

30 September 1986

Mr. Don Otto, Director
The Fort Worth Museum of Science and history
1501 Montgomery Street
Fort Worth, Texas 76107

Dear Don:

I am sending this letter to you by registered mail so that I will know whether or not you have received it. There is some doubt in my mind about my past letters reaching your desk. At least this is the only reasonable explanation I can think of to explain the breakdown in our communications and your apparent surprise about our recent exhibition at the Dallas Museum of Natural History. Of course this does not completely explain away the fact that Ralph and I have had at least three meetings with you in your office, meetings which were also attended by Ann Tinsley, Linda Johnson and one of your legal representatives in whose presence we discussed the forthcoming Dallas show.

If I may refresh your memory, one of the reasons why we crammed our exhibition at the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History into what was originally to be only a three-day show in early January, was because of your insistence on having the birds make their debut in Fort Worth before they could be displayed at any other institution. And perhaps you have also forgotten that I had the Dallas museum write you a formal letter concerning the exhibition. In addition I requested of Linda Johnson that some notice of the Dallas show be mentioned in Harbinger to keep local interest up and to enhance the importance of the pictures by showing that other institutions were anxious to display them. That the paintings were being displayed with pride elsewhere might possibly encourage further donations to ensure that the collection would remain in Fort Worth. It is a useful example of simple psychology, but there was not a word of the show in your museum's paper. The last edition only mentioned that several new contributions had been made. Neither Ralph nor I had been informed of these donations until we read it in the paper. It is somewhat embarrassing to me (and my banker) to have to read about these gifts instead of being properly informed by the museum staff. It should be embarrassing to the museum as well.

These are not " little " oversights in the real world though such carelessness does seem to be standard operating procedure at museums everywhere. What is

becoming painfully apparent to me is that we either never had a meeting of the minds or that the museum is not acting in good faith, or perhaps it is unable to act in good faith inspite of good intentions. I certainly have been warned enough about the value of "gentlmen's agreements", but our arrangement depends on much more than what was written down on paper. If I had insisted on putting everything down on paper, we would still be waiting for the contract to be drawn up. I think it should also be embarrassing both to the museum and to the museum's attorneys that it took eight months to draw up the simplest contract - an agreement which I largely wrote and which vastly favored the museum's interests over those of my brother and me. Since your lawyers were not getting paid for their work, their delay is not surprising. A word or two from you could have speeded this process, no doubt. But taking eight months to draw up a contract that was unchanged from our original agreement cost me much delay in getting the publication of our book started. I fully realize that the museum is not responsible for the vagaries of the publishing business, but the museum's dilatory shuffling in the handling of this simple task threw our publication off schedual, and this cost us a considerable amount of money. You may have forgotten that we already had a previous offer to purchase our paintings before Ralph was approached by one of the museum's board members. It was the thought of having our collection remain in Fort Worth on public display that persuaded us to work with the museum. The other would-be buyer would have taken the paintings away from Fort Worth forever.

Perhaps it might be useful to refresh our memories concerning our unwritten agreements. Though the contract allows the museum eight years in which to purchase the collection, you and I had a clear understanding that every reasonable effort would be made to raise the money as quickly as possible. You and I both discussed the fact that projects like this can go stale and that their best chances for success occur early when the opportunities for publicity and public awareness are at their maximum. We also discussed the possiblity that, if all the money was raised quickly, the \$300,000 or part of it could remain with the museum to collect interest for you, and Scott and I could schedual payments to us according to our tax situation. We certainly discussed the probability of our wanting three \$100,000 payments to be made over a period of three years - if all the money happened to be raised at once. We decided to keep the schedual flexible, to be determined by events and by our mutual financial situations. Never did we agree that the museum would intend to take eight years to raise the funds and pay us. And yet Ann Tinsley, presumably acting on instructions from your office, began to tell

prospective donors that they could have as much as eight years to pay for a painting. In this way even a \$250.00 payment for each painting could lock the collection up for eight years with the museum reaping the substantial benefits of the interest money while my brother and I would be unable to derive any financial benefit whatsoever from the sale during this time. This has, indeed, already happened on several occasions. I believe that the museum currently has more than \$25,000 in partial payment contributions which Scott and I can not touch in spite of our present need. A number of contributors, namely Bruce Petty and Howard Walsh contributed what was to be a blanket payment with no specific picture purchases in mind. Apparently the museum knew this, but I was not informed of it, and consequently we lost the opportunity to apply these blanket gifts to the partial payments, thus filling them out to purchase the pictures and release those sums. I discussed this dilemma with you in your office, but nothing was done when it could have been done to remedy this situation. If the museum would only act in good faith and with some degree of competent coordination with its own staff and with us, problems of this nature could easily be avoided. This project is not a complicated one.

That these little problems are beginning to grow into big ones seems to indicate, if not a lack of good faith on the museum's part, then an apparent apathy or perhaps even a disregard with which the museum view any fund-raising for the project. I know that you have other serious priorities, but when both you and Mrs Tinsley told Ralph and me in your office several months ago that we should not attempt to approach any of your important contributors or interfere with your other fund-raising efforts, I should have seen the handwriting on the wall. Unfortunately you did not make this request before we signed the purchase contract. It did not seem to make any difference to you whether or not those same patrons had been our own patrons for nearly thirty years. Just where was Ralph and I to go to find contributions?

