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ROBERT M. MENGEL (1921–1990):  
THE BLENDING OF SCIENCE AND ART

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In his often quoted essay on wildlife art, “Beauty and the Beast,” Robert Mengel observed that confusing the qualitative differences between Louis Agassiz Fuertes’ birds and those of Allan Brooks was like confusing Tchaikovsky and Rudolf Friml.<sup>1</sup> Such an unabashedly pointed, if esoteric, comparison reveals as much about Robert Mengel and his Renaissance view of the world as it does about the artists and composers he was discussing in his text.

By his own admission, Mengel was a unusual hybrid of a man, combining in his rich and productive life the various disciplines of science, art, history, literature, and much more.<sup>2</sup> Mention his name to a librarian and you will be shown his “Ellis catalog,” a watershed model in ornithological bibliography.<sup>3</sup> Discuss his scientific achievements, and colleagues will cite “The Birds of Kentucky,” his papers on wood warblers, avian biogeography, dog–coyote hybridization, or any of more than one hundred other publications. Ask a biology student, an artist, a writer, or a fly fisherman what they know of Robert Mengel, and each will have a different story to recount.

To me his most original and inspiring legacy is in his art, which, like the rest of his life, was far more varied and proficient than a first encounter might suggest. I had long admired his black and white illustrations in “The Birds of Kentucky” and “The Handbook of North American Birds,” and, more recently, those in “A Guide to Bird-finding in Kansas and Western Missouri,”<sup>4</sup> but after visiting his studio and seeing the full extent of his artistic productivity, I have come to realize that these and other published works represent only one part of his much larger artistic oeuvre.

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“Sharp-shin,” Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), 1978, watercolor by Robert M. Mengel. (Unless otherwise noted, all Mengel paintings reproduced are from private collections and copyrighted by the artist’s estate.)



FIG. 1. Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), 1977, oil. Robert Mengel turns the world on its side in this dramatic scene in which a diving Peregrine Falcon screams headlong into the viewer's world. By counterbalancing the painting's skewed horizon with the tilt of the Peregrine's wings, Mengel ingeniously creates a simultaneous sense of motion and balance. By muting the background and details of the escaping teal, he rivets our attention on the attacking falcon whose blurring wingtips extend beyond the confines of the canvas. Mengel preferred to work in watercolor or pen and ink, but as this powerfully conceived and executed painting reveals, the artist could also work with considerable skill in oil.



FIG. 2. Robert M. Mengel (1921–1990) at work in his Lawrence, Kansas, studio circa 1986.

This essay and future exhibitions of his paintings may begin to help others know more about the artistic ability and achievement of this immensely talented but modest man.<sup>5</sup>

“Talent,” explained Mengel, “means the ability to draw something that vaguely resembles something in the real world, without seeming to try. You’ve either got it or you don’t.”<sup>6</sup> Robert Mengel clearly had it. His earliest datable drawing—an airplane—captures the romance of flight. It is a small pencil sketch of “The Spirit of St. Louis” in the air, drawn when he saw Charles Lindbergh visit Louisville during the aviator’s triumphal tour of 1927. Bobby Mengel was six years old. A pencil drawing of a few years later (Fig. 3) captures a different kind of flight in a subject

that would fascinate him for the rest of his life. It shows a diving Peregrine Falcon dramatically captioned “Nevver [sic] a Pause! Down! Down Down!” In the lower right hand corner is the artist’s own contemporary assessment of his work: “fair.”

Mengel’s qualitative grading of many of his earliest drawings reveals his life-long commitment to improvement through self-criticism. He received no formal training in art, but taught himself to draw by studying his subjects and the work of other artists, honing his innate talent through repeated trial and error.

