



# Peter Jablokow IRON AND RUST

## KEY FACTS

**1986** Bachelor of Science in Architecture, Iowa State University, Ames Iowa

**1996** Associate of Art in Graphic Arts, American Academy of Art, Chicago, Illinois

**2012** Received signature status of the Transparent Watercolor Society of America after winning the founder's award

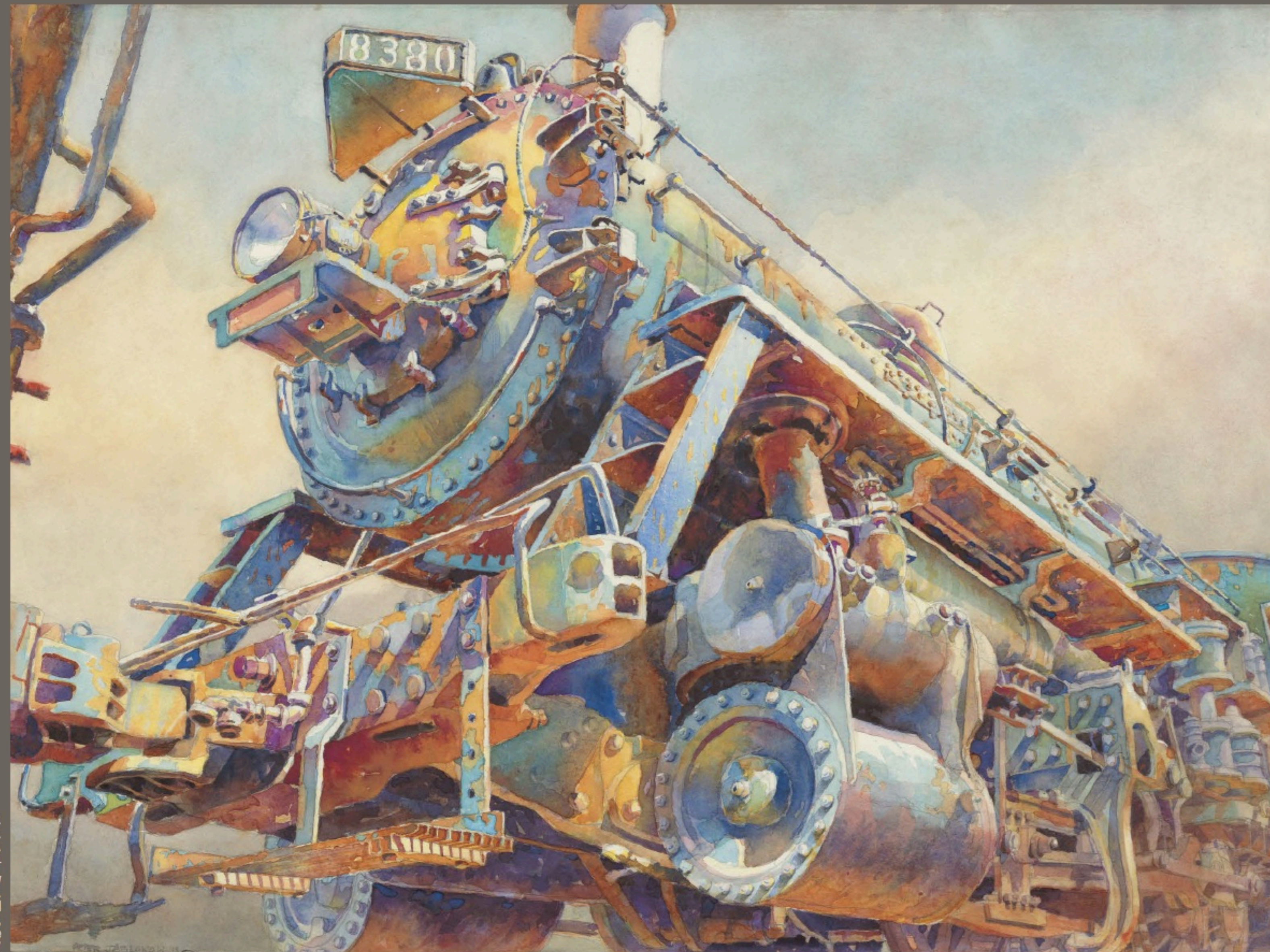
**2014** Current annual show for the Transparent Watercolor Society of America, Kenosha, Wisconsin

- Won the Lakes Region Watercolor Guild Award

- Currently in "Splash 15: Creative Solutions!", an annual collection of the best watercolor artists today, North Light Books, June 2014

## CONTACT

[www.3rdtowerillustration.com](http://www.3rdtowerillustration.com)



Engine No.8380- Nose.  
Illinois Train Museum, Union, Illinois.  
56 x 76 cm.

