

The BEST Painting Advice (Right When You Need It)

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Watercolor artist

Make Art Happen

10 Dependable Ways to Enthuse Your Muse

+
16 Prompts to Inspire Everyday Sketching

WATERCOLOR OUT WEST
Putting the *Life* in Wildlife Painting

25th
Anniversary
1993-2018

OCTOBER 2018

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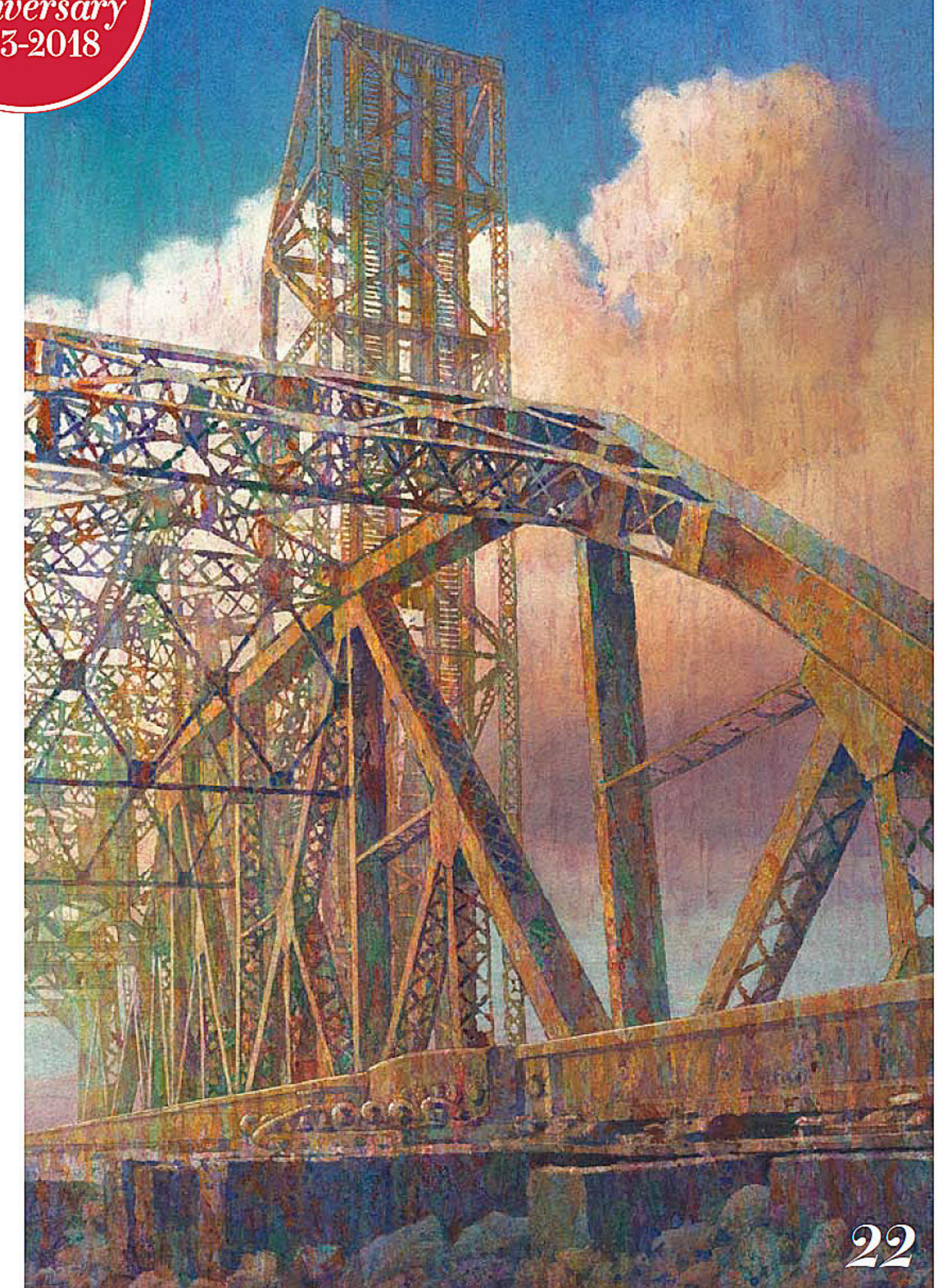
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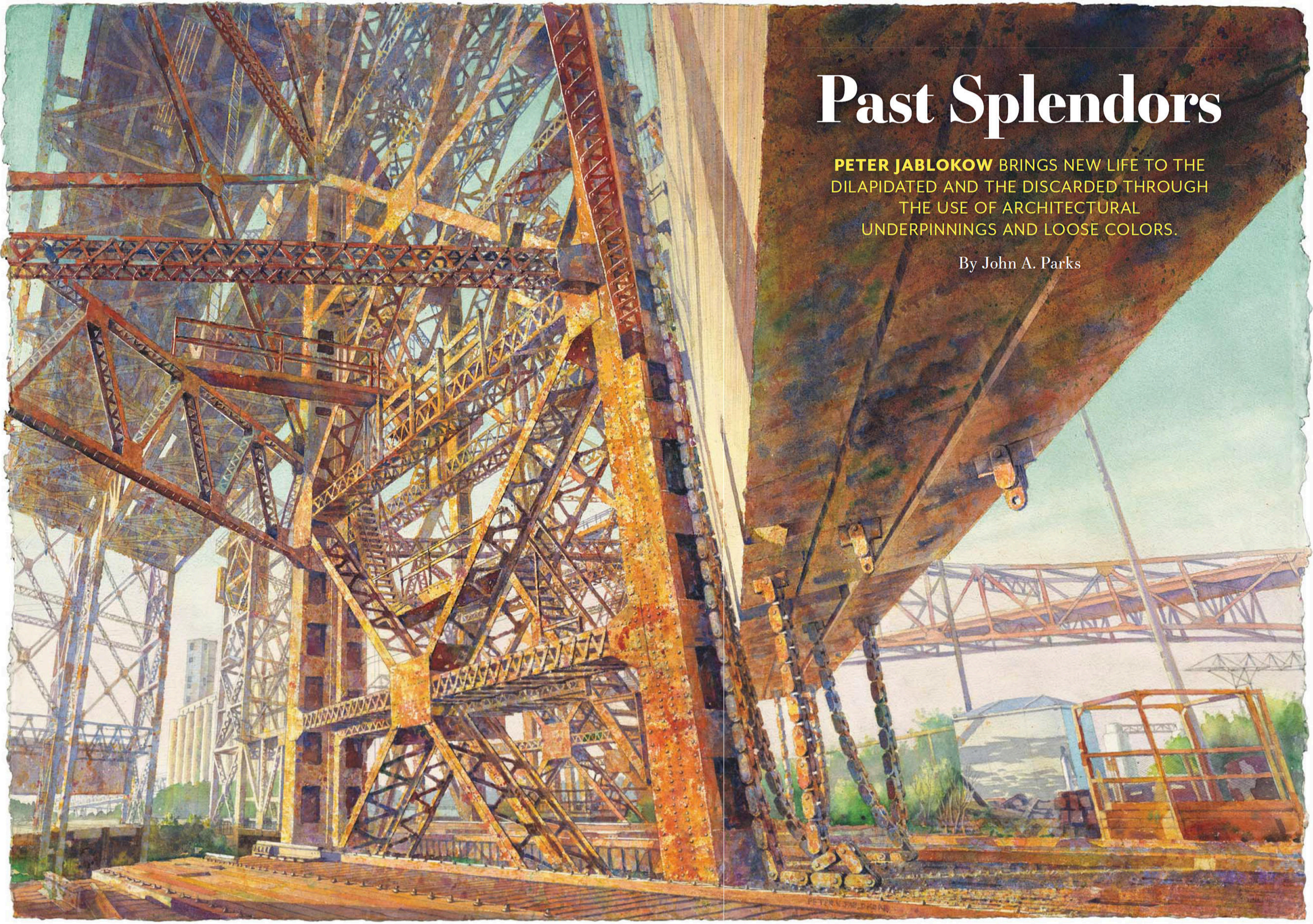
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Past Splendors

