

# The Association for Creative Zoology and the 20th Annual Scopes Trial Reenactment

Beauvais Lyons

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Many contemporary artists using print media have explored ideas drawn from the history of science. The 2006 Southern Graphics Conference (held at the University of Wisconsin-Madison) on the theme of "Genetic Imprint" included sessions and exhibitions that explored the relationship between science and printmaking. In his seminal book *Prints and Visual Communication*, William Ivins (1881-1961), the first curator of prints at the Metropolitan Museum of Art asserts that science, and by extension the Enlightenment, would not be possible without the "repeatable" printed image. He writes "The various ways of making prints....are the only method by which exactly repeatable pictorial statements can be made about anything. The importance of being able to exactly repeat pictorial statements is undoubtedly greater for science, technology and general information than it is for art." [1]

While the methods of repeatability have changed for science, technology and general information, traditional printmaking reflects the function, process and materials of earlier periods in the development of science. Woodcut was used for sets of early botanical prints in the late 15th century. Diderot's encyclopedia of the 18th century is a product of the engraver's burin. Archaeological excavations in the mid-19th century such as Sir. Austin Henry Layard's work at Nineva (in modern-day Iraq) were recorded through monochromatic stone lithographs. Late 19th century excavations in Egypt were documented in elaborate chromolithographs, some of which included more than 15 color runs.

Print history related to zoology traces similar steps. Albert Seba's (1665-1736) hand-colored engravings from the 18th century provide a marvelous record

of animals, plants and insects from across the world (figure 1). Collected in four volumes, the series included real and mythic beasts, including a seven-headed hydra.[2] Seba presents himself as a man of science, striving to understand the wonders of creation while surrounded by his various specimens (figure 2). From the 19th century we have other superb examples of animal graphics, including lithographs by the John Gould (1804-1881) and the better-known John James Audobon (1785-1851). These publications offer a record of human study of, and dominion over, the animal kingdom.

Explaining the human-animal bond is at the core of both science and religion, and is reflected in the history of printed science, as well as the struggle between evolutionary scientists and creationists today. This struggle has precedence in the 1925 trial of John Scopes, a high school science teacher who was charged with teaching Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution in violation of a recent statute passed by the Tennessee Legislature. The law forbade the teaching, in any state educational institution in Tennessee, of "any theory that denies the story of Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals." Often called the "Monkey Trial," it pitted William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925), a former Secretary of State for the

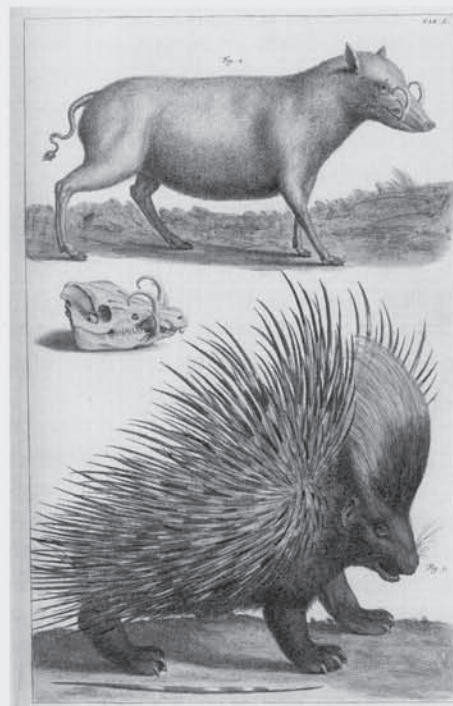


Figure 1. The Cabinet of Natural Curiosities. Plate L. Porcupine. Hand-colored engraving.





Figure 2. Portrait of Albertus Seba from The Cabinet of Natural Curiosities. Hand-colored engraving.

prosecution, against the self declared agnostic and leading member of the American Civil Liberties Union, Clarence Darrow (1857-1938).

Held in the Rhea County Courthouse in Dayton Tennessee, 30 miles north of Chattanooga, the trial attracted international attention, including the Baltimore journalist H. L. Mencken and live-radio coverage by WGN from Chicago. During the trial the area surrounding the courthouse took on a carnival atmosphere with banners, displays, book-sellers, circus monkeys and itinerant evangelists. Many people know about the trial through its fictionalized representation in the 1955 play *Inherit the Wind* and the subsequent 1960 movie by the same name.

