

GENTLING

20 November 1985

Mr. Stanley Marcus

Dear Sir:

Some months ago Jane Graves mentioned to me that you might be interested in a book which my brother and I are producing in collaboration with John Graves and with David Holman of Wind River Press in Austin. It is a book entitled Of Birds and Texas, and to the best of my knowledge it is unique in the history of Texas publishing. Because I would like for you to be able to judge for yourself, I am taking a rather unusual step by sending you an example of the title page and four of the book's color plates.

It is frustrating to know that no matter how direct and honest I try to be in describing this extraordinary publication, my words still sound like typical promotional hyperbole. I would probably avoid describing the details of the book altogether if there was simply some way of letting people whom I do not know have a chance to see part or all of the book itself. Already we have sold more than one-half of the limited edition of 500 books and all but two or three of the 25 artist's copies. These artist's copies are remarked with a finely-finished watercolor study of a Texas bird by either my brother, Scott, or by me. The price of the regular books is \$2,500.00 per copy. The price of the artist's copies is \$5,000.00 per book. I never thought that such would be the case, but it has become a very real concern of mine that we might sell out all of the books just in the North Texas area and that Of Birds and Texas will never be known widely outside of this region. One encouraging prospect is that recently the Board of Directors of The Fort Worth Museum of Science and History voted to purchase the entire collection of our original bird paintings. These paintings will eventually be displayed to more than 1,000,000 visitors annually, but the book which

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is the primary goal for which the paintings were created may still not become well-known. I have read your foreword to Al Lowman's book, and I would like to say that I share your interest in the printing arts in Texas. I believe that our bird book will certainly help in this direction if the right people get to know about it. I have no doubts that this book will be a sellout, but it is extremely important to me that the book gets the kind of recognition that its quality deserves.

Scott and I are already planning our next book which will be a personal attempt to bring to life in words and in pictures a view of the Aztec capitol, Tenochtitlan, and its people as they appeared at their zenith just before the coming of the Spanish. I am not at all modest about this undertaking. The paintings which we have already done are not romanticized views of the past. They are based upon twenty-five years of research and are, I think, by far the most beautiful paintings of ancient Mexico yet done. Fernando Benitez, the great Mexican historian, is interested in collaborating with us on the text, and the Mexican government has invited us to come to Mexico and stay at the house of the Minister of Culture. We have been invited to explore the back rooms and warehouses of the Museum of Anthropology and to consult with archaeologists about the unpublished findings of excavations carried out in the city in the last twenty years. But that is another story. I can tell you right now that this book will be a publication of outstanding beauty and elegance and should be the visual standard for this subject for many years to come.

If you happen to be in Fort Worth in the near future and would like to see our bird book and perhaps talk to us about our other publishing projects, please feel free to call me at any time. We have an office here in Fort Worth which functions like a gallery, but it is open by appointment only. The office number is 817 - 332 7059, but I

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am most easily reached at home before noon. My home number is 817-738 4427.

Along with the title page and the four color plates I am also enclosing a reproduction (facsimile-size) of a painting of Boat-tailed Grackles done by John James Audubon in Philadelphia in 1824. Scott and I discovered the painting and purchased it from a Philadelphia print dealer late last year. It has been authenticated by William Reese of New Haven, Connecticut. It happens to be Audubon's first published work, and it is the only original Audubon bird painting published in his lifetime that is still in private hands. It was painted for Charles Lucien Bonaparte who published it in his four-volume supplement to Alexander Wilson's American Ornithology. Its inclusion in our book which is dedicated to Audubon unites our bird book in a symbolic way with two of the most famous publications on birds in American History - Wilson's American Ornithology and Audubon's Birds of America. I know of no contemporary publication about birds which can claim this distinction. I am including a monograph which I wrote concerning the interesting history of this grackle picture. It has a few typographical errors and has been re-written for our book, but I think that you might enjoy it. What a fantastic coincidence it is that we have wanted to dedicate our book to Audubon since we first began to talk about this project in 1966, and in the year of its publication we should discover this picture!

I hope that you enjoy the prints and the other material and that this will give you some idea of what our book is all about. I am also enclosing an article by Susan Freudenheim in this November's issue of Texas Homes. It is an objective evaluation of our book. If you are interested, please give me a call. Scott and I would be delighted to talk with you.

Sincerely yours,

Stuart W. Gentling
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