

John James Audubon: Life, Work & Legacy

by

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A Project

Approved by the Department of Museum Studies

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts

Approved by the Project Chairperson

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ABSTRACT

John James Audubon: Life, Work & Legacy

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During the summer and fall of 2018, I worked with the Martin Museum of Art to design and produce the exhibit, *John James Audubon: Life, Work & Legacy*. To do this I broke the project into three main areas: design, fabrication, and installation. The first half of the summer was focused on the design of the space, which I created in SketchUp a 3-D drafting program. The second half of the summer was dedicated to fabrication. During this time, I created three pieces in the Mayborn's woodshop that were used to recreate a period room. This included a fireplace mantle, a window, and a period delivery box for the subscriptions. Finally, the fall semester was dedicated to the install of the exhibit, and the programing that accompanied it. This project taught me how to carry out an exhibit from start to finish, and to work within the constraints of a budget. This is a useful skill to carry into the world of museums and will help immensely with creating future exhibits.

Final Project Report

Over the course of the fall 2018 semester I finished designing/installing the exhibit “John James Audubon: Life, Work & Legacy”. This exhibit was the culmination of both the summer 2018 semester and the fall 2018 semester. As I discussed in my midterm report earlier this year I had four main goals for this exhibit, to create the font style and color for the exhibit, create the layout and theme of the exhibit, design graphics for the walls, and re-create period rooms to display the artwork. I believe by the end of installation I was able to achieve these goals and then some. This summer I was able to solidify the layout, create the color scheme, select the font styles, and fabricate the pieces for the 19th century parlor room. That left the design/order of the vinyl pieces for the wall, installation of the exhibit, and attend the opening day for the show.

Upon returning from the summer semester we had exactly one month until the opening of the show, “John James Audubon: Life, Work & Legacy”. This deadline got even tighter when the construction on the museum was not slated to finish until the week before the show opened. Due to this factor, we had to make sure that everything was ready to go so that all we had to do was install the Mila-wall, Paint, and hang the artwork. This is the biggest show we have done to date and we knew most installations take us about a week, because this one was more involved we knew we had to do as much as we could while the construction was finishing up. I placed the order for the vinyl for each room two weeks prior to the show to make sure it would be there and be installed by the opening, we went to Lowes and bought the different paint and stencils we would need for the show. Then I painted the chandelier for the parlor room. Once I finished painting the chandelier, Elisa worked on beading the chandelier. Evangeline and Krista worked on prepping everything for the opening events, and Chani and Allison premeasured all of the artwork so we knew the hanging heights for each piece. This helped us immensely and saved us

a lot of precious time during installation week. Even with all of these times saving measures in place we had to break the show into several different pieces to get it done in time for the opening.

First was the installation of the Mila-wall. This was an interesting step in the installation because this was the first time we had ever used this object in our space. We had several pieces of wall that needed to be installed to create the different spaces, “Life, Work, and Legacy”. In the front gallery where we installed the “Life” segment we needed to build a “T” shaped wall that consisted of two and a half walls on the face side, and two walls on the back side. For the separator in the back gallery we created an “L” shaped wall unit that consisted of four full wall segments. This was interesting to build because each full piece was one hundred pounds, and the half walls weigh fifty pounds. During the installation, we had to figure out the intricacies of connecting these very heavy pieces of wall. They ship ready to be built into a straight line but if you need to build them into a “T” or an “L” shape you need to add connector pieces which adds a few more steps. You need to remove the insert that keeps the walls straight and attach a corner piece that allows you to build an angle. While this wasn’t immensely difficult it took us a few minutes to figure out how to make our Mila-wall work. This was the first major hiccup due to construction. We were hoping to have a little more time to learn how the wall worked, but in the end, it all worked out.

Once we had the different walls were assembled it was time for us to paint them. Each wall acted as an accent wall for the show and indicated what part of the exhibit you were in. “Life” was red, “Work” was blue, and “Legacy” was green. By my design each of these colors became the flagship for those areas and that pattern was used in all of our marketing material, and throughout the museum in our signage. The signage in the “Work” and “Legacy” galleries

was a muted version of the wall color, but due to the fact that this would have been a very pink color in the “Life” gallery I went with a tan color that complimented the red. These colors were a part of the design I worked on earlier in the summer and were pulled directly from the works of Audubon, through the use of InDesign. After the three walls were painted there was one left to paint and that was the accent wall in the parlor area. I wanted this wall to look like 19th century wall paper, so we purchased a Fleur De Leis stencil and subtly spray painted it in a checkerboard pattern on the wall. The paint color for this was and of white/cream color that complemented the Red wall and was similar to the panel color in the “Life” gallery.

The next task was the installation of the pieces for all of the simulated emersion spaces in the exhibit. These included a parlor room, a print press area, and a recreation of Audubon’s workshop. Each of these areas were inspired in my mind by the work of Pine and Gilmore, “The Experience Economy” that I read in introduction to museum administration class. In this article, they discuss that your goal should be to create an unforgettable experience for your guests. I knew that the goal for the Martin was to make this exhibition amazing and I wanted to incorporate the idea of an experience into my design. That is why each area had an in-depth area to give the viewers a different kind of art museum experience. For the parlor room and other recreation areas, for the parlor room we needed to place the furniture and mount the fireplace, window, and curtains. Allison mounted the window and used a metal French cleat to do so, this is the same thing that was used to mount the fireplace on the wall. For the other pieces, we just had to figure out where to place them in the space. The final piece to be installed in here was the curtains. For these Allison and I just mounted them as you would for your house.

