
stuffed bird
attached

a bird plucked from paradise -
a male in peak plumage, on a
treetop in New Guinea. Competing
for female attention, its elaborately
evolved display exquisitely
fulfilling the possibilities
of feather and form

They are in a state of excitement and incessant activity, and the males assemble together to exercise, dress and display their magnificent plumage. For this purpose they prefer certain lofty, large-leafed forest-trees (which at this time have no fruit), and on these, early in the morning , from ten to twenty full-plumaged birds assemble, as the natives express it, "to play and dance". They open their wings, stretch out their necks, shake their bodies, and keep the long golden plumes open and vibrating – constantly changing their positions, flying across and across each other from branch to branch, and appearing proud of their activity and beauty. The long, downy, golden feathers are, however, displayed in a manner which has, I believe, been hitherto quite unknown, but in which alone the bird can be seen to full advantage, and claim our admiration as the most beautiful winged forms which adorn the earth.

Alfred Russell Wallace (1857): the first scientific description of the mating practices of the Greater Bird of Paradise, in The Annals and Magazine of Natural History.

killed in mid-performance
by traditional hunters, bird-skins
were prepared for human display

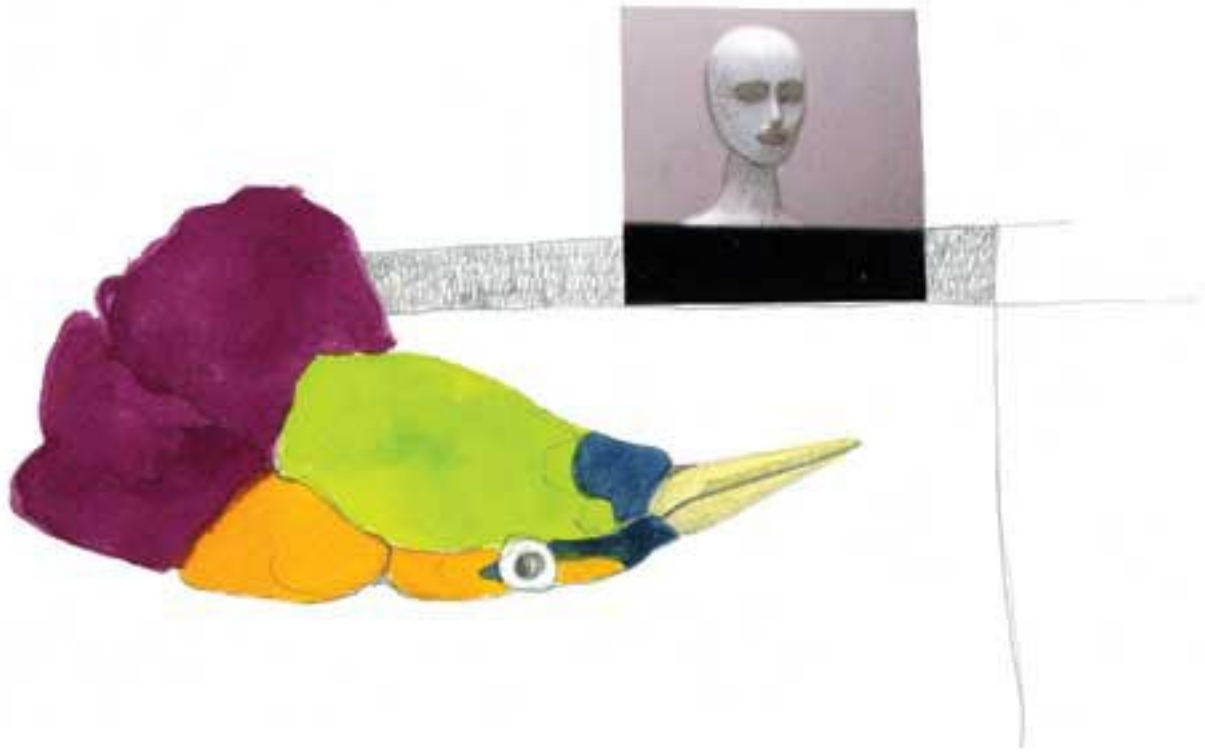
…the males assemble early in the morning to exhibit themselves in the singular manner already described…This habit enables the natives to obtain specimens with comparative ease. As soon as they find that the birds have fled upon a tree on which to assemble, they build a little shelter of palm leaves in a convenient place among the branches, and the hunter ensconces himself in it before daylight, armed with his bow and a number of arrows terminating in a round knob. A boy waits at the foot of the tree, and when the birds come at sunrise, and a sufficient number have assembled, and have begun to dance, the hunter shoots with his blunt arrow so strongly as to stun the bird, which drops down, and is secured and killed by the boy without its plumage being injured by a drop of blood. The rest take no notice, and fall one after another till some of them take the alarm. The native mode of preserving them is to cut off the wings and feet, and then skin the body up to the beak, taking out the skull. A stout stick is then run up through the specimen coming out at the mouth.