Though grateful for his natural ability in drawing, Mengel considered it something of a liability, for it brought him a level of praise he felt he did not deserve. “In the eyes of my family I was a prodigy,” he recalled,

and at gatherings of our large clan I would be exhibited with my latest bird pictures. Fame was pleasant, but I suffered mightily because it seemed impossible to communicate with an audience of adults whose ignorance of birds was almost as complete as their adulation of Audubon. ‘Dear Bobby,’ one or another of my great-aunts would say, ‘you’ll be a second Audubon!’ I could never make them understand that this was not my fondest ambition, and my efforts only magnified my churlishness in rejecting the highest compliment they could offer.<sup>7</sup>

Mengel’s life-long fondness for natural history subjects began with a childhood infatuation with reptiles, amphibians, and birds.<sup>8</sup> “The way many natural historians of my generation started,” explained Mengel, “was as little kids running around with snakes in their pockets and black-birds rotting in their mother’s dresser drawers.”<sup>9</sup>

Born in Glenview, Kentucky, now a suburb of Louisville, on August 19, 1921, Robert Mengel was reared by his mother, who encouraged her son’s wide-ranging interests and energetic zeal. After her death in 1934, he was taken in by an equally talented and encouraging maiden aunt. Fortunately, at just this time he also found an ornithological mentor and substitute father (his own having been institutionalized in the 1920s). Burt Leavelle Monroe, Sr. (1901–1968), a knowledgeable birder who would eventually serve as president of the Kentucky Ornithological Society, treasurer and president of the Wilson Ornithological Society and treasurer of the American Ornithologists’ Union, took Mengel under his wing and devoted many hundreds of hours to his informal education.<sup>10</sup> “I was too naive by far to think of it then,” wrote Mengel, “but in memory it is astonishing how much information, common sense, encouragement, and character he imparted or demonstrated without a trace of ‘adult’ superiority.”<sup>11</sup>



NEVEY A PAUSE! DOWN!  
DOWN DOWN!

1930

fair

FIG. 3. Bird of Prey in Flight, Kentucky, circa 1930, graphite. From early childhood, Mengel was intrigued by raptors and sought to capture their speed, power and grace on paper. He drew, captioned, and critically graded this example when he was less than ten years old.



FIG. 4. Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax violaceus*) Kentucky, 1941, watercolor. In 1940, Mengel matriculated at Cornell University where George Miksch Sutton (1898–1982) encouraged him to develop his talent for bird painting. Mengel's life studies—this one painted during a return trip to his home-state of Kentucky—soon reached a level of excellence surpassed only by Sutton and his mentor, Louis Agassiz Fuertes (1874–1927).

As a teenager, Mengel spent many “mirthful” after-school hours at Monroe's house “examining specimens and talking ornithology and many other things.”<sup>12</sup> Whenever possible, he joined Monroe and his son, Burt, Jr., for weekend outings near and far:

Most of these trips were necessarily carried out near Louisville. We were often out until after dark, returning tired out and laden with birds to be skinned, nests, eggs to be blown (still respectable in those days), and other objects. There were no limits to Burt's enthusiasm for either birds or foolishness. . . . On rare occasions we drove to the wilder parts of Kentucky, either in the mountainous east or the lowland west, staying overnight in the simple 'tourist courts' of the day and leaving them liberally sprinkled with corn meal and feathers.<sup>13</sup>

These excursions helped Mengel to build his field skills and led to some memorable adventures. "Once," he recalled, "we almost blundered into a moonshine still in full operation. Such was Burt's rustic charm with the impressively armed operators that we ended with the risk to our sobriety being far greater than that to our skins."<sup>14</sup>

In 1937, the year he left Louisville for boarding school in Pennsylvania, Mengel joined the Wilson Ornithological Society.<sup>15</sup> He became a member of the A.O.U. in the following year.

