Primary Maker: Unidentified artist
Title: Bird of Paradise (Paradisaea apoda) Skin
Date: ca. 1554-1564
Medium: Watercolor, black ink, and gouache, with touches of white lead pigment on ivory paper, laid on paper, formerly laid on an album page
Dimensions: Overall (irregular): 8 1/16 × 11 5/8 in. (20.5 × 29.5 cm)
Credit Line: Gift of Nathaniel H. Bishop
Object Number: 1889.10.2.55

Classification: DRAWINGS

Curatorial Remarks:
The Greater Bird-of-Paradise, one of forty-two bird-of-paradise species, hails from southwest New Guinea and Indonesia. Europeans prized the exotic species for its flamboyant plumage. Ferdinand Magellan introduced the first specimens to Europe in 1522. His expedition brought back dried, legless skins prepared by New World natives, leading to the belief that the birds lived in the air “fed by the dews of heaven.” During the age of exploration, exotic avian species from Asia and the New World were prestigious additions to collections and aviaries. Milliners sought both the magnificent plumes and prepared skins to embellish countless hats.

Physical Description:
Avian Study
Inscribed: Inscribed along left edge vertically: Manucodiata. ex Gesn. et Dalec.
Markings: Inside cover of Album 1 contains a printed catalogue description reading: "Drawings of European Birds, a Collection of upwards of 200 Drawings, most beautifully executed colours, of European Birds, taken from Nature, and most faithfully copied with a view to be published; but from the death of the artists M. la Grese, and M. Petit, they never were engraved. Most of them are accompanied with their names, in 4 large vols. oblong folios, formerly in the Duke of Devonshire's Collection"
Related Objects: