

14 August 1987

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

Dear Don,

Now that the Of Birds and Texas exhibit has about three weeks remaining of its four month run, I think it is time to take a look at the museum's fund-raising attempts - its past accomplishments and its future chances for success.

To the best of my knowledge only one picture, the rufous-sided towhees, has been sold during the current run of the show. Another picture, the ring-necked pheasant, was spoken for by David Komatsu just prior to the exhibit's April opening, but I am unable to get any information on whether or not he has paid for the work. This feeble response does not give me much reason for optimism about the eventual success of the museum's efforts.

I do hope you remember that back in 1984, when we were first approached by museum board members about selling the collection, you and I mutually agreed that if the museum could not purchase all or most of the works within three years, the chances were very slim that it would ever be able to buy them. Of course, that was before the 1985 oil slump and its subsequent impact on the Texas economy.

So far only thirteen paintings have been paid for and released to the ownership of the museum. Most of these contributions were given in early 1985 as a result of the brief January exhibit at the museum and the assiduous efforts of Mrs. James Blake, without whose help very few sales would have been made. Now that she is no longer a board member we have lost our most dedicated and capable hand. Several times I have asked to be provided with two board members who would be willing to work with us. Apparently none have volunteered for the job. Ralph Carr and I have told you that we would be more than willing to seek donors, but this cannot be done without proper consultation and coordination with the museum's board of directors. Our task has also been further complicated by the museum's request that we not contact prominent or past contributors of bird paintings, since the museum has them targeted for projects of a higher priority. Without board support and equal access to donors I really do not see what we can or should try to do.

Perhaps in the beginning I should have gotten some strong hints about museum efficiency and its prospects for success when it took almost eight months

to get board approval for our contract, the terms of which remained unchanged from our initial agreement made in the Fall of 1984. Although the contract stipulates an eight year time limit for the museum to purchase the paintings, you and I personally agreed and had the understanding that the museum would make every effort in good faith to acquire the collection in three years. I also hope you recall that we had an understanding about what would happen if the museum was not able to do so. You promised that, if for any reason the museum was not able to purchase the complete collection after eight years, Scott and I would have the right to buy all the paintings back for their original purchase price. It would certainly be a reassuring sign of the museum's good faith if you could re-affirm this promise in writing and with board approval so that if the museum does fail in its efforts, we might still be able to keep the collection intact somewhere else.

I really believe that we have acted in very good faith, not only to honor our original agreement, but also in volunteering to donate many working drawings and other studies and all the original manuscript material for future researchers. Several important Texas libraries have shown an interest in this material due to the book's critical reception and the significant place it now occupies in Texas publishing history. We even agreed to provide security when the paintings were not on display and to re-frame all works when the entire collection is handed over to the museum. Insuring the collection for eight years unstead of the hoped-for three year period may cost us more than \$40,000. It is hard for me to believe that the museum, while trying to secure an agreement most favorable to its interests, would want us to be harmed by it, or that it could care less one way or the other. It is beginning to appear that Scott and I face the very real prospect that, with the turn-over of the board members and possibly the other people who originally committed to this project, the museum will lose interest and not acquire the collection afterall.

The future of this whole enterprise seems very cloudy indeed. It is difficult to get a clear picture of what is going on when our inquiries and requests for sales updates are treated as intrusions into museum business, and we make these requests so rarely. Sadly, the impression that does seem to emerge is one of confusion, inefficiency and lack of coordination between museum departments, so that at any given time no single person or department ever knows all the facts. Now that we have been promised an update every three months, perhaps the flow of information will improve.

Don, it has always been Scott's and my dream to keep the entire collection intact. We endured a great many hardships to keep these pictures together.

They required much time and effort to create and produced no income while demanding attention normally spent on works for sale. When the first donations came in I even suggested some of the most appealing and popular bird paintings to be chosen first. I hope that I do not have to tell you what a great disappointment it will be to us if all our efforts have gone for nothing. If the museum decides to back away from the project in six more years, taking the paintings already donated and leaving us with no hope of keeping the collection intact unless we give it the remaining pictures, then a real injustice will have been done which I cannot believe the museum ever intended. To avoid that unhappy prospect, could we not try to work a little more closely together and perhaps re-dedicate ourselves toward pursuing the completion of this project with a little more sincerity and vigor? Afterall, Don, you best know what the museum's intentions and capabilities are likely to produce. If you think that the lack of progress which has characterized the museum's sales efforts since the departure of Cornelia Blake is a graphic indication of the future, perhaps we should meet to see what should be done and not be timid to discuss the viability of the entire project. It would certainly be nice if the museum and not us would ask for a meeting and create a schedual for regular get-togethers.

In the meantime, it is very pleasing to see the collection steadily growing in stature as the bird book continues to gain more attention and praise. The Texas State Historical Association Quarterly is publishing a cover story in color for the Fall issue. The Texas Library Association Quarterly is doing a cover story later this month, and Stanley Archer is reviewing the book for the Texas Ornithological Society Bulletin. A.C. Greene and Al Lowman are publishing a new magazine Texas Books in Review which will feature a long Lowman article on the book. Thus Of Birds and Texas has been reviewed and praised from the different perspectives of art, ornithology, history and literature, and this can only enhance the importance of the collection of the original paintings. By the way, I have read that the museum is planning to show the paintings on tour. If this is true, I certainly would like to be kept informed about it. I am sending along with this letter some xeroxed material from the publicity which we have received in the last few months.

I hope that you are not offended by this letter and that we can get together and have a candid discussion about what can be done to see that our mutual interests and objectives are satisfied.

Stuart