

Cross Timbers country of Central and North Central Texas. Many of these people came incredibly ill equipped to face the dangers of life on the prairies. And a hard life it was! Droughts, blizzards, dust storms, insect invasions, poor soil, no doctors, few schools or churches in towns and none beyond, and of course Indians. The annual raids of lean red men on horses were more than many people could take. When Texas entered the Civil War in 1861 so many white male protectors went off to fight that wives and children and old people were made more vulnerable than ever to fatal attacks by Kiowa and Comanche. Swooping down from Oklahoma, they brought so much death and destruction in the war years that some believe the country never regained its former population density in relation to the rest of the state.

And yet somehow enough of these pioneers held on to their homes and survived the hardships of those early days--as well as later dust bowls and bank failures--to create a hardy breed of West Texans who even today exhibit character traits that seem uniquely their own. As a rule they are a vigorous and independent people who place high value on honesty and good humor. As John Steinbeck would say, they endure.

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(Plate 19) American Woodcock

On the day before Thanksgiving 1999, I flew to Houston to join Caroline "Cina" Forgason and her husband, Mark, for a weekend hunt and holiday dinner at the Norias division of her family's famous

King Ranch. Cina picked me up at the airport while Mark ran some errands in downtown Houston. We were to rendezvous at Mark's family ranch west of the city before heading south to the King Ranch in the notorious holiday traffic. After picking me up, Cina deposited me at the Houston museum of art and immediately went back to the airport to pick up her Washington friend, Nini Ferguson, a beautiful lady with the whitest teeth I ever saw.

Cina and Nini met me outside the art museum, and we drove over to the nearby museum of natural science to see Scott's recently installed thirty-seven-foot-long mural of the Aztec Templo Mayor that was a part of the museum's impressive new pre-Columbian art display.

While we were enjoying this, Cina got a call on her cell phone. It was Mark. He told her about the oddest event that had just occurred. Accompanied by his small terrier, he had stopped by an optometrist's shop in the middle of downtown Houston. He let the dog out into the parking lot while he went into the store, and as he walked inside he saw his dog running around the back corner of the building as if it had seen an alley cat. When Mark came back out a few minutes later, there was his terrier sitting at the front door, wagging its tail and with a bird in its mouth!

"I think it's some kind of plover or snipe. Maybe even a woodcock," Mark said.

I asked Cina to inquire if the bird was still alive.

"Yes, but pretty roughed up. I'm taking it out to the ranch



so you can see it when you come to pick me up."

It was almost sunset when we finally got to Mark's parents' place, a beautiful ranch surrounded by thick stands of pines. After our brief hellos, Mark retrieved a red plastic egg box. There huddled in a corner was an adult American Woodcock, eyes wide open and terrified, but nonetheless not looking too frazzled.

Mark and his mother and father are hands-on ranchers with a mild almost old south way about them. But clearly they were excited about their new prisoner and the fact that it had been retrieved in the middle of all the asphalt and cement of downtown Houston! We all speculated that it must have been flying through town to some distant swamp and had hit a window. It was not the first bird brought to me that had suffered that fate. But a woodcock in downtown Houston?

It was an oddity to be sure. Mark's parents wanted to keep the bird to show it to friends and relatives later that evening or the next day. I didn't think it would live that long and said so. I asked if I could examine the woodcock outside of its improvised cage.

It put up no resistance when I reached into the box and picked it up. It showed some signs of having been mouthed by Mark's terrier, but upon close examination seemed to have no broken ones, no signs of blood. Only an incredibly fast-beating heart and beautiful eyes that never blinked.

"I think this bird is okay," I said. "It would probably

survive if we let it go."

Mr. And Mrs. Forgason looked somewhat disappointed. They gently hinted that they would like to keep it at least for a little while. They graciously relented, however, when I told them that the bird might die of shock that night. Mark agreed.

I wanted to see how well it might fly on its own so I did not gently toss it up into the air. I merely opened my hand. The woodcock flew out of my hand like it had been shot out of a cannon. It winged straight away into the nearby pines. No zig-zagging like its cousin, the snipe, but a direct and unaltering straight line to the woods. I was delighted. So were Cina, Nini, and Mark. Mark's mom and dad were, I think, somewhat disappointed. When I returned to Fort Worth, I sent them one of our folio prints of the woodcocks to replace the live one they lost.

