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May 16, 1987

Mr. Robert Semple
Art Editor
THE NEW YORK TIMES
229 W. 43rd Street
New York, NY 10036

Dear Mr. Semple:

I want to make you aware of a fascinating story with *great visual impact* and audience appeal—a tale of art discovery and art rescue, unusual coincidences and unnerving ironies.

On Friday, March 29, at 10:30 a.m., Sotheby's will auction in New York the John James Audubon painting, "The Great Crow Blackbird". The painting, believed lost or destroyed for more than 160 years, was discovered by twin brothers and Fort Worth artists Scott and Stuart Gentling, who paid \$18,000 for it. Now authenticated by the New York Historical Society, Sotheby's believes it may sell for \$300,000 or more! (A Sotheby's official says there is no greater art discovery in this auction of 400 paintings.)

Whether or not one believes in fate or kismet or some other kind of cosmic destiny, it is difficult to explain how dramatically the Gentlings' artistic hero came to their rescue.

The Gentlings had been working for nearly eight years to complete a Great Imperial Folio (22 x 28 inches), "Of Birds and Texas," a monumental collaborative undertaking that eventually cost \$550,000. (The limited edition of 525 books, called by one critic "the most stunning and prodigious book in Texas history...breathhtaking," is almost sold out at \$2,500 each. It was released a few months ago.)

"With the authentication, we were able to re-finance our project and complete the publication," says Stuart. Of additional coincidence and curiosity:

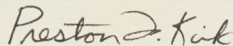
- At 13, the Gentling boys had discovered an edition of Audubon's "The Birds of America" in the Fort Worth Children's Museum. They were inspired to copy his work and a few years later borrow the family car to retrace Audubon's southern travels. The museum, now known as the Fort Worth Museum of Science & History, is purchasing the 40 bird paintings for \$300,000 and has just begun a six-month exhibition of the collection.
- In 1976, at age 33, they began the massive project, dedicating it to Audubon. Incredibly, the introduction to the book, written in 1984, mentioned the lost artwork six months before they discovered the painting through a Philadelphia print dealer's catalog. (It is the only painting Audubon ever published in America, and with bitterness!)

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Audubon/Gentlings Query

- The "rescue" -- in Audubon's bicentennial year, no less -- assured the success of the new book and is helping see these 44-year-old "mildly eccentric geniuses" through their shared malady of cataract surgery and well into their next adventure: *the artistic reconstruction of the Aztec Empire!*

Since time *is* short and interest *is* high, please review the enclosures immediately and call me today about interview possibilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Preston F. Kirk".

Preston F. Kirk, APR

PFK/mp

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