

15 November 1995

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Fort Worth, Texas 76107

Dear Ted,

Thankyou for your note. Scott and I are really looking forward to the December 9th lecture. We are titling it "Behind the Mask of Power." Since our talk is part of the Artist's Eye series, I will use the Assyrian show as a point of departure to discuss the current state of our Aztec project.

It is probably just a coincidence, but fascinating nevertheless, that the British Museum chose the Instituto Nacional de Anthropologia y Historia in Mexico City for the Assyrian show's first venue. In many ways the Assyrians share with the Aztecs a similar image as cruel conquerors who only left behind huge stone monuments glorifying the power of the state. So little was left behind to show their softer side. It has always been one of Scott's and my main goals to show the Aztecs in a more humane and realistic view as people who loved beauty and had great respect for artistry in all its forms.

They were among the world's greatest gardeners. Their textiles and intricate featherwork creations were not rivaled by any contemporary world culture. They had an immense appreciation of poetry and drama which ranged from high mythic tragedy to ticklingly funny burlesques. They had an elaborate and highly varied dance tradition which made some of their great religious festivals among the most beautiful and splendid the world had ever seen. They were great jewelers, creating magnificent things in silver and gold and pearls and semi-precious stones. They were great lovers of toys, and they doted on their children. They valued cleanliness, often bathing more than once a day. Their cities were laid out in a highly symbolic and orderly fashion to insure social harmony and were always swept and cleaned daily. When the Spanish entered the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan on November 8th 1519 they were astounded. This island city of perhaps 200,000 set in a clear highland lake, with its shining white palaces and temple towers, its wide and straight avenues and winding, tree-lined canals seemed to Cortes and his men to be the most beautiful city in the world. Remember, the largest city in Spain had no more than 20,000 inhabitants. Madrid had only 9,000!

This is what Scott and I have spent thirty years studying, and our December 9th lecture will be a kind of preview of the type of exhibit that we would like to present at the Kimbell. We will be showing slides of our paintings, drawings, models and our own collection of original Aztec art which, though small, is still a significant gathering of ancient material ranging from stone sculpture, ceramics, clay models of Aztec temples

to even a few pieces of jewelry in obsidian, shell and gold. We even have an original Aztec sacrificial knife!

Aztec art, I believe, is the rarest of all pre-colombian art appearing for sale on the market. Sotheby's, the largest auctioneer of pre-colombian art, which sells about eight hundred objects a year, rarely offers more than one or two Aztec art works per season for sale. Often there are years when no Aztec art is offered. It has taken Scott and me more than fifteen years to form our Aztec and related Mixtec collection. We now have about thirty-five items in all, and with luck we may be able to acquire four or five more objects before 1998.

In relating the Kimbell Art Museum's collections and educational scope to our development as "artists/ scholars/ designers/ archaeologists/ collectors" I scarcely know where to begin! Although Scott's and my eclectic interests in the history and art of other peoples can be traced back to our early childhood, Most of our collecting habits have matured since the Kimbell opened in 1972 when we began to have a daily opportunity to see first hand real masterpieces from many world cultures. Today our art collection ranges widely from prints by Marin, Miro, Motherwell and Gottlieb to Durer, Rembrandt, Piranese and Goya to Japanese screens and prints, Indian and Persian miniatures, to sculpture from Africa, New Guinea, India, Tibet, Nepal, China and Mexico. Our pre-colombian art collection includes sculpture, ceramics and textiles ranging from Casas Grandes, Mimbres, East and West Coast Mexican, Mixtec, Aztec, Olmec, Zapotec, and Maya works. From Peru we have examples of art from Nazca, Chimu, Mochica, Lambayeque cultures and others.

To compliment our love of natural history subjects, we have collected a number of 19th century bird and animal prints by Wilson, Audubon, Selby, and Mitford. We have also assembled over the years numerous works of contemporary area artists, friends most of them, as well art from the so called Fort Worth School, most of whom were also friends.

And, of course, there is our collection of 18th century costumes, items dating from 1730 to 1810, men's clothing mostly. Recently we have acquired some 18th century dresses for still life subjects. We just bought at Christies, London a very rare fragment from the French Revolution, from the year of the great terror, 1794. It is a cockade of the national tricolor with a letter written in 1828 authenticating the piece. It cost a fortune! This joins a number of our French costumes from that period. I am sorry that I did not mention our costume collection in time for it to be of use for your wonderful Boilly exhibit. Boilly's life (1761 to 1845) spanned the greatest period of change in men's apparel in the history of European fashion, and we have beautiful examples from every decade.

