

# PAN

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ZEBREGS&RÖELL FINE ART AND ANTIQUES



An exceptional and extremely rare victorian gilt-wood fire screen with taxidermy hummingbirds by and labelled for Henry Ward (1812-1878)

England, third quarter 19th century

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*H. 130 x W. 140 cm*

On two scrolling foliate feet with casters, above which a rectangular two-side glazed frame, with on top a two-sided shield with initials crowned by a royal coronet on a pillow, the vividly colored hummingbirds, amongst

which Anna's hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), Lucifer hummingbird (*Calothorax lucifer*), Ruby-throated hummingbirds (*Archilochus colubris*), Bumble-bee hummingbirds (*Atthis heloisa*), Sword-billed hummingbird (*Ensifera ensifera*), Little hermits (*Phaethornis longuemareus*), Woodnymphs (*Thalurania*), the Marvellous spatuletail (*Loddigesia mirabilis*) and many others, perched, highly naturalistic, on branches with nests sprouting from the foliate bottom. This fire screen, that was placed in front of the fireplace when the fire was out, can be regarded as one of the most important pieces of Victorian taxidermy, and quite probably one of the pinnacles of Henry Ward's oeuvre, still in private hands today. What makes it even more special is the iridescence of feathers of the 'gems of the jungle' still present, which means this screen has been preserved well, for colours of feathers often fade in daylight.

Henry Ward is the founding father of the Ward lineage, that started the privately-owned taxidermy hype in Victorian England. As a young man, Henry Ward (1812-78) was employed as a taxidermist by the legendary American naturalist and bird painter John Audubon, whom he accompanied on several of his expeditions. They probably met whilst the latter was visiting England in 1831 and returned to America together. How long Ward remained in America is not known, but he is listed in trade directories as a taxidermist at his London address (2, Vere Street) from 1857 until his death in 1878. His most common trade label is very small and is situated inside his cases. The 'late Williams' refers to the fact that Ward worked for T.M. Williams of Oxford Street. He is described on one label as the 'chief artist in taxidermy to the late T. M. Williams'. Ward did not take over Williams' premises. Cases bearing Henry Ward's own label, were probably produced between 1857 and 1878. Rowland Ward tells us that he derived considerable profit from his father's knowledge and experience during the ten years he worked with him. At the time of his death, Henry Ward was still at 2, Vere Street, although by then he also owned 5, Vere Street. Provenance: Noble collection, United Kingdom