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Lively Arts

Texas tome: Hefty bird book has hefty price

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The largest and most expensive book ever published in Texas weighs in at 47 pound and costs \$2,500 and made its debut this week before art lovers and bibliophiles in San Antonio.

According to Blanco bookseller Maggie Lambeth, who arranged a showing at Club Giraud, the book "is destined to become the Audubon of rare Texana."

"Of Birds and Texas" is in fact dedicated to Audubon and contains a print of that great American bird painter's first published painting, the "Great Crow Blackbird." There was a lot of talk of Audubon at the showing, as one of the artists, Stuart Gentling, explained his life-long fascination with Audubon's work. His interest began at age 15 when he purchased a rare print of Audubon's "Wild Turkey" for \$15. The print now sells for about \$1,500.

"Of Birds and Texas" contains 40 prints of Texas birds using Texas

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— Maggie Lambeth

landscapes as background, and another 10 prints of "the land and people" of the state. Painted by Stuart and Scott Gentling of Fort Worth, the major text is by noted Texas hard-scabble philosopher, John Graves. Each print is accompanied by a full-page essay by the artists.

Considered on the basis of art alone, the paintings are not all stunning. Some of the in-flight pictures suffer from a lack of vivacity and a few lack the exactness so admired in the work of Audubon. Most are skillfully done, however, and all are extremely accurate — the result of almost seven years of research and observation.

As an example of the printer's art, however, "Of Birds and Texas" is surely not only the most ambitious one-man printing venture ever attempted, it is a masterwork of its kind.

According to Al Lowman, author of "The Printing Arts in Texas," the book contains "the finest color separation work that has ever been done in the Southwest. . . there is absolute fidelity to the original artwork."

The printer was David Holman of Austin's Wind River Press, who had to retouch his entire shop in order to accommodate the Imperial Elephant Folio sheets (22 by 23 inches when trimmed). The text was set and printed in letterpress, and the pictures were done by offset color lithography on a Heidelberg press.

The sheets are housed in hand-made, linen-covered boxes, constructed by Craig Jensen, one of the finest hand bookbinders in the state. Only 500 boxed, numbered and signed copies of the tome are available for sale — and almost 300 copies already have been sold.



DETAIL OF TURKEY
in "rare Texana"