PETER JABLOKOW BRINGS NEW LIFE TO THE DILAPIDATED AND THE DISCARDED THROUGH THE USE OF ARCHITECTURAL UNDERPINNINGS AND LOOSE COLORS.

By John A. Parks

Calumet River Lift Bridge (watercolor on paper, 29x41)

Peter Jablokow is drawn to the weathered, rusting relics of a bygone industrial age. A long-abandoned steam engine languishes in a field, its cab a spectacular welter of peeling rust and flaking paint. A huge dredging vessel tilts into the mud of a lake, where it lies half sunk, its sagging cranes still sprouting wires and cables. The shell of a stamp mill building stands with its sides open to the weather, icicles hanging from the beams, its floor strewn with the detritus of an incomplete demolition.

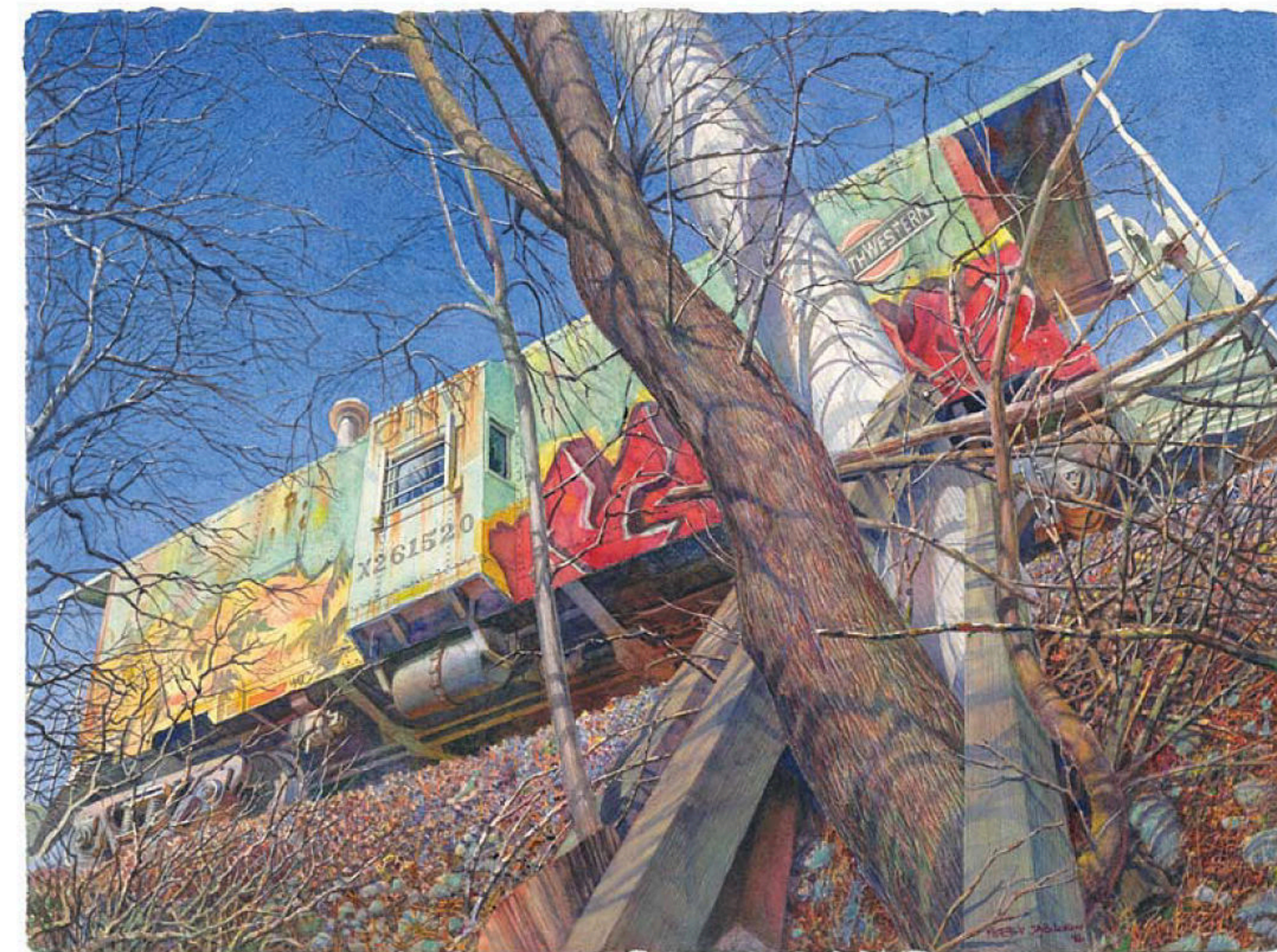
All of these scenes are rendered with a kind of hyper-clarity that's achieved with immaculate drawing, crisp edges and flawless perspective married with rich, varied color and a wealth of texture. Jablokow succeeds in creating a sense of extreme precision while bathing his subject in a vibrant, warm light that suggests pleasure and attraction. We're aware that he's enamored with his unexpected subject matter.

Searching For Subjects

"When I started painting in 2010, my family and I had just visited the Keweenaw Peninsula, within the Upper Peninsula of Michigan," recalls the Illinois-based artist. Soon he began to paint things he encountered there. "There are great old mining structures, some of which are now gone. It's a beautiful, remote place with historic old towns and mining relics—a combination I like. The Quincy mine in Hancock has a steam engine in a field, so I started painting

RIGHT
Caboose Near My
House (watercolor
on paper, 22x30)

BELOW
St. Charles Airline
Bridge No. 2
(watercolor on
paper, 41x29)



steam engines, too. After the engines, I painted train bridges in the Chicago area, because they were closer to home. I love the complicated, weathered structures, but they're lacy-looking, not heavy. These days, I look for bridges with massive counterweights or huge, solid pieces of steel."