I really believe that Scott and I are about as good an example as you can find in Fort Worth of youngsters who took advantage and were deeply influenced by our city's cultural institutions. The old Childrens' Museum and the Zoo were an intimate part of our early lives from at least the age of seven, stimulating and reinforcing our interests in natural history studies and native American cultures. I learned Taxidermy, and

Scott and I studied art and music history from books and records at the old Carnegie Library where, incidentally, we saw our first exhibits of art from the Fort Worth Art Association collections and paintings owned by Mr. and Mrs. Kay Kimbell. When I was thirteen I discovered a book of Audubon's bird prints in the library of the Children's Museum, and it was Scott's and my subsequent interest in copying those prints that literally launched us on our path to becoming artists. At about this same time we, along with two friends, started raising rare ornamental pheasants. That project turned out to be one of the largest collections of rare pheasants in Texas. Our aviary was located, of all unlikely places, in Westover Hills behind the huge Loffland House, later the home of Donny and Pat Williamson. We received invaluable help from Zoo Association Board member Harry Tennon and Fort Worth Zoo Director Lawrence Curtis.

After The Fort Worth Art Association moved into its present building in 1954 we took our first formal art classes there under John Chumley and James Blake. In fact it was at the Art Center's Tarrant County Annual Show in May of 1962 that guest judge Walter Stuempfig discovered Scott's work and arranged for him to be invited to attend the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts the following September. Scott had his first public exhibition at the Fort Worth Art center in 1964.

We have not only been recipients of the bounty from Fort Worth's cultural institutions, we have also been patron donors from an early age. Our first gifts were a small collection of Kachina Dolls to the Children's Museum in the middle 1950's. They are still on display, and I secretly wish I had them back. In the late 1950's we gave the Fort Worth Zoo three pairs of rare pheasants, including a pair of Malayan Crested Firebacks. At the last Zoo Ball Scott and I donated art that raised \$15,000 to start a new rare pheasant program. Our first purchase? A pair of Malayan Crested Firebacks! We have also donated our time (I was a board member for five years) and artworks to the Modern Art Museum here which have raised about \$25,000 over the last two decades.

But it is the Kimbell that has most captured our hearts. From the time that Jim Meeker first told us about a splendid new museum on the drawing board to our first meeting with Rick Brown and later with Louis Kahn, Scott and I have been unabashed fans. (I'll never forget that critical letter I wrote to you when you first arrived in Fort Worth!) While I am now more than a little embarrassed by that incident, it did show my passion for the Kimbell and an almost personal sense of stewardship. I rarely write that kind of letter. I have written infinitely more letters of praise. I can tell you that it has given me a distinct pleasure to admit over the years that I judged you too harshly and much too quickly and that the Kimbell Museum is a finer institution today than it was when you took over - not only in its collections but also as a vastly richer educational resource.

Although I had forgotten about it until I sat down to write this letter, I am proud to say that Scott and I have also been donors to the Kimbell. I think it was in 1973 that we gave the

museum library a circa 1904 printed work on the great Maya Dresden Codex. Several weeks after we made the gift Ilse Rothrock, the Kimbell librarian, wrote an extremely enthusiastic letter to us extolling the rarity of the gift, saying that it was not in any of the great U.S. libraries and that the Kimbell Museum was to be listed by a prestigious index of rare books and manuscripts as the only major North American institution which owned a copy. I remember Scott and me looking at each other when we read Ilse's letter and saying simultaneously "What in hell did we give away?"

Scott and I in the ensuing years have lectured for Kimbell educational programs at least four times that I can remember. I once gave a talk on pre-columbian art at which I let the audience actually hold original objects from our collection. Scott and I also displayed some of our 18th century costumes at a lecture we gave on the drawings from the Fitzwilliam Museum. I remember that we brought papers dating back to the fourteenth century for the people to handle, and we demonstrated the use of conte, charcoal, pen and ink, and silver point on copies that Scott had made of Fitzwilliam drawings that looked so much like the originals on display that the guards got nervous. I recall that we had an 18th century coat that looked exactly like one worn in a beautiful Watteau drawing, and we demonstrated how the cut of men's clothing influenced their posture and how that gave people a "different" look. The audience really appreciated those "hands on" lectures. They really got involved.

