

THE GENTLINGS

Evoking Audubon

by Donna Pate

"It's simply uncanny how Audubon came to our aid," exclaims Fort Worth artist Stuart Gentling when describing the strange twist of fate that enabled him and twin brother Scott to complete *Of Birds and Texas*, their magnificent ornithological book. Dedicated to, and inspired by nineteenth-century artist and naturalist John James Audubon, the book's completion was halted by its production costs, which had doubled from original estimates. A dramatic rescue ensued when Stuart discovered a long-lost Audubon painting one Saturday while browsing through an art catalogue. Their purchase of *The Great Crow Blackbird* for \$18,000, followed by its authentication as an Audubon original and sale by Sotheby's for \$253,000, assured completion of their own monumental work of art.

It is certain that if Audubon were alive today, he would sanction the Gentling masterpiece. Like the famous naturalist's *The Birds of America*, published in the 1830s, *Of Birds and Texas* is a folio-style book, measuring twenty-two-by-twenty-eight inches, and weighing in at an impressive forty-six pounds. The unbound collection of fifty prints of Texas birds and landscapes, together with a John Graves essay, are contained in a linen-covered box.

Applauded by art and book critics alike, this Texas masterpiece is the result of a decade's labor by the Gentlings, who declined the use of an editor. "We put the book together exactly as we wanted, and quite honestly,



photos, courtesy of the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History



The prints in Of Birds and Texas include, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, a black-crowned night heron, rufous-sided towhees, and boisterous caracaras.

that's why it's so good," Stuart says. "For us, the book had to be as accurate as possible."

Book sales verify his proud claim; fewer than 150 copies remain of the 500 published just one year ago, despite the \$2,500 price tag. Trammell Crow, T. Boone Pickens, and the Bass brothers are just a few of the Texans who have snatched up this collector's item. Interested buyers won't find *Of Birds and Texas* at the corner bookstore, however. Copies are available through the Gentling Gallery, (817) 332-7059.

For the Gentlings, *Of Birds and Texas* exemplifies their artistic philosophy. "The book creates emotion, it doesn't display it," says Stuart.

ULTRA

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