

Audubon and Us

Twelve years have passed since my twin brother Scott and I published our elephant folio "Of Birds and Texas," a book we dedicated to a man we never even met, ~~because he died on January 27th 1851. His name?~~ John James Audubon. As I look back, I can see what a profound role he has played in our development as artists, and I am better able to appreciate just how closely our publishing efforts in the most uncanny way paralleled Audubon's own experiences. Now after all these years, my brother and I and our book are being honored as part of the celebration of the Texas State Audubon Society's 1999 Centennial. There ~~will be a traveling exhibition of our bird paintings from "Of Birds and Texas" as well as this accompanying catalogue.~~ As a tribute to this event I offer the following account, gleaned from my written remembrances, of how in the course of creating our book we had the strangest encounter with John James Audubon himself.

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Audubon is still a controversial figure, criticized by revisionist historians for his bloody deeds as a hunter and his less than honest approach to self promotion. He is often taken to task by many contemporary wildlife artists and ornithologists for the melodrama and exaggerations of his bird portrayals and the anthropomorphism reflected in his written ornithological accounts. There is some truth to these criticisms, yet, in my opinion Audubon still remains the greatest American artist ever to paint birds. I also believe, as does contemporary art historian Robert Hughes, that Audubon needs to be recognized as among the finest and most important American artists of the 19th century. The understanding and full appreciation of his paintings and artistic legacy is a matter of taste and not of science. No matter how his work is viewed, few will deny that Audubon's "Birds of America" is among the greatest publishing monuments ever erected by art to nature, and that indirectly Audubon's most important legacy just may be the famous organization which bears his name, the National Audubon Society founded many years after his death.

this is in the introduction

Memories fade or play tricks with the passage of time, so early in 1993 I began writing a memoir about the many adventures we experienced in the nearly ten years it took us to accomplish the ambitious task of personally publishing "Of Birds and Texas." What we finally produced was a forty-six pound boxed set of fifty color plates of our paintings of Texas birds and landscapes accompanied by a text specially printed with metal type set by hand called letterpress. This text included not only my Introduction and Scott's and my commentaries to the plates, but was also graced with a charming Foreword by international conservationist Harry Tennison and another very special contribution by a man universally regarded as

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