And then, of course, there was our first Artist's Eye lecture with Dave Hickey as moderator and you in attendance. We must have been insane to have tried to cover the whole range of the Kimbell collections from Queen Hatshepsut's scribe to the new Miro. We had a great crowd, and I remember how transfixed they were when Scott began to explain the use of Geometric systems in not only European works but also the Kimbell's Maya relief carvings. They were fascinated by our discussion of symbolism. Since that time you have acquired the Jacopo Bassano, an absolutely wonderful picture to introduce people to the mysteries and poetry of geometry and symbolism.

It was while working with the Kimbell's outstanding Maya limestone panel of the captured prisoners and the museum's two incised Maya bowls (which are two of the finest in the world!) that Scott developed what, I think, is a groundbreaking study of geometric systems in pre-columbian art. Ted, don't you remember all those wonderful ink drawings in Scott's notebook that you thought were prints? When Scott is finished with his manuscript he would like to give it to the Kimbell library, since so much of his early work was done from Kimbell pieces.

I think I should mention that Rick Brown used to consult us from time to time on various pieces the museum was thinking of acquiring. I particularly remember him asking us about the wonderful sculpture of Xipe Totec. I told them to grab it without delay. Although small, it is one of the finest modelled Xipes in the world. It was at that time that we met Gillette Griffin who was helpful in our Aztec studies. In fact he is one of the few people who has a copy of our Aztec project notebook. He

was not the only important Aztec scholar we met through the Kimbell. During the "Blood of Kings" extravaganza I met as many important Aztec scholars as Maya scholars, including Carolyn Tate, who later became curator of pre-columbian art at the Dallas Museum of Art, and who was responsible for our participation in the important Aztec exhibit held at the Denver Museum of Natural History in 1992-3, where Scott and I met almost every major scholar in our field. Perhaps, if we do have a show at the Kimbell, we could organize a mini-symposium of Aztec scholars to lecture at the museum during the run of the show.

I also recall fondly the many times that Scott and I were asked to drive around Fort Worth many of the visiting Kimbell guests from out of town - lecturers and associated art people. The Kimbell would usually pick up the dining tab, and we would get a rare opportunity to talk with these always interesting people on a more informal basis. I simply can not tell you how these visits enriched our knowledge of the art world and helped to expand our horizons, not to mention just the fun of it. It was rather like old times dining with you and Robert Anderson et. al. of the British Museum at the Hyders a few weeks ago.

As I have said, our upcoming December 9th Artist's Eye lecture will be a kind of preview of the type of exhibit we would like to have at the Kimbell. I know that some may find it difficult to believe that two Fort Worthians, especially two practitioners of the fine arts, would dedicate so much time and effort to studying a long destroyed Aztec city. However, we have received a great deal of official recognition and encouragement from both U.S. and Mexican scholars for our work in this field, and the book that we are working on will be, I am sure, the definitive visual treatment of this fascinating subject for many years to come. We really hope to create a book that will rival the beauty of Stephen's and Catherwood's famous 1840's folio on the ruins of Yucatan, one of the most popular American books ever written. It is still in print today and is, in fact, still a best seller, so deep is the current interest in ancient American cultures. We, as you know, contributed both paintings and models to the Denver Museum's great exhibit and catalogue, "Aztec," the largest show of Aztec art and culture ever held outside of Mexico. It was lauded by all the major scholars in this field as well as by the Mexican government which contributed the majority of the art works from its national museum collections. We later allowed the use of more than fifteen paintings and drawings for the outstanding thirteen part television series "500 Nations" produced by Kevin Costner. A full hour was devoted to the Aztecs and the conquest of Mexico. The series which covered almost the entire Native American experience from the first crossings of the Bering Strait to the battle of Wounded Knee in 1890, had the full support of important scholars and the Mexican government. And finally there is a new book coming out next year written by Peter Tsouras, a warfare historian for American military intelligence. It is titled "Warlords of the Ancient Americas" and it is dedicated to Scott and me. He even told Scott that his models of Aztec temples were so good and our photos of them looked

so realistic that the CIA's own experts were fooled by them. They told Tsouras that we could get a job at the CIA anytime. That probably says more about the CIA than about us!