In his free time between academic and athletic commitments at The Hill School, Mengel pursued his interest in both birds and art. Like most aspiring bird painters of the period, he was heavily influenced by Louis Agassiz Fuertes (1874–1927), whose paintings dominated the ornithological literature of the day and whose thorough knowledge of his subject filled Mengel with admiration then and throughout his life. "Fuertes probably possessed the most thorough understanding of birds of any artist of any kind," he wrote.<sup>16</sup>

Fuertes's long association with Cornell and the university's well-established reputation as a center for ornithological study, made it a natural choice for Mengel when he was considering college. On a scouting trip to Ithaca in May 1940, Mengel had a chance to visit the very room in which much of Fuertes's work was created. His host and guide for this pilgrimage was none other than George Miksch Sutton (1898–1982), Fuertes' most distinguished student, and a major artistic figure in his own right. Sutton was then teaching ornithology at Cornell and living in what had been Fuertes' studio.

The two men hit it off immediately and established a life-long friendship. Mengel was entranced by Sutton's paintings and captivating personality. "I had never seen anything on paper like those crisp, lively, bright-eyed birds," he later recalled, "and I had certainly never met anyone at all like this man."<sup>17</sup>

So strong was the Fuertes/Sutton influence on Mengel during his undergraduate years at Cornell that his paintings of the period grew uncannily similar to theirs. Were they not signed and dated, some of Mengel's



watercolor head studies from 1940 and 1941 might easily be attributed to his mentor. The most stylized of these, a series of duck heads, were painted from stuffed birds in sunlight under Sutton's direction.<sup>18</sup> Some of the others—a Yellow-crowned Night Heron (Fig. 4), a Fuertes Red-tailed Hawk, a Red-breasted Merganser, and a Cooper's Hawk—all painted from fresh specimens or observations of live birds, evoke the power of Fuertes or Sutton at their best.

Almost a decade after their first meeting, Sutton asked Mengel to provide some paintings for an article he was writing for *Audubon Magazine* about the use of baby birds as artistic models.<sup>19</sup> Since this was the subject for which Sutton himself was deservedly famous, the invitation was a tremendous compliment to the younger artist. Mengel's professional collaboration with George Sutton would almost certainly have come sooner had World War II not intervened (see Fig. 9).

Robert Mengel joined the U.S. Army Air Force in 1942 and, after a brief period of training, applied to Officers Candidate School with the following letter of recommendation in hand:

To Whom It May Concern:

I have known Robert M. Mengel for several years. He did a good deal of work with me at Cornell University and this gave me an opportunity to observe him closely. He is a born ornithologist and bird artist. This is saying a good deal, for a good many ornithologists are not born so. He is deeply interested in ornithology, works hard at it, and has attained some eminence in the field especially in so far as Kentucky bird-life is concerned.

Bob's interest in birds does not hide certain other important attributes, among them an excellent memory; enjoyment of working with, and being with, his fellows; ability to concentrate; and an innate tendency to plan with care a course of action. These are attributes a good leader should have.

Sincerely yours,

G. M. Sutton  
Captain, Air Corps<sup>20</sup>

Not knowing quite what to make of such qualifications, the Army assigned Mengel to Airways Communications and sent him to the Middle East. He spent 21 months in Libya, Egypt, and what is now the United Arab Emirates. His drawings of fellow soldiers and military installations there reveal his growing versatility as an artist. A 1945 sketch of two men overlooking the Persian Gulf evokes the loneliness and boredom of Army



FIG. 5. Servicemen on the Beach, Jask, Iran, 1945, graphite. During World War II, Mengel's military service included a tour of duty in the Middle East where he continued to expand his artistic and ornithological skills. In this sketch Mengel captures the boredom and loneliness he and others experienced during periods of the war. In addition to scenes of military life, his wartime sketchbooks are filled with drawings of birds.

life with a masterful economy of line. Many of his other wartime drawings capture the youth and innocence of his friends during this difficult time.

Birds were frustratingly scarce in the desert regions to which he had been assigned. Nevertheless, Mengel managed to find enough birds—and enough free time—to pursue some ornithological interests even under the restrictive exigencies of war. He organized some of his watercolors from the Middle East as an informal field guide to the birds he had seen there.

