



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
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(American Lithography) [Collection of Early American Lithographs, including the First Known American Lithograph of a Natural History Subject - by Charles Alexandre Lesueur; early lithographs by Abadie and other unnamed experimentalists; and unattributed student artwork, likely by pupils of Marie Duclos Fretageot's girl's school]

Stock#: 90036
Map Maker: Lesueur
Date: 1810 - 1830 circa
Place: n.p. (Philadelphia)
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 17.5 x 23 inches
Price: Not Available



Description:

Charles Alexandre Lesueur and the Origins of American Lithography.

Collection of Early American Lithographs, Circa 1810s-1820s

Including the First American Lithograph of a Natural History Subject

A remarkable collection of early American lithograph prints and original drawings, dating from the late 1810s to the early 1820s. The lithographs in this group are examples of the *cradle* of American lithographic production and represent a significant puzzle piece for historians attempting to reconstruct the origins of the then novel printing technology in America. The collection includes experimental lithographs and pedagogical sketch work, documenting the earliest progress of the medium in the United States. A highlight of the collection is the first known American lithograph of a natural history subject, made by Charles Alexandre Lesueur, a French artist and naturalist renowned for his illustration work on Nicholas Baudin's expedition to Australia in the early 19th century, as well as for his natural history collecting on western expeditions in the United States, and his association with Robert Owen's utopian community at New Harmony. The subjects illustrated in the present collection cover a wide range and include pastoral landscapes, scientific and natural history specimens, classical portraits, and human skulls. At least two of the lithographs can be positively identified as the work of Lesueur, and one of the original drawings - a finely finished pencil sketch of a human skull - is signed by Lesueur. Other items in



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the collection appear connected to Lesueur's Philadelphia milieu, and likely relate to his time teaching art in Mme. Marie Fretageot's girl's boarding school. Intriguingly, John James Audubon also taught art at Fretageot's school - a position Lesueur helped Audubon get. Deeper research into the present material will likely yield further connections among the component works and their respective authors, shedding further light on the history of lithography in America.

Lesueur and Early American Lithography

The development of lithography in America - a planographic printing technique that uses a flat stone to transfer an image to paper - was largely driven by the enthusiasm of naturalists and artists in Philadelphia during the first two decades of the 19th century. Scientifically-inclined artists living in Philadelphia, including Charles Alexandre Lesueur and Bass Otis, experimented with the new medium beginning in the 1810s. In fact, a lithograph by Bass Otis that appeared in the July 1819 issue of the Philadelphia periodical *Analectic Magazine* is generally recognized as the first American lithograph. Otis's diminutive self-styled "lithographic" shows a bucolic homestead scene, a view not unlike that depicted in several of the lithographs in the present collection. In their book, *Philadelphia on Stone*, Erika Piola and Jennifer Ambrose suggest that the Otis lithograph represented the culmination of more than a decade of experiments by a number of individuals working in the United States. In a sense the present collection, comprising a critical mass of intriguing early experimental lithographs and related drawings, is the back story to the Otis lithograph. While the Bass Otis lithograph is well described by historians of lithography, Lesueur's role in early lithographic progress, particularly his experimental work, is not well documented. Indeed, Lesueur's pivotal contribution to the development of lithography in the United States has been eclipsed by his other prodigious artistic accomplishments.

Charles Alexandre Lesueur (1778-1846) was a French-born artist and naturalist who is perhaps most remembered for his extensive work as artist on Nicolas Baudin's 1800-1804 expedition to Australia and the southern Pacific. In an era of generalist naturalists, Lesueur distinguished himself in a variety of fields, including paleontology, archaeology, ichthyology, and zoology. He is also notable for his involvement with the utopian community of New Harmony, having sketched scenes of daily life along the Ohio River in the 1820s and 1830s. A little-known chapter in Lesueur's varied career dates to his time in Philadelphia, where he moved in 1816, shortly after meeting noted Scottish-born American geologist William Maclure. Lesueur quickly became part of the close-knit circle of scientists and artists in Philadelphia (even influencing John James Audubon, on which more below). He was elected to several American learned societies, including the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia and the American Philosophical



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Society. He published numerous papers on natural history, often illustrating the works himself. It is believed that Lesueur learned the lithographic technique, invented in Europe by Alois Senefelder in the 1790s, while still in Europe. He certainly imported lithographic stones from Europe into the United States at an early date and may have corresponded with Senefelder himself after arriving in America. The introduction to Senefelder's 1818 treatise includes a brief mention of Philadelphia lithography ("....even in Philadelphia lithography is already introduced") and Sally Pierce has made light of this comment:

...it does raise the intriguing possibility that there may have been some communication between Senefelder and Dr. Brown, Judge Cooper, Charles Alexander Lesueur, or other members of the group. At very least, Senefelder must have read or heard of their efforts... - Pierce, Early American Lithography: Images to 1830, page 10.

