galleries on the mezzanine floor: Cypriote terracotta rattle (?) in the form of an Owl (1600-1450 B.C.E.).

[67.11.23](#), Gallery 171: Terracotta skyphos (Greek deep drinking cup; ca. 460 B.C.E.) showing Aphrodite holding a Goose, symbol of love.

Byzantine Art

[L.2000.74.3](#), Gallery 300: Peafowl flank a menorah. Temple instruments are also incised on this marble plaque from Asia Minor (300-700).

[1986.3.15](#), Gallery 300: This silver Dove was made in Attarouthi, Syria (late 6th-7th cent.). From its beak once dangled a cross. When St. John recorded in his gospel, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him" (1.32), he was baptizing Jesus.

[61.111a,b](#), Gallery 301: Hanging lamp in the form of a Peacock (500-700). Because of an ancient belief that the flesh of a peacock never decayed, it became a Christian symbol of immortality and Christ's resurrection.

Medieval and Early Renaissance Art

[47.101.60](#), Gallery 304: Statuette of Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*) (1200-1220). In the 1240s Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, with whom this piece may be associated, wrote a book on ornithology and falconry.

[30.30](#), Gallery 304: Relief panel showing griffins drinking from a chalice (9th cent.). These mythical creatures with the head and wings of an

Eagle and the body of a lion came to represent the divine and human nature of Christ.

[2013.268](#), Gallery 304: Marble Relief of an Imaginary Bird (900-1100).

[17.190.344](#), Gallery 305: Eucharistic Dove (1215-35) from Limoges. Consecrated bread of the mass could be placed in the cavity of its body, which would be hung over an altar.

[53.37](#), Gallery 305: The Intercession of Christ and the Virgin (painted before 1402; attributed to Lorenzo Monaco). A dove appears over the heads of Jesus and his mother, who appeal to God to show mercy to a Florentine family. The Dove, being dispatched by God, completes the Holy Trinity of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Spirit).

[41.190.107](#), Gallery 305: Hunting with a Hawk (1515-35). The artist of this tapestry from the South Netherlands accurately shows the folded wings of the hawk before takeoff.

[41.190.228](#), Gallery 305: Hunting of Birds with a Hawk and a Bow (1515-35) is a companion tapestry to the one above.

[41.100.196](#), Gallery 305: Shepherd and Shepherdesses with a Pheasant (1500-1530) in South Netherlandish floral scene.

[20.42](#), Gallery 305: Oak Lectern from France for reading Christian scripture (1475-1525) takes the shape of an Eagle. The eagle was the attribute of St. John the Evangelist.

[16.32.178](#), Gallery 305: Beauteous alabaster Crucifix (1450) from South Netherlands with delicately carved Eagle. The eagle became a medieval symbol of Christ's ascension.

[18.70.28](#), Gallery 305: Lectern for the Reading of the Gospels with the Eagle of St. John the Evangelist by Giovanni Pisano (1301) from Pistoia.

[64.101.1498](#), Gallery 307: Netherlandish brass Plate with Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) piercing her breast to feed her young. The pelican was thought to have the greatest love of all creatures for its young and thus became a symbol of Christ's crucifixion. Christians associate this interpretation with verse 6 of Psalm 102, "I am like a pelican of the wilderness."

[39.153](#), Gallery 501: *Studiolo* from the Ducal Palace at Gubbio. This treasure from the Italian Renaissance made of wood inlay (*intarsio*) contains the images of a large, caged Parrot and

an Ostrich (*Struthio camelus*). The latter holds a spearhead in its beak, which represents victory in the face of adversity. Inside a cupboard a crowned Eagle sits on top of Federico da Montefeltro's helmet.

Musical Instruments of the World

[89.41619](#), Gallery 681: Densho. Japanese temple bell (19th cent.) topped by an Eagle. In China similar bells were employed to summon Buddhist monks. The striking of the bell represented the receptive sound of *ying* energy; it was often preceded by the creative *yang* sound made by beating a drum.

[207.194 a-f](#), Gallery 681: Japanese *Koto* with Case. This is the jewel in the crown of the Crosby Brown Collection, the most historical and comprehensive collection of musical instruments in the world. On the instrument (early 17th cent.) there are Cranes; on the nineteenth-century black, lacquered case there are gold *maki-e* Cranes (symbol of the Karasumaru family) and Geese. The instrument was made by Goto Teijo, a ninth-generation koto master.

