

Total length approx 3,910 words Page 1

Introduction Part II

Why should two artists like Scott and me who have established a reputation for being "realists" in our paintings of landscapes, still-life and portraits produce with these bird pictures a body of work that stands outside the ^{or} current trends of realism which characterize so much of the best of contemporary wildlife art? The answer to this question is somewhat complicated. It is an explanation that is very personal; it has to do with our knowledge and appreciation of the history of bird painting as a genre in both Eastern and Western cultures. Our ^{work on} interest in the study of the publishing history of American birds is particularly important, and perhaps a brief summary of that history might be useful here.

^{One} It is interesting to note that one of the very first publications on birds ever undertaken was a book on American birds begun by Mark Catesby in 1731. This book was titled, "A Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahamas". It was a folio containing 220 plates that were sketched and hand-coloured by Catesby ^{himself} in London from observation, and material which he had gathered during two trips to the American colonies in 1712 and 1725. ^{109 of these plates were of birds.} It is obvious when looking at his work to see that Catesby was no artist, though the pictures

do possess a genuine charm. This naive but
 lonely publication was not to be surpassed
 until Alexander Wilson, ^{called in previous days} "The Father of
 American ornithology" published his
 nine volumes, "American Ornithology" in
 Philadelphia between 1808 and 1814. This
 was the first publication of its ^{kind} type printed
 in America, and as an artist Wilson was
 considerably more accomplished than Catesby.
^{However} ~~but~~ his drawings ^{though} while charming were
 still rather stiff and unsophisticated. After
 Wilson's death in 1813 Charles Lucien Bonaparte,
 nephew of Napoleon, published in four volumes a
 supplement to the Scottish naturalist's work titled,
 "American ornithology - Birds not given by Wilson." This
 was also published in Philadelphia between 1825
 and 1833. The Bonaparte supplement is important
 in several ways. It employed for the first time
 the services of a professionally trained artist. He
 was Titian Peale, a member of the famous
 Peale family. ^{Through it} ~~It~~ was he who designed the
 majority of the supplementary illustrations, ~~but~~
 this publication also contained the work of another
 and as then unknown artist. It was a single plate,
 an illustration of a boat-tailed Grackle. That unknown
 artist was John James Audubon who was
 within two years to begin the publication of

what I consider to be the greatest book
 on birds ever published, the monumental
 double elephant folio of "The Birds of America".
 This publication was produced in London between
 1827 and 1838. It contained 435 hand
 colored aquatint engravings, all but the
 first few prints having been executed by
 Robert Havell. The scope of this work will
 probably never be equaled or even attempted
 again. Here for the first time were shown
 birds depicted in ^{very actual} ~~natural~~ size with many
 species ^{being placed} ~~set~~ in ~~landscapes~~ of their ^{own} natural
 habitats. "The Birds of America" was one of
 the last books ^{published} ~~published~~ by ^{the techniques of} engraving,
 and hand coloring. In the early thirties
 new advances in stone lithography were
 making a difference in the publishing field,
 and though the plates were still hand-colored,
 printed coloring ^{may} was only a couple of decades
 into the future. In the early 1840s Audubon
 was relying on ^{the} hand colored ~~stone~~ lithographic
 techniques to produce his famous "Viviparous
Quadrupeds of America" in Philadelphia ^{between} 1842 - ?
 and shortly before the American Civil War some
 years after Audubon's death his son Victor
 attempted to reissue "The Birds of America"
 by using the complete lithographic process with

the coloring, in the stones, I Ben New York 185—

The war ended this enterprise but it did not end the search for better and faster techniques. The decades after the Civil War saw the perfecting of the ^{present} chromolithographic process, and the scientific advances made in Europe and in America with photographic and photographic methods of reproduction have brought us to the present ^{Even if the} ~~era~~ era of the photolithograph. ^{photolithograph} ~~which~~ ^{though it} lacks the personal touch of engraving or ^{stone} lithography and hand-coloring, ~~it nevertheless~~ produces a print more nearly like the artist's original painting than any other method yet devised.

