

8 January 1985

Mr. James Maroney
129a East 74th Street
New York, N.Y. 10021

Dear Sir:

My friend, Dutch Phillips, told me that you might be able to help me authenticate and appraise the value of a work of art which my brother and I purchased early last year. It is a small painting of a pair of Boat-tailed Grackles that is attributed to John James Audubon. We bought this picture last January from Messrs. Don Cresswell and Christopher Lane of the Philadelphia Print Shop in Philadelphia. We have been great admirers of Audubon's work and have studied it for more than thirty years. Quite frankly I believe that we are as familiar with his style of painting birds and his peculiar techniques and dating problems as most accredited experts. What we are not familiar with is the possible value of his work since very few of his paintings ever appear on the market, and consistent sales records are very scarce.

In order to determine the painting's value, it is important to keep in mind several factors that are unique to this work of art. As a painting by Audubon it is simple and unpretentious, though it is very finely executed. Its main value certainly lies in its historical importance. If this Grackle painting is the particular work of art that Ron Tyler, Jan Muhlert, William Reese, and my brother Scott and I think it is, it occupies a very important and interesting place in Audubon's life story. It is in fact his very first published bird painting. Even though most of the painting was redrawn by Alexander Rider for publication, Audubon still received credit for the work. (See the accompanying exhibits.) This picture was given by Audubon to Charles Lucien Bonaparte in May of 1824. Charles Bonaparte, a nephew of Napoleon, had come to this country with his uncle Joseph Bonaparte, the exiled king of Spain. He was 21 years old at the time, but he was already one of the most important pioneers of Ornithology in both this country and in Europe. He was to publish this Grackle painting in 1825 in volume one of his four volume supplement to Alexander Wilson's American Ornithology, the first great publication of American birds produced in this country. Since the Bonaparte supplement is now considered by book dealers to be part of Wilson's earlier publication, this painting provides the only direct link between Audubon - by far the most famous

painter of birds in history — and the work of Alexander Wilson, who is honored as the " father of American Ornithology. " Keeping in mind the fact that for 160 years this Grackle painting was considered by Audubon experts to be either lost or destroyed, its reappearance will be an important event for those scholars who are interested in this period of Audubon's life. This painting clears up a number of questions that Audubon researchers have asked concerning how the picture was translated into the etched plate that appeared in the Wilson - Bonaparte Supplement. It clearly explains how George Ord, Alexander Lawson and perhaps Titian Peale acted to remove as much of Audubon's contribution to the Supplement as possible. (See Exhibit G) It is also very important to remember that it was Audubon's bitter disappointment over the way that his artistic contribution to the Supplement was handled which made him determined to seek a publisher abroad. This little Grackle painting, then, figures in a very important way in Audubon's decision to have his work published in Europe. And, finally, from the standpoint of monetary value, the most important fact of all is that this painting of the Boat-tailed Grackles is the only Audubon bird painting published in Audubon's lifetime that is still in private hands. All the rest are in the New York Historical Society with the exception of his original paintings of the Blue-grey Gnatcatcher and the Black-throated Blue Warbler which are presumed to be either lost or destroyed.

We intend to give this painting to the Amon Carter Museum some day, and I have already discussed this with Jan Muhlert. Until that time, however, I intend to use the painting to help finance loans for publishing ventures. Scott and I are currently producing a monumental book titled OF BIRDS AND TEXAS which will be ready for delivery to our subscribers in a couple of months. The book will contain fifty colored plates measuring the Great Imperial Folio size of 22 by 28 inches. The text is printed in monotype and letterpress, and the book will weigh forty pounds! The book is dedicated to Audubon and will contain an offset reproduction of this work. *Boat-tailed Grackles*

I have enclosed my correspondence with Ron Tyler and with William Reese, the book dealer considered by Tyler to be an important Audubon scholar. (See Exhibits D,E and F.) I hope that these exhibits will be a research aid to you should you decide to help us. I would like to discuss this with you at your convenience. My telephone number here in Fort Worth is 817 - 738 4427. I look forward to talking with you and hearing what you may have to say con-

cerning this fascinating little painting.

Sincerely yours,

Stuart W. Gentling

Stuart W. Gentling

4801 Harley Street

Fort Worth, Texas 76107

P.S. Please see the following page for a list of the exhibits accompanying this letter.