Next to the parlor room was a “nature” area created to feel as though you were stepping outside from the house. To create this area, we placed three different taxidermy birds in this area,

A Brown Pelican, a Goshawk, and hung a Turkey from the ceiling. Each of these birds coincided with the Audubon print of the bird. The final piece in this area that pulled the environment together was a vinyl silhouetted tree tied to each bird's environment. For the Turkey, I chose an oak tree, the Pelican was a coastal bush, and the Goshawk was a pine tree. These vinyl pieces were the crown jewel in how we pulled this area together as an environment, and this led to the biggest hiccup in the show. At first my plan for these vinyl silhouettes was to cut them on campus at Baylor's techpoint in Moody Library, however due to a time crunch I had to seek other options. I had discovered that there was a business named "FastSigns" in town that could get them done supposedly on time. There were several delays on both ends of the order and it was quite the battle to get them installed before the opening. In the end, they showed up with the vinyl the day before the show opened. When I went to show the installers where each tree went I had two bushes and a tree instead of the other way around. This was because the company printed our oak tree the same size as the bush and did not inform us. Unfortunately, with us being less than 24 hours away from the opening we had to accept the pieces as they were. This was annoying but was a good learning experience and I will know to ask for several proofs in the future.

The other two spaces were less involved, for these areas I built two new shop tables that we ordered in, and placed one in the workshop area and one in the printing press area. In the workshop area, we did our best to recreate Audubon's workshop based on his journals. To do this we included sketching paper, charcoal pencils, faux feathers and eggs, taxidermy, and a photo of Mill Grove, Audubon's home in America. For the Print Press area, we borrowed a print press from the print department, and used the table to display the work we commissioned from a student that she created in the style of Audubon.

The Final touch before the installation of the artwork was for me to install the six iPad stands that were tied to different internet pages with supplemental information. These iPads were located throughout the galleries, three were in the environment area, one was on the red accent wall, and two were placed in the “Legacy” gallery. The three in the environment area were placed next the *Brown Pelican*, *Goshawk*, *Stanley Hawk* and *Wild Turkey, Meleagris Gallopovo, Male* which displayed the Audubon Society’s webpage with information about each piece. The red accent wall in the “Life” gallery was a direct link to the “Birds of America” page on the Audubon Society webpage. The idea behind this was that the guest could learn about all of the pieces even the ones not in this exhibit. Finally, there were two iPads in the “Legacy” gallery one was installed on the wall with the *Carolina Parrots* and the *California Vulture*. This iPad was locked on a segment of the Audubon Society webpage dedicated to climate change and endangered bird species. This website was chosen because the California Vulture is endangered, and the Carolina Parrots are extinct, and I wanted this to be a place where people could get more information about potentially endangered species in their area. The second iPad in the “Legacy” area was placed near the portrait of Lucy Audubon the wife of John James Audubon was tied to the home page of the Audubon Society, because this is the most tangible version of John’s legacy in our day and age.

Once all of these pieces came together we could finally install the art. This was interesting in its own rights, because we had borrowed pieces from several different institutions, and each had certain lighting requirements for their pieces. To achieve this Allison made sure that we had several bulbs in a range of wattage, and a candle foot detector to make sure we were keeping each piece at its appropriate lighting level. Some of these pieces required lighting as low

as five candle feet. The installation of the art pieces went fairly quick due to Chani and Allison pre-measuring the installation heights of each piece.

Once we had the show completely installed it was time to focus on our two major events related to the show, opening day/family weekend, and cultural arts festival downtown. Both of these events went very well and helped to make this our most visited show in history. Our total visitors to the museum was 2,066 and our total at cultural arts festival was 1,075 this brings the grand total of people this show reached to 3,141. This was the most people the Martin Museum of Art has ever reached in one show by nearly double. The most a show has reached in Allison's time as director was 1,500 in the summer of 2016. This was great to hear because our major goal was for the Audubon show to be big and represent a new benchmark for exhibits at the Martin, and the visitation numbers here tell us we achieved that goal.

All in all, this project was the most stressful thing I have ever done in my life but it is also the thing I am most proud of. While there were a few hiccups along the way, it represented not only the creation of an exhibit. It represented the culmination of years of study. Everything I have learned over the last five and a half years has been leading to this point. From my time as an Undergraduate working for the University of Wyoming Anthropology Museum and fabricating different mounts, to my time handling artwork at the University of Wyoming Art Museum. I was able to take my knowledge from those times in my life and bundle them into the different courses I have taken at Baylor. I was able to incorporate the things I learned in Museum Education when I thought about the layout and how people would engage with the spaces I was creating. I also used the readings from Introduction to Museum Admin when creating these areas. I used the knowledge from collections and my internships when it came to handling and installing the artwork, and I used the inspiration of the period rooms at the Metropolitan Museum

of art that were discussed in the Intro to Museums class when creating the different simulated emersion spaces. Overall this exhibit was an amazing learning experience and I am so proud of the work I did for the exhibit and for the Martin Museum of Art, and I am incredibly thankful for the opportunity.