Mengel's less conventional works during this period include two large watercolors which he intended to submit as possible cover designs for *Audubon Magazine*.<sup>21</sup> The paintings of flamingos and shorebirds are unlike any of his other work. Their highly stylized treatment, bold composition, and limited palette have a strong art-deco flavor, without losing their integrity as accurate depictions of the natural world. This brief experiment with the popular style of the era was the closest Mengel ever came to the field of commercial art.

At the close of World War II, Mengel returned to Cornell to complete his undergraduate degree.<sup>22</sup> He then moved to Ann Arbor to pursue his



*Aegolius acadicus*  
Saw-whet Owl  
Mich., back of house  
Jan. 2, 1949  
M. Mengel

FIG. 6. Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*), Michigan, 1949, watercolor. Following World War II, Mengel returned to Cornell and later moved to Ann Arbor to pursue graduate studies at the University of Michigan. His studies from this period are among his best, capturing the essential features of his subjects without overworking the details. "Watercolor is an unforgiving medium," he observed. "It's like ski-jumping—you can't turn back."

master's and doctoral degrees in zoology at the University of Michigan.<sup>23</sup> His paintings during this period show a return to the powerful portrait style of the early 1940s in which he focused on capturing the spirit of his subjects as well as the physical aspects of their anatomy, posture, and

plumage. In a series of owl and raptor studies of the late 1940s and early 1950s, Mengel again approaches the quality of Fuertes and Sutton at the heights of their respective careers.

Equally impressive are his portraits of upland game birds (he was an enthusiastic sportsman) and warblers—to name just two groups of birds that especially interested him at the time. In these, Mengel's first-hand field knowledge and total familiarity with his subjects is self-evident. His deft and confident brushwork, his skilled handling of color, light and shadow, and his intuitive grasp of form are often infused with a sympathy for the subjects that carries them well beyond literal depictions. Although few of these individual studies were ever turned into formal paintings, many stand as minor masterpieces of their kind.

In 1953, while still working on the text and illustrations for his massive "Birds of Kentucky," Mengel took a half-time position at the University of Kansas, cataloging the library's recently-acquired collection of rare ornithological books (the Ralph N. Ellis collection).<sup>24</sup> There his daily access to the beautifully illustrated volumes in the collection enabled him to develop an extensive knowledge of the history of ornithology and scientific illustration.

During his early years in Lawrence, Mengel leavened his ornithological research with a study of dog-coyote hybridization, much of which he based on observations of the offspring of his own terrier bitch and a pure-bred coyote that lived for a while in his house.<sup>25</sup> Naturally, the animals attracted his artistic eye as well, resulting in a series of charming watercolor studies. The accuracy and individuality of each pose—often captured with the barest minimum of brushwork—speak volumes about Mengel's ability to observe and spontaneously record the personalities of his subjects.

In 1962, after 11 years of work, Mengel completed the "Birds of Kentucky" and plunged into another gigantic project, the illustrations for the American Ornithologists' Union's multi-volume "Handbook of North American Birds."<sup>26</sup> In the hundreds of individual black and white portraits he drew for the "Handbook" over the next two and a half decades, Mengel combined traditional India ink renditions with more experimental scratchboard techniques. Working closely with the "Handbook's" editor, Ralph Palmer, Mengel developed a distinctive illustration style which integrated avian appearance and behavior with depictions of characteristic habitat. His effective use of solid and void, and the effortless balance of his compositions make each of the book's illustrations a visual delight as well as an instructive complement to the text.<sup>27</sup>

George Sutton spoke for many readers when he admired the results. "In my opinion your work is both good illustration and good art," he wrote Mengel in 1962.



*Actitis macularia*  
 Juvenile  
 New York, N.Y.  
 1947

FIG. 7. Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) juvenile, New York, 1947, watercolor. Mengel's knowledge of bird anatomy and his deft handling of watercolor enabled him to paint juvenile birds with a fidelity matched by few other artists. In 1949 George Sutton invited him to provide several pictures for an article he was writing on "Baby Birds as Models" for *Audubon Magazine*. Mengel's Spotted Sandpiper was among the group selected by Sutton for publication.