[89.4.163](#), Gallery 681: Mayuri (peacock) bowed lute from India (19th cent.). When played, the feet of the Peacock (mayuri is its name in Sanscrit) rest on the ground. The bird is known as the vehicle of Sarasvati, the Hindu goddess of music, as well as other arts, wisdom, and learning.

[89.4.169](#), Gallery 681: Sursanga, or lute, from Bengal with Duck's head (1880). It was presented to the museum by the accomplished musicologist Raja Sir Sourindro Mohun Tagore, an elder relative of the writer Rabindranath Tagore.

European Sculpture and Decorative Arts

[07.287.12.13](#), Gallery 544: The Annunciate Virgin (1552). Above the archangel Gabriel's right shoulder the omnipresent Dove of the Holy Spirit is beautifully depicted in this glass-stained window made in Paris for a church in Normandy.

[16.32.299-304](#), Gallery 544: Six panels of an oak choir screen (1540-10) with imaginary birds.

[1971.206.39](#), Gallery 530: Linnets (*Acanthis cannabina*) attend to their chicks in this wondrous floral still-life relief in lime wood by Aubert Parent (1785).

The Wrightsman Galleries

[07.225.14a,b](#), Gallery 545: Above the entrances inside this gallery are carved and painted (on oak and linden wood) representatives of astronomy and geography (ca. 1775) in the forms of a celestial sphere and a terrestrial globe. The Cock of France alludes to Louis XV1 and the Eagle to his Austrian wife, Marie Antoinette.

[50.211.110](#), Gallery 545: Grey Partridges (*Perdix perdix*) on the cover of a faience bouillon bowl.

[17.190.1910](#), Gallery 545: Basin with a robust scene of Leda and the Swan (1753-95) from Sceaux.

[2008.529,530](#), Gallery 545: Pair of Sevres vases (1789) with decorative birds.

[68.141.285a, b](#), Gallery 545: Blue Tits (*Parus caeruleus*) on a delightful bowl with cover from the Meissen Manufactory (1734) with golden handles.

[54.147.25a,b,26](#), Gallery 545: Mustard pot and stand from the Vincennes Manufactory (1732-53) with Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*).

[1976.155.156](#), Gallery 545: Potpourri vase with Mallards from the Vincennes Manufactory (1753-54).

[2007.90.3,4](#), Gallery 526: Pair of three-light candelabra (ca. 1750) from the Meissen Manufactory; models for the Bitterns (*Botaurus stellaris*) attributed to Joahann Joachim Kandler.

[53.217.4](#), Gallery 524: Grey Partridges on the modern silk brocade covering of a carved and gilded beech armchair (one of a pair; 1768-79).

[1976.155.162](#), Gallery 529: Gloriously-colored birds on a punch bowl (1771-72) from the Sevres Manufactory.

Wrightsmen Galleries: Sculptural and Decorative Arts in Central European 1700-1800

[50.211.8](#), Gallery 533: Chinoiserie dish and bird made by the Du Paquier factory in Vienna (1722-1723).

[54.147.97](#), Gallery 533: Chinese man threatened by fowls of the air. Vase decorated by Ignaz Preissler (Konstadt, present-day Kunstst; ca. 1729-32).

[1974.356.323](#), Gallery 533: Chinese man with a colorful bird (1725-1730), attributed to George Fritzsche, early Meissen Manufactory. The Meissen Manufactory, near Dresden, made approximately life-size models of birds and animals for its owner, Augustus 11 the Strong, Elector of Saxony (1670-1733), to be displayed in his Japanese Palace. To create their hard-paste porcelain models Johann Joachim Kandler (1706-1775), and other artists copied from life the birds kept at the royal aviary at Schloss Moritzburg as well as from preserved specimens. In Gallery 533 birders will be fascinated by a floor-to-ceiling vitrine filled with these models.