Along with the rapid growth of science and industry following the Civil War came a new attitude toward ornithology and the painting of birds. At the end of the ^{in this country} century emerged an artist who was to ^{affect the field of bird painting} ~~influence the painting of birds~~ so profoundly that his influence is still felt strongly ^{to this day} ~~to day~~. His name was Louis Agassiz Fuertes, and he is considered by many critics of ornithological art to be the finest American bird artist who ever lived. Certainly there is scarcely a bird painter alive who does

not owe this man a ^{great} profound debt, and though he died in 1922(?) his influence can still be seen the works of his two most famous ^{living} followers George Mical Sutton and Roger Tory Peterson.

~~Of course this century has seen a number~~

Of course there have been a number of important influences from outside of this Country. From Britain and Europe ^{Came} the early examples of Selby, Gould, Har and others. From the Continent emerged two artists whose influence is almost as important as ^{that} of Frutkin. They were ~~the~~ Bruno Liljefors of Sweden and German's ^{William} Wilhelm Kuhnert. Both of these artists took their work a step beyond that of Frutkin in that they placed ^{as} ~~and~~ ^{great an} ~~equal~~ emphasis on ^{the} ~~the~~ and the environmental background as on the birds or animals being depicted. Liljefors achieves an almost mystical union between the two so that in fact both bird and background become truly one. This is a ~~purely~~ ^{with} ~~west~~ ^{aiming} He achieved ~~the~~ in a purely Western approach and technique ~~which~~ ^{which} an ideal that ~~was~~ had long been the concerns of Oriental Artists, especially the Chinese and to some extent

the first time the proper recognition that is due to them. The works of ^{Gay} Cohellach, Robert Bateman, Al Guillert, and George McLean come instantly to mind but there are ~~many~~ ^a many more. These artists paint in ~~great~~ ^a variety of styles and ~~have~~ ^{employ or use} ~~wide~~ range of media and techniques. ~~Then~~ Most of them ~~artists~~ follow their own paths, but clearly they are the artistic descendents of ^{men whose} like Frutez, Silsbeys and Kluener who established a tradition of wild life painting that essentially exists to day. Scott and I on the other hand trace the origins of our style and painting approach to another and somewhat discredited source, the works of the Romantic painter of the 19th century and especially the art of John J. Audubon.

Why Audubon? Certainly his work is ~~not~~ ^{und} above criticism. I have discussed his ~~work~~ ^{work} paintings with a number of leading wildlife painters. They are almost universal in their praise of his abilities as a designer, but in the same breath they are quick to point out ^{that} the poses of his birds are ~~frequently~~ ^{often} stiff or distorted and ~~the tone of his painting~~ that his paintings are frequently too melodramatic. They are correct. However, I think that they have missed the

point. Why I ask is Audubon's work still so popular today in spite of the fact that there have been since his time a number of "advances" in the ^{science} ~~account~~ rendering of wildlife subjects. ^{I think} There are several reasons for this. First of all it is the age of Audubon's work and the fact that it ^{very much} ^{reflects} the Romantic era in which it was produced, a period in American history which many people today think of as an heroic time when this country still had frontiers to explore and to conquer and an abundance of natural beauty that it was never to know again. It was an age of discovery and optimism, and Audubon's great "Birds of America" very much reflects this. There is another reason for Audubon's appeal. His ^{work} is beautiful. ^{His just painting an} ~~It is very~~ elegant. In a critical ^{comment} ~~comment~~ on Audubon's paintings made at the time of their publication an English observer noted that Mr. Audubon's people would ^{probably} have limited public appeal, the pictures being too aristocratic and exclusive for popular taste. What so many modern wildlife painters fail to ^{do} ~~do~~ is to rise above the demands for accuracy in their work. In their sincere attempts to let no scientific fact escape their eye so many of these painters

Manley Hopkins called it "inscape." These words are not easily explained in ~~common~~ ^{language}. Some define "Chie" as "spirit," but this is not quite accurate. ^{They flow of as} ~~A~~ ^{as} spirit as life essence of ~~the~~ ^{an} life forces which manifest its self as the existence of a natural rightness of things perhaps comes closer to explaining this concept. Hopkins' ^{concept} ~~idea~~ ^{an} of the "inscape" of a thing is an ~~equally~~ ^{equally} ~~mystical~~ ^{idea} view which, though colored by the fact that it rises from a Western tradition, is an equally mystical ^{view} view. It means a rightness of structure and function ~~which through which~~ ^{by which} the particular ~~object~~ ^{identity} ~~thing referred to~~ ^{exposed} being, or thing referred to is defined.