I can't tell you how I enjoy the freedom from cross-hatching and the occasional complete omissions of line where no line is needed. . . . I get a tremendous kick out of this work, not alone because it is exciting as it stands, but also because it bespeaks a remarkable potential and future.<sup>28</sup>



FIG. 8. Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*), Virginia, 1955, watercolor. In this “bird’s eye view” of a Lesser Scaup, Mengel creates the varied textures of water, feathers, bill, and eye with subtle changes in brushstroke. His low angle and foreshortened perspective create an illusion of motion, as if the bird has just been startled and is swimming away to safety. Such original concepts of composition give Mengel’s watercolors a fresh, lifelike quality rarely achieved in paintings of this kind.

The future for Mengel was a move away from bird painting per se. Although he continued to love birds—and to paint them brilliantly—he painted them as part of a broader experience. In his non-commissioned painting, he focused more and more on landscape, incorporating wildlife



FIG. 9. Greater Prairie Chickens (*Tympanuchus cupido*), Kansas, 1958, pen and ink. When Mengel sent this pen and ink drawing to George Sutton in 1958, Sutton responded enthusiastically: "By golly your Prairie Chickens are nice! The sweep of habitat below the flying birds is really magnificent and your drawing of the upcountry prairies is something to comment about! Only he who draws birds knows what know-how this sort of thing represents. I congratulate you, my good friend."

as enlivening elements to an overall composition, rather than the subjects of central importance. Quite apart from any birds he might choose to include, he wanted each of his paintings to stand on its own as a work of art.<sup>29</sup>

"I have just submitted three pictures to the annual Kansas Watercolor Society show," he wrote George Sutton in 1978.

I have enjoyed some modest success recently with smaller juried shows and, of course, have been smart enough to leave the animals out or, at the most, much sublimated in the landscape. I have become persuaded that Carl Rungius was right, namely, make a name in the field of general art (if you can) and *then* emerge as a closet bird (mammal) painter, easy of mind and thumbing your nose at the provincial of both persuasions!<sup>30</sup>

In "Beauty and the Beast," Mengel quoted George Sarton, the historian of science, as saying: "works of art are precious to us, above all, because they enable us to understand . . . as we could in no other manner, the people who produced them. Each gives us an intuitive, synthetic, and immediate knowledge of their deepest aspirations."<sup>31</sup> In his own copy of the article, Mengel underlined the quote and noted "I have found it useful to return often to these words."<sup>32</sup>

