

DESCRIPTION OF THE BOOK

When the forty-six pound elephant folio "Of Birds and Texas" by twin artists Scott and Stuart Gentling first appeared in 1986 it was unanimously acclaimed as the most magnificent book in Texas publishing history. Containing 50 large color plates of Texas birds with landscapes and accompanying bird tales by the Gentlings and an important autobiographical essay by famed Texas author John Graves, the book was often described as the Audubon elephant folio of the twentieth century. About a third of the bird species depicted were game birds, and all but a few of the others were birds well known throughout the rest of the United States, making the Gentling folio, in the words of James Mooney, Librarian of the New York Historical Society, "... a colossal artistic achievement which will be of interest to all Americans and not limited to collectors of Texana. . . ."

Although widely acknowledged for its stunning visual beauty, the folio was very much intended to be read, a fact made difficult by its very size. Also, its limited edition of only 525 copies and its considerable expense practically insured that the general public would rarely get to enjoy the work either as art or as literature.

The editors of the University of Texas Press at Austin have long believed that a book of such visual beauty and literary merit should be made available to readers and collectors of fine books everywhere, a new book that would be affordable and of convenient size. Two years ago they began to work closely with the Gentlings to produce a magnificent trade edition bearing the same title as the original elephant folio "Of Birds and Texas." The editors decided that the new trade edition, however, would contain not only all the material of the original, but also an additional 30 color plates to grace the new book. There is even a fascinating new essay by Stuart Gentling about how, during the creation of their folio, which from the beginning had been dedicated to the great bird artist John James Audubon, they actually had the most strange and wonderful encounter with Audubon himself. The experience was on a very personal level and had a profound, almost surreal impact on the twins' lives and ultimately saved their folio project from disaster.

In 1998 the Gentlings were honored as the official artists for the celebration the centennial of the Texas Audubon Society. Although the study and painting of birds has been a very special part of their artistic lives since childhood, birds have provided only a comparatively small part of their artistic production. In fact their main efforts have been the painting of portraits, still lifes and landscapes in a meticulous and demanding drybrush watercolor style. A book based on these works to be titled "From Time to Time" is currently in preparation for the University of Texas Press.

Also planned is a monumental work on the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan as it may have appeared on the eve of the conquest of Mexico. Already more than thirty years in preparation, this two volume publication will offer an

unparalleled view of the people, the gods, the cities and the great temples and palaces which so astonished the first Europeans to see them. This publication will be called "The One Reed Year." The Gentling twins have sometimes been called renaissance men, a term perhaps too loosely bandied about these days. But for those who are fortunate enough to eventually own these forthcoming books, they will be greated by a wide ranging exploration of nature and history that should provide works of beauty and much to think about for many years to come.

Stuart Gentling