[64.101.11,12](#): (1.) Pair of Mistle Thrushes (*Turdus viscivorus*). (2.) [1974.356.340](#): Pair of Rose winged Parakeets. (3.) [1976.155.127](#): Parakeet. (4.) [1976.155.124](#): Cockatoo. (5.) [1974.356.334](#): Parrot. (6.) [64.101.37](#): Common Waxwing (*Bombicilla garrulus*). (7.) [64.101.17](#): Parrot. (8.) [1976.155.122](#): Pair of Kingfishers. (9.) [1982.380](#): Parrot group. (10.) [64.101.35](#): Pair of Pied Wagtails (*Motacilla alba*) (No image available). (11.) [1976.155.133](#): Pair of Parrots resembling Pale-headed Rosella (*Platycercus adscitus*). (12.) [1974.356.326](#): Pair of Hoopoes. (13.) [1974.356.398](#): Juvenile Lesser Blackback Gull (*Larus fuscus*). (14.) [64.101.8](#): Magpie (*Pica pica*). (15.) [1976.155.146](#): Pair of Mallards.

[50.211.190](#), Gallery 533: Parrot resembling a Turquoise Parrot (*Neophema pulchella*) and Grey Partridge on a jug (Enghalskrug) by Bartholmaus Seuter (1720).

[50.211.188](#), Gallery 533: Faience plate with birds (ca. 1730), possibly by Joachim Leonhard Wolff at the Ansbach Pottery and Porcelain Factory known for its “carp pond” pattern.

[1974.356.501](#), Gallery 533: Rooster and Hen on a small tray from the Meissen Manufactory (ca. 1725).

[1974.356.347](#), Gallery 533: Porcelain model of a European Roller from the Meissen Manufactory (ca. 1733).

Annie Laurie Aitken Galleries of English Decorative Arts

[32.53.1](#), Gallery 519: Two magnificent plasterwork Eagles, attributed to Thomas Roberts (1748), on the walls of a dining room from Kirtlington Park, Oxfordshire.

[58.75.1.1-22](#), Gallery 516: Common Cranes, Doves, Scarlet Macaws (*Ara macao*), and Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) appear on a tapestry designed by Robert Adam and woven at the Royale Goblins Manufactory in Paris. Tapestry room from Croome Court, Worcestershire (installed 1771).

[64.101.1155](#), Gallery 514: Cheval fire screen (ca. 1755-60) attributed to Thomas Moore. Scarlet Macaw.

Robert Lehman Collection

(Asterisk denotes the Jack and Belle Linsky Collection)

At the entrance to the Robert Lehman Collection is the painting Madonna and Child with Saints, [1920 \(20.92\)](#), by Girolamo dai Libri (ca. 1520). Vasari wrote about this painting, which once hung above the altar in the church of San Leonardo nel Monte outside Verona: "This tree, which has the appearance of a laurel, projects considerably with its branches ... the tree seems to be truly a living one, graceful and most natural. Very often, therefore, birds that have entered the church by various openings have been seen to fly to the tree in order to perch upon it." The Peacock on another (dead) tree is the symbol of immortality.

[1975.1.1061](#), Gallery 950: Apothecary jar (1431?) perhaps from the workshop of Guiuta di Tugio. The Crane is symbolic of vigilance, a fitting attribute for a pharmacist.

[1975.1.1083](#), Gallery 950: Leda and the Swan on a plate, perhaps from the workshop of Guido Duarntino (1530-40).

*A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.* – W.

B. Yeats

[1982.60.11](#),* Gallery 537: Leda and the Swan by Francesco Bachiacca (ca. 1520).

[1957.1.2279a,b](#), Gallery 951: Meissen covered jug with what resembles a Large Niltava Blue Flycatcher (*Niltava grandis*). At about the same time when this jug was made (ca. 1760), Christopher Smart was writing in his poem *Jubilato Agno*, "For nature is more various than observation though observers be innumerable."

[1957.1.78](#), Gallery 952: Madonna and Child Enthroned with Two Donors by Lorenzo Veneziano (ca. 1360). George Szabo, a former curator, described the European Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) in this painting as being "gingerly perched on the thumb of the Madonna's raised left hand," an action that may signify that the painting is a votive offering for her intercession on behalf of a sick child.

[1975.1.65](#), Gallery 952: The Crucifixion by Andrea Cione (Orcagna), and Nardo di Cione (1365). Above the cross is a White Pelican on her nest, who is piercing her breast to feed her three chicks with her own blood. This act of generosity alludes to Christ's sacrifice.