It is not by chance that in Mengel's paintings we see bits of Carl Rungius,

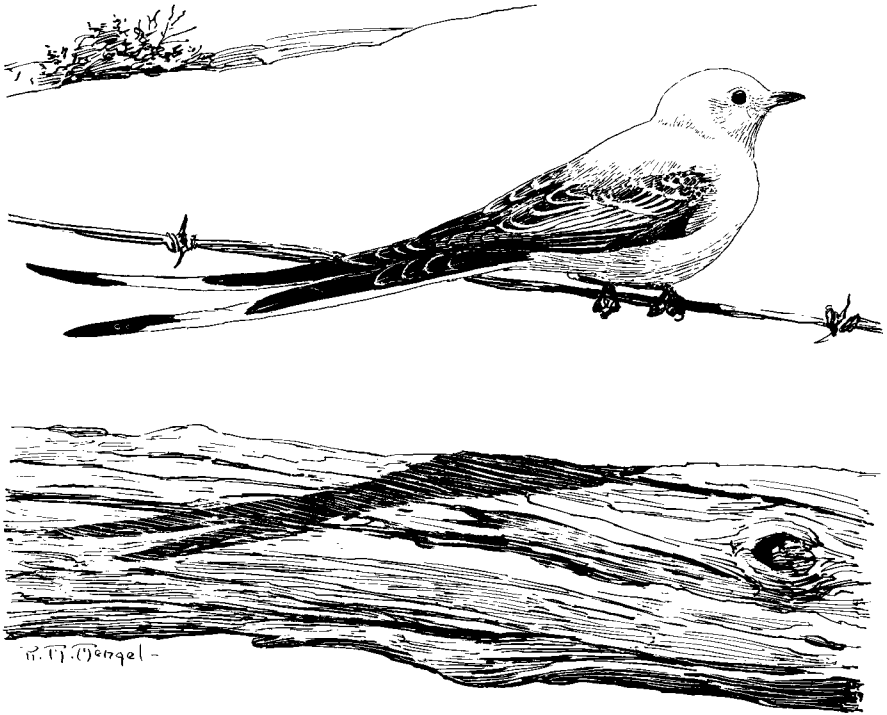


FIG. 10. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*), 1987, pen and ink, published in "Guide to Bird-finding in Kansas and Western Missouri" by J. L. Zimmerman and S. T. Patti (1988). As an artist, Mengel is probably best known for the many black and white illustrations he created for publication. A brilliant draftsman with an instinctive eye for composition, Mengel distilled the essence of his subjects and placed them in stylized but entirely characteristic habitats. The resulting images are often as evocative of time and place as they are of the birds depicted. (Courtesy, S. T. Patti).

Ogden Pleisner, Andrew Wyeth, Eric Ennion, Bruno Lilejefors, Winslow Homer, George Miksch Sutton, Robert Verity Clem, Frances Lee Jaques, Louis Agassiz Fuertes, and a dozen or more other artists whose work he admired, for with these artists he shared common approaches to art.

Despite such affinities, except in his early paintings, very little of what he created with pencil, pen and brush was derivative. Where stylistic overlap with others did occur, it reflects not emulation so much as a convergence of objectives and achievement.

The pictures he made throughout his life were filled with joy and light, and love of the outdoors. He reveled in the freedom of wildness on every scale: Golden Plovers in an Alaskan meadow, Prairie Chickens booming





FIG. 11. "Carman in the Snow," Coyote (*Canis latrans*), Lawrence, Kansas, 1955, watercolor. Mengel's scientific interest in coyotes and coyote-dog hybridization took on a highly personal dimension when he decided to have the animals live with him at home. They soon became a part of his extended family, and the subjects of his pen and brush. As this watercolor study reveals, the artist's ability to convey the external appearance, behavior, and even the personality of his animal subjects was by no means limited to birds. (Courtesy, S. T. Patti).

to a Kansas dawn, a mink sunning by one of the Montana spring creeks he loved to fish, or a pair of Golden Eagles dancing in a clouded western sky.

My favorite is a loose wash of streamside vegetation with a bleached drift log reflecting in a quiet pool (Frontispiece). Two thirds of the way up the paper and slightly to the left of center is a soaring sharpshin. The hawk, fluid, almost casual, yet precisely composed and rendered, infuses the painting with spontaneity and life. In "Sharpshin," as in a number of his later works, Mengel managed to transcend the accurate replication of nature. At the height of his artistic power, he was able to recreate the intangible sensations of experience.

In the written, drawn and painted work that punctuated his career, Robert Mengel went a long way to bridging the "gulf of mutual incomprehension" between science and the humanities described by the British author C. P. Snow.<sup>33</sup> His rare combination of artistic talent, technical competence, intellectual acumen, and emotional involvement with his subjects, enabled him to effectively blur the boundaries of science and art. In so doing, he created a legacy that is at once comprehensible, instructive, and inspiring to the proponents of both.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This appreciation of Robert Mengel and his art, originally suggested by Ken Parkes, is based on a reading of Mengel's many published and unpublished writings, a comprehensive

review of his art, and my own long admiration of his artistic, literary, and scientific contributions to the field of ornithology. For a more personal perspective on Robert's life, and for her invaluable help in making his art work accessible to me, I am deeply grateful to Marion Jenkinson Mengel.

