



**Media only:** Liz O'Brien (202) 633-1522

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## **Smithsonian Institution Libraries Opens Two Exhibitions on Illustration and Exploration**

The Smithsonian Institution Libraries has unveiled exhibitions at two Smithsonian museums on the National Mall. “Picturing Words: The Power of Book Illustration” showcases some of the world’s greatest pieces of illustration from the Libraries’ collection of rare books and is on view until Jan. 4, 2010, at the Smithsonian Institution Libraries Exhibition Gallery at the National Museum of American History. The “Art of African Exploration” will be on display until Aug. 16 in the Constitution Avenue Lobby of the National Museum of Natural History.

Organized by guest curators Helena Wright and Joan Boudreau, “Picturing Words: The Power of Book Illustration” explores how visual images influence, inform and inspire readers and users and the many ways images have been produced throughout the centuries. Through historic illustrations, viewers are able to see what inspires and drives graphic art. Andreas Vesalius, an early physician and progressive scientist, wrote the book “De Humani Corporis Fabrica” (1543) with illustrations of the human body showing muscles pulled back to see what was underneath. Vesalius’ illustrations changed the way people looked at the human form and helped develop modern medicine. Letters are an inspiration for some writers, as seen through the colorful images from children’s alphabet books, such as the letter “F” morphing into the word and picture “Flamingo” in Dorothy Schmiderer’s “The Alphabeast Book: An Abecedarium” (1940). The engraving process is shown in the meticulously crafted “Nuremberg Chronicle” of 1493, with its 1,800 illustrations printed from 650 woodblocks, a graphic feat that amazed affluent readers in the 15th century. These books and more than 50 others are on display in the exhibit. Museum visitors are also invited to learn about three printmaking processes—relief, intaglio and lithograph—through an educational video demonstrating these techniques.

The “Art of African Exploration” exhibition showcases the Russell E. Train Africana Collection, a collection rich in visual materials. Curators Kirsten van der Veen and Daria Wingreen-Mason feature printed illustrations, original art, portraits, book-cover art and field sketches from Western scientists, missionaries, artists and journalists who visited Africa in the 1800s.

Notable 19th-century British explorers Henry Morgan Stanley and David Livingstone sought fame and fortune in their African expeditions and were heralded as heroes to a captivated Victorian public back home. The exhibit displays Stanley's novel "In Darkest Africa" (1890) and commemorative objects such as a glass lantern slide from a 40-piece set of slides depicting Livingstone's life and career, a Stratford-upon-Avon illustrated transcript of a lecture and a special issue of the magazine *The Graphic* (April 30, 1890). Artists and scientists played a large role in African expeditions in which explorers encountered uncharted territories, peoples, plants and animals. Displayed are the map of Africa from Cary's *New Universal Atlas* (1808), Anders Sparrman's "A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope" (1786) and a drawing of the extinct "quagga" animal from Samuel Daniell's "African Scenery and Animals" (1804).

The Libraries is a 20-branch system containing more than 1.5 million volumes, with 50,000 rare books, 10,000 historic manuscripts and nearly 1,600 electronic journal titles. Researchers, Smithsonian staff and the general public are able to use the collections in library branches located in Washington, Maryland, New York and the Republic of Panama. The Libraries is a member of the Association of Research Libraries, the Chesapeake Information and Research Library Alliance and the Federal Library and Information Center Committee.

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