Abstract

As we enter 2017, animals only face more challenges from climate change and shrinking habitat. The endangerment of these species often puts their entire ecosystem at risk. I wanted to highlight this issue by creating a series of prints focusing on a few species threatened by the habitat loss and climate change that comes with our modern way of life.

This series consists of three individual images, each with editions of twelve prints. Each includes elements of Byzantine icons, playing on traditional religious symbolism for saints and martyrs. Depending on where each species originates, the image also includes religious symbolism from the respective region, and depicts parts of what makes them important to their own ecosystem.

For instance, my portrait of the Mexican Long Nosed Bat includes elements of Retablo, a South American folk art style, and plants such as agave, which relies heavily on pollination from the microbat. I’ve also included the Bluefin Tuna and the Red Panda, both ecologically important species whose population is severely declining due to habitat loss and climate change that comes with our modern way of life.

Sarah Jenitsch, Faculty sponsor Candace Hicks

Process

Each of these prints is an original screenprint. Screenprinting is a printmaking process using a fine mesh screen as a stencil to create a finished design. The artist uses various methods to block parts of the screen and then uses a squeegee to push ink through the open areas of the screen onto the paper. This leaves an even, thin layer of ink on the paper wherever the screen is unblocked. Using multiple screens or consecutively blocking out areas of the same screen allows for different colors to be layered on top of each other. Each color requires another full layer of ink, called a “run”.

The process also allows for multiples of each image to be created. A series of identical images is called an edition of prints. Each unique image from this series has 10-12 identical copies, all created from the same stencil.

Icons

According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s website, “Icons are sacred images representing the saints” and “allow direct communication with sacred figures.” I wanted to use the convention of Icons, especially Byzantine, in a lighthearted way to create martyrs out of endangered species. Byzantine icons are known for their golden halos, overly dramatic quality and floating forms. However, since many diverse species from different areas of the world were used for this project, I wanted to include religious iconography from the various areas they represent, including Retablo, Taoist and Greek mythological elements.

Example of a Byzantine Icon via the National Gallery of Art website (Nyagana)