

Fact Sheet: ‘Conservation Through the Arts: Celebrating the Federal Duck Stamp’

Exhibition: “Conservation Through the Arts: Celebrating the Federal Duck Stamp”

Dates: Sept. 5, 2024-Feb. 9, 2025

Venue: Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut

Significance: Trace the evolution of renowned wildlife artists and learn the history of a program that has conserved more than 6.5 million acres of wetlands in “Conservation Through the Arts: Celebrating the Federal Duck Stamp.” The exhibition features more than 60 original artworks that have been selected for the annual Federal Duck Stamp alongside taxidermy and carved decoys from the Bruce Museum’s collection. In the past 90 years, the Federal Duck Stamp has raised more than \$1.2 billion to fund habitat conservation that protects waterfowl species that once faced extinction because of market hunters and agricultural growth that drained wetlands.

On Sept. 19 and 20, the Bruce Museum will also host the 2024 Federal Duck Stamp Art Contest, a two-day event during which jurors will select the 2025 Federal Duck Stamp from hundreds of entries in front of a live audience. In the early years of the program, a panel of judges chose the annual stamp design from a shortlist of invited wildlife artists. The first art contest open to the public was held in 1949. It remains the only art competition run by the U.S. government, with winning considered one of the highest honors in wildlife art.

Content: In the past nine decades, mergansers, pintails, mallards and eiders have all been featured on the Federal Duck Stamp. Original paintings, drawings and etchings representing the winning stamp designs will anchor “Conservation Through the Arts: Celebrating the Federal Duck Stamp.” The Bruce Museum turns to its permanent collection for most of the artworks on view, which were part of a recent donation to the Museum by collector Richie Prager, an avid outdoorsman, conservationist and former Federal Duck Stamp Art Contest judge.

Highlights of the exhibition include an early print by two-time Pulitzer Prize winner Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling, who created the first Federal Duck Stamp; two paintings by David Maass, one of history’s most famous wildlife artists; and contemporary paintings by Joseph, James and Robert Hautman, three brothers renowned for collectively winning 15 competitions. Also on view will be Edward J. Bierly’s “Ross’ Geese,” the first artwork to be produced in full color on the Duck Stamp; a rare winning design done on scratchboard depicting Canada Geese by Alderson Magee; and Nancy Howe’s “King Eiders,” the first Duck Stamp design by a women artist.

Historic documents and objects from the Bruce Museum’s natural history collections will accompany the artwork on view. Visitors will encounter the Redhead, Brant, Canvasback, Surf Scoter, American Black Duck and a Red-breasted Merganser and through interactives learn about their calls and hatchlings. Hand-carved wooden decoys on view welcome visitors to celebrate functional folk art and offer insight into how hunters lured waterfowl. Decoy carving was prominent in Connecticut in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and many master carvers developed distinctive styles that were later imitated.

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