After more than a week of trial proceedings, the jury determined that Scopes had violated Tennessee law, and he was sentenced to pay a fine of \$100. In his concluding arguments, Darrow argued for a guilty verdict, intending to appeal the case to the Tennessee Supreme Court. Despite affirming

the constitutionality of the law, the Tennessee Supreme Court later dismissed the verdict against Scopes on a procedural technicality. The law was not enforced again, and was finally expunged by the Legislature in 1967. [3]

Shortly following the trial, William Jennings Bryan died. In his honor funds were raised to found Bryan College in 1930, a non-denominational Christian college in Dayton that has a student population of 600 today. The college includes The Center for Origins Research, which is devoted to research in creationist biology with the belief that "science is an avenue for learning about God by studying the things He made." [4]

The Scopes trial is regarded by many historians as a critical episode in American history, one that pits our self image as a God-fearing Judeo-Christian nation against our self identity as a modern, enlightened society which seeks to progress through science. The trial, now over eighty years old, reflects a struggle in American culture that continues today between fundamentalist Christians and scientists on subjects encompassing human evolution, global warming and stem-cell research.

My first involvement with art and zoology took place in the early 1990's when I chaired an interdisciplinary faculty task force at the University of Tennessee to acquire and place William Willers' *The Centaur Excavations at Volos* project on our campus. Willers, an artist and zoologist from the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh had made a centaur burial display using human and equine bones



Figure 3. The Centaur Excavations at Volos on view in the Hodges Library. University of Tennessee, Knoxville.





Figure 4. The Association for Creative Zoology booth on the Rhea County Courthouse lawn. Dayton, Tennessee, July 21, 2007.

in the mid-1980's. The installation of the display required the construction of a showcase and involvement by members of the faculty task force in adapting the exhibition text, which was screen printed on two panels as part of the display (figure 3). Since 1994, *The Centaur Excavations at Volos* has been prominently displayed in the Hodges Library on the University of Tennessee campus in Knoxville and is presented to each college freshman as part of his/her campus orientation experience. One outcome from this project was a series of lunch-time forums Neil Greenberg, UTK Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, and I coordinated for several years that featured "recent scholarship on centaurs by distinguished university faculty." These lectures extended the academic parody, and helped to give the centaur display greater prominence on our campus. [5] For the first of these forums I presented a talk illustrated by a series of collages demonstrating how "zoomorphic juncture" could allow the creator to produce species variation. I argued that the centaur and other chimera, including the duck-billed platypus, are examples of collage, and that "if God was the creator of all life, collage was central to His creative process."

Recent media attention regarding the Theory of Evolution by religious fundamentalists who claim that Intelligent Design offers a plausible alternative explanation for creation (and should be taught as

legitimate science), has compelled me to return to my zoomorphic series of collages. These have become the basis for a new series of lithographs "documenting" the principle of "zoomorphic juncture" (figure 4). On July 21, 2007 for the twentieth reenactment of the trial of John Scopes in Dayton, Tennessee, I presented a booth on behalf of the Association for Creative Zoology (figures 5-6). Wearing period clothes, I claimed that the presentation was a facsimile of the original booth presented by the Association in July of 1925. Many of the people attending the Scopes Trial Reenactment came

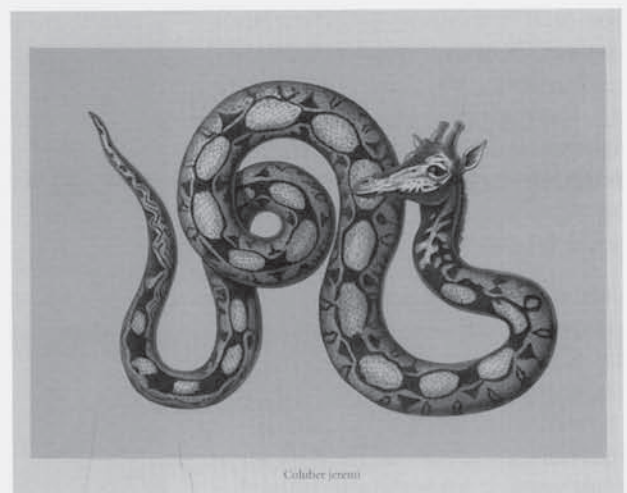


Figure 5. Beauvais Lyons. *Coluber jeremi*. Lithograph.



