

# In Praise of the Intensely Visual: Fishes, Birds and Artists, Oh My!

If I had to define my mission as a gallery director and blogger about all things art-related, it would be to put the visual back into Visual Art. Rarely am I interested in conceptual art where the visual is secondary, non-existent, or in a state of forced servitude to an idea. It bores me senseless and even makes me angry. I also have little patience for bad drawing and painting. I don't want to be shocked, grossed out or repelled by overly-slick work. I want a heightened visual experience, well-crafted work that speaks to me viscerally, raises my consciousness or makes me see in a new way. I want to leave a museum or gallery with a sense of wonder and discovery, not the grumpy state I often find myself in. I want that feeling I used to get sitting for hours on the floor of the college library pouring through art books.

Now that I've put forth my manifesto, I want to talk about a book and a video that both fit the bill.

The book is Taschen's [Tropical Fishes of the East Indies](#), a volume of natural history illustrations from the early eighteenth-century. The original drawings for this eye-popping catalog of marine fauna were made by Samuel Fallours, who was in the service of the Dutch East India Company. Fallours swore that all the original colored drawings were done from life and were faithful to nature -- even the mermaid! Lucky for us, Fallours was an imaginative artist with a bent toward the fantastic. Brilliant colors and fanciful flourishes make these images a triumph of science-meets-nature-meets-imagination.

The book itself is printed on heavy textured paper and faithfully reproduces an original manuscript down to the smudges and bleed-through from other pages. An accompanying booklet contains illuminating essays on the history of the plates as well as an appendix identifying each specimen. Buy this book for your collection! You won't be disappointed.



390. *Femme de Mer, Syrene, ? Dugong dugon* (Muller, 1776), *Dugong*  
 Courtesy Taschen