



Picturing Nature: American Nineteenth-Century Zoological Illustration

Ann Shelby Blum

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The panorama of American animal study, from the natural history of Alexander Wilson and John James Audubon through the development of professional zoology and its large institutions, provides the backdrop for Ann Blum's study of illustration styles. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the move from field natural history to museum and laboratory study together with changes in printing technology helped bring about a dramatic shift from realism to schematization in published zoological illustration. Blum notes, however, that the early emphasis on depicting the living animal in nature had a persistent influence on American zoologists and their pictorial representation of animals.

Systematic zoology and its illustration developed within the social context of divergent definitions of science and art, maintains Blum, and the production of zoological illustration reflected the division of labor and demotion of technique at work in society at large. She examines how zoology, in consolidating its self-definition as a profession, also consolidated certain conventions of pictorial representation for its own use, and how developments in printing exerted pressures on the discipline to adopt new technologies and mediums. Her focus on pictorial convention and disciplinary practice gives historical depth to recent sociological approaches to twentieth-century scientific illustration that challenge the traditional supremacy of theory in science studies.

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