"This is the height of crazy colour for me. Mostly Aureolin Yellow and Manganese Blue. The simple formula I followed was Aureolin for warm areas, Manganese for cold, Ultramarine and Burnt Sienna for darks."



FROM HIS CAREER IN ARCHITECTURAL ILLUSTRATION COMES A CERTAIN TASTE FOR PRECISION AND BOLD VIEWPOINTS. HIS VERY INDIVIDUAL APPROACH, WHICH YOU CAN DISCOVER IN DETAIL HERE, IS PERFECTLY SUITED TO RENDERING THE TEXTURES AND LIGHT HE SO LOVES TO PAINT.

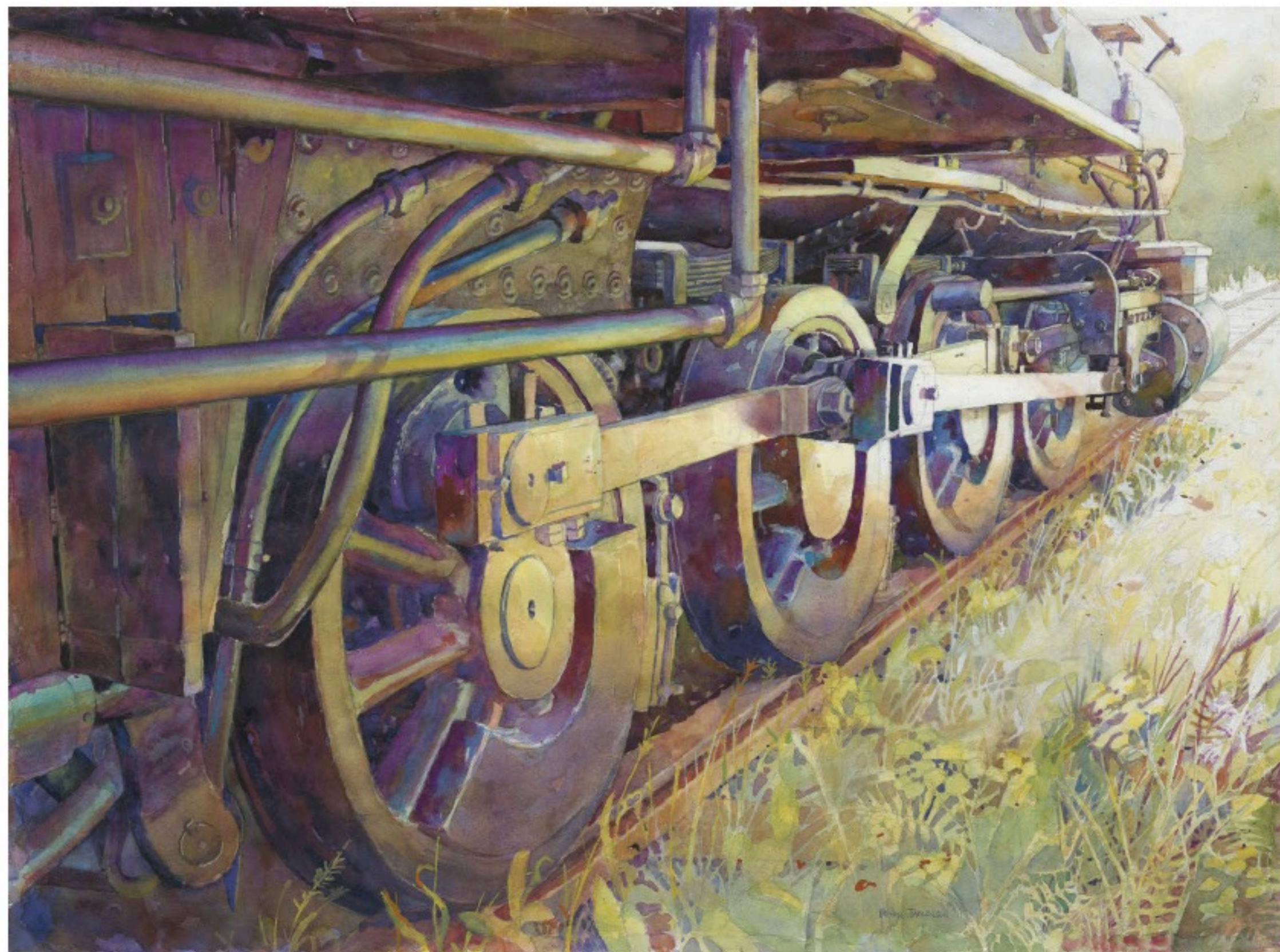
**The Art of Watercolour: You are both an illustrator and a painter. How do these two occupations interact with each other?**

