



ILLUSTRATING CUBA'S FLORA AND FAUNA

CUBA IS OFTEN IDENTIFIED WITH ITS FLORA AND FAUNA. Natives and tourists alike remember Cuba's romantic landscapes, brightly colored flowers and birds, and delicious fruits.

Cuba's plants and animals have been illustrated throughout the country's history. The Amerindians were the first to depict the species they encountered. Following the Spanish Conquest, Europeans began to prepare illustrations of Cuban plants and animals, which were usually published in books. Some Cuban species were illustrated from specimens collected inside Cuba. Others were drawn or painted after specimens collected elsewhere in the New World, as many plants and animals present in Cuba also thrive in other lands. Plants and animals also appeared in Cuban landscapes and still lifes, and have been incorporated into tourist souvenirs and other ornamental objects to market the island as a tropical paradise.

This catalog and exhibition offer a first look at some of these illustrations of the flora and fauna of Cuba. The majority are printed illustrations from the colonial period (1492–1898). Their primary purpose was “scientific” or “utilitarian”: they classified, described, analyzed, and even sold Cuban species to a European public that was seeing them for the first time. That they are also colorful and beautiful to look at is a testament to the artistic excellence of the illustrators, and to the wonder and variety of Cuba's natural world.