

Holotype Skull of

Torosaurus latus

Wyoming, Niobrara County, Late Cretaceous
Lance Formation (68 million years ago),
collected 1891 by John Bell Hatcher

Unlike artists, who embrace ambiguity—often even leaving their works untitled—scientists fragment and name the world in an effort to understand and explain it. O. C. Marsh, the founder (in 1866) of the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History and the first professor of paleontology in North America, spent his career wanting to *know*. He discovered and named many of the large dinosaurs that we first learn as children—Brontosaurus, Stegosaurus, Triceratops—unearthed from fossil beds of the American West, where their bones had fallen hundreds of millions of years before. The holotype skull on view here is from a dinosaur that Marsh discovered and named as a new species in 1891, *Torosaurus latus*. Excavated in Wyoming and brought to New Haven by the legendary fossil hunter John Bell Hatcher, it is the largest skull of any animal to ever walk the earth.

This installation is part of the exhibition *James Prosek: Art, Artifact, Artifice*, on view on the fourth floor.

James Prosek

American, born 1975, B.A. 1997

Sequence No. 3

2019

Pigmented inkjet print

As the eggs in this room were being laid, epithelial cells in the birds' oviducts released pigment that made unique drawings on the eggs' surfaces. Such marks can help the mother bird identify her eggs (thus serving as a kind of writing) and can camouflage the egg from predators by mimicking the patterns of the stones or sand on which it is laid (a kind of representational painting). The birds are most likely unaware of the marks being made and therefore are achieving something akin to what the Surrealists and, later, the Abstract Expressionists strived to create—a mark made outside of conscious thought, a method known as *automatism*. The two-dimensional artworks shown next to each egg were made by taking a three-dimensional scan of the egg, then digitally unrolling and enlarging the image in what is known as a Mercator projection.

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Bird Spectrum

2019

Bird specimens

The Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History's ornithology collection consists of 150,000 specimens collected over the last 150 years from every continent of the world. The over 200 birds shown here include extinct species like a Carolina Parakeet collected in Tampa, Florida, in 1882; a lorikeet endemic to the island of Pohnpei, Micronesia; several specimens of the brilliant orange cock-of-the-rock of South American rainforests; an indigo bunting collected in New Haven in 1883; and an orange fruit dove from Fiji. The artwork at left, *Memory of Life*, comprises images of the specimen tags for every bird in the *Bird Spectrum*. The tags generally record the location where the bird was collected, the name of the person who collected and prepared it, the name of the bird, and, sometimes, the person who named the species.

Specimens provided by the Yale Peabody Museum
of Natural History

Courtesy the artist