

Lifestyle

Texas birds are stars of book

Continued from Page 1
Museum of Science & History.

He skins the birds deftly, studies the wing structure, the head and the musculature. Then he takes measurements. The body is decently interred, and the skin and feathers are kept around for closer scrutiny and repainting purposes.

Both Gentlings repaint constantly. And sometimes Scott gets up at 2 a.m. and adds some fine detail to the feathers Stuart had been painting the night before.

Neither seems to resent help from the other. Sometimes they forget where one brother stopped and the other took over. Usually Stuart draws the first few swooping lines, the upthrust of a bird in flight or poised for flight. But then again it may be Scott who catches that fine careless rapture.

"Sometimes we seem to have quite a few birds around," says Scott. "I remember once we seemed to have a lot of woodpeckers."

It was Scott who painted the young turkey cock in the portfolio, each feather glinting bronze and green and purple down to the black-and-white-patterned torso and the black-and-cream banded brown tail feathers.

Once, they decided to paint a wild turkey, after Audubon. Scott had already painted three and sold them to his mother's friends.

The Gentlings and their friend Dutch Phillips, now of the Fort Worth Gallery, took the painting to New Orleans to show to a dealer.

"We were just kids. We carried it in a cardboard tube. The hotel maid saw the tube and thought it was empty, so she threw it away. We had been planning to ask \$250 for it. I spent five weeks on that project, and 25 hours on the details."

Entwined careers

Scott was named staff artist for the school yearbook at Arlington Heights High, after years of practicing on his friends. "But I drew a caricature of a teacher. She did not like it and I was fired from the yearbook," he recalls.

He continued painting portraits of their schoolmates and their cats. Scott painted portraits, Stuart painted landscapes and still lifes. But sometimes Scott did a still life and Stuart did a portrait commission, and they both did landscapes,

and their careers became inextricably entwined.

John Chumley, who was the first artist-in-residence at the Fort Worth Art Center, now the Fort Worth Art Museum, remembers Scott Gentling as "an explosive bundle of raw talent" in those days. Stuart, who had boyhood visions of becoming a writer, began art classes a little later. The realist style they developed with John Chumley, and later at the Pennsylvania Academy of Art in Philadelphia, became a way of painting all their own.

Scott went to the Pennsylvania Academy while they were at Tulane University. Stuart soon followed. There may be differences in their style and technique, and some experts claim they can tell a Stuart from a Scott on first glance. But there are times when the artists themselves cannot seem to remember who painted what part of a picture.

"We're not ornithologists, not any kind of naturalists in the strict sense of the world," Stuart says. "We don't want to be categorized as bird-painters. We both do portrait commissions, and we both paint landscapes."

There will be five Gentling landscapes in the folio, including Stuart's white limestone river bottom with a pair of herons feeding in a shallow pool, against the Brazos River vegetation, and Scott's remarkable autumnal scene with tight green trees in the foreground and the late sunlight upon a sun-gilded patch of russet field beyond.

They do consider themselves conservationists in the broad sense of the word.

At the age of 14 they discovered the shelf of bird books at the Children's Museum and American reproductions of Havell's London editions of Audubon's *Birds of America*.

"It blew my mind," says Stuart. "Here, I'd been painting birds since childhood. I looked at pictures of wood ducks and king eiders. Then I stopped painting and built a model railroad. Scott finished it. We still have it in a closet somewhere. Then we went back to king eiders."

Homage to Audubon

It was about the same time that the Gentlings began their backroads wanderings. They became

Texas history buffs. They continued to paint.

It was 1964 when they began thinking about doing their own bird book in homage to Audubon. Even then, 20 years ago, they knew that it would be a big commitment.

An exhibition of 25 of the original drybrush watercolors from the 45 included in the Imperial Folio is on view at Evelyn Siegel Gallery, 3612 W. Seventh, through June 2. Ralph Carr Art Consultants is in charge of the project, which includes publication of the folio, bound in Japanese linen, over heavy, acid-free archival bookboard, and the making of a book to be published later. They have worked with a half-dozen experts in Texas and in London.

The Gentlings are identical twins only in the sense that both paint in the same style, a verism as realistic as a photograph.

"But it has to show much more than a photograph," says Stuart. "Otherwise, we've failed."

Both studied under John McCoy at the Pennsylvania Academy and came to the attention of Walter Stuempfig of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art in Philadelphia. Stuart made his professional gallery debut with Valley House of Dallas in 1966 when he was 23. Scott, at 21, was featured in a show at the former Fort Worth Center.

Now they have their own gallery at 901 Boland.

When they were invited to the White House last year to view Nancy Reagan's Christmas tree and submit paintings for the White House Christmas card, Scott declared he would rather stay at home and work or take a long hike in the woods.

But both went and had a wonderful time. The Reagans were not in residence, and they had the rooms to themselves, with the sanction of White House security. They examined the nation's treasures at leisure and made many photographs. Scott's painting, typically, was a miniaturized view of the Christmas tree with each ornament glowing. Stuart's captured the tree and a bit of architectural detail. The commission went to Mark Hampton, designer for River Crest Country Club.

This year they have been invited to do the White House Christmas card, and so far as they know there is nobody else in the running.