[1975.1.113](#), Gallery 953: The Annunciation by Hans Memling (ca. 1480-1489). The foreshortened Dove of the Holy Spirit hovers over Mary in this masterwork.

[1975.1.120](#), Gallery 953: Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin Annunciate by Gerard David (ca. 1510). From the third century there was a legend that Mary was impregnated through her ear by the words of the angel or by the Holy Spirit, represented here as a Dove.

[1975.1.27](#), Gallery 956: St. Anthony Abbot Tempted by a Heap of Gold by the Osservanza Master (ca. 1435). The gold paint on the desert has been scraped away. What might have meant to be Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) fly overhead.

[1975.1.42](#), Gallery 956: Madonna with Saints Jerome, Bernardino, St. John the Baptist, and Anthony of Padua and Two Angels by Sano di Pietro (1465-70). Here a rather washed-out Goldfinch seems to have too small a head.

[1975.1.29](#), Gallery 959: The Virgin Annunciate by Andrea Delito (1445-50?). The Dove of the Holy Spirit, enveloped in a nimbus, approaches the shy Virgin.

[1975.1.77](#), Gallery 959: The Annunciation by Alesso di Benozzo (ca. 1490-1500). Gabriel alights before Mary. At top left one can see the

hands of the Almighty who has directed the Dove of the Holy Spirit to her.

[1975.1.1912](#), Gallery 959: The Falcon Hunt (ca.1445-50?), a tapestry from the Southern Netherlands. Helen Macdonald, writing about training her Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), says in her book, *HI for Hawk*, “Hunting with the hawk took me to the very edge of being a human. Then it took me past that place to somewhere I wasn’t human at all.”

Italian and European Paintings

Artists in Italy used the Goldfinch and the Barn Swallow as symbols for the resurrection from the second half of the thirteenth century until about the third quarter of the sixteenth century. The Goldfinch might also represent fertility and protection from disease (in particular, the plague). As mentioned earlier, the Dove is omnipresent as representing the Holy Ghost (Spirit).

[41.100.33](#), Gallery 602: The Trinity by Agnolo Gaddi (ca. 1390). The Dove of the Holy Spirit perches with unfurled wings upon the cross of the crucified Christ. God, the Father, firmly holds the cross with his hands.

[41.100.10](#), Gallery 603: The Nativity by Jacopo del Sellaio (late 1480s). The Christ child clutches a Goldfinch with one hand and the mantle belonging to his mother with the other. Herbert Friedmann, in his book *The Symbolic Goldfinch: Its History and Significance in European Devotional Art* tells of a persistent legend, “that of the Christ Child playing with toy or clay birds which His companions brought to Him, and which He miraculously brought to life. This bringing to life quickly came to stand for the idea of Resurrection.”

[49.7.2](#), Gallery 606: Madonna and Child, from the workshop of Giovanni Bellini (ca. 1490). The Christ Child holds a Barn Swallow. Friedmann writes, “The swallow, long considered as a sign of spring, of the rebirth of the year, was assumed to hibernate in the mud through the winter and then become revitalized with the advent of warm weather. The similarity between the idea of the dormant mud-encrusted swallow and the clay bird [held by the Christ child] is obvious.”

[11.118](#), Gallery 606: Meditation on the Passion by Vittore Carpaccio (ca.1490). This enigmatic painting shows a bird resembling a Crag Martin (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*), soaring above the head of Christ as a symbol of the resurrection. Between Christ and Job is a Red Parrot (*Chalcopsitta cardinalis?*). On the left sits St. Jerome, who wrote a commentary of the Book of Job and who was, as someone once said, cursed with a feeling for prose. Above his lion, to the left of the broken throne, is an overlarge Goldfinch. Friedmann observes, “This is the only painting in which I have found the goldfinch in which Christ is shown as older than a small child, but I doubt if the bird has any particular symbolic meaning here.”

[41.100.3](#), Gallery 606: Madonna and Child with Saints Francis and Jerome by Francesco Francia (ca. 1500-10). While in the arms of his teenage mother, Jesus holds a Goldfinch captive in his left hand.

Italian Earthenware and Austrian Sculpture

(Asterisk denotes the Jack and Belle Linsky Collection)

[46.85.22](#), Gallery 604: A dramatic Peacock decorates this storage jug from Pesaro (ca. 1470-1500).

