

THE DRAWING ROOM 16R Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY 11937 T 631.324.5016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From March 18 through May 1, 2005, The Drawing Room is pleased to present an exhibition of French natural history drawings and watercolors made in the 19th century, as well as a new selection of rare, hand-painted botanical collages by William Booth Grey (English, 1773-1852). The collection of French gouache, watercolor and pencil drawings – all direct observations from nature – includes works by professional naturalists such as Jean-Gabriele Prêtre (c. 1775 - c.1830), Anthelme-Eugène Grobon (1820-1878) and Louis-Pierre Riocreux (1791-1872), along with equally engaging examples by trained and untrained amateurs. Made before the invention of photography, most of these drawings served the purpose of recording a particular species during a period characterized by an obsessive interest in categorizing the wonders of nature.

Prêtre, who is represented by a refined and highly detailed watercolor and gouache study of wasps, was the official painter of the Museum of Natural History and the Ménagerie of the Empress Josephine, and was hired as a naturalist on the Napoleonic expeditions to record newly collected species in Egypt. A generation later, Grobon and his brother produced a number of very fine collections of hand-colored prints of flowers and in 1850 co-published an instruction manual for flower painters. Grobon's delicate renderings of pears, whether *Poire William* or *Poire Beurre Diedant*, reveal the distinguishing profile and other characteristics of each species in three views per sheet: a delicate pencil contour of the circular bottom of the fruit; a cross section of a halved pear; and the whole fruit, painted in full color with watercolor.

A series of fifteen studies of nuts includes whole views and cross-sections of walnuts, hazelnuts and hickory nuts, as well as details of the nut tree branches. Latin names in fine script appear at the bottom of most sheets, among them a suite of whimsical mushrooms made in the early 19th century with pencil, ink and watercolor. By contrast, the early 19th century studies of birds' eggs floating on sheets of white paper appear remarkably modern. These rare original pages come from various sources – the naturalists' notebooks, folio collections of presentation drawings, and sets of drawings for lithography.

William Booth Grey (1773-1852) is represented by a group of five hand-painted collages as striking for their botanical exactitude as for their brilliant color, compositions and technique. Grey's recently discovered collages reveal the influence of his grandmother's friend, Mrs. Mary Delaney (1700-1788) whose floral collages from the collection of The British Museum were exhibited in 1986 at The Pierpont Morgan Library. Grey's process involved painting watercolor renderings of floral specimens that he then cut up into the various elements – petals, stamens, leaves and roots – and reassembled on a heavier paper prepared with washes of dark inks. With this painstaking technique Grey achieved the effect of delicate pressed flowers set off against velvety black backgrounds.

Whether made for scientific study, presentation drawings, or to record personal or public natural history collections of rare species, the French and English material in this show has fresh appeal to the contemporary eye.

For further information or reproductions, please contact Susan Papa at 631.324.5016 or info@drawingroom-gallery.com.

