

**AUDUBON, JOHN JAMES**, 1785-1851), b. Les Cayes, Haiti

Highlight of the KIA Collection: *White Headed Eagle* by John James Audubon

### EDUCATION/INFLUENCES

- Basically self-taught. Born in Haiti to a French naval officer father and a Creole slave mother (his father was a merchant, planter and slave dealer as well), he was taken to France at age 4 where he was educated among the upper class. By age 15, he was drawing French birds and at 17, he was studying drawing in Paris. It has been rumored that he studied with Jacques-Louis David but there is no credible evidence to support that.
- He worked on his skills at drawing birds while managing his father's estates in Pennsylvania in the early 1800s. His goal was to travel the country and paint every bird in North America.



### BIG IDEAS/THEMES

- Conservation and preservation: Although Audubon was an avid hunter in his early years, actually killing the specimens he painted, over time, he began to understand the importance of conservation of wildlife. As one of America's first wildlife artists, his name is now synonymous with conservation. Wanted to create images of rapidly declining species of birds.
- He financed his travels and the publication of his bird drawings by painting portraits. He was unable to find a publisher in the US but he succeeded in London where he lived from 1826 to 1831. The four-volume series, *The Birds of America*, was published in 1839. Over 1000 life-size images of birds were featured. He worked on this project from 1819-1839.
- Traveled the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and the Great Lakes looking for birds.
- Works printed in London because Audubon was unable to find an American printer.
- Original drawings were done in mixed media, watercolor, pencil, pens and pastel. Realistically and enthusiastically drew and painted wildlife (especially birds) in flying or grounded positions with detailed accuracy and preserved many now-extinct birds for future generations to study and observe.

KIA work-*White Headed Eagle*, 1828, hand colored engraving with aquatint on paper

- Drawn from nature by Audubon
- Engraved, printed and colored by Robert Havell, Jr. in London
- Naturalistic pose, incredible detail
- Does not include habitat or reference to habits. Artist is focused on recording bird's unique markings, color and physical characteristics. Later series of works includes birds' habitats.