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Mr. Les Thomas
Features Editor
Southern Living
P. O. Box 523
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Dear Mr. Thomas:

Thank you for your interest in "Of Birds & Texas" and the artists Scott and Stuart Gentling of Fort Worth. Free lance writer Sara Pentz asked that I compile some basic information for your review. Also, the artists will send a folio to you with a down-sized manuscript for handling ease.

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 at a Sotheby's auction in New York on May 28, 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 and the critic's acclaim these first six months of issue.

This "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. That development and the fact that the Gentlings definitely worked in the style of Audubon, one of the most famous 19th Century artists and particularly the South, will be of special interest to your readers.

I have learned that the individual prints are selling for \$200 each, and that some book and print dealers are stripping them out of the book to sell individually. (A nice mark-up, indeed, and a move which probably makes collectors of rare books even happier. The book sells for \$2,500, while the 50 prints at \$200 each could bring \$10,000!)

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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.

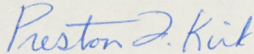
o At 13, the Gentling boys had discovered an edition of Audubon's "The Birds of America" in the Fort Worth Children's Museum. They were inspired to copy his work and a few years later to borrow the family car to retrace Audubon's southern travels. The museum, now known as the Fort Worth Museum of Science & 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.

o Even the Philadelphia print dealer is unable to explain how the twins received his catalog in Fort Worth the day after he mailed it. It was coincidence that he was even in the shop that Saturday afternoon in December. They were not previous customers and only later discovered that an older brother in South Carolina had placed them on the shop's mailing list a few months before.

So this is a tale of art discovery and art rescue, unnerving ironies and strange coincidences...and a stunning collection of superior artwork. I'm sure Sara can help you and your staff produce a good feature.

Sincerely,



Preston F. Kirk, APR

PFK/cs

Encls.

cc: Gentlings
Pentz