In the painting, we wanted to show the birds' beautifully camouflaged plumage, a marvelous combination of warm and cool colors, of light and dark tones that bespeak the autumn colors of forest and earth. We isolated the birds somewhat by contrasting them with their background, choosing a scene quiet, somber, and reflective against which we could place these sparks of wildness in a sort of living, swift-moving still life.

The earth here at the Trinity River bottoms near our home is wet, dark, and primordial, saturated by long, quiet autumnal rains that presage winter. Soon the birds will be feeding on the nearby mud flats with bills probing moist earth for hidden worms and



such. Although American Woodcocks are solitary by nature and hardly ever found in pairs, we took some artistic license in this painting in order to give the reader a view of both the upper and under sides of this bird. We constantly marvel at the sheer beauty of its coloring, back and breast, and could not resist the temptation of showing both.

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*Changed from 566*

{Plate 20} Acorn Woodpecker

On our journey around the state with Travis Beck in May of 1981, we had the opportunity of seeing many species of birds that were new to us, especially in those parts of South and West Texas near the Mexican border. Some were very localized, like the Colima Warbler and the Magnificent Hummingbird, then called Rivoli's Hummingbird. Others like the Green Jay, the Great Kiskadee, and the Altamira Oriole (known then as Lichtenstein's Oriole) were more common within their range but still exotic to us, offering the same thrill as if we had seen something really quite special. The Acorn Woodpecker of the Big Bend was for Stuart and me certainly one of these, though veteran birders there irritated us by referring to it as a "trash bird." We nevertheless took an immediate liking to this strikingly beautiful little woodpecker with its almost clownish markings. We studied it closely at every opportunity. When we returned home from that expedition, the Acorn Woodpecker was the first "exotic" that we drew and painted.

We have always had a fondness for woodpeckers of all kinds.

out the spot to me, and I had plenty of time to inspect the ground.

The camouflage of bobwhites is so good they are simply impossible to see. When they roost they will do so together in circles or semicircles depending on the number of birds and the roosting ground. There may be several birds concentrated in one spot and still they are almost impossible to see. They roost in this way because if they should be surprised by a predator they can flush in all directions and with such a noise that all but the most intent of hunters are easily confused. I might add that I have seen bobwhites roosting together in relatively open country and at midday.

This plate of Northern Bobwhites was one of the black-and-white drawings that I did for the Junior League in the mid 1970s and later colored by hand, much in the same way that Robert Havell's colorists painted the black-and-white aquatint prints of Audubon's birds after they were pulled from their copper plates. I have shown a covey of birds roosting on the side of a hill away from the winter wind. They have just heard a suspicious sound, perhaps a snapping twig or a dried leaf crunching under foot or paw. They are suddenly alert and in an instant ready to flush forth in all directions with a loud whirring of wings.

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{Plate 40} Six Migrating Warbler Species

The month of August is usually a rather dead month in Texas. Those

*This one has a feeling  
of being tacked on*



who do not take vacations to cooler places are driven inside for the relief of shade and air-conditioning. There is a stillness about the month as if everyone pauses to rest physically and psychologically for the coming stress of autumn activities beginning in September. But as quiet as August usually is, it nevertheless promises a certain measure of excitement for bird people, for in the last two weeks or so of the month the first autumn warbler migrants begin to arrive in Texas. At this time in the old days, the trees in our neighborhood of west Fort Worth literally used to be alive with warblers of many kinds. Their numbers, however, seem to have steadily diminished over the years for reasons of habitat loss, strange toxins and animal waste and chemical fertilizer runoffs, and even cowbird parasitism. But come that time of year, I perk up my ears for the sounds of their bills snapping after insects in high branches.

Scott and I have greatly enjoyed several of Audubon's paintings in which he portrayed a number of bird species on a single page. He made no attempt to make a naturalistic picture of such scenes. He was under great pressure because of publishing costs and complaints from subscribers, many of whom had waited eleven years for Audubon, his printer Robert Havell, and Havell's workshop to complete the entire set of 435 bird prints. For economy he simply had to group a number of birds together.

