

Long-lost Audubon work on auction in New York

BY CAROL SEWELL
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A John James Audubon bird painting thought lost for 160 years was found by Fort Worth artists Scott and Stuart Gentling, and today they will sell it to help pay for their own book of bird prints.

A *Pair of Boat-Tailed Grackles*, painted by Audubon in 1824, is expected to bring \$200,000 to \$300,000 when auctioned at Sotheby's New York.

The Gentlings bought the painting in 1984 for \$18,000.

"I guess you could say Audubon came to our rescue from his grave," Stuart Gentling says.

The money will help pay for the Gentlings' monumental book/folio, *Of Birds and Texas*, a \$2,500-a-copy limited edition book of their watercolors showing Texas birds life-size and in their natural habitat.

Texas author A.C. Greene has called *Of Birds and Texas* "the most stunning and prodigious book in Texas history."

The Gentlings' discovery of the Au-

dubon painting just when they were about to publish their own works "was a most unusual coincidence," Stuart Gentling says.

The Gentlings found the painting in a Philadelphia print dealer's catalog in December of 1984. The modest price indicated the dealer could not positively attribute the work.

Stuart Gentling telephoned and after questioning the dealer and relying on his own knowledge of Audubon's work, Gentling was convinced the painting was genuine. The twins bought it on the spot.

A *Pair of Boat-Tailed Grackles* was later authenticated by the New York Historical Society, the authority on Audubon paintings, just when several costly printing delays had threatened the very existence of the Gentlings' own epic work. Using the painting as collateral, "we were able to refinance our project and complete publication," Stuart Gentling says.

"In a very real sense, Audubon has participated in the creation and actual publication of *Of Birds and Texas*."