Another figure of note at this time was Marie Duclos Fretageot - also an associate of William Maclure's - a teacher at a Pestalozzian school in Paris who had studied with Senefelder. Fretageot brought one of the Senefelder's papirographic presses with her to the United States per Maclure's instructions.

There is some evidence of attempts at lithography in Philadelphia as early as 1814 (Philip J. Weimerskirch cites James Cutbush's *The American Artist's Manual*, published in Philadelphia in 1814, as stating that etching on stone had been practiced in Philadelphia, but that "no progress, with respect to its use, has yet been made") - but it took Lesueur, with likely assistance from Fretageot, with their respective training in lithography and possession of imported stones, to truly push American lithography forward.

The First American Lithograph of a Natural History Subject

A stand-out in the present collection is an 1821 lithograph by Lesueur depicting two fish. This pioneering effort, made to accompany an article that Lesueur published in the October 1821 issue of the *Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*, was suppressed by Lesueur himself due to his dissatisfaction with the result. Most extant copies of the journal contain a copperplate engraving which he substituted for the now extremely rare lithograph. The lithograph, signed in the stone "litog. by c. a. f.," shows two elongated specimens, labeled B. Argalus and B. Truncata. Maurice E. Phillips, then editor of the Scientific Publications of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, described the circumstances and extreme rarity of this historic lithograph in a 1955 article in *Notulae Naturae*:

...in the editor's copy of [the Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences] is inserted a rough and



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primitive lithograph print by the same artist [Lesueur], which contains both these species... While this plate itself is of considerable historic and artistic interest because it is the first natural history subject known to have been drawn on stone in America, and the copy referred to one of only two known by the writer to exist... The rough character of the lithograph (Plate X) seems ample reason why Lesueur did not use it, but made the illustrations over, engraved on copper.

A year later, in 1822, Lesueur published a paper on a fish he had discovered, *Cichla aenea*, which was also illustrated with a lithograph, but that plate was made by the New York firm of Barnet and Doolittle, after a drawing by Lesueur. Clearly Lesueur struggled with perfecting his technique in lithography, and though he was not happy with his own fish lithograph, it stands as an important experimental piece. The various items in the present collection reflect a spirit of experimentalism which characterized Lesueur and his Philadelphia circle:

Early lithography in America was characterized by experimentation and involved practical scientists and artists with broad interests in new technologies and the natural world. They saw the potential of this new printing medium to spread knowledge, particularly scientific knowledge, more broadly and at a more reasonable cost. An active center for scientific inquiry and the printing trade, Philadelphia provided the ideal environment for artists, scientists, and publishers, like Otis Brown, and naturalist Charles Alexandre Lesueur to promote this new printing process. - Philadelphia on Stone, pages 1-2.

The scientific community's involvement and enthusiasm over the advent of lithography was not unlike that surrounding another novel technology with the potential to revolutionize the reproduction of visual images. The announcement of Louis Daguerre's invention of photography in 1839 was also closely followed by several Philadelphia area experimentalists who were among the earliest pioneers of photography in the United States.

While the invention of photography generated even greater excitement among American naturalists and scientists, lithography remained an important tool for naturalists and scientists for decades, as it allowed for the creation of large, detailed images that could be easily reproduced.

Lesueur's Connection to Audubon: Marie Fretageot's Girl's School

During his time in Philadelphia, Lesueur seems to have played a pivotal role in the career path of famous ornithologist John James Audubon. Audubon had gone to Philadelphia looking for financial and



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professional support for his project of illustrating the birds of America. Impressed with the quality of Audubon's paintings, Lesueur helped the artist get a job teaching art at a girls' school where he himself had taught. The school belonged to Marie Fretageot. Interestingly, both Audubon and Lesueur taught drawing to Lucy Sistare, who would later marry Thomas Say, the noted specialist in insects; she worked as a colorist on many of her husband's natural history illustrations. More importantly, Lesueur advised Audubon that there would be better chances of financial backing for the bird project in Europe. Lesueur's letters of introduction helped Audubon. Thus we can thank Lesueur's for steering Audubon in the right direction.

Here follows a list of the items in the collection.

Lithographs and drawings by Charles-Alexandre Lesueur:

- Lithograph of two fish. Plate numbered "X" in upper left corner. Caption title: 1. B. Arqalus. 2. B. Truncata. Signed in the stone, in lower left: "litog. by c. a. l." 9 x 11 1/2 inches.
 - This lithograph was intended to illustrate Lesueur's article, "Observations on several genera and species of fish, belonging to the natural family of the Esoces," in the October 1821 issue of the *Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*, but in fact this lithograph was suppressed by Lesueur himself - he replaced it with a copperplate engraving - thus the lithograph is extremely rare. **It has been described as the first American lithograph to depict a natural history subject.**
- Spider with other figures (total of 10) on single sheet. Plate numbered "Pl. V." in upper left corner. 9 x 5 inches.
- Original pencil drawing of a human skull. Signed C. A. Lesueur, del. Wove paper. 11 x 9 inches. This remarkable skull, which appears to be partly accomplished in crayon, exhibits the wonderful charcoal-like texture so characteristic of a fine lithograph.