**Peter Jablokow:** I started out as an architect, then transitioned to architectural illustration. I love the technical aspects of drawing a perspective image and I am comforted by the exactness of detail and scale. The renderings that result however can be stiff, with every detail defined, rendered and properly coloured. While realistic, they are not very artistic. My art career is a response to that stiffness, both in subject and process. I will never abandon tight technical drawing, but my painting process seems arbitrary and chaotic to me. I start painting with what feels like arbitrary layers of watercolour, essentially grabbing whatever colours are on my palette. While inevitably feeling lost, I add and delete many layers of colour, back and forth, until the painting eventually comes back into focus. I hate chaos and love order and feel gratified when I end up with a combination of both.

**Where does this 'passion' for trains come from? What does it enable you to convey or experiment?**

I've painted many steam engines, but my interest lies in factors other than the trains themselves. They're huge, historical, rusty and exposed. Old machines have all their pipes, valves, gears and bolts out in the open, allowing for a visually chaotic mess. I love it. I enjoy the challenge of conveying the rough, arbitrary texture of rust and age with watercolour. I'm impressed when I see someone else do it successfully. Old film projectors, clock movements, abandoned buildings and old mines have the same feeling as steam engines. Modern equipment is all boxed in, clean and boring, not unlike an architectural illustration of a new building.





Engine No. 2, Quincy Mine. Hancock, Michigan. 56 x 76 cm.

"The colours are more subdued (or realistic), since this is one of my first formal paintings. The glowing green reflected light on the shiny wheels was irresistible."

"I will never let go of tight technical drawing, but my painting process seems arbitrary and chaotic to me."

**Is your painting more about technique or conveying something in particular?**

I'm not looking for a specific idea or story, but a visual composition that grabs me: a sense of torsion, weight, precarious balance, scale, or movement. A common technique is to place the camera on the ground with a looming mass hovering overhead. I weed through hundreds of photos until something has an impact. I'm always blindly searching, photographing from every angle, hoping something will appear, but I'm never sure until I get home and look. There's always a surprise, so I never assume a seemingly great shot on site will transfer to a great painting.

**Any odd techniques?**

By adding texture to my paintings, I'm not only trying to recreate the actual conditions, but also taking control of the brush out of my hands. My main move is to mask a section with drafting tape and cut the exact shape with an X-Acto knife. This gives me a defined area to work. In fluid flowing areas, various colours are splattered with a toothbrush until the

paper is saturated, then tilted this way and that causing the paint to run together. In more textured areas, masking fluid is splattered with a toothbrush (or mouth atomiser), followed by the splattering of paint on top. When dry, the mask is rubbed off and re-splattered, repeating as much as necessary. Lost whites are pulled out by masking an area and scrubbing hard with a toothbrush.

**Do you paint from life or from reference photos?**

I try to see what's near my vacation, family or business travels. When I find something, I take hundreds of photos from every angle with the hope one stands out. I like finding trains sitting outside, maybe in a museum, or abandoned in the woods. These are the rusty, twisted ones. Last June I stumbled through dense poison ivy and thick brush to find a train hidden in the Galt, Illinois woods. Luckily, I brought back one good shot, but of course, not the one I expected.

