

THE BIRDS OF ACID

DIDIER MUTEL

The Birds of Acid, the newest project from Atelier Didier Mutel, is a response to John J. Audubon's extraordinary *Birds of America*. In this work Didier Mutel reinterprets, in his own way, this monument in the history of engraving and printmaking.

The sheet size for "The Birds of Acid" is nearly identical to Audubon's original: differing only slightly due to standard paper sizes between France and England / America (Mutel's French Colombier sheet (93 x 62 cm) being closest to the double elephant folio (96 x 66 cm) of Audubon's original.



Hand-colored serigraphs on Rives 270 gram

Limited edition of 50 copies: 49 regular copies and one deluxe copy with unique chromatic variations by the artist. Available in Orchamps, France or in Los Angeles, CA, USA. **Available only by subscription – now sold out.**

Subscribers will receive each new part, released at the rate of 2 per year, shipped from Atelier Mutel in Orchamps, France.

Part no. 1 comprises title plate in black, + 5 hand-colored plates: Antonio Pollaiuolo, Charles Meryon, Jacques Callot, Edouard Manet, and Rembrandt van Rijn.

Part no. 2 comprises 6 text plates in French and English and 5 hand-colored plates: Vija Celmins, Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith, Käthe Kollwitz and Christiane Baumgartner.

Part no. 3 comprises 3 alternate title pages and 6 hand-colored plates: Mary Cassatt, Sonia Delaunay, William Hogarth, Pierre Lallier, Berthe Morisot, and Félicien Rops. (shown below)



The Birds of Acid: an homage to engravers and John J. Audubon

The title page is a spectacular pastiche of the original, in which Mutel has altered a few words: "America" becomes "Acid"—acid being the key engraving tool of the Atelier Mutel, and broadly conceived as the metaphor for creation and printing. Also notable, in response to Audubon's proud affirmation of membership in the Royal Society of London and Edinburgh, and others, Mutel, perhaps jealously, but honestly, adds a hopeful honorific for himself. Finally, Mutel identifies himself as an engraver, artist and geographer, but also as the founder of Acid Air Lines, a fictional carrier, whose motto is: *A better flight for a better life.*

But the title page also functions as a declaration of intentions, emphasizing an important structural element of this epic project: a direct rapport with an historically significant creation, but also a joyfully impertinent displacement of the original, an esthetic spectacle which celebrates its predecessor while also interrogating the function of mimetic representation.

The first 16 plates depict dinosaurs,* each named for an artist, each of them a member of the pantheon of engravers. Mutel has previously referred to many of these artists in earlier productions such as his *Rosetta Stone* (2015), *My Way II* (2013), and also in his *Atlas of the United States of Acid* (2018), and Mutel's work has consistently maintained a strong relationship with other artists.

* *The present scientific consensus is that birds are a group of theropod dinosaurs that originated during the Mesozoic Era.*

If we look at Mutel's work retrospectively, birds have always been important to the artist. When he received his first diploma in 1991, his final presentation, a portfolio of 40 engraved sketches, and a series of 12 large etchings, as well as his second artist book was *Oiseaux, poems by Saint John Perse* (1991). Later on, he published a version of Wallace Stevens's "thirteen way of looking at a blackbird" (1997). Thus, oiseaux—or Birds—have been a frequent presence in his work for nearly 30 years.

Oiseaux, which can fly, can ascend from the earth toward the sky, metaphorically linking the earth and sky, are for Mutel, similar to artists and their books: they deliver our imagination to greater heights. According to the artist himself:

"The sky is «le lieu merveilleux», «le ciel est une liberté» en opposition à la terre, lieu de contraintes. The sky is the perfect geography for the most wonderful journey."

N.B.: Mutel's trademark company, Acid Air Lines, is a flight carrier.



Above: the hand-colored plates for *The Birds of Acid no. 1*