[Drawings including some possibly by other contemporaries of Lesueur](#)

Other signed lithographs:

- Abadie. Fossil Elephant Teeth. Abadie from a drawing by Titian Peale. With 5 numbered figures. Plate numbered "P. V." in upper right corner. 9 x 6 inches.
 - This plate was intended to illustrate a paper by Richard Harlan, "Observations on Fossil



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Elephant Teeth, of North America...Read May 6, 1823" for the *Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*. April, 1823. The original drawing is in the Ewell Sale Stewart Library, Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia.

- Abadie. View of a country house. Small trees in the foreground. Signed in the stone, lower left corner: "Abadie's lithog." Proof print of same view on verso of sheet. 4.5 x 8 inches.
- M.A. Pastoral scene of a river and a few buildings, including a church steeple and mountain in the background. Light watercolor. Signed in the stone, "M.A." Approximately 6 x 7 inches.

Other lithographs:

- Rural farm house scene with gated wall, three structures. Lithograph. 6 x 8 inches.
- Houses in a pastoral setting. Three farm houses. Nicely delineated tree in foreground. Lithograph. 8 x 4 1/2 inches.
- Marsh tern. A type of bird found in freshwater marshes, rather than coastal locations. Lithograph. Approximately 4 x 5 inches.
- Leaves printed in green ink, 11 figures. Experimental lithograph or perhaps contact print directly from leaves. 5 x 8 inches.
- Another view of 11 leaves. Printed in green ink. 5 x 8 inches.
- Branch with leaf and cherries. Lithograph. 5 x 4 1/2 inches.
- Topsy-turvy visual trick print with two figures: including a donkey's head which turns into a caricature of a Chinese man. Lithograph. 4 1/2 x 10 1/2 inches.
- Small flowers and leaves. Etching or experimental lithograph. Approximately 4 x 3 inches.

Engravings and original pencil drawings:

- Birds:
 - La fauvette bleue et rousse, male. Sylvia Sialis. A Blue Bird. Langlois imp. From Vieillot, L. P. (Louis Pierre). *Histoire naturelle des oiseaux de l'Amérique Septentrionale* (Paris : Chez Desray, 1807). Handcolored engraving. 12 x 9 inches.
 - Red Owl. Le bibou asio. Bubo Asio. Langlois. From Vieillot. Hand colored engraving. Approximately 11 3/4 x 9 inches.
 - Pigeon Hawk. ...des pigeons. Trinnunculus Columbianus. Hand colored engraving. 13 x 8 inches.
 - American Redstart. Le Moucherolle doré male. Muscicapa ruticilla. pl. 35. Langlois.



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Engraving. Approximately 11 x 9 inches.

- Le Vautour aura. Vultur aura. pl. 2. bis. Langlois. Engraving. Approximately 15 x 12 inches.
- Blue Jay. Engraving. 13 x 8 inches.
- Maryland yellowthroat. Engraving. 8 1/2 x 5 1/2 inches.
- Flicker. Engraving. 10 x 8 inches.
- Yellow-Rump Warbler. La fauvette couronnee. Sylvia coronata. Engraving. 10 x 9 inches.
- Small unidentified bird on branch. Engraving. 8 x 7 inches.
- Pencil drawing of two human skull profiles. Laid paper. 9 x 15 inches.
- Portrait of a young woman, pencil drawing. On sheet, 11 x 17 inches.
- Human eyes, pencil drawing on large of laid paper, with watermark signed J. Cusson. 23 x 17 1/2 inches.
- Profile portrait of a young man. Charcoal drawing. 11 x 9 inches.
- Portrait of a woman wearing a head scarf. Charcoal drawing. 11.5 x 9 inches.
- Profile portrait of a person wearing a hood or wimple. Charcoal drawing. 11 x 9 inches.
- Numerous other pencil sketches of various sizes: human figures, dogs, landscapes, and the like.

Rarity

Original lithographs by Lesueur are extremely rare in the market. While there are institutional holdings of original Lesueur material (notably at Drexell Univeristy), such holdings relate to other aspects of Lesueur's output and do not offer the comparatively broad overview of samples and experimental work from this nascent period of American lithography. As such the present collection is entirely unique in terms of both rarity and potential research value.

Detailed Condition:

Collection of approximately 12 lithographs of various sizes: 17 1/2 x 23 inches or smaller and about 50 additional engravings of birds, and original pencil and charcoal sketches.