It means a rightness of structure and function by which the particular identity of the being or thing referred to is defined. ~~Perception~~ ^{of a being} ~~is separated~~ ^{is separated} from nature by our perception of ~~their~~ ^{its} structure but its oneness with the ^{order and} ~~natural~~ ^{flow} of things becomes apparent ~~when~~ ^{if} we understand its natural function ~~in~~ ^{in the painter}.

With ~~our~~ ^{the} painter's knowledge of the structure and function of ~~our~~ ^{his} subject, ~~or~~ ^{very} is important but for a painting, to be a good work of art there ~~is~~ ^{is that} ~~one~~ ^{essential} added element. The structure and function of the subject form

The subject is artificial separated

Therefore

only two parts of a triad. ^{the painter} ~~It~~ is the artist's personal perceptions of that structure and function of his subject ^{which} he ^{renders} into paint by his skill as a craftsman. A painting then succeeds ~~for~~ ^{when} it reflects ^{the} an artist's personal awareness of these principles. Painters who work in whatever medium or pursue whatever ^{kind of} subject matter with one eye to the picture and the other eye to public approval seldom produce art of any ^{real} importance. However, when an artist begins his work with an understanding of the principles I have just discussed he will be able to express himself in any style without straying far from essential artistic truths. Complete

^{of this essay}
I said at the beginning, that when it comes to the painter, creation of bird paintings Scott and I are not as realistic as we appear to be in our other work. Our sense of Audubon's ~~work~~ paintings ^{is responsible for this}. Our appreciation of his ^{unmatched} ~~art~~ of composition, his use of line, his wonderful sense of drama (or melodrama) have been with us since the beginnings of our careers. ^{True that} ~~True that~~ his poses ^{of his birds} even in his best works are very formal ^{do} somewhat like a 19th century tableau vivant, but it is precisely this formality that creates

artist's picture

that that

Professional work may be of questionable validity & deep in the wool Ornithologist but for us who are artists, first and bird people second his paintings have never lost their uniqueness, ~~and~~ their fresh and vital energy.

Scott and I make no ~~excesses~~ ^{apologies} for the way in which we paint our pictures of birds. As I have said, we are not professional wildlife painters nor do we intend to ~~pursue that~~ make a career of working in this genre. We certainly could ~~just~~ ^{have} paint birds more "realistically" if we had wanted to paint them that way, but it is ~~the~~ precisely those ^{formal} qualities of composition, line, and form so beautifully displayed in the work of John James Audubon ^{that have} ~~which~~ pointed the direction which we ~~have~~ in our own ^{way} ~~style~~ have followed. Though our art has taken a different path from that of most contemporary wildlife painting, our pictures are in no way a reaction to these trends. ^{Our bird paintings} ~~They~~ are a natural outgrowth of our earliest artistic interests. ^{and} Our painting style ^{did have} ~~had~~ its beginning on that Saturday after-noon when Scott and I first saw Audubon's "Birds of America" and made our first attempt to copy his painting of the Woodpecker. We ^{have} developed from Painters of birds to Painters of landscapes, still lifes and portraits, but even though our artistic ^{interests} ~~career~~ were to take us

into new areas of ~~interest~~ we have returned
 time and again to paint an accession picture
 of birds. What we have done, with this book,
 "Of Birds and Texas" is to bring together ^{and} the
~~bird painting~~ ^{personal} two different ~~styles~~ approaches to painting.
 Our backgrounds ^{of the painting} are very much related to our
 current landscapes and still life, but ^{the birds} ~~the birds~~
 still reflect ^{those elegant qualities of line and pose and} ~~formal~~ ^{composition}
 which first so impressed us in Audubon's work, the
 work of Audubon. Our book then is an
 homage which we through our work ~~very~~ wish
 to pay to our love of Texas and all her natural
 beauty

Our book, ^{as a work of art and literature} ~~then~~, is created to pay homage
 to ^{a deep affection for} ~~our love of~~ Texas and all its natural beauty
 and to ~~honor~~ ^{our} celebrate an art form that became
 the foundation of "Of Birds and Texas" ^{thing} honors
 these two important sources and if it succeeds
~~itself~~ as a work of art, it will stand, ^{in its own small way} ~~let~~ hope, as
 our ~~own~~ personal tribute to the art and expression
 of gratitude to the Great American Woodman