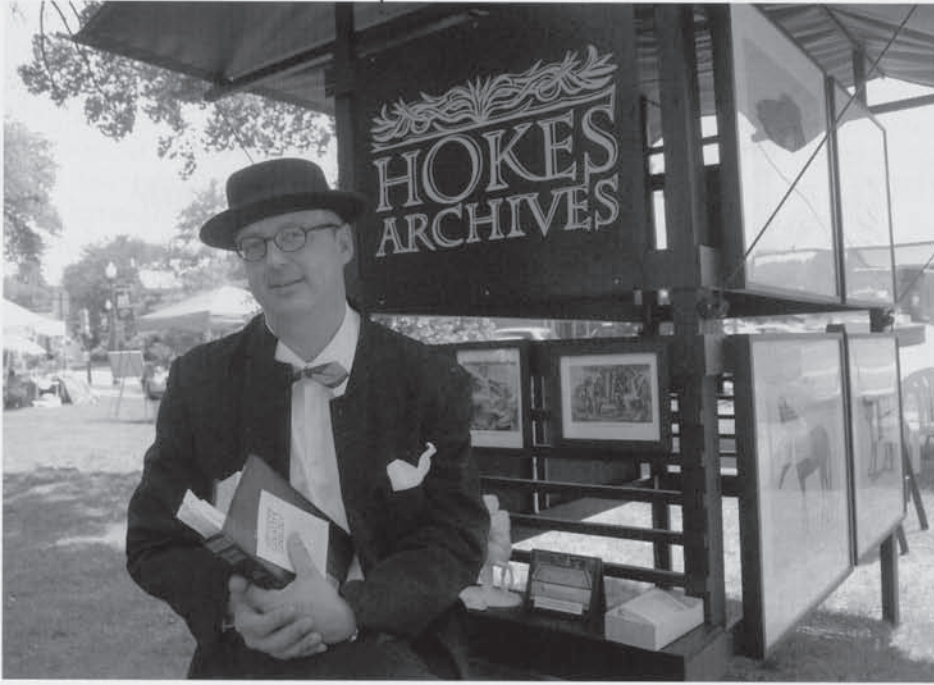


Figure 6. Beauvais Lyons with The Association for Creative Zoology booth. Photo by David Andrews.

for a theatrical production in the courthouse for which the trial transcripts were the basis for a two-hour performance. As the original trial was held in the heat of July, hand-held fans are abundant in photographs of the period. Working with Yee Haw Industries in Knoxville [6], I produced a set of letterpress fans for sale for \$2 each, with the proceeds going to support the work of the Association and handed out free tracts on Creative Zoology (figure 7).

This mode of exhibition gave me an opportunity to engage a broader audience than one might typically encounter in art galleries. Cedar Lorca Nordbye, from the University of Memphis, and others have sought to apply Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics [7], first advanced in the late 1990's, to the printed arts. Relational Aesthetics offers a model for art that recasts modernism from a top-down authoritarian system dictated by government, academic and corporate systems to one that is bottom-up, a form that involves a greater level of civic and community engagement. Relational art emphasizes new economies of cultural production and consumption. Inserting an art production into a regional cultural festival may be regarded as a relational aesthetic.

When printmaking draws from its own history of populist, vernacular and design uses, it can create exhibition contexts beyond the gallery and the museum. In this way the artist is less concerned

with the physical work of art as a timeless object, but as an artifact of a lived event or process. We can find precedence for this in the print works of Joseph Beuys, Felix Gonzales-Torres, Keith Haring, and others.