In the course of producing our folio, Scott and I had many opportunities to appreciate the pressures under which Audubon

labored, and it was really quite amazing how closely our publishing experiences paralleled his. We could have gone on to paint another forty birds and still not covered all the species that we wanted to represent, but there was a point where, like Audubon, we were forced to stop because of costs. As we reached the end of the project we regretted that we had not done more paintings of smaller birds. We yielded to this temptation by doing this picture of several warbler species in homage to our enjoyment of similar plates in Birds of America.

In 1999, Vera and Bob Thornton published Chasing Warblers, a book about their quest to photograph all fifty-two species of wood warblers that nest in the U. S. The Thorntons, whom I met when Scott and I were in the last throes of publishing our folio, are a perfect example of why--in spite of what I might have hinted to the contrary--you can not really profile bird persons as a type. To look at them you would think they epitomize upper-class yuppie Dallas perfectly; they are a handsome couple right out of Vanity Fair. Yet it took a single-minded determination and much dirty work to track down and photograph all our U. S. warblers. And what photos they are! Many of the warbler attitudes they captured on film uncannily echo some of Audubon's most audacious, and most criticized, bird poses, proving again that Audubon was a far more astute observer than modern bird painters generally credit him.

Here we have included the Yellow Warbler, Northern Parula, Blackburnian Warbler, American Redstart, Magnolia Warbler, and



Black-and-white Warbler. I added as a joke a seventh, the Golden-cheeked Warbler, which I thought was a year-around resident of the cedar country near where John Graves lives. It was a joke that backfired. A savvy ninety-year-old bird lady in San Antonio pointed out to me in mid-lecture that they migrate to Central America. Oddly enough, though this picture was not really meant to be naturalistic, I have indeed seen as many as five different kinds of warblers at one time in a tree, and that tree has usually been a cedar elm as in our picture, whose many small leaves hide thousands of tiny insects.

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{Plate 41} Canvasback

When I think of Canvasbacks I can't help but ruminate about the many duck hunts of my youth and the friends, some no longer living, who shared a brotherhood of mutual interest and a closeness that adult life rarely allows. Bill Utley, Charles Priddy, Don Burford, Tom Loffland, Dutch Phillips, John Truelson, Tom McCoy--each name recalls a different story. The survivors have in some cases followed diverging paths, but when we meet from time to time, the passage of years is simply swept away. When I hunt, which is rarer these days, I do so with friends made as an adult and with women, too, like Nancy Ferguson, a crack shot. It is a real but different kind of pleasure with occasional moments of youthful exuberance. And when I hunt with men like Doug More and Bill Meadows and others today, I often share the chase with their teenage sons as well,

why they were made. Nature worship seems to be indicated by the frequent use of earth, sun, moon, rain, and mountain symbols. The presence of the maltese cross and other quatrefoils, as well as the human hand, in all likelihood refers to the number "5" which symbolized the four cardinal directions plus the center, marking the painted site as sacred ground. Ancient human representations show hunters, warriors, and shamans performing rituals. At cliffs in Terrell County, an area visited by generations of Jumano, Comanche, and Apache peoples, are also paintings of more recent vintage depicting Christian priests, cowboys, horses, and other evidence of Europeans.

When Scott painted this picture he thought that the mud swallow nests reminded him of the adobe dwellings of New Mexican pueblo people, and he wanted the painting to be a kind of microcosm of Texas history by combining a part of its ageless natural beauty with a hint of its ancient and historical human presence.

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{Plate 45} Chuck-will's-widow

The spring storms in North Central Texas are often astonishingly violent. At this time of year, just when life seems to be luxuriating in renewal, the vernal forces of high and low air masses confront each other with often terrible results, producing flash floods and sudden destructive wind storms that can strike with little warning. Of all the kinds of bad weather that can plague this area, tornados are the most feared--and rightly so.



Though we live in part of what is called "Tornado Alley," it is a fact that no place in the continental United States is immune from them, nor are they confined only to the spring months. Indeed, a particularly bad tornado was once recorded in Massachusetts during the month of December.