Whether it's bridges or mine equipment, Jablokow seems to relish the heroic scale of these structures. "I like the size of them, how they loom over my head, with exciting textures and chaotic shapes," he says. "I love the mess of shadows and shapes—and the fact that there's still an underlying structure there."

While Jablokow's sense of structure is strong, there's also a romance in his images. "There's certainly a nostalgia to them, of all the things people used to do and how they did them. Now only some of the skeletons remain."

Jablokow's search for subject matter involves more than a passing visit with a sketchbook and camera. He'll often return to a location a number of times to obtain better angles and photos. "On the first visit, I might take a thousand photographs," he says. "Then I'll go home and review them and often determine that I really should have taken this or that

Sourcing Inspiration

Jablokow's move to full-time painting in 2010 was precipitated by the decline in demand for handcrafted architectural illustration that occurred with the advent of lower-cost computer rendering. He began taking classes with Peggy Macnamara at North Shore Art League, in Chicago, and continues to take classes with Alain Gavin, in Evanston, Ill. "I need outside critiques as I work," he says, "but I don't know many people to ask for that. Alain is a good source."

As for inspiration, Jablokow names a variety of contemporary and historic artists. "Gottfried Saltzmann has done some impressive, simple compositions with really wet washes and some great aerial city shots with spattered cream or mask over the whole scene," the artist says. "I turn to Jeanne Dobie's *Making Colors Sing* for reference. I like her way of creating gray using cobalt blue, quinacridone rose and aureolin yellow. I use this gray as a base for muted colors. I also like the idea of surrounding a bright color with a muted opposite."

"Andrew Wyeth was incredibly loose and incredibly tight at the same time, which I like and hope to be able to do someday," Jablokow says. "I like Winslow Homer for the same reason."



view, so I'll go back to the scene. And then I'll go back again until I'm sure that I have what I want."

When searching for the perfect vantage point, Jablokow isn't content simply to stand back; he loves exploring the structures, diving into tunnels and clambering up roofs. When it comes to train bridges, he even has had to run from oncoming trains.

Constructing the Scene

Eventually, Jablokow selects an image from which to work and a size, sometimes as large as 41 inches. He works on Arches 300-lb. hot-pressed paper, a choice that allows for stability and offers options for working into the surface. He begins by making a light print of his photo on a sheet of 8½x11-inch paper and then draws the main outlines over it in pen to establish the overall proportions and angles.

Next, he scans the drawing, puts it in Photoshop and changes the image

to the size of his painting. At this stage, he's careful to identify the horizon line and the vanishing points of the perspective. He then prints it out in sections, taping the pieces of paper together until he has created a full-size image. He lays this over his watercolor paper and traces the image onto it using transfer paper. He then draws with a 2H pencil to create a sharp, accurate line drawing, which can take eight hours or more. "I need the line to be fairly strong, because I know that some of it is going to get covered in washes, and I have to be able to see it," he says. "I also take a photo of the drawing so that if I lose a line, I can redraw it."

Having established a crisp, exacting outline, the artist launches into an entirely opposite approach, showering parts of his painting in drips and splashes to create a multicolored patina. "My primary goal is to force a looseness or random pattern that runs through various parts of the

painting to link them together," he says. "Somehow it seems like more of a painting that way. If I try to use a brush, I tend to get stiff and repetitive. I also like to get paint thrown all over the paper as soon as I begin, so I'm immediately digging myself out of a hole. I'm better at reacting to what I've done than getting it right the first time."

Although this part of the painting process is deliberately uncontrolled, Jablokow is careful to first mask the portions of the image that he wants to preserve as white paper. For small areas, he uses masking fluid; for larger areas, semitransparent painter's tape.

ABOVE
Quincy Smelter
(watercolor on paper,
22x30)

RIGHT
Lots of Limbs (watercolor
on paper, 22x30)

Because he can see his pencil lines through the tape, he's able to cut the tape exactly to the line. "I've discovered that it's better to put a little masking fluid under the edge of the tape, to stop the paint from bleeding underneath," the artist says. "The cutout shapes allow me to create a chaotic texture or wash within a very specific area. Masking fluid, either dripped on the paper or blown through a mouth atomizer, creates crisp edges and areas that can be filled with color after I've removed the masking. I've been able to loosen up within the different shapes, but I still need those shapes to be exact."

Playing With Color

Once he has established his areas of lively, free-wheeling texture,