[65.6.2](#), Gallery 604: Two-handled storage jug with crowned Eagles (ca. 1460-80).

[1982.60.123](#)* Gallery 537: Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) on a Frog (1620). Bronze figurine of an owl, who is looking forward to his next meal.

Italian and European Paintings (cont.)

[43.98.1](#), Gallery 625: The Journey of the Magi by Sassetta (ca. 1433-35). In this fragment the stylized rendering of the migrating Common Cranes (*Grus grus*) above the three Magi contrast with the two earthbound Ostriches on the hill to the left. The egg of the ostrich, and thus the ostrich itself, came to be associated with the miraculous birth of Jesus because of Job’s statement that the ostrich “leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in dust” (39.14). There are clearly defined Goldfinches on the right, one on the ground and the other one on the wing about to pick food from a plant. As its

Latin name, *Carduelis carduelis*, suggests, the goldfinch is fond of eating the seeds of thistles – and by extension thorns. It is said that the European Goldfinch acquired its red face from the blood of Christ when it attempted to pluck at the crown of thorns his captors had thrust upon him. There is a hunting Falcon on the fist of the horseman dressed in pink.

[06.1046](#), Gallery 625. Paradise by Giovanni di Paolo (1445). Sadly, despite the Sieneese penchant for details, it is notable that no bird appears in paradise.

[49.7.5](#), Gallery 627: Madonna and Child by Carlo Crivelli (ca.1480). Both the enchanting, porcelain-faced Madonna and the child look down at the Goldfinch, symbol of redemption, held by the child with both hands. To the child's right on a balustrade is a housefly, symbol of the Devil, Lord of Flies, harbinger of disease. Herbert Friedmann notes, "As though to convey still further the disease-repelling symbol of the juxtaposition of the goldfinch and the fly, Crivelli has strung along the top of the picture some apples, symbol of death, and a gourd, the antidote for the apples, symbol of recovery and redemption and anti-plague."

[1982.60.6](#),* Gallery 537: Madonna and Child with Two Angels by Vittore Crivelli (ca. 1481-82). Carlo Crivelli's younger brother has introduced a three-dimensional embellishment to his painting of these pensive figures. Jesus holds a well-defined Goldfinch.

[1999.225](#), Gallery 607: St. Catherine of Alexandria in Prison by Paolo Veronese (ca. 1580-85). The Holy Spirit, in the form of a strikingly foreshortened Dove, comforts the saint.

[2011.26](#), Gallery 609: The Holy Family with the Infant St. John the Baptist by Perino del Vega (ca. 1524-26). Jesus holds a Goldfinch in one hand and in the other a cherry, which suggests the delights of the blessed.

[2000.420](#), Gallery 609: Madonna and Child by Francesco Granacci (ca. 1520). Jesus holds what resembles a Crag Martin more than it does the traditional Barn Swallow.

[1970.134.2](#), Gallery 609: St. John the Baptist Bearing Witness from the workshop of Francesco Granacci (ca. 1506-07). Sixteen Doves accompany Jesus and his disciples. Granacci's

young friend and fellow Florentine Michelangelo may have provided drawings for this scene.

[1971.155](#), Gallery 623: The Coronation of the Virgin by Annibali Carracci (after 1595). A Dove represents the Holy Ghost in this outstanding painting of rich color and lighting.

[1981.186](#), Gallery 622: The Baptism of Christ by Sebastiano Ricci (ca. 1713-14). The Dove of the Holy Spirit is prominently shown in this vigorous sketch.

[37.165.4](#), Gallery 622: Neptune and the Winds by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1764?). Swallows sail through the air. In his thought-provoking and sometimes lyrical book *Birdscapes*, Jeremy Mynott lets the Scottish poet Andrew Young describe the flight of the hirundines:

The swallows twisting here and there

Round unseen corners of the air.

[1980.363](#), Gallery 622: The Apotheosis of the Spanish Monarchy by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1752). Jupiter (Zeus) is shown accompanied by his messenger, the marvelous Golden Eagle.

[1977.13](#), Gallery 622: Allegory of the Planets and Continents by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1752). The four continents harbor Ostriches, Peacocks, and Swans.

[1997.117.7](#), Gallery 622: The Chariot of Aurora by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1762?). There are two swans on the right of this oil sketch.