The Association for Creative Zoology booth functions much like a portable wunderkammer, a cabinet of curiosities intended to provoke wonder and mystery. In addition to the prints, the display includes bookshelves with science and history texts, a small sculpture of a centaur, specimen models, and even "insectoserpensis," the ant-snake that I claim to be "native to East Tennessee." The systemic presentation of the lithographs evokes references to the taxonomies used to name and organize the animal kingdom. As one would expect from an authentic zoological display, each of the prints also include names of the specimen or animal grouping in Latin. I regard taxonomies as intrinsically aesthetic, exposing the unity and variety that are characteristic of good design.

In my interactions with festival attendees I talked about how Creative Zoologists regard the animal kingdom as far too complex and beautiful to result from a random process of natural selection. I assert that God is the "Almighty Artist" whose design principles are reflected in the unity and variety of all things. I described how God uses "zoomorphic juncture" to create new species from previously



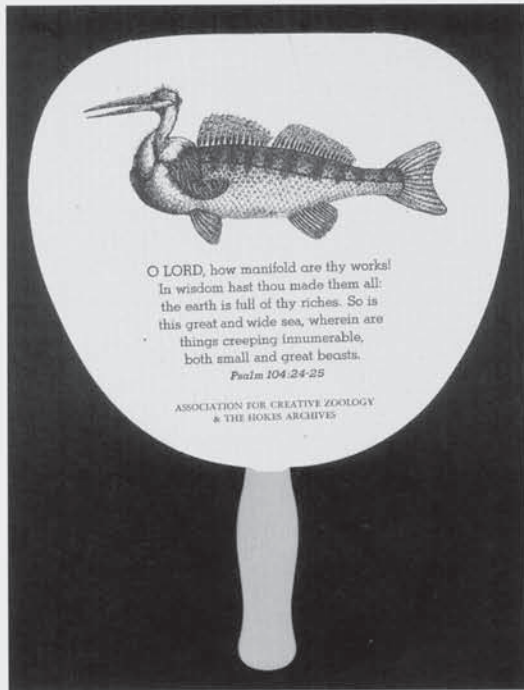


Figure 7. Beauvais Lyons. Letterpress fan for the Association for Creative Zoology. 12 x 9 inches.

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existing ones. Reading passages from the Bible (King James Edition), I site references to dragons in the Books of Job (30:29), Isaiah (13:22) and Psalms (148:7). While there is some variation in the elements of a dragon, they typically employ zoomorphic juncture to combine a serpent with mammalian and bird elements.

For almost thirty years my art has involved various forms of academic parody, but all situated within the trappings of the museum [8]. This production is more assertive, being in a public space as part of an event that is itself, an interpretation of an historic event. One of the interesting aspects of this project was assessing how festival attendees understood the exhibition. Some attendees grasped the display as a work of fiction immediately, while a few others seemed pleased that a new line of evidence supporting creationist biology was being championed. Based on this experience, it would be safe to say that religious fundamentalists were less receptive to ironic signals. Finally, children were the most engaged by the booth, offering evidence that our empathy for animals, real or imaginary, may be an innate aspect of the human condition.

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## Notes

1. William Ivins, *Prints and Visual Communication*, MIT Press, 1969, p. 2.
2. Taschen has published an impressive facsimile based on a copy in the *Koninklijke Bibliotheek* in The Hague reproducing 449 plates: *Albertus Seba, Cabinet of Natural Curiosities: The Complete Plates in Colour, 1734-1765*, Taschen, 2005, ISBN: 3-8228-4794-1.
3. One of the best accounts of the trial is Edward J. Larson's *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion*, Harvard University Press, 1997, ISBN: 0-674-85429-2. Larson's book was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in History.
4. See the Bryan College web site for more information: [www.bryan.edu/core.html](http://www.bryan.edu/core.html)
5. The University Studies website includes a record of the Centaur Centripetals: [web.utk.edu/~unistudy/](http://web.utk.edu/~unistudy/) (follow links to "Special Projects", the "Centaur of Volos" and "Showcase of Contemporary Centaur Scholarship").
6. For quality "art-like products," see their web site: [www.yeehawindustries.com](http://www.yeehawindustries.com).
7. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du rée, 2002, ISBN: 2-84066-060-1.
8. For more information on projects from the Hokes (pronounced "hoax") Archives, including works of academic parody in archaeology, folk art and medicine, see the web site: [web.utk.edu/~blyons](http://web.utk.edu/~blyons).