

10 January 1992

Mr. Ernest Allen  
2140 Highland Park Circle  
Fort Worth, Texas 76107

Dear Ernest,

Here is my description of the two paintings you purchased at our Aztec exhibit at the Fort Worth Gallery. The larger painting is titled VIEW OF THE GREAT TEMPLE FROM TEOPAN. The garden scene is titled THE XOCHITECPANCALLI.

In the great temple view the spectator would be standing in a canoe in the middle of a wide canal flowing through the Teopan district in the southeast part of the island city of Tenochtitlan. " Teopan " means " Place of the Gods " or " Devine Place " in the nahuatl language of the Aztecs. Teopan was a residential area for the islanders who claimed royal blood or pure Aztec ancestry. The view is toward the northwest, toward the backside of the great double temple of Huitzilopochtli, the solar god of war, and Tlaloc, god of the earth and rain.

Notice that the houses turn their backs on the canal. Aztec houses were usually built facing inward toward central courtyards. Notice also that access to these courtyards were through " L " shaped entrances that blocked the view from the public thoroughfares. It is mid-morning. The woman on the left paddles her canoe from the market. Another woman can also be seen on the roof of the house on the left watering her rooftop garden, and in the middle of the canal a young man is poling his dugout canoe.

It should be noted here that the lake of Mexico was shallow, only about 8 to 12 feet deep. The entire island upon which the city of Tenochtitlan was built was criss-crossed with canals for transportation and flood control, making it a kind of Venice of the new world. In the middle distance is a small temple complex at the intersection of several canals. Note the thatched roofs

This painting represents our first attempt at a definitive view of a high status residential area of Tenochtitlan. I know of no others that exist. Unfortunately archaeological information on Aztec Houses is very scarce, so that Scott and I have been forced to rely on descriptions of Spanish conquerors, early colonial property documents and the archaeology of Teotihuacan and Tula. Since our view is near the center of the island where property is at a premium, we believe that there would be few plots of land used for agriculture except for kitchen gardens. As one moved out to the edge of the city, however, one would see humbler houses and more agriculture, even chinampas or floating gardens for staple crops and temple flowers. Do keep in mind that Tenochtitlan on the eve of the conquest was primarily

an administrative, craft and religious center producing finished goods manufactured for trade while importing raw materials and food through forced tribute from the conquered provinces.

XOCHITECPANCALLI means " The place of the lordly house of flowers." This scene of the royal gardens could be anywhere on the island city of Tenochtitlan or on certain other islands in the lake or the nearby mainland where there were a number of royal houses.

Royal gardens were probably laid out along religious lines- there was no concept of a secular world in the Aztec mind- and with symbolic places. Colored stone tiles laid in checkerboard style formed walkways. Water was both a practical as well as a very important symbolic ingredient with artificial streams, stone-lined pools and baths and very large tanks for fish and rare birds. Stuccoed walkways were constructed in orthogonanal grids where the land was flat, and they were lined with very formal plantings of sweet-scented trees and flowers. This kind of rigid formality might recall the gardens of LeNotre and other Europeans of the 17th century. More "natralistic" gardens were built on slopes and hilltops where water was available from springs or aqueducts. The Aztecs were also very fond of topiary as well as painted sculptures, gravity fountains and latticed summer houses and dancing pavilions. Evidence still exists of at least four major Aztec gardens- at Chapultepec, Texcozingo, Oaxtepec and Xochimilco. These few remains and the descriptions of the spanish conquerers merely hint at the fun loving side of the Aztecs - a side of their culture which adds a human dimension to soften an image gleaned primarily from their awesome and often frightening temple sculptures. They were a fierce and elegant people who placed a high value on poetry, song, dance and their love of flowers and gardens.

Ernest, Scott and I are literally just beginning to depict the city as we think it may have looked to the first europeans. Carolyn Tate, curator of pre-colombian art at the Dallas Museum of Fine Art, has asked us to exhibit our Aztec paintings at the opening of their new thirty million dollar Hammon " Art of the Americas " wing in 1993. The Mexican Government also wants us to show with a large Mexican exhibit to open in Madrid later this year. It is an exhibition sponsored by the King of Spain. The public response to our work has been so forcefull and so enthusiastic that it is getting increasingly difficult for Scott and me to avoid being pushed too fast to complete this extremely complicated project.

We are very excited that the Dallas Museum has just proposed organizing a major symposium of the best Aztec scholars and archaeologists for the purpose of helping to " envision Tenochtitlan " according to the latest, often unpublished discoveries.

In closing, I hope that you like your copy of the Borgia Codex. I do thank you for making the trade, and I think we both got a good deal.

Sincerely yours,