

II December 1985

Mr. Graham Arader III
1000 Boxwood Court
King of Prussia, Pennsylvania 19406

Dear Sir:

Earlier this year my brother and I acquired a small painting of a pair of Boat-tailed Grackles attributed to John James Audubon. As artists ourselves and students of Audubon's life and work for about thirty years, I frankly believe that we know about as much concerning Audubon's techniques and painting style as any acknowledged Audubon expert. However, I am currently seeking several opinions to "officially" authenticate the work and to determine its value for insurance purposes, for possible re-sale, or for a possible donation for tax purposes to the Amon Carter Museum here in Fort Worth. I realize that there is frequently a charge for this service and that you should also have the picture in your hands for a definitive analysis. However, I am caught in an awkward kind of catch 22 situation; I do not wish to travel with the painting or send it through the mails until it is insured or insurable, and I cannot insure it until I know its value.

I have already shown the painting to Ron Tyler, Chief Curator at the Amon Carter Museum, and I have sent my research material including an 8"x10" transparency to William Reese in New Haven, Connecticut. Both men are convinced of its authenticity. Reese's opinion is especially important, because he has written a paper dealing with this particular work, an article that by coincidence was published by the Carter Museum in a book titled, Prints of the American West. We bought the painting from Don Creswell and Chris Lane of the Philadelphia Print Shop. They were extremely circumspect in their analysis of the painting and would go only so far as to list the work as attributed to Audubon. They have since changed their minds based on the evidence which we have given them. In their catalogue the grackle painting was originally reproduced in a small black and white illustration. They stated only that it was done in pen and ink and watercolor. When I first looked at the catalogue it was obvious to me that it was definitely painted

in Audubon's style, but I also knew that it would have to have been created with pastel, egg-white glazing, and probably lead or graphite pencil if it was, indeed, an original Audubon of the early 1820's — and not a copy. These, as you know, were Audubon's techniques of the period.

After looking at the catalogue for about five minutes, I decided to call the shop. I took the chance of asking Cresswell whether or not he could detect any signs of pastel crayon work or the shine of egg white glazing on certain parts of the birds and to look to see if there was any pencil work on the feathering. He confirmed (to his surprise!) the presence of all these elements, and I bought the picture on the spot. Don told me that he wanted to send the painting to an Audubon expert in New Haven, but I told him to send it immediately to me, and I would send the appropriate information to the expert in New Haven. Cresswell would not at that time give me the name of this expert. I was later to learn from Ron Tyler that the expert was Bill Reese. My brother and I have a fine library of books on birds and the life work of Audubon, including the four volume set of the Amsterdam Audubon prints. By the time that the painting had arrived we had sufficiently researched the work from books in our own library for us to be convinced that we could prove its authenticity. It is also a strange coincidence that we working to produce an Imperial Folio size book titled, OF BIRDS AND TEXAS which had been dedicated to Audubon since we first began work on the project eight years ago. Though I spoke to one of your agents from Houston and was told that you were not interested in contemporary books about birds, I am nevertheless sending you several plates and a title page from our book. The entire work contains 53 reproductions, a special new work by author, John Graves — one of Texas' most respected prose writers as well as personal commentary by Scott and me. The pages of the book are not bound but are contained in two portfolios enclosed in a special bookboard box covered with linen. The finished book weighs forty pounds! By the way, the whole text is printed with hand-set monotype and letterpress. We have already sold more than half the edition of 500 books plus 25 artist's copies right here in the north Texas area, and the rest of the edition will sell out as soon as I am able to devote time to promoting the book in other areas. We have sold the entire collection of the original paintings done for the book to the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History. The Museum is scheduled for a public opening for the collection on January 10th.

For those students of Texas history who also share an interest in birds and books about birds 1985 and 1986 mark two very special anniversaries. This year is the Bicentennial birthday of John James Audubon, unquestionably the most famous bird artist of all time, and the observance of this event will be followed in 1986 by activities throughout our state celebrating the 150th anniversary of Texas's independence from Mexico. To commemorate these special events we wish to announce with pride the forthcoming publication of a monumental new book entitled OF BIRDS AND TEXAS by Scott and Stuart Gentling and John Graves.

The Gentlings have been at work for over eight years to create the fifty paintings reproduced in this remarkable book, a work of art and literature dedicated in memory of John James Audubon. Forty of the color offset lithographic plates are of Texas birds depicted against backgrounds of the state's many different regions showing the changes of seasons and weather and the different times of day and night. The ten additional plates deal more exclusively with the land and people of Texas painted in the Gentlings' more familiar drybrush watercolor style. Stuart Gentling has contributed an introduction to the book, and either he or his twin brother, Scott, has written one or more pages of commentary preceding each of the color plates. Accompanying the Gentlings' text and plates is a major new work by Texas author, John Graves, certainly one of the most admired prose writers in the United States today. The Foreword is written by Harry Tennison, an international sportsman and conservationist and currently the President of Game Conservation International.

Both the plates and text are printed in the Great Imperial Folio size of 22" X 28", a format rarely used for books today and, to the best of our knowledge, never attempted before in Texas. As with many fine art publications of this importance, the pages of this volume are not bound but are contained in two fine handmade, linen-covered portfolios and a box of durable bookboard also covered with lined. These have been constructed by Craig Jensen. As a former conservator of rare books and manuscripts at the prestigious library of the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin he has seen to it that only the best acid-free materials of archival quality were used in the manufacture of the portfolios and the box to hold them.

*Audubon
winning* ?

The design and printing of the book are by David and William Holman of Wind River Press at Austin. They have won numerous publishing awards, and they are unanimously considered by collectors of important contemporary limited editions to be the finest practitioners of the printing craft in Texas. They have worked closely together to design the layout of the book and to print the entire text by the now rarely used traditional method of letter-press, thus giving OF BIRDS AND TEXAS a personal touch which cannot be matched by the standard computer-directed machines of today. The edition limit of the book is 500 copies ¹⁵ plus 25 artist's copies, and the edition limit of each individual reproduction in the book is 750. Each book ~~will be~~ ^{is} numbered and signed by Scott and Stuart Gentling and John Graves, and each individual print in the book ~~will bear~~ ^{bears} the same edition number as the book and ~~will be~~ ^{is} signed by one or both of the Gentlings.

This impressive work, OF BIRDS AND TEXAS, is certain to become a classic in the history of Texas publishing. Its creation is the product of a unique combination of talents drawn from the exacting disciplines of painting, literature, printing and design. This book, then, will be an appropriate monument to John James Audubon and to the Texas Sesquicentennial, and as such it is created to celebrate our present, to commemorate important people and events of our past and to provide us and our descendants with a truly exceptional heirloom for the future.