

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

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FEATURES

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Dear Pa --

Thanks very much for the Christmas check, and for the shares in the receipts for the portfolio -- and for the portfolio itself, which arrived the other day, intact and in lovely order. My plans for the shares of the yield from the sales of the portfolio -- which must be going very well -- are to put most of it in fund for Sam.

We all were able to get together in Portsmouth for Christmas: the boys, Bella, Jane, her mother and Sam who is a very jolly little soul, quite large for ^{his} age. He almost never cries and spends most of his waking hours putting things in his mouth and grinning, toothlessly, at anyone who will grin at him. He spent most of Christmas Day sitting like a centerpiece in the middle of the living room, eating Christmas wrapping paper.

Your exhibition, the one that opened in Fort Worth, will be at Steinberg Gallery at Washington University Here, beginning at the end of next week. The curator called to ask me to supper the evening of the opening with Marney Sandweiss, who's giving a lecture, and a philanthropic couple whose names I can't remember, whose largess made mounting the show possible. Everyone is very disappointed you and Aline aren't going to be here.


Life in St. Louis is really a little dull. Boxie brought in a parakeet a couple of years ago because he thought I needed company, Fillmore having passed to his reward. I subsequently acquired several more parakeets to keep the first one company during the day when I'm not there and now they've sort of taken over the house. They are very cheerful and sociable and rather mischievous and destructive but the continuous background sound of whirring wings and chirping and clucking is quite pleasant.

I write mostly about architecture nowadays which is only moderately satisfying inasmuch as very little of the new architecture in the Midwest -- or perhaps any place else -- is worth writing about. I'm getting quite sympathetic to the views of Prince Charles who declared a couple of years ago that developers, architects and planners (DAPs, he calls them) have done more damage to London than the Luftwaffe. His comments could apply to most American cities.

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Occasionally, more or less for the sake of variety, I write about something entirely different. Had an interesting time a few weeks ago writing about the decline in the populations of migratory songbirds in the U.S. It seems to be a result, at least in some cases, of the clearing of tropical rainforests in central and northern South America for coffee, cattle and ~~xxxxxxx~~ coca. The best information seems to be a study by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Chandler Robbins, et al.) which is so far unpublished. It was rejected by Science, apparently on the grounds that they had fulfilled their self-imposed quota of articles on ecological subjects for the year. The authors are trying to see if Nature is interested.

Right now, I'm trying to do an article on what is variously called the European Tree Sparrow or Eurasian tree sparrow (Passer montanus), a kin to the English sparrow, that was introduced in St. Louis in the 1870s and has never expanded its range much beyond the St. Louis metropolitan area. Why this is so has puzzled ornithologists for sometime, particularly in light of the fact that P. montanus has been able to hold its own against the English sparrow (P. domesticus) throughout Europe and Asia and (I'm told) is actually predominant in China. One fellow who did his doctoral dissertation on the subject about 20 years ago said he'd found that domesticus tends to commandeer nesting sites from the smaller, less aggressive montanus unless the entry is too small for the domesticus to pass through. Using nesting boxes over a period of several years, he found the critical diameter was 29 mm. Any hole larger than that, the domesticus would move in and take over, often destroying the eggs or young of the montanus. ~~xxxxxxx~~ That size or smaller, the domesticus cannot squeeze through.

Have you ever made a picture of P. montanus, Pa? If so please let me know. This paper would pay for the one-time use of it. 

I'll send you the review of your show when it's published.

Love to Aline and all,

B.