**How do you render the play of light in your paintings?**

I'm always on the look out for a strong light source with crisp



Engine No. 1225.

76 x 56 cm. Photo: Jeff Rayner.

"I used someone else's photo in this painting, which is rare. I cropped and reversed the image. I wanted to capture both the smoke, and flying snow. As usual, I added rust to a perfectly good train."



shadows and, hopefully, dappled light over all the messy machine parts, along with a wealth of reflected light. Sitting low and looking up gives me a great opportunity for reflected light, which I try to push. I see shadows and reflected light as the main tools to define shapes and volumes. I'm always looking for them.

**It's often said watercolour is the hardest medium to master because once you're committed, you can't go back. Do you agree?**

While watercolour is tough, the most liberating thing I've learned is how to correct mistakes, often big ones. It has freed me up to be bolder, to try and get the full range of values and try something when I'm stuck. Armed with my drafting tape, knife and toothbrush, I can scrub out darks, redefine edges, and even repaint a whole sky. I found I have two, possibly three chances to start completely over before the paper starts to fight back.

TEXT: ÉLODIE BLAIN.

PHOTOS: ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

**A SNOW-COVERED BRICK EFFECT**



I taped the whole area, then cut out specific zones with my knife, before splattering masking fluid onto the exposed paper with my toothbrush. I also sprayed a fine mist of masking fluid with my mouth atomiser by sticking the bottom end into my bottle of mask.



I splattered layer after layer of paint. I also held the paper and tilted it at different angles to let the paint flow in streaks. I repeated the process several times. Taking the drafting tape off is unsettling, since it always looks darker than expected. I was pleased with the effect when I filled in the white areas. The building needed to be quite dark to convey the brightness of snow.



Finished! The main snow colour is Manganese Blue with Quinacridone Coral, Bright Violet and Quinacridone Burnt Orange thrown in for variety. I put the Manganese Blue on quite wet and rolled the paper to get maximum granulation.





## MY MATERIAL

• For formal work, I paint on full sheets of Arches 300lb hot press natural paper. I like to scrub with a toothbrush and this paper takes it best. Not so smooth that a scrub is noticeable and not so rough that it changes the tooth: in short, thick enough to take a beating.

• I use Daniel Smith, Holbein and Winsor & Newton watercolours, but mostly Daniel Smith right now. I can't read Winsor & Newton's paint tube graphics, so I haven't been buying them. I look for granulation and transparency. My palette includes Aureolin Yellow, Lemon Yellow, Quinacridone Burnt Orange, Permanent Orange, Cadmium Red Light, Alizarin Crimson, Rose Madder Genuine, Quinacridone Coral, Bloodstone Genuine (Daniel Smith), Bright Violet, French Ultramarine Blue, Cobalt Blue, Manganese Blue and Hooker's Green. I've bought many granulating colours from Daniel Smith, but find many of them are heavy and are best for dulling down and adding texture to other colours.

## MY CREATIVE PROCESS IN 5 STEPS

1. Once a photo is picked, I create a detailed pencil drawing using my many reference photos. A drawing can take up to 8-10 hours. My goal is defining every line and detail in pencil. This is the calming, illustrative part of the process, where everything comes together and gets resolved.

2. Now I'm ready to paint. This is the scary artistic part, which is very chaotic and unknown. I often find another activity that suddenly needs attention. To soften the oppressive white paper, I first divide the painting in half. White or lighter areas are left white, mid and darker areas are painted with a light wash of various colours. I don't stick to specific ones at this point, other than try for more transparent paints. If I try to control the colours they will feel stilted.

3. Next I slowly layer washes within the darker areas using complementary colours, often Manganese or Ultramarine Blue and Quinacridone Burnt Orange. I try to push colours, often arbitrarily, just to have colour to react to. Often patterns of colours and dark shapes start to emerge. I'm not so good at thinking through these things beforehand, I just wait and see what I get, because this is a reactionary process for me.

