

TexasMonthly

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Gregory Curtis, Editor

BCC: Gentlings

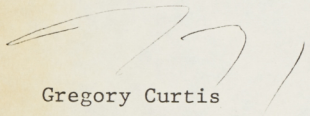
July 8, 1987

Preston F. Kirk
Kirk Public Relations
1511 Jennifer Street
Richardson, Texas 75081

Dear Preston:

I have seen the materials on the Gentlings. Thanks for sending them. I'm afraid, however, that all the press coverage they've received deters us from doing a story. Still, I appreciate your interest in TEXAS MONTHLY. Best of luck to you.

Yours,



Gregory Curtis

GC/jb

#

7.11.87

Gregory:

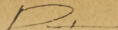
With all due respect to our friendship and your story judgment, much of the coverage in the file material was from 1979, 1985 or recent hometown papers.

The exception, PEOPLE, focussed on the windfall art find and the artists' eccentricities.

My hope is that TM will focus on THE work, as a book...as an artistic achievement ...as a true collector's view of rare books. Moreover, as a collaborative effort between two interesting twin brothers, a venerated writer--John Graves--and perhaps the state's finest printers, The Holmans. Why should these men be "prophets in their own (state)"?

Why should a magazine of TM's wide reputation and respect abdicate the review of such a triumph of artistic scholarship to the East Coast media, to the natural history/library/museum critics? Just read again what the critics to date have said. This illustrated artbook will **not** be surpassed in the 20th Century! And reconsider, too, all the fresh angles--print dealers raiding the plates, the proposed trade press edition, the near sell-out, the ironies and the unfolding Aztec project. Please do reconsider, Greg.

Regards,



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ABOUT THE BOOK

"Of Birds and Texas" can be purchased for \$2,500 from: Gentling Publications, 902 Boland St., Fort Worth, Texas, 76107. Telephone: (817) 332-7059 for additional information or preview.

— Bill Whitliff, Author, Film Director,
Publisher of Encino Press, Austin

HAPPY BIRTHDAY 124
Britain's favorite bad boy,
Prince William, begins to act
his age—5

3

TWINS SCOTT AND STUART GENTLING SELL OFF A HIGH-PRICED AUDUBON AND GIVE WING TO THEIR OWN BIRD BOOK

Two records were under siege last week when a standing-room-only crowd converged on Sotheby's auction house in New York. Outside, an early heat wave was threatening to push the mercury over 97 degrees, an all-time high for the date. Inside, brisk bidding closed in on, and soon surpassed, the highest price ever paid for a work by the naturalist painter John James Audubon. When the gavel fell, a New York dealer had paid \$253,000 for an 1824 watercolor of two boat-tailed grackles—known to most people simply as blackbirds.

Just two and a half years ago the same painting had been offered in the mail-order catalog of a Philadelphia print dealer for \$18,000—and was snapped up by two Audubon fanatics who recognized it as one of the master's long-missing early works. Not long afterward the new owners, 44-year-old twins Scott and Stuart Gentling of Fort Worth, decided to use their treasure to help bankroll their own Audubon-inspired masterwork, *Of Birds and Texas*.



COURTESY OF SCHLERS

A massive boxed portfolio of 50 paintings of birds and landscapes, it was 10 years and \$550,000 in the making and might never have seen the light of day without the grackle windfall. "We literally ran out of money," says Stuart, like his brother a full-time artist since college, "and we had to use the grackles as collateral." Most of the \$210,000 profit the brothers expect to clear from the sale will go toward clearing up their grackle-backed debts.

Stuart also hopes the publicity sur-

rounding the auction will produce some national recognition for him and his twin. "It's so difficult to get people to take us seriously," he says. "They don't think that something like *Of Birds and Texas* could be created in the boondocks."

They may now, however, since the Gentlings' opus has been getting rave reviews. The *Dallas Morning News* described it as "destined to become a classic of ornithology and fine printing," and painter Andrew Wyeth declared it "overwhelming." It

is certainly that: Two feet long and weighing 46 pounds, it could pass for a coffee table without legs. The price is Texas-size too: \$2,500 for one of a limited edition of 500 books.

Two of four children of an anesthesiologist then working at the Mayo Clinic, the twins were born in Rochester, Minn. in 1942. "Scott and Stuart had a

Audubon's long-lost blackbirds (above) helped Stuart (left) and Scott realize their literary flight of fancy.

CONTINUED



special language they talked when they were 18 months old that no one else understood," recalls their mother, Barbara. "In the family we're all good friends, but we're outsiders. They're a closed corporation."

Dr. Benjamin Spock, who predicted they'd be high achievers, studied Stuart (left) and Scott as twins from age 1 to 4.



COURTESY OF SCOTT & STUART GENTLING

When the boys were 5, the family moved to Fort Worth. Stuart was 13 when he first came across Audubon's *Birds of America* at the library of the local natural history museum. Inspired to draw a bird of his own, he prevailed upon Scott, the younger twin by 15 minutes, to fill in the sketch with watercolors. Three years later the boys took the family station wagon and retraced Audubon's journey through the Mississippi and Ohio river valleys.

Schooling temporarily put an end to their collaboration. Stuart picked up his B.A. in English at Tulane in 1965, then spent a year at the University of Texas School of Law. Scott had spent four years at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts by the time he persuaded Stuart to join him there in 1966. "I really learned painting from Scott," admits his twin. "He's the better painter." Scott's portraits of Texas titans, such as Dallas real estate developer Trammell Crow, fetch up to \$25,000, while Stuart's landscapes and still lifes top out at \$10,000.

It was Stuart's idea to do the book, and when he first mentioned it, Scott was unenthusiastic. "I haven't painted a bird for 17 years," he said. But Stuart convinced him, proposing the same

collaborative approach they had tried as kids. Some pictures took three or four years to produce as both twins struggled to find a dramatic moment in the life of a scissortail flycatcher or a roseate spoonbill and then worked out the picture's composition.

For their next project, the brothers would like to do a visual history of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlán from 1519 to 1521, when it fell to the Spanish conquistadors. "It's never been done before," says Scott, "I'd like to finish by 1992."

None of the brothers' future undertakings are as likely to be touched by such rare good fortune as *Of Birds and Texas*, which is dedicated to Audubon, the brothers' inadvertent benefactor. Writing the introduction to the book in 1984, Stuart made mention of the long-lost grackles; six months later they suddenly turned up and improved the project's finances, though not, as it turns out, Scott's attitude toward his fine-feathered subjects. "To be honest," he says, "I don't care if I ever paint another bird again."

MARY VESPA

"I think Scott is a more spontaneous painter than I am," says Stuart (right) working with his twin near home.