I am also indebted to the friends and colleagues of Robert Mengel to whom I turned for personal insights and advice. For their many thoughtful suggestions and enthusiastic encouragement, I would especially like to thank R. Clem, C. Dwigans, D. Eckelberry, F. Gill, M. Hill, F. Lohrer, J. O'Neill, R. Palmer, K. Parkes, V. Pine, G. Schnell, G. Tudor, H. Tordoff, and G. Woolfenden.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Robert Mengel, "Beauty and the Beast," *The Living Bird*, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Ithaca, N.Y., Vol. 18, July 1980, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Mengel, "Bibliography and the Ornithologist," in Thomas R. Buckman, ed. "Bibliography & Natural History," Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Libraries, 1966 p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> "A Catalog of the Ellis Collection of Ornithological Books in the University of Kansas Libraries" compiled by Robert M. Mengel, Vol. 1, A-B, 1972; Vol. 2, C-D, 1983. Vol. 3, E-G, is still being prepared for publication.

<sup>4</sup> "The Birds of Kentucky," A.O.U. Monograph #3, 1965; "The Handbook of North American Birds," Ralph S. Palmer, ed., A.O.U.; "Guide to Bird-finding in Kansas and Western Missouri" by J. L. Zimmerman and S. T. Patti, Univ. of Kansas Press, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> The most recent exhibition of Robert Mengel's painting, for which the author served as guest curator, was displayed in the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History at the University of Oklahoma in conjunction with the joint meeting of the Wilson and Cooper Ornithological Societies, May 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Robert Mengel by Cathy M. Dwigans and John E. Simmons, 9/25/86, quoted in *Panorama*, Univ. of Kansas Museum of Natural History, Vol. 15, No. 3, Winter, 1986, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> From a book review of "The Original Watercolor Paintings by John James Audubon," *Scientific American*, Vol. 216, No. 5, May 1967, pp. 155-158. Mengel goes on to discuss the reasons for Audubon's almost universal popularity despite his shortcomings as an accurate illustrator of nature.

<sup>8</sup> When asked by a reporter how he developed an interest in birds, Mengel admitted "I haven't the slightest idea," but then went on to speculate that it had something to do with their "combination of aesthetics and complexity." *Lawrence Journal-World*, January 1, 1984, p. 6A.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Robert Mengel by Cathy M. Dwigans and John E. Simmons, 9/25/86, quoted in *Panorama*, Univ. of Kansas Museum of Natural History, Vol. 15, No. 3, Winter, 1986.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Mengel met Burt Leavelle Monroe, Sr., through the Beckham Bird Club of Louisville. Monroe served as president of the Wilson Ornithological Society from 1954 to 1956.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Mengel, "In Memoriam: Burt Leavelle Monroe, Sr.," *The Auk*, Vol. 88, No. 1, January 22, 1971, p. 91.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Mengel attended the Hill School in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, graduating with the class of 1940.

<sup>16</sup> Mengel, "Beauty and the Beast," pp. 56-57.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Mengel, "George Miksch Sutton: A Bird Artist's Bird Artist," *The Living Bird Quarterly*, Spring, 1983, p. 30.

<sup>18</sup> This, according to a much later annotation by Mengel on one of the studies.

<sup>19</sup> In a letter to Mengel of June 24, 1948, Sutton writes: "Dear Bob: Recently I've been doing a baby bird a day or better and the collection of baby bird drawings is growing rapidly. I've thought of doing an article for *Audubon Magazine* on baby birds as models, and wonder if you and Bill Lunk would like to let me use one or two of *your* drawings of baby birds as additional illustrations. . . . I liked your Robin study *very much*. . . ." Letter from the estate of Rober Mengel.

Sutton's article, complete with two of Mengel's paintings, appeared under the title: "Baby Birds as Models," see: *Audubon Magazine*, March-April 1949, pp. 104-108.

<sup>20</sup> Letter of recommendation, February 18, 1943 from the estate of Robert Mengel.

