

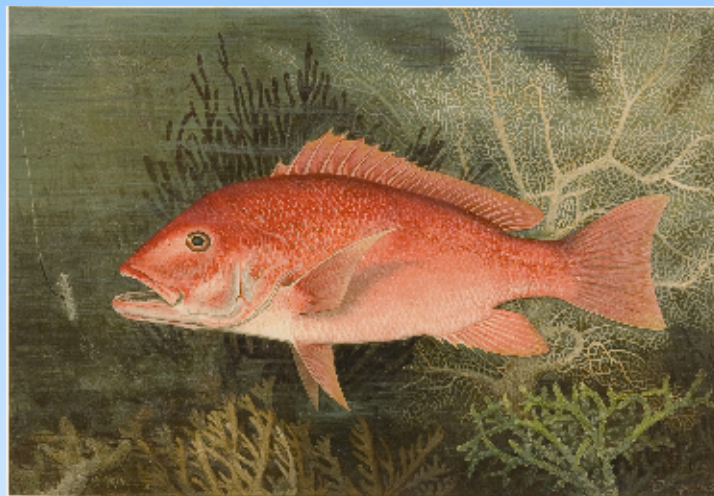
# Gone Fishing

"Fish Stories" at Crystal Bridges Museum



*By Stephen May*

**B**ENTONVILLE, ARK. - Combing through the riches in its ample collection, staff at the relatively new Crystal Bridges Library, an arm of the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, have made some interesting discoveries. Case in point: former library director Catherine Petersen found among the American color plate books one of the largest and most spectacular Nineteenth Century American sporting volumes, *Game Fishes of the United States* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879). Petersen says, "I marveled at how as a body of work they convey the drama of sport fishing that is so popular in the beautiful lakes and rivers of Arkansas." She speculated that anglers who



"Red Snapper"

(Previous Page) "Yellow Perch"

All plates are by Samuel Kilbourne (1836-1881), from *Game Fishes of the United States* by George Brown Goode (1851-1896), Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1879-1880. Chromolithograph, 14 by 20 inches. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art Library. -Heugh-Edmondson Conservation Services, LLC photos

visit Arkansas in spring and summer would be similarly intrigued by the display of these depictions of distinctly American fish in their natural surroundings.





"Bluefish"

Killbourn  
1858

Petersen used *Game Fishes* as the centerpiece of an intriguing exhibition, “Fish Stories: Early Images of American Game Fish,” on view through October 4. The exhibition, says Rod Bigelow, Crystal Bridges executive director, offers visitors “a glimpse into the many facets of Nineteenth Century life with works that capture American values, provide scientific



"Speckled Trout"

documentation and illustrate the playfulness of the great outdoors throughout history.”

The display features 20 splendid, richly colored plates based on original paintings by a leading sporting artist of the day, Samuel A. Kilbourne. Each chromolithographed plate in the show is individually matted and uniformly framed. The accompanying text in *Game Fishes* was written by the respected ichthyologist George Brown Goode, then curator of the Smithsonian Institution’s United States National Museum.

Little is known about Kilbourne (1836-1881). Born in what is now Bridgton, Maine, he was originally trained as a landscape painter and executed a variety of landscapes and still



"Striped Bass"





"Pompano"

lives until he turned to fish as a subject at the age of 22.

Fish portrayals gave Kilbourne the chance to combine his talent for landscape painting and fish painting. His carefully composed images ran the gamut from fish swimming peacefully in the water to fighting a

fisherman's line, or drawn up on a bank. The fish are vivid, their shimmering colors and individualized profiles precisely delineated. Kilbourne's compositions conveyed both the drama of angling and the beauty of the natural surroundings. His fish-related landscapes are detailed with foreground foliage and backgrounds of trees, rocks or



"Sheepshead"

sailboats. He painted on commission for scientists and sportsmen, but is best remembered for his fine illustrations in *Game Fishes* and for contributing to the American sporting art tradition. It seems certain that Kilbourne spent a good deal of time observing fish along the New England coast and perhaps at more distant locales. Unfortunately, he died soon after *Game Fishes* was published.

Petersen recognized at the outset that Kilbourne's prints "were very much in need of repair - *the fish needed cleaning!*" To carry out this delicate paper conservation task Petersen turned to Heugh-Edmondson Conservation Services in Kansas City...

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