Because the plains of the middle west and southwest are the areas that come to mind when most people think of tornadoes, and since these storms are so much a part of Texas at this time of year, we thought it fitting to include a view of one in our book. The picture itself is based on the memory of an actual tornado that we witnessed just west of Fort Worth in May of 1967. The fact that we were in no actual danger did little to lessen our apprehension, but we did have the presence of mind to take detailed notes of the storm as it passed.

Recently, in March 2000, Fort Worth and our small studio in the cultural district had a truly frightening encounter with a tornado. It happened around 6:30 in the evening, when the funnel touched ground in a neighborhood only a few blocks away and then proceeded roughly in the direction of the studio. We were at home sitting in total darkness since our electricity had gone off. Outside, the skies were darker than usual but appeared no more menacing than any typical spring storm.

Ralph Carr, our Fort Worth dealer, was at the studio, however, doing some evening paperwork, and the storm rapidly bearing in his direction presented an entirely different picture. The studio

building, though completely rebuilt in the early 1980s in preparation for our folio project, was only a small frame structure, no match for the 150-mile-an-hour winds this force two tornado possessed. Worse, we had only recently assembled there all our original Aztec and Mixtec art, all Scott's Aztec models, all our paintings and drawings of Tenochtitlan--the product of twenty years of work.

Even Ralph, ever the optimist, could sense something ominous in the sudden, almost pitch-black darkness and in the sound of the approaching winds--like a huge jet engine he later told me. He knew he had to do something and quickly.

Oddly enough, the studio had in its backyard something that had been an object of humor ever since we acquired the place in 1977. It was a 1950s-era bomb shelter. Years ago we had a door built to cover the shelter, which was so heavy it required two people to lift it. We hadn't been down inside for at least ten years and one could only imagine what might be living down there.

But now it was the only place of refuge. Already branches and other objects were flying through the air as Ralph slammed the back door of the studio and ran to the shelter. With the kind of adrenalin-spiked super strength that sometimes allows little old ladies to lift cars off hurt children, Ralph somehow pulled the shelter door open and descended just far enough down the steps to close the heavy door over him.

He stayed there crouched at the top of the steps, immersed in



complete darkness with the storm roaring overhead, thinking about hordes of scorpions, centipedes, and brown recluse spiders. In a few minutes the sounds diminished then subsided altogether. When Ralph finally decided it was safe to come out, he had no idea what he would find once he emerged. But the strength that had gained him entrance to the shelter now failed him, and he could not get the door open. He remained trapped for an hour before he finally managed to pry the door open wide enough to slither through.

As he emerged in the darkness, leaves and broken branches were everywhere but the studio still stood--minus a few shingles. Sirens were sounding throughout the city. Just a block away, several buildings had been completely leveled, trees were toppled, and the trees left standing were missing limbs and filled with debris. Downtown, major office buildings were windowless and power lines were popping everywhere. Our dear friend Bill Bostelmann's new two-story flower shop and living quarters, with one of the best views of downtown, was destroyed almost to the bottom floor. When we were at last able to get past the police cordon to Bill's place, he was sitting forlornly on a naked stairway. But he was in good spirits. He was well insured at least. The first thing he said was that his copy of our big bird book had miraculously survived with just some small areas of water damage to the box. Both his delivery trucks had been carried off by the winds, but we laughed that the bird book must have been too heavy.

Thank God Ralph and Bill were safe and our studio, which

contained the blood and sweat of so many years work on our Aztec project, was intact. But after having had such a close call and seeing our friends damaged, we'll never look at our painting of Chuck-will's-widow quite the same way again. And we don't think we'll make any more jokes about our bomb shelter either.

We chose the Chuck-will's-widow for this painting primarily because it felt right. It is a shy and gentle creature which, like its more common relative the nighthawk, feeds on the wing, scooping up insects with its incredibly wide mouth. It is frequently seen flying just ahead or in the wake of thunderstorms, feeding on the thousands of insects stirred up and sucked high into the air by violent updrafts.

This Chuck-will's-widow is at rest on the top of a fence post, partially concealed by an enveloping trumpet vine. Though it is in repose, its large dark eyes are alert for any change in the course of the distant storm. There is a stillness around the bird that belies the turbulence in the clouds overhead and the swirling cyclone on the distant horizon. Shafts of light appear and disappear in swift succession as gaps in the clouds pass beneath the sun to illuminate and shadow the landscape. The bird appears fragile in the face of such fury, but in an instant it will be bound for the shelter of some distant woods or perhaps fly out along the edge of the storm to find insects in the upward spiraling thermals.

