

November 13, 2001

second fax of the day

Stuart

Here is a first draft of how I recommend we structure the interview and the main questions I'd like to ask. Can you look over these and let's talk so I can get your feeling for things.

Maybe Wednesday will work for you?

Suzanne

3 pages faxed

Three-part interview

- I. Background
- II. Process (painting together, techniques, details of the folio edition, what next?)
- III. Audubon's Great Crow Blackbird and JJA Art
- IV. Questions from the audience

Background

In the introduction to the folio edition you made this lovely remark about your childhood – you wrote that you and Scott were “not induced to focus our energies or limit the reach of our curiosity.” This sounds like wonderful parenting to me. Can you tell us about your parents, your brother Peter and your childhood?

How do you account for your early awareness of birds? My bird-watching friends who are most passionate about the subject, like you, were “caught” early. What caught your 5-year-old eye and ear? Was this true for Scott as well?

You also write about the bus trip you and Scott took alone when you were 14 or 15 to visit Natchez and New Orleans – tell us some more about that trip and the times. These days, most 15 year olds don't have the freedom and independence to wander about the country.

What sparked your and Scott's interest in pre-Colombian art and culture?

That brings up the question of interests. You and Scott seem to be so close, to have so many of the same affinities. Are there things you are passionate about that Scott isn't and visa versa?

For our audience, I would like you to reconcile hunting birds and watching birds. I think many people remain obstinate about the two endeavors. They view them as two separate and opposing activities, rather than a continuum.

Process

Many of your and Scott's paintings seem to evolve over a long period of time – almost like they are alive and growing – could you describe that process.

Also how do you and Scott work together? Who does what? How does each of you work – that is, for long stretches, in bursts, late at night, early in the morning? Why are you not jealous or competitive of each work – like most of us would be?

When a write-up for one of the paintings is signed by you, does that mean you also did the painting?

One thing I noticed about the write-ups, is that yours tend to be narrative -- the painting sparks a memory for you and you recount the memory -- while Scott's write-ups tend to be sensory and to describe the painting as if it is playing out in real time. For example, with the painting of the black-crowned night heron, he wrote "... a cowbell sounds downriver." I thought that was quite touching. Do your personal styles of writing about painting reveal anything about how you each paint or see the world, or am I reading too much into your writing?

In your conversation with Don Cresswell -- which we will return to shortly -- you questioned him about techniques Audubon used like pastels, graphite pencil and egg white vanishes in order to authenticate the painting of the Great Crow Blackbird. Could you demonstrate these techniques and explain why this multi-media approach enhances a painting?

You write that the folio edition weighs 46 pounds. The whole history of making this happen is monumental but one aspect of it that particularly impressed me was the assembly process -- when you actually put each box of plates together. Could you describe that process for everyone? One thing you mentioned was how hot the weather was -- how did you keep the color plates clean?

Speaking of process, now that the trade edition of the folio has been published, it looks like this particular narrative is coming to a conclusion. What are you and Scott going to do next?

Audubon's Great Crow Blackbird and Audubon's Art

Of course, one of the great stories you tell in this edition is the discovery and subsequent auction of Audubon's painting of great tail grackles. I hesitate to have you tell the whole story now -- because I want you to sell books! I want people to go out and buy the book and read the roller-coaster story themselves. But why don't you explain the significance of the painting and why purchasing it made the folio possible.

There are several things about the story that I am curious about. Have you since talked with Don Cresswell or Chris Lane, the dealers you bought it from? I guess I was surprised that dealers would undervalue something like this. How do you explain that?

Do you have the sketch you made at Sotheby's during the auction?

I've grown weary of the continued distinction critics and people in general continue to make between art and wildlife or bird art. In the write-up accompanying the Cattle Egret painting you talk about Audubon's sense of line -- would you talk about Audubon's line and how the grace of his paintings, and of your and Scotts, and of all great art surpasses subcategories.

IV - I think we should leave 15 minutes
because I expect a lot of questions