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Monday, June 22, 1987

Mr. Bryan R. Johnson, Editor
BOOK ARTS REVIEW
102 Preston Forest Dr.
Blacksburg, VA 24060

Dear Bryan:

Thank you for your interest in "Of Birds & Texas" and the artists Scott and Stuart Gentling of Fort Worth.

As I stated, the Gentlings, 44-year-old twins, worked on this project for nearly eight years, having dedicated it to Audubon in 1976. They were about to abandon this monumental, collaborative undertaking--which eventually cost them \$550,000--when they discovered a John James Audubon painting, "The Great Crow Blackbird," a.k.a. "A Pair of Boat-tailed Grackles." They bought it from a Philadelphia print dealer for \$18,000, authenticated it along with the New York Historical Society, and used it as collateral to finish their book.

The Audubon, believed lost or destroyed for more than 160 years, was JJA's only painting to be published in America--and with bitterness, due to alterations by a Philadelphia engraver. It sold for \$253,000, well above the record \$110,000 paid for an Audubon at a Sotheby's auction in London in 1981.

The enclosures, particularly the PEOPLE reprint, back page, will tell you quite a bit about the book. Other articles about the book and the artists, perhaps more than you'll ever want to know, will help round out the story for your readers.

"Of Birds and Texas," a Great Imperial Folio (22 x 28 inches), was printed in a limited edition of 525 books containing 50 color plates, and weighing in at 46 pounds. Yes, they are moving toward a trade edition, probably 10 x 12 inches, later this year.

I have learned that the individual prints are selling for \$200 each, and that some book and print dealers are stripping them out to sell individually. (A nice mark-up, indeed!) Only about 125 copies remain, so your advice on reaching the key museums is well taken, thank you.

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.

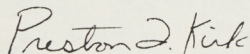
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o At 13, the Gentling boys had discovered an edition of Audubon's "The Birds of America" in the Fort Worth Children's Museum. They were inspired to copy his work and a few years later to borrow the family car to retrace Audubon's southern travels. The museum, now known as the Fort Worth Museum of Science & History, is purchasing the 40 bird paintings for \$300,000 and is exhibiting the originals through Labor Day.

o In 1976, at age 33, they began the project, dedicating it to Audubon. Incredibly, the introduction of the book, written in 1984, mentioned the lost artwork six months before they discovered the painting.

While you will see a number of reproductions in the materials I am sending, the folio will come by separate cover from the Gentlings. Thank you for your genuine interest and your kind counsel. Call me, if you have questions. I can arrange a telephone interview with the artists or printers, if desired.

Sincerely,



Preston F. Kirk, APR

PFK/scm

Encl.

cc: S & S Gentling