SGG/SWG

*note*



our oriole and again at quite close range. Its perch was the top of a yucca in superb full bloom. Its color against a cloudless blue sky was matchless. Stuart and I were tempted to paint them on just such a plant, but the yucca bloom was simply too big. Instead we have depicted two males and a female (the upper bird) in the eternal triangle of mating-time rivalry. We placed them in a semitropical setting against a Texas sky laced with typical summer clouds.

SGG

{Plate 49} Ring-necked Pheasant

The Ring-necked Pheasant is an Asiatic bird imported into the United States toward the end of the nineteenth century. It is now well established in parts of the northern Panhandle in Texas. Scott and I included this bird in our collection, not only because of its obvious beauty, but also as a memento of a time when we had a very interesting collection of live ornamental pheasants. For about two and a half years, until going off to college put an end to it, Scott, Tom Loffland, Denny Woodson, Dutch Phillips, and I put most of our after-school energies into collecting and maintaining the inhabitants of a ramshackle assortment of bird pens, which we constructed behind the Loffland house in Westover Hills on the west side of Fort Worth.

Westover had the distinction of being a separate township within the city limits of Fort Worth. It had its own mayor, police force, and fire department, and since it was an exclusive area with

big estates, there was plenty of space with large lawns and fields and untouched wooded areas offering an excellent country atmosphere in which to construct and conceal our pheasant farm. I can still vividly recall the look on the face of Tom's father T. W., who was sometimes mayor of Westover, as he heard the news of our latest project. He threw his hands up in mock despair. He exclaimed that he never thought he would end up with a "chicken ranch" in his backyard. He would badger us about our sloppy carpentry and apparent lack of planning, but he secretly took keen interest in our enterprise. He proved a good ally on every occasion of calamity or economic shortfall, always being there to bail us out and to offer good advice. If our pheasant farm was a shared hobby, it was still hard work--and expensive. Tom, who became our self-appointed treasurer, was annoyingly efficient. He was constant and never let us escape our weekly dues obligations.

An added responsibility was thrust upon us each time it rained. No matter what we had planned for that day, we would have to stop everything and replace rained-soaked feed in each of the approximately twenty pens, an onerous task. In spite of this, our project ran well enough, and though Tom and Denny and Dutch were not really bird people, they seemed to enjoy the pheasants as much as Scott and I did.

At one time we had more than twelve different kinds of ornamental pheasants. Some were quite rare. We had one pair or more of: Blue-eared Manchurians, Malayan-crested Firebacks, Swinehoes,



Reeves, Blackneck Pheasants, Japanese Versicolors, Himalayan Impeyans, Cheers, Goldens, Lady Amhersts, Silvers, and Elliotts, as well as the common Ring-necked Pheasants. We also raised banties, bobwhite quail, and even a pair of Wood Ducks.

Since we were always short of money to procure necessities such as wood, wire, and gravel for the benefit of our growing bird collection, we were not above borrowing these materials from nearby Westover house constructions. We always needed more gravel, which was on hand to maintain proper drainage in our pheasant pens. Fortunately, there was a plentiful supply just a couple of houses away in Mr. and Mrs. Perry R. Bass's driveway. They certainly seemed to have far more than they needed, and early one Sunday morning, armed with two shovels and two wheelbarrows, we made our way down the street to the Bass's house.

We filled one wheelbarrow and had just begun on the other when without the slightest warning sound of an engine, a car appeared from around the corner and came to a sudden stop right by us. It happened so fast that we didn't have time to even think about running away. No such luck that it might have been some sort of early Sunday morning delivery or a servant. It was Mr. Bass at the wheel, his wife Nancy Lee on the seat beside him, and if I recall clearly in the back seat were all four boys, Sid, Ed, Bob, and little Lee. Down came the electric window on Nancy Lee's side, and Perry leaned over. Unfortunately, he recognized Tom, his neighbor's son, immediately. The rest of us just stood there dumb.

"What are you doing?" Bass said, acting as if he didn't know.