Ted, the reason why I mention these honors is that they have been hard won in a field that can be rather snooty and territorial, especially about credentials. Scott and I lack official credentials to be sure, but strangely enough we have been very well recieved by the scientific community. Infact so much so that many scholars would like us to finish our project as soon as possible so that we might help them on their projects. We have even been told by a spokesperson for the Mexican government's cultural programs that we would be given an entire room for our Aztec models and paintings in the new Cuevas Museum in Mexico City if we gave them to the nation. The pursuit of fine art, however, will always be our main love. Wonderfully, though, Scott and I often paint scenes from contemporary Mexican life that contain the mysterious survival of the ancient culture in every day subjects. Scott and I would very much like to conclude our Kimbell exhibit with a selection of these contemporary works, since they truly demonstrate the ultimate impact of the museum and our studies on our lives as modern artists.

Sometimes, I find it hard to believe that we really have become world experts on the ancient Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlan and its people. I also believe that a well-mounted and well-publicized exhibition of our paintings, drawings, models and original Aztec art would bring into the Kimbell thousands of Mexican-Americans who seldom cross the threshold of any art museum. That certainly was the case when Dutch Phillips showed some of our Aztec things at his gallery a few years ago. Busloads of people from as far away as San Antonio and El Paso came when they read about the show in the Dallas Morning News. The same thing happened at the Dallas Museum of art when the Morning News published an announcement of my Aztec lecture and included a photo of one of Scott's Aztec temple paintings. I was told the other day that by the year 2000 the population of the metroplex (I hate that word.) will be about 40% Hispanic. A show of our project would certainly be a well-received recognition of their presence in our city. But this subject really crosses cultural lines as the well-attended exhibits of other pre-colombian cultures demonstrate.

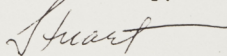
I also believe that a poster of our Aztec eagle painting from Aztec mythology, the bird depicted with a serpent in its claws and a view of the Valley of Mexico and the city of Tenochtitlan in the background, would be hugely popular. A small catalogue too, I think, would sell out as well, as was the case with the Denver catalogue. Scott and I have had people call us from around the country wanting to see more of our work and saying that they bought the Denver catalogue mainly because of our paintings. Such a catalogue could be a nice record of our development as artists/scholars/artists etc. and could be visually very rich and exotic. So, Ted, I hope that I have stated a reasonable case for our Aztec project and for our interests having been deeply influenced by our exposure to the Kimbell

Art Museum and several other cultural institutions of Fort Worth. I think I have also explained why such a show would be more appropriate for the Kimbell than the other museums here and that it would not only be "politically correct" for the museum but popular if well promoted. It certainly would compliment the Kimbell's small but outstanding collection of pre-colombian masterworks, and a modest lecture series by noted Aztec scholars which, I think, Carolyn Tate would be more than happy to organize, would certainly add distinction to our exhibition and the Kimbell's existing educational programs.

Scott and I may be the only Fort Worth artists or perhaps the only artists, period, whose work in one form or another has been in all four major Fort Worth Museums. We have paintings at the Modern Art Museum, two books with Gentling paintings on sale at the Kimbell book store, copies of our elephant folio "Of Birds and Texas" in the libraries of the Amon Carter Museum and the Fort Worth Zoo, and all forty of our original bird paintings for our folio are owned by the Museum of Science and History. In fact it might be nice to have an exhibit of the bird paintings at the same time as our Kimbell show - or would it?

I am currently putting together a photographic record of all the art works that could be part of a Kimbell exhibition. We literally have just begun the painting phase of our project, and we will need every bit of two years to create the wide range of views necessary for the kind of truly exciting and educational show that we have in mind. I will prepare a photographic file for you and Anne Adams. If you have any questions, I would be glad to come down to your office at your convenience.

Sincerely,



PS. After our lunch with Joachim the other day, I think we somewhat dazzled him when he brought up the subject of the Vermeer show in Washington and we proceeded to offer our interpretation of his paintings. Now he wants us to go with him to Washington for a first hand look. It is interesting to see how close the scholars have come to getting it right with Vermeer and still have missed the meanings. It is so difficult to break through our modern biases. We have studied and researched his work since the late 1960's, when research material was very scarce. Recent publications have only reinforced our views, and now Scott and I really believe that we can prove most of our theories and offer some intriguing insights into his mysterious life. Ah, but that's another project!