<sup>21</sup> In a letter to George M. Sutton from Tripoli, Libya, of June 16, 1945, Mengel wrote: "I have done quite a bit of painting myself from time to time since I have been overseas. Not really a great deal, but at least a few 'field sketches'. . . . In addition to the above-mentioned portraits, I have done two other pictures of a freer type—made with the idea in mind of suitability for covers of magazines—to wit: *Audubon Magazine*. One is of a pair of stone curlews in black and white, the other of three flamingos in

black and white and pink. (I saw quite a number of flamingos in Arabia before I left there). Do you seriously [think] *Audubon Magazine* would consider publishing foreign birds on its cover? That is, assuming the pictures are suitable for reproduction, and of satisfactory quality (which, of course, remains for them to decide)." (A copy of this letter is in the estate of Robert Mengel.) No evidence survives to reveal whether or not he ever submitted the paintings to *Audubon*. They were never published.

<sup>22</sup> Mengel received his B.S. from Cornell in 1947.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Mengel received his Master's degree from the Univ. of Michigan in 1950 and a Ph.D. from the same university in 1958 under the direction of Josselyn Van Tyne and (after Van Tyne's death in 1957) William H. Burt.

<sup>24</sup> In 1967 he was made Curator of Ornithology and Associate Professor of Systematics and Ecology at the Univ. of Kansas. He was given a full professorship in 1971. As his long-time friend Bud Tordoff has written, Mengel found at the Univ. of Kansas "exactly the sort of job he had aimed for, museum curation with some teaching involvement." See: Harrison B. Tordoff, "In Memoriam: Robert M. Mengel," *The Auk*, Vol. 108, No. 1, 1991, pp. 161-165.

<sup>25</sup> According to several of Mengel's friends, his pack of semidomesticated coyotes occasionally escaped. On more than one occasion his study subjects were captured and returned by the police. Thus his study of dog-coyote hybrids (*Journal of Mammalogy*, Vol. 52, 1971, pp. 316-336) may be unique among scientific journals in giving thanks to the local chief of police!

<sup>26</sup> "The Handbook of North American Birds," Ralph Palmer, ed. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1962-1988: Vol. 1, 1962; Vols. 2 + 3, 1976; Vols. 4 + 5, 1988. In addition to the many black and white illustrations Mengel made for this series, he also created 11 full page color plates.

<sup>27</sup> According to Ralph Palmer, the "Handbook's" editor and artist "were of one mind that, where feasible, a humdrum delineation of diagnostic details was out—the illustrations were to be both biologically truthful and esthetic. Typically, the editor supplied a layout (sketch) to which was clipped and written suggestions and often photos. Bob then executed the picture and sent a facsimile copy to Palmer, a few needed minor changes, which were marked on the copy and this was returned to Bob. Then he corrected the original and it was forwarded directly from the artist to the publisher." Personal correspondence, March 19, 1991.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from George Sutton to Robert Mengel, October 17, 1962, from the estate of Robert Mengel.

<sup>29</sup> "When I paint birds . . . for my own pleasure," Mengel explained, "I don't paint ornithological pictures at all. I try to paint birds as part of an experience, as part of a landscape. The painting ought to be able to stand without a bird, but when the bird comes along, all the better." From an interview with Robert Mengel by Cathy M. Dwigans and John E. Simmons, 9/25/86, quoted in *Panorama*, Univ. of Kansas Museum of Natural History, Vol. 15, No. 3, Winter, 1986, pp. 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Robert Mengel to George M. Sutton, from the estate of Robert Mengel.

<sup>31</sup> George Sarton, "Introduction to the History of Science," Vol. 1, Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1927, p. 4, quoted in Robert Mengel, "Beauty and the Beast," op. cit. p. 28.

<sup>32</sup> From Robert Mengel's own copy of "Beauty and the Beast," the estate of Robert Mengel.

<sup>33</sup> C. P. Snow, "The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution," Cambridge Univ. Press, 1959, p. 4.