[1984.191](#), Gallery 191: The Tame Magpie by Alessandro Magnasco (1707-8). One wonders what the bird is declaiming. According to the *Collins Pocket Guide Birds of Britain and Europe*, the Magpie has "no true song; babbling subsong rare, but a musical 'chook, chook' during spring display. Chief call a loud harsh chatter or chuckle, but confusable with imitations by Jay and with the Grey Squirrel's rasping chatter."

[03.37.2](#), Gallery 615: Portrait of a Woman, possibly Madame Claude Lambert de Thorigny, by Nicolas de Largilliere (1696). A Blue-and-yellow Macaw (*Ara ararauna*) adds a certain piquantness to this portrait.

[1970.295](#), Gallery 615: Aegina Visited by Jupiter by Jean-Baptiste Greuze (ca. 1767-69). This is no casual visit: Jupiter, in the form of an Eagle, is about to abduct the daughter of the river-god Asopus.

[71.57](#), Gallery 616: Dog Guarding Dead Game by Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1753). Among those being guarded are a Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*), Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*), Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), and Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*).

[71.89](#), Gallery 616: Ducks Resting in Sunshine by Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1753).

If ducks do slide at Hallowtide, at Christmas they will swim;

If ducks do swim at Hallowtide, at Christmas they will slide.

This English rhyme suggests that if the weather is freezing at Halloween, then we can expect mild temperatures at Christmastime.

[20.155.9](#), Gallery 616: The Toilette of Venus by Françoise Boucher (1751). The goddess is accompanied by two Doves in this famous painting.

[49.7.41](#), Gallery 612: Don Manuel Osorio Manrique de Zuniga by Francisco Goya (possibly 1790s). In his magisterial book about Goya, Robert Hughes writes: “The little boy, who was four at the time . . ., holds a string whose other end is tied to the leg of a magpie (the eclectic bird, noted for picking up things here and there, has Goya’s calling card in its beak, complete with a design of palette and brushes). Two [three, actually] cats are staring at the bird with fixated, murderous concentration, waiting for the boy’s attention to stray. Nearby on the floor is a cage full of finches, which the cats will presumably polish off as well if they get a chance.”

[32.199.35](#), Gallery 641: The Annunciation, attributed to Petrus Christus (ca. 1450). In this bird’s-eye-view Gabriel, with a wonderful set of wings to match his vestments, confronts the demure Mary as the Dove of the Holy Spirit descends.

[13.26](#), Gallery 640: The Adoration of the Magi by Hieronymus Bosch (ca. 1470-75). Behind the stage-like set there are Blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) in the fields and a Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) in the river.

[50.145.9ab](#), Gallery 640: The Annunciation by Gerard David by Gerard David (1506). Mary looks up from her prie-dieu as Gabriel, in his beautiful chasuble, arrives before her and the Dove, in all its glory, approaches from behind.

[1983.451](#), Gallery 643: St. John on Patmos by Hans Baldung Grien (1511). While writing his Book of Revelation St. John the Evangelist has a vision of Mary and the child. At bottom left is his symbolic Eagle.

[19.164](#), Gallery 642: The Harvesters by Pieter Breugel the Elder (1565). This iconic painting moved Robert Frost and William Carlos Williams to write poems about the harvesters under the pear tree. Neither mentioned the Grey Partridges, who point the way through the wheat, or the Blue Moon at the top left. Are youngsters in the middle distance playing with the carcass of a bird?

[1974.293](#), Gallery 642: A Woodland Road with Travelers by Jan Breugel the Elder (1607). In the foreground is a Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*).

[36.14a-c](#), Gallery 642: The Penitence of St. Jerome by Joachim Patinir (1518). In the left panel of this wonderful triptych the first master of landscape painting shows the baptism of Jesus by St. John: “And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3.22). In the central panel we can see Swans on the river and a Blue Tit in front of St. Jerome.

[26.244](#), Gallery 642: Christ’s Descent into Hell in the style of Hieronymus Bosch (1550-60). There may not be birds in Paradise ([06.1046](#)) but here in Hell there is an Owl.

[1983.452](#), Gallery 642: A Mountainous Landscape with a Waterfall by Kerstaen de Keuninch (ca. 1600). Birds fly high in this remarkable imaginary scene.

