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THE ONE REED YEAR: WONDERS OF AZTEC MEXICO

Two Texas Artists Pursue Their Vision of the Aztec Capital
Tenochtitlan

DATES: September 22 - November 22, 2003

PLACE: The Fine Arts Gallery of the Buddy Holly Center, Lubbock,
Texas and Texas Tech University

BACKGROUND: Artists Scott and Stuart Gentling, twin brothers from Fort Worth, have been interested in pre-Colombian peoples since early childhood, especially the ancient Maya. In 1962, however, while students at Tulane University they discovered a copy of Bernal Diaz del Castillo's vivid eyewitness account of the fall of Aztec power titled, "The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico". That book would transform their lives and bring about a major change in the direction of their studies.

Like everyone else they were enthralled by Castillo's descriptions as he recounted that fateful day in November 1519 when he and the small army of Spaniards under the command of Hernan Cortez first sighted the splendid island city of Tenochtitlan. That year of 1519 was in the Aztec calendar called the One Reed year. By an astonishing coincidence the year One Reed marked the birth of the great god Quetzalcoatl who in the well-known myth had fled Mexico but vowed to return to reclaim his kingdom in a One Reed year. The Spaniard wrote:

"During the morning we arrived at a broad causeway . . . And when we saw so many cities and villages built in the water and other great towns on dry land and that straight and level causeway going towards [Tenochtitlan], we were amazed and said it was like the enchantments they tell in the legend of Amadis on account of the great towers and [temples] and buildings rising from the water and all built of masonry. And some of our soldiers even asked whether such things we saw were not a dream . . . I do not know how to describe it, seeing things as we did that had never been heard of or seen before, not even dreamed about . . . Of all these wonders that I then beheld, today all is overthrown and lost, nothing left standing."

For the Gentlings a persistent conviction has grown over their nearly forty years of close study of the eyewitness descriptions, both Spanish and native, as well as the early pictorial and archaeological evidence and on what is now being discovered almost daily, that it just might be possible to capture in a series of paintings and drawings some idea of what it felt like to look upon these vanished marvels.

The Fine Arts Gallery of the Buddy Holly Center is pleased to bring together for public viewing many of the watercolors and oil paintings, pen and ink drawings, and fascinating architectural models that - along with the Gentlings' own world

class collection of Aztec and Mixtec art - form the core of this remarkable work in progress. Although still years from completion, what they have produced so far may well be the most extensive visual reconstruction of the vanished wonders of the Aztec world yet done, having depicted many of the splendors that once made Tenochtitlan, by the year 1519, one of the world's grandest and most beautiful cities. The exhibit will feature magnificent views of the great religious shrines with their ballcourts and exotic skullracks, spacious markets and plazas as well as the beautiful wide avenues and pleasant tree-lined canals that lent dignity to the city and provided such a lush setting for the palaces of the nobility. Not only the houses of the great but those of more humble people had gardens of sweet scented flowers, cultivated around their dwellings and on the rooftops as well. Tenochtitlan's buildings, their clean polished walls of white stucco with accents of brilliant color shining in the alpine light that so dazzled the eyes of the first Spaniards, was virtually a new city rebuilt after the devastating flood of 1502.

Long recognized as among the best realist painters of portraits, still lifes, and landscapes, the Gentlings are unique in being able to combine their considerable fine art skills with an in-depth scholarship to create works of art that aim for something more than typical archaeological illustration. Their success has earned them enthusiastic support and praise from major scholars in the field, museum people as well as important political leaders.

The Gentlings make no claims to have mystical knowledge of what the Aztec capital looked like. Their researches are based on the same information generally available to all scholars. However - unlike so many professional scholars - they have not been burdened by the need to teach or to publish papers or by the many other distractions of academic life. They believe that they have had the luxury of being able to focus intently on specific aspects of Aztec life and religion bringing insights which they hope will make a contribution to pre-Colombian studies. Scott and Stuart Gentling are the first to admit that, like other scholars, much of their work is based upon speculations. Since they began their searches in earnest in 1971 many of their insights have been verified by subsequent archaeology, and of course, many cherished theories have not held up or had to be modified as new information has come to light. But that has been the challenge and, quite frankly, the joy of their labors.

CONTENT OF THE EXHIBITION: (OK)

OPENING EVENTS: (OK)

LECTURE SERIES: (OK)