

STUART W. GENTLING

16 March 1983

Dear John,

It is about time that I touched base with you since our last telephone conversation. A lot of things have happened. First of all I am right in the middle of our gallery remodeling project. It is proceeding fairly smoothly, and, I think, you will be very pleased with its appearance. The effect that I am aiming for is that of a private library — study. The place will be intimate and comfortable with lots of books, private memorabilia and curiosities. There will be no gallery in Fort Worth quite like it. You would not recognize either the exterior or the new interior, and it ought to be a good space in which to hang pictures and efficient enough to serve as an office for handling the Bird Book project. At the moment, however, the renovation is a kind of Hard Scrabble for me, demanding more time than I have to give it, and it is a great devourer of money. This is the main reason why Scott and I are now working entirely on our regular pictures in preparation for an opening sometime in late May. Deciding to move the publication date back at least six months has taken much of the pressure off, and I am glad that you were also relieved.

Now for some exciting news. About a month ago our Austin attorney, Denny Ingram, and our public relations expert, Bennett Spelce, had the opportunity to arrange for me a meeting and interview with Jack Maguire, Director of the Institute of Texan cultures in San Antonio. This Institute, as you may know, is a branch of the University of Texas. It is a huge, contemporary building in the Hemisfair complex in San Antonio with wonderful display space and a monthly attendance of more than 50,000 visitors. Jack is a member of the Board of Regents of the University of Texas and was in Austin for an emergency board meeting. On the urgings of both Denny and Bennett I packed up about fifteen bird paintings and made a mad dash for Austin. When I arrived at the hotel I was met by Ingram and Spelce who both had rather long faces. It had developed that Maguire could not get away from his meeting, but could I bring my pictures over to the University so that he could take a look at them during one of their recesses?

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I didn't think that it was a very good idea. I told Denny to call Maguire and tell him that we should postpone our meeting and arrange for me to bring our pictures to San Antonio for a proper viewing. There followed a number of telephone calls back and forth when denny came back into the living room and happily announced that Maguire was going to leave his meeting and come over to view the paintings. I am now glad that I did not really know what an important person Maguire was, for I seemed to be the only person in the room who was not nervous when the Bell Captain called to tell us that Jack Maguire was in the building and on his way up.

He arrived with an assistant, and after brief introductions were made I immediately began my presentation with the idea that Maguire was on a short schedule. He pulled out his pipe, sat on the couch and looked on in silence as I went into my routine explanation. I described the physical size of the book. I told him that the text would be written by John Graves and that it would not merely be a introduction but an independent work of art of Substantial length. I told him that the book will be designed by David Holman of Wind River Press, that there would be at least 40 prints of birds in landscapes depicting all the regions of Texas, and that many of the birds shown were native only to Texas. I told him that the book would not be bound but would be contained in a fine handmade hardwood box with two drawers. The upper drawer would contain your text and my introduction plus five pure Texas landscapes (no birds), and there would be a booklet containing a catalogue of the prints with small black and white photos of the birds for easy identification and a smaller version of your text for more convenient reading.

Now and then Maguire would interrupt me, always asking pertinent questions about the project. After I had finished my presentation he leaned back on the couch, took a long puff on his pipe. I could tell that both he and his assistant were very impressed. He then suggested that, inspite of his packed exhibition schedule, he could fit us in for a show in early 1984. I explained to him that 1985 would be a better time, since we would be going to press early in 1984. He took another puff on his pipe. He told me that he was a member of the committee appointed by the state of Texas to review and to choose projects for the celebration of the Texas State Sesquicentennial in 1986. He said quite candidly

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that not until now had he seen one project that so excited him or that seemed so appropriate to celebrate the magnitude of the occasion and remain a lasting tribute to the event long after the Sesquicentennial has passed. He added that to the best of his knowledge nothing like this publication had ever been attempted before in Texas. He is a very great admirer of your work, and he knows and respects the work of David Holman as well. In fact the library of the Institute contains all of your books and all of the books designed by David Holman as well.

Jack then made me the following offer; he would like for the Institute to give us an exhibition from October 1985 to the beginning of 1986 when the paintings would be put on a state-wide museum tour during the entire Sesquicentennial year. He promised a grand opening in San Antonio with all the state's big-wigs in attendance and that the Institute would handle all publicity, publish a large poster, and probably publish a catalogue or book on the project. He volunteered the services of the Institute as far as selling the books, making the box, and undertaking the crating and shipping of all the books which we would allow them to sell. We would, he said, have complete control over the design and production of the book. Our project would have to be submitted to the whole committee as a matter of form, but Maguire has given me to believe that if we already have the support of the Institute, then the committee's approval is assured. With the state's involvement in choosing the Bird Book as one of its commemorative projects, a complete sellout of the entire edition would happen in a very short time.

I did not commit myself, John. After our meeting was over (it had lasted for more than one and a half hours) we agreed to meet in San Antonio to discuss the project further. When Jack and his assistant finally left, Bennett and Denny were practically jumping up and down in their excitement. Bennett Spelce's company handles the public relations for the Institute. He knows Jack Maguire well, and he said that in all the years of their friendship he had never seen Maguire so enthusiastic, that he was by nature extremely cautious and rather indirect. To see him make us such a direct offer so soon after just meeting me was really exciting.

I have just returned from our second meeting in San Antonio. I went there

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to see the Institute and to get absolute confirmation of Jack McGuire's offer. In the weeks between our first meeting and our second meeting, I had begun to wonder if I had imagined it all. My fears were soon allayed when after Marilyn Maxwell, my Ft. Worth attorney, and I arrived at Jack's office deep in the bowels of the Institute and were greeted with great warmth. He introduced us to Allan Lowman, another assistant and an avid admirer of yours. We sat down and immediately began to talk business. He confirmed his offer, and we actually set the date of mid-October 1985 for the exhibition and the official debut of the book. He told me that he wants the Institute to become as involved with this project as we would permit. I answered that we would have to take some time to work out the many details to determine what the Institute would require of us. We did not discuss percentages etc.. We would leave that for a later time.

We took a long tour of the facilities which are nothing short of marvelous. The place is huge. They are equipped to print, to photograph, to construct exhibits, to do practically anything. Our tour took some time to make, and during that time we were able to talk about many of the aspects of the Institute's support of our project. One of the most important aspects for me, John, and one that means as much to me as the money that we will make, is the fact that this book will be important historically. Jack even mentioned that the title page would probably bear the imprint of the Great Seal of the State of Texas. All this involvement will not only insure the success of the bird book but will pave the way for the success of the other books which Scott and I have planned. I hope that you might want to participate in some of these future publications. More about that later. Let me know what you think about all this when you get a chance. I still have not written Bill Wittliff at the Encino Press. A simple contract based on your requests is almost completely drafted by My Fort Worth attorney. I will see that both you and Bill get copies for your review as soon as possible. I hope to get down to see you one of these days and to make some photographs etc. Until then, John, I remain as always. . .