Alfred Russell Wallace (1869): The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-utang and the Bird of Paradise.

the way the birds were prepared gave European scholars a peculiar view of their natural history

When the earliest European voyagers reached the Moluccas in search of cloves and nutmegs, which were then rare and precious spices, they were presented with the dried skins of birds so strange and beautiful as to excite the admiration even of those wealth-seeking rovers. The Malay traders gave them the name of "Manuk dewata," or God's birds; and the Portuguese, finding that they had no feet or wings, and not being able to learn anything authentic about then, called them "Passaros de Col," or Birds of the Sun; while the learned Dutchmen, who wrote in Latin, called them "Avis paradiseus," or Paradise Bird. John van Linschoten gives these names in 1598, and tells us that no one has seen these birds alive, for they live in the air, always turning towards the sun, and never lighting on the earth till they die; for they have neither feet nor wings, as, he adds, may be seen by the birds carried to India, and sometimes to Holland, but being very costly they were then rarely seen in Europe.

Alfred Russell Wallace (1869): The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-utang and the Bird of Paradise.



with the Plume Boom, there was an insatiable hunger for these feathery remains from Paradise — marketed as accoutrements of taste and decorum

Bird-lovers must now bid farewell forever to all the birds of paradise. Nothing but the legal closing of the world's markets against their plumes and skins can save any of them. They never were numerous; nor does any species range over a wide area. They are strictly insular, and the island homes of some of them are very small. Take the great bird of paradise (*Paradisea apoda*) as an illustration. On Oct. 2, 1912, at Indianapolis, Indiana, a city near the center of the United States, in three show-windows within 100 feet of the headquarters of the Fourth National Conservation Congress, I counted 11 stuffed heads and 11 complete sets of plumes of this bird, displayed for sale. The prices ranged from $30 to $47.50 each! And while I looked, a large lady approached, pointed her finger at the remains of a greater bird of paradise, and with grim determination, said to her shopping companion:

"There! I want one o' them, an' I'm agoin' to have it, too!"

W. T Hornaday (1913): Our Vanishing Wildlife: Its Extermination and Preservation. e-book available www.gutenburg.net

the feathers 'willowed' and dyed - often black
in plumassier's workshops, probably a sweatshop

The secrets of the black dyeing of feathers are kept by good dyers; but the process with logwood dye, which is the best, takes about six days. The methods of dyeing, except for the black feathers, are quite simple. The feathers are dyed in small quantities. Acid dye stuffs, either formic or oxalic acid, are best in color and fastness. If the feathers are not bleached before dyeing, they are washed thoroughly in castile soap and water and rinsed. They are then soaked in hot water half an hour to get the stems and quills soft enough to take the dye well. Feathers are often painted with oil paint and gasoline, but the color rubs off and there is danger of plastering the tiny barbules together if the paint is too thick. Barred or stenciled effects may be obtained by painting.

The 1922 edition of 'Millinery'.

a common pose for these worked feathers was atop a hat -
a strange development of the birds' own treetop display.
Once on a hat, pinned and stitched to silken forms,
the male bird now had his movements choreographed.
Their glory extinguished, dead feathers, oblivious to
the likely extinction of their species.

strapped in place as macabre puppets of
mourning - instead of their own eyes, glassy
hemispheres pinned to black-dyed feathers

Millinery is ever a matter of interest to women, and a new chapeau is almost invariably regarded with greater interest than even a new frock, for the latter is more of a necessity… Mrs. John Jacob Astor is wearing a chic purple crinoline hat with a small, flat, round crown and a wide brim that curves over a bit at the edges and then rises at the right front and describes a wide, flaring semi-circle to a point back of the left ear. Its sole trimming is a black bird of paradise plume that starts from the left of the crown and sweeps upward, outward, and backward against both brim and crown. Mrs. Clarence Mackay wears hats to match her frocks, the hats being made to go with each costume. The other evening she had on at dinner at Sherry's a charmingly light but large round hat of pearly grey white tulle shirred on invisible wires and quite transparent as to the wide brim. From the front and left of the hat floated a plume of white bird of paradise feathers. The gown this frail but beautiful creation topped was pale gray covered partially with darker gray paillettes in chenille effect.

The 'What Women Are Wearing' section of the New York Times, September 25th, 1904

When Malay, Polynesian, Portuguese, Dutch and English traders became fascinated with the rare birds, they were also merely dis-covering – making appear – objective effects of sexual selection accumulated over a few tens of thousands of years. No heroic entitlement can be conferred to anyone in this story: evolutionary creativity is absolutely without subject.

Arun Saldanha (2010) 'Two Birds of Paradise in North Holland, 1592: The Gift in the Exotic', Parallax, vol. 16, no. 1, 68–79.

This booklet, *“stuffed bird attached”,* was compiled by Kate Foster and Merle Patchett for the show *Fashioning Feathers*. It uses material available on the online catalogue (www.fashioningfeathers.com) - including Ulisse Aldrovandi, Ornithologiae (1599), "Natives of Aru shooting the Great Bird of Paradise”, from The Malay Archipelago (1869) and photographs from the UACTC by Merle Patchett. Original drawings and notes by Kate Foster.