4. Now comes the most uncomfortable part. I've painted a foundation to react to, but now must make actual decisions. Another chore that needs attention is to put in a few pure darks in small places to find my value range, and then inch my way toward a final composition. I often have to scrub out and start over because something's not working. The colour might be completely wrong, or an area too heavy or undefined. I may struggle for days trying to figure out why something isn't working, or why my eye gets stuck in the corner for example. Sooner or later, the answer appears, and I wonder why it took so long.

5. The magic point is when everything seems to fit into place. The composition works and I feel good about it. Now it's time to flesh out the details, pushing reflected light, brightening or dulling colour, or adding something to push the composition or detail just a little more.

This can take many hours. I average 40-50 hours from starting a drawing to signing the painting. The actual signature is fairly easy, though I often erase that and start it over too.



## AT FULL STEAM

THIS IS THE IMAGE THAT CAUGHT MY EYE BECAUSE OF THE REFLECTED LIGHT OPPORTUNITY BELOW THE CAB. I FLESHED THE IMAGE OUT IN ADOBE PHOTOSHOP, STITCHED A FEW PHOTOS TOGETHER AND SEPARATED THE ENGINE FROM THE TENDER TO CREATE A LITTLE AIR BETWEEN THEM.



1 First comes the detailed pencil drawing, then I start by dividing the painting in two, leaving light areas white and adding various colours to the darker areas.



2 Everything is coloured in now and I've started defining within the darks. The rear wheels have been used to establish my darkest darks.

"I always find vanishing points

and horizon line to make sure everything lines up."



3 I've reached the point of tough decisions: how can I make this painting work? I'm afraid to fill in the light areas of the train, so I take a photo of the painting and import it into Photoshop. I add blue to the light areas to see how they look.



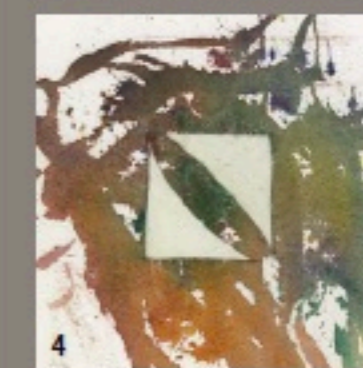
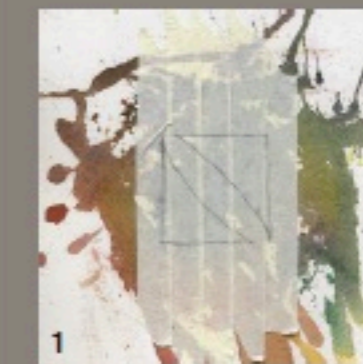
4 I paint the blue into the light areas, but make a typical mistake - I make it too dark, so I use drafting tape to mask out the areas, scrub them out with my toothbrush and repaint them lighter. If I was to just lighten the existing wash, the freshness would not be there.



5 Finished after many hours of back and forth. To me, the most difficult was defining the cab floor, along with all the pipes and tanks below. I love the cab looming above my head with the complicated pipes and valves tucked in below, but the reflected light bouncing up from the ground was what caught my eye.

## HOW TO GO BACK TO THE WHITE OF THE PAPER AND CRISP OUTLINES

I love this fix for the inevitable mistakes! I may have accidentally painted over my whites or just changed my mind. If I'm not using staining colours and haven't overworked my washes, I can bring them back!



1. I wait until the paint is completely dry, then use (low-tack) drafting tape to create an outline for scrubbing. Drafting tape is semi-translucent so I can see my lines underneath. If I'm still having trouble, I pull up the tape and re-check my line below. I then draw my outline on the tape. It helps to run the tape parallel to the outline line to minimise tape joints where water might seep in.

2. I take a sharp knife and cut into the tape along my outline, being careful not to cut the paper. I pull the tape off where I want my whites back.

3. I scrub hard to pull off my paint, using a paper towel to blot the paper and dipping my toothbrush in water to remove excess paint. I take care to scrub from the tape onto the paper otherwise I might pull up the tape edge.

4. I remove the remaining tape. I usually do this while the surface is still wet in case water has seeped under. If it has, I do some touching up.