

Kelly ANDERSON
Coe Kerr Gallery

24 SEPTEMBER 1986

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Mr. Kelly Anderson
Coe Kerr Gallery
49 East 82nd Street
New York, New York 10028

Dear Sir:

I am sending you in the accompanying box a copy of our recently published book entitled OF BIRDS AND TEXAS. Enclosed with the book is all the information that I think is necessary for you to pursue the sale of our painting of the boat-tailed grackles by John James Audubon. Though the picture is small (approximately 10" X 14") and in need of conservation work, it is nevertheless an extremely important work that played a pivotal role in Audubon's decision to have his BIRDS OF AMERICA published in Europe instead of this country. In spite of the fact that it was altered in the print which finally appeared in volume one of Charles Lucien Bonaparte's 1825 supplement to Alexander Wilson's AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY, it is still Audubon's first published work, and, to the best of my knowledge, it is the only Audubon bird painting published in the artist's lifetime that still remains in private hands.

Carol Slatkin's letter authenticating the painting adequately explains its uniqueness and importance in relation to Audubon's other work and his life story. I have enclosed two monographs which I wrote about this painting. One of the monographs appears on page 87 of our book, and the other monograph titled Strange Coincidences tells the same story but details our specific research. Our book is dedicated to Audubon, and because I believe that our own book will become well-known and important in its own right, the fact that this painting is reproduced in it for the first time in its unaltered state may even enhance the importance of the Audubon painting. It certainly gives our book a unique quality.

I am sending a copy of our book, because it may be of some help in selling the Audubon painting. Please keep the book as long as you think it may be of use. OF BIRDS AND TEXAS has just been out for a month and a half, and I have had very little time to promote it. However, it is already garnishing some very impressive praise from book dealers, librarians and critics. The November issues of Town and Country and Southern Accents are the first magazines outside of Texas to cover the book, and several more important magazines are going to do something on the book. By the way, our mutual friend, Michael Thomas, recently ordered a copy. I am very proud of the fact that book dealers and librarians and book connoisseurs, the kind of people who are usually cautious by nature, are calling OF BIRDS AND

TEXAS the greatest book of its kind ever produced in Texas and that it is an important American book as well.

As my monograph titled Strange Coincidences explains, the painting of the grackles was thought to be either lost or destroyed for 160 years. Its "rediscovery" provides a fascinating and important footnote in American art history. Carol Slatkin, who is the assistant director of the New York Historical Society which has the largest collection of original Audubon paintings in the world, has told me that seeing this work come to light has been one of the most exciting moments of her professional career. She is very excited by the fact that the painting actually does shed considerable light on a very important period in Audubon's life history which until now has only been partially understood, even though it has been written about in practically every Audubon biography.

The value of the picture has been difficult to determine, because there are no consistent sales records on the sales of Audubon bird paintings. And how does one put a price on the painting's unique historical importance. James Maroney told me that he thought the painting could be worth as much as \$350,000 or even more. Mary Naud at Hirschel and Adler's told me on the phone that the painting was probably worth between \$300 and 350,000. Hirschel and Adler's currently has an original Audubon painting of three English finches which is the same size as our grackle picture. It is quite lovely, but the birds are European and not American and it is not Audubon's first published work etc. They want \$300.00 for the work. Mrs Naud wrote an appraisal for ^{OUR} ~~the~~ work, giving an evaluation of \$200,000, because she knew that I was seeking a loan to finish our book, and I was using the Audubon as collateral. She did not want to be held liable for a larger sum. Peter Rathbone of Sotheby's thought that the picture would be worth between \$250,000 and \$350,000, though he said that it was only a guess and that the only way to really find out was to test it on the market — preferably at auction. None of these people knew the estimates given to me by the other people I have mentioned here.

I personally think that an asking price of \$300,000 would not be out of line, but I am open to suggestions about this. I told you that the Amon Carter Museum is very interested in the picture as well as the New York Historical Society. However, only the Carter Museum knows that I want to sell it. We have not talked money yet. I also told you that I have been talking to Bob Christmas of Lacombe, Louisiana — a dealer in important Audubon material. As I told you on the phone, I will contact no other people for the time being in order to give you a chance to work with the picture. Mr. Christmas is asking a 10% commission if he sells the

painting. He has told me that he has several prospects in the \$275,000 range, but I frankly think that the painting may be worth much more than that, and I am not going to make any move until I have had a chance to work with you. Mr. Christmas has had the advantage over you, because I sent him all the necessary research and appraisal materials last week, and I have not had the time to write to you and send you these same materials until now. Art and Antiques is very interested in our book and the Audubon discovery, and I think they are going to do an article on the Audubon. Such an article would, indeed, heighten public interest in the painting, and this might enhance the value and the saleability of the work. It is certainly something to think about.

With this letter I give you permission to negotiate on my brother's and my behalf, although, of course, I reserve the right to make any final decision about the sale. I am not familiar with art dealing practices concerning pictures as important as our Audubon painting, and I don't want to make any protocol mistakes or step on anybody's toes. Mr. Christmas knows that I have talked to you and that I am also going to work with you. I have also promised him that I am not going to work with any other dealer but you for the time being. Your advice to me — not to have too many people involved — serves your interest, as you pointed out, but you are also right that it best serves my interest as well.

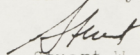
Since Bob Christmas has gotten a bit of a lead on you, I shall not agree to any of his prospects until you have had a reasonable opportunity to find a possible buyer. Of course I would like to get the best possible price for the work. I have told you that I am selling the painting because of the tremendous amount of money the delay of a year and a half in publishing our book cost us. I want to take care of this debt quickly to minimize our interest costs and maximize profits from our book. Our book is selling quite well, and I have no doubt that the entire issue will sell out. The problem is that my brother and I do not want this book to sell out locally and be buried in the collections of wealthy book people. Scott and I have never had a show that was not a sell out, but we have yet to make a wider reputation, because our pictures are usually sold as soon as they are painted and soon disappear from public sight. Publishing this book is an attempt to remedy this situation. Though birds are only a peripheral interest of ours, our book contains, as you can see, ten landscapes painted in our usual drybrush watercolor style. People who buy the book will be given an opportunity to see these works, and the spectacular size and quality of the book is an easy newsmaker which I hope will help to promote our work outside of this area.

We recently sold all of the original bird paintings to the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History for \$300,000.00 which was a very good deal for the Museum. A million people a year go through that museum — three times more than all the

combined visitors to Fort worth's three art museums. This exposure is one of the main reasons why we accepted the museum's offer. Our price range is usually between \$4,500 and \$25,000 depending on the size and complexity of the work. By the way, Scott and I have lectured at the Dallas Art Museum, the Kimbell Museum where our work has even been on display, and the Fort Worth Art Museum where, until last year, I was a member of the Board of Directors. Scott likes to say that as artists we are not modern enough for the Fort Worth Art Museum, not western enough for the Amon Carter Museum and not dead enough for the Kimbell Museum. Perhaps our book will help us to remedy our situation. It will only help, however, if I am able to take my time in selling copies so that I may strategically place this work where it will do us the most good. At the moment we are under considerable pressure to sell as many books as possible to pay off our extra debt, and for this reason we are reluctantly selling our Audubon painting.

Please feel free to call me at any time. My home number is 1-817-738 4427. My office number is 817-332 7059. I am usually at home in the mornings and at my office-studio in the late afternoons.

Sincerely yours,



Stuart W. Gentling

4801 Harley Street

Fort Worth, Texas 76107