Tom did the talking. "We need some gravel for our pheasant farm, sir, and it looked like you had more than you needed."

"Pheasant farm? So that's what I've been hearing making so much noise every morning." (It was spring breeding time when several of our species called loudly)

"Yes, Sir, that's what you've been hearing."

"Well, I guess you know that what you are doing is wrong, don't you?" Bass said. The boys in the back seat said nothing. Nancy Lee was quiet too.

"We're sorry, sir," said Tom.

"Well," said Bass, "you can have the two wheelbarrows full, but no more, okay?"

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir."

The electric window began to go back up, then stopped. Perry leaned over again and shouted out of the window, this time smiling. "I suppose you can't do anything about those damned pheasants calling at five o'clock in the morning, can you?"

"We'll try our best, sir."

The car sped off, leaving us with legs shaking, standing in a cloud of gravel dust.

The next afternoon while Tom and I were feeding our birds and cleaning their water bowls, a huge dump truck rumbled down the long driveway past the Loffland house and came to a stop at the steep stone stairway that descended to our pheasant farm. Tom and I



hurried up to investigate the commotion.

The dump truck was loaded with gravel. A lot of gravel. It was clear that the driver had been given definite instructions. Right there by the stairs, with the loud grinding of gears and a straining engine, the back of the truck tilted to empty its load. Out spilled a mountain of pea gravel.

As soon as this was done the driver got out of the cab and without a word walked over to the gravel pile. He took out a small piece of paper with some writing on it. He took out a pencil too. He placed the note against the gravel and stuck the pencil through it. Again, without a word he gave us a kind of two fingered salute, got back into his truck, drove up around the curving drive, and was gone.

Tom and I walked over to the gravel pile. The note read, "This gravel ought to hold you awhile. Leave mine alone. Perry."

For this plate Scott and I depicted a male Ringed-necked Pheasant resting quietly on a sawed-off tree stump. It is a bitterly cold winter morning as the sun begins to rise over the bleak Panhandle countryside. This bird is sitting on its heels, a peculiar posture that I often observed among caged birds when they were relaxed and sitting on top of the flat roofs of their nesting boxes. In cold weather they usually ruffle their feathers to trap and conserve warm air next to the body, but this bird has just heard a distant alarm of some kind, far off but menacing. Its body has become taut. In its eyes is the look of apprehension--cold and

alert. In the wild these pheasants can never relax for very long.

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{Plate 50} Surf Scoter

This handsome duck is a rare winter visitor to Texas. It is more commonly found along the shores of the northern Pacific, and from Alaskan waters inland across much of northwestern Canada. They are less common along the North Atlantic coast. We have chosen to end our volume with a view of this sea duck set against the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The sea in a way is all about journeys. We began this portfolio of birds with our painting of the Turkey Vulture high above the Brazos River, because it is one of the most common sights for Texas birdwatchers. It is a permanent resident, and like the river itself, it is an indigenous part of our state. In our vulture painting the river flows eastward and south toward our journey's end at the Gulf Coast with this Surf Scoter out to sea.

The land and the waters along the Texas coast are the destinations of hundreds of species of migratory birds, and the tropical and mountain country along the Rio Grande is visited by many exotics found nowhere else in the United States.

The Surf Scoter is not exactly an exotic species, but it is certainly not a common visitor. Like plovers, terns, cranes, and geese, it is a migrant from distant lands arriving with the first frosts to grace our state and add to its natural beauty. Now at its journey's end until spring, the scoter rests and feeds quietly in



## Remarques

Early subscribers to the elephant folio edition of Of Birds and Texas allowed us to use their money to finance the first stages of our publishing project. In return, we painted these remarques on the title pages of their books. Scott painted all but one--the Rose-breasted Grosbeak--and they are in Scott's most personal bird painting style, which spontaneously evolved in the course of our folio work, intended as a stylistic homage to the art of John James Audubon.

*Do you love this pic?*



*"I had several very tempting opportunities to have the book published elsewhere by widely recognized publishers, but it has always been my aim to have this book produced within Texas, entirely by Texas artists and craftsmen," stated Stuart Gentling (left). He and his brother, Scott (right), pose with their masterpiece, Of Birds and Texas.*