I viewed with some amusement your recent request to Ralph that the Dallas Museum hire an armed guard to protect the collection during our show there. Perhaps you have never been to the Dallas Museum of Natural History? Our exhibition is on the second floor, well away from any exits. I certainly do not remember an armed guard present at the Fort Worth Museum where all forty of the paintings were on display only a few feet from the back door. When I made several unannounced visits to see the pictures, there was nobody guarding them.

WACAS- BIRD
SOUTH WORTH CO. TEXAS

What conclusions can Ralph or Scott and I reach concerning the Musuem's attitude. I realize that there are at least two sides to this scenario, but I can not help but believe that there really is not much interest in our collection on the part of the museum administration, and it raises serious doubts in my mind that the museum is really willing or even capable of taking the pains to properly protect and display the collection once it is purchased. Even with the best of intentions the museum may discover that it does not want the responsibility of maintaining the collection, and would soon move to de-accession it. The museum's lack of interest in the collection was made embarrassingly apparent by the fact that not one official representative of your institution was at the Dallas Museum on the very successful opening night of the exhibition. When I was asked to make a speech to the assembled guests, the first comments that I made were my expressions of thanks to the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History for their cooperation in helping to make this show possible. I spent the rest of the evening trying to explain why nobody from your musuem was there.

As we begin to sell more and more to important universities and libraries and the book garners praise and critical acclaim, perhaps the museum will come to realize the importance of owning the entire collection of the book's original paintings. However, I have had too much experience with the bureauracies of other museums ever to view them as repositories of wisdom. In the meantime our collection may languish and actually deteriorate physically then be sold off and eventually broken up and dispersed. The contract gives us no real protection in this regard. In fact the contract gives us very little protection at all. From the time of our first discussions I have relied on our mutual understanding, good will and good memory to see that our collection found a worthy home. With the turn-over that occurs with your board of directors, people who have dedicated their efforts to help the museum purchase the collection are not re-placed. Not being a member of your board, I have no authority to speak on our behalf, and the current leadership does not seem interested. What success the museum has had to date is due almost entirely to the hard work of Cornelia Blake. Roby Penn has been ill, and Mr. Keltner has managed to keep an extremely low profile. Now that Cornelia is no longer a board member and we can expect no help from Ted Gorski, to whom are we to turn for help? Protocol and good manners demand that we do not do all the fund-raising by ourselves without the approval and help of board members.

I know that this letter is bound to anger you, but I feel that I have stated the facts truthfully and fairly as I am able to interpret them. Scott and I were

greatly honored when the museum expressed an interest in purchasing our paintings. We even offered to add to the scholarly importance of the collection by adding all our drawing studies, first drafts of texts and all our correspondence and related material to what has turned out to be the greatest publishing effort of its kind in Texas history. In addition to donating material that may one day be of interest and help to researchers, we even have offered to allow the museum to keep all interest monies accrued during the life of the project. It may have been this decision that has encouraged the museum to move so slowly in expediting the release of payments to us and to help us with the more than \$25,000 from partial contributions which we are currently not allowed to touch. I think that we have tried to cooperate in every way — even to our own detriment. Nothing would please us more than to have a successful conclusion to the fund-raising and to know that the paintings would be housed permanently in an important Fort Worth institution. I truly want to avoid the bad feelings which are beginning to come to the surface at the present time. Any discord will serve neither of us well, and it would be a great disservice to people like Cornelia Blake and all the other contributors who have dedicated their enthusiasm, their trust and their money toward the success of this business. To have this project falter now when a little coordinated effort and leadership might insure its success would be an ill reward for their hard work. I believe that our paintings will one day be a major asset to the museum, and I would like to think that you believe this too.

Now that our book is at last published after many costly delays, Ralph Carr and I will do everything in our power to help the museum. There really is no reason why the fund-raising, inspite of the hard work, could not be an exciting and even pleasant experience if only some genuine enthusiasm can be generated at the museum. We both know that delay does not favor the success of this project and that, if the initiative is lost, it may be impossible to regain it again. I do not believe that the museum wishes to fail in this effort, nor do I believe that it wants Scott and me to suffer the results of such a failure. If, indeed, the project does not succeed, it will not be because of a lack of public interest or the absence of willing contributors out there in the community.

Ralph and I would like to meet with you as quickly as possible to see what can be done to arrive at a clearer understanding of our mutual responsibilities. The museum has the power to re-assess the viability of the project at any time, and I sincerely believe that now is the time for such a re-assessment. No doubt you may feel that the museum's past efforts have been considerable. But it does

not take an expert in the workings of institutional fund raising practices to see that the museum's current performance will not be sufficient to raise enough money to buy the pictures, and perhaps the whole project should be evaluated. A good way to begin would be for the museum not to take Cornelia Blake's past efforts or us and our collection for granted.

Sincerely yours,

Stuart W. Gentling