

Reese letter

28 March 1985

Mr. William S. Reese
409 Temple Street
New Haven Connecticut 06511

Dear Sir:

My brother and I recently purchased a picture which we believe to have been painted by John J. Audubon. We have been looking at Audubon's work for almost thirty years, and as we are both artists and devoted admirers of his art, we have studied closely his techniques and the evolution of his style and have on occasion even copied his pictures. Though I have seen a number of Audubon's original works in New York and elsewhere, I have never had the opportunity to examine one closely, unframed.

When I first saw this picture reproduced in the small catalogue mailed out by the Philadelphia Print Shop I was certain that it was by Audubon even though the dealers themselves were quite frank in maintaining that there was no internal evidence to prove conclusively that the picture was truly by him. Now that I have had the opportunity to study the original closely I can see absolutely no stylistic anomalies. It simply looks correct.

I have included a transparency for your inspection as well as a zeroxed copy of the painting and the print from the Bonaparte supplement which was etched by Alexander Lawson from Alexander Rider's re-drawing of the Audubon original. Unfortunately the zerox of the Lawson plate does not pick up many of the small corresponding details of Lawson's rendition of the Grackle egg which match the "Audubon" perfectly.

Ron Tyler is quite excited by the piece, but he agrees with me that we should seek the opinions of recognized Audubon authorities. He suggested that I write to you to see if you had any thoughts concerning this painting. He told me that you would be frank in your opinion and such candor is what I appreciate even if your opinion might not be good news. I have tried to remain objective in my own analysis, but every time I look at the picture and review Audubon's work of the early 1820's I can not find any evidence that would cast doubt on the work. The paper, the use of watercolor for the beaks and claws and general underpainting,

and pastel overwork, the varnishing of certain areas with egg white and especially the penciling style used to depict the feathers — all are the hallmarks of Audubon's peculiar and unique style.

I am also inclosing a copy of the letter which I wrote to Ron detailing my thoughts about the work and the research that I have made to date. We never intend to sell this treasure whatever may be its value, and it is our wish to eventually give the painting to the Amos Carter Museum and thus to the city of Fort Worth.

It seems so strange that we should be able to get this picture in 1985 which is the bicentennial year of Audubon's birth. For eight years my brother Scott and I have been working on a very special book on Texas birds. We have wanted to do such a book since 1966 even though the painting of wildlife subjects is more of a sideline, a kind of hobby set apart from the rest of our paintings. From that early time when we first considered doing the book we have had it in our minds to dedicate it to the memory of Audubon. What a coincidence it is that our publication should be coming out in Audubon's bicentennial year. I have also inclosed with this letter some materials concerning our publication. When you look at the brochure you will catch a few hints of Audubon's influence as it has been absorbed into our own style. John James Audubon is certainly one of our heroes, and I still think that he is the most fascinating artist ever to make a career of painting birds. Nothing could give me more pleasure than to know that we possess an original painting by this great artist.

If you could help us in any way, it would be greatly appreciated. Since I do not plan to be in the New York area in the foreseeable future, I can not go to the New York Historical Society to look at the Audubon Boat-tailed Grackle painting done in Louisiana in 1821 that might have served as the model from which our painting was done. However, Ron is going to help me to contact people at the Historical Society to look for further evidence.

Thankyou for your time, and I hope that I have not inconvenienced you. If you would like to talk to me directly, please feel free to call me at any time. My home number is I-817-738-4427, and my office number is I-817-332-7059. It is easiest to reach me at home before noon (our time) I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

Stuart W. Gentling
Stuart Gentling