

Sarah Stone



A blue and yellow Macaw

Reference: 11158

Dimensions:

Height: 44 cm / 17³/₈ in

Width: 34 cm / 13³/₈ in

KT496

Signed l.c.: Sarah Smith, watercolour heightened with bodycolour and gum arabic, with a black line border

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44 x 34 cm.; 17 ¼ x 13 3/8 inches

Provenance

Frances Smith Beale (1800-1849), the artist's niece, daughter of Frances Mary Stone (1769-1852), sister of the artist;

Ellen Beale Brooker d. 1900, (m. in 1868 William Watkiss Lloyd, 1813-1893);

Eireene Watkiss Lloyd; daughter of the above m. William Docker Drysdale (1866-1952) of Wick Hall, Radley, Oxfordshire;

William Docker Drysdale (1906-1985); Park End, Radley;

Patrick Dockar-Drysdale (1929-2020), Wick Hall, Radley;

Literature

Christine Jackson, Sarah Stone Natural Curiosities from the New Worlds, 1998, p. 131 no. 6 (Watercolour Drawings by Sarah Stone in Public and Private Institutions-Private Collection A)

Sarah Stone was the first female British painter of birds and animals to achieve professional recognition. Her drawings of birds are a highly important visual record of the specimens held in collections in late eighteenth century England and included some from the voyages of Captain Cook, and were exhibited at the Leverian Museum in 1784. This spectacular drawing with its finished background is an important work intended for display.

Stone was employed when she was still in her mid-teens to draw the objects in the Holophusican or Leverian Museum, housed in the former royal palace Leicester House, and a major cultural institution of the day. She was to work there for nearly thirty years. Its owner, Sir Ashton Lever (1729-1788) commissioned her by 1777 to record specimens and ethnographic material brought back by British expeditions to Australia, the Americas, Africa and the Far East.

For financial reasons, Lever had to dispose of his collection in the 1780s, by lottery. Before doing so he apparently commissioned Sarah Stone to depict the birds, ethnography and antiquities. From January to March 1784 Lever exhibited Stone's work, advertising the show as:

'a large Room of Transparent Drawings from the most curious specimens in the collection, consisting of above one thousand different articles, executed by Miss Stone, a young lady who is allowed by all Artists to have succeeded in the effort beyond imagination. These will continue to be open for the inspection of the public until they are removed into the country. Admittance HALF-A-CROWN each...Good fires in all the galleries.' (See C. Jackson, *ibid*, p. 22).

Lever kept Stone's drawings after the exhibition was over. The Leverian Museum continued to grow under new ownership through the 1780s and 1790s, and Stone continued working there. This exceptional drawing of a macaw can be linked with one of the three specimens of this bird sold at the sale of the Leverian Museum in 1806 when the collection was dispersed (see Christine Jackson, *ibid*, p. 131).

Stone also drew items from other private collections and the British Museum. As most of the actual specimens have not

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survived, her drawings are a vital record of contemporary collections, few of which produced catalogues, and give valuable insight into the collecting practises of contemporary museums.

Stone was the daughter of James Stone, a fan painter, and it is highly likely that she assisted her father. As a child she was taught to make her own pigments using natural ingredients - the intense blues and yellows of this work are extraordinary and a testament to her skill at mixing pigments. She practised working in bodycolour as well as watercolour as a child, and the exquisite brushwork which can be seen in the drawing of the feathers of the macaw also demonstrates her skill at using bodycolour and gum arabic to intensify the colours. The tree branches which Stone habitually included in her drawings are a distinctive feature of her work. Very few of her works include a sky, and Christine Jackson *ibid*, p. 16, suggests that she included them in watercolours which were intended to be framed. The spectacular and carefully drawn nature of the present work appears to bear this out and suggests that it was an important work intended for display which remained in her family.

Stone exhibited at the Royal Academy, London in 1781, 1785 and 1786. She exhibited paintings of birds at the Society of Artists in 1791. She married John Langdale Smith, a midshipman, on 8 September 1789 and exhibited as a 'painter' before her marriage and in her married name as an 'Honorary Exhibitor' thereafter. She painted less after her marriage, mainly drawing live birds which her husband, also an artist, brought back from his travels. She signed her work with her married name of Smith and thus the present work must date from after September 1789.

Stone was nearly thirty when she married, and a daughter Eliza, who probably died in infancy, was baptised in September 1792 at St John the Evangelist, Westminster. A son, Henry Stone Smith (1795-1881) was baptized in the same church in March 1795. The family has a note by him recording a bird 'Topial', probably a troupial, brought back from the West Indies by his father and living and domesticated with the family (see C. Jackson, *ibid*, p. 30).

Further examples of Stone's watercolours can be found in the British Museum, the Natural History Museum, London, the National Library of Australia, the State Library of New South Wales, the Yale Center for British Art, the Getty, the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawaii and the Alexander Turnbull Library, New Zealand.

Paris Spies-Gans has written about Stone's participation in the imperial project in Paul Mellon Centre Notes, No. 20, 'Colonialism in the Photographic Archive', January 2022, pp. 11-12).

The blue and yellow macaw (*Psittacus arauna*), also known as the blue-and-gold-macaw is a large South American parrot, and one of the most popular. They live in forests and woodlands. In captivity they are known for their skill at mimicry.

Patrick (Paddy) Dockar-Drysdale (1929-2020)

Born in Shropshire, after his education at Oxford Paddy went to Canada with his wife Olwen, as a stage-manager of a theatre company in Newfoundland. They stayed in Canada from 1955 until 1982. Paddy switched from theatre to teaching English as an assistant professor at the University of Newfoundland and then to publishing in Toronto. His specialisms were the use of language, dialects and lexicography. He made an important contribution to the codification of Canadian English.

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The Dockar-Drysdale returned to England to Wick Hall, Radley where they restored the grounds and gardens.

Patrick Dockar-Drysdale was a descendant of Sarah Stone and had a lifelong fascination with her work about which he was knowledgeable and which he collected throughout his life. It seems likely that the macaw may have come down in the family of the artist's niece, Frances Smith Sheppard (1800-1849), who married Lionel John Beale, a surgeon. In 1868 their daughter Ellen Brooker Beale (d. 1900), married the businessman (who worked in the family tobacco firm) and writer William Watkiss Lloyd (1813-1893). He wrote on the classics and history, his best-known work 'The Age of Pericles', 1875. Sophia Beale (1837-1920), the artist, writer and sister of Ellen Beale, discussed his work in a 'Memoir' prefixed to Lloyd's posthumously published 'Elijah Fenton: his Poetry and Friends', 1894. Their daughter Eireene Watkiss Lloyd was Patrick Docker-Drysdale's grandmother, who took the drawing to Wick Hall after her marriage to William Docker-Drysdale (1866-1952).