[2001.216.3](#), Gallery 639: The Birth and Naming of St. John the Baptist by Bernard van Orley (ca. 1514-15). A handsome Peacock stands guard on the left.

[14.40.632](#), Gallery 639: Virgin and Child with Angels by Bernard van Orley (ca. 1518). Here the artist paints two Peacocks.

[20008.26](#), Gallery 638: A Wooded Landscape with Cows and Goats by Roelandt Savery (1616). Overhead there are flying Geese.

[89.15.4](#), Gallery 638: The Forest Stream by Jacob van Ruisdael (ca. 1616). In *Landscape Into Art* Kenneth Clark writes that Van Ruisdael “felt the grandeur and pathos of simple nature with a

truly Wordsworthian force.” There are invariably birds flying in his paintings.

[71.75](#), Gallery 638: Drawing the Eel by Saloman van Ruisdael (early 1650s). Saloman, Jacob van Ruisdael’s uncle, also included birds in his paintings, as he does in this impressive skyscape of cirrostratus.

[50.145.22](#), Gallery 638: Woodland Road by Meyndert Hobbema (ca. 1670). Walter Liedtke, the former Metropolitan curator of Dutch and Flemish Paintings, observes, “Cloud formations fill the remarkably blue sky, their billowing shapes conspicuously sympathetic to the ascending branches. The tallest tree and the cumulus cloud to the left (where two birds focus attention) are the two prominent - almost paired - motifs.”

[12.31](#), Gallery 638: A State Yacht and Other Craft in Calm Water by Jan van de Cappelle (ca. 1600). A Common Gull (*Larus canus*) flies lower left.

[27.250.1](#), Gallery 635: Peacocks by Melchoir d’Hondecoster (1683). The indomitable English naturalist-curate Gilbert White considers that the train of the peacock in fact consists of hugely elongated upper-tail coverts, which are propped up by the short stiff brown feathers that form the true tail and act as a fulcrum. On the left is a Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) as well as a Swallow and an American Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*). D. H. Lawrence describes the turkey thus:

*You ruffled black blossom,
You glossy dark wind
A raw American will, that has never been tempered
by life;
You brittle, will-tense bird with a foolish eye.*

[50.55](#), Gallery 635: Falconer’s Bag by Jan Weenix (1695). Prominent among the carnage is a Grey Heron.

[L2002.12](#), Gallery 635: Still Life with Dead Birds by Pierre Dupuis (1666). Black Grouse Greyhens (*Tetrao tetrix*).

[71.45](#), Gallery 635: A Partridge and Small Game Birds by Jan Fyt (1650s). A masterly composition of feathers.

[58.89](#), Gallery 633: Merry Company on a Terrace by Jan Steen (ca. 1670). Is there a Red Parrot imprisoned in the cage? It is difficult to make out. At left of the hanging cage is an Owl. Liedtke notes, “The owl overhead stands for

folly, not wisdom as it generally does when perched in a tavern.”

[57.104](#), Gallery 631: Portrait of Boy with a Falcon by Wallerant Vaillant (1650s). “History collapses when you hold a hawk.” – Helen Macdonald.

[45.141](#), Gallery 630: Feast of Achelous by Peter Paul Rubens with Jan Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1615). Scarlet and Blue-and-yellow Macaws brighten the branches upper left.

[55.135.1](#), Gallery 630: The Holy Family with St. Elizabeth, St. John and a Dove by Paul Rubens (1608-9). The baby Jesus seems to have snatched the dove from John. Joseph takes a keen interest in the tug-of-war.

[10.73](#), Gallery 628: Wolf and Fox Hunt by Peter Paul Rubens and workshop (ca. 1615-21). The mounted lady on the right carries a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*).

*I hover and I twist,
But only want the feel
In my possessive thought,
Of catcher and of caught
Upon your wrist. – Thom Gunn*

[1981.238](#), Gallery 628: Rubens, His Wife Helena Fourment, and Their Son by Peter Paul (mid- to late 1630s). Rubens painted this touching picture for himself. His wife carries a fan made from Peacock feathers. Sitting in the flowering bush at the extreme right is a Scarlet Macaw, which, as an emblem of Mary, here represents motherhood.

[Editor’s Note: Italian and European Paintings are not finished, but for reasons of space we must break this wonderful tour at this point and continue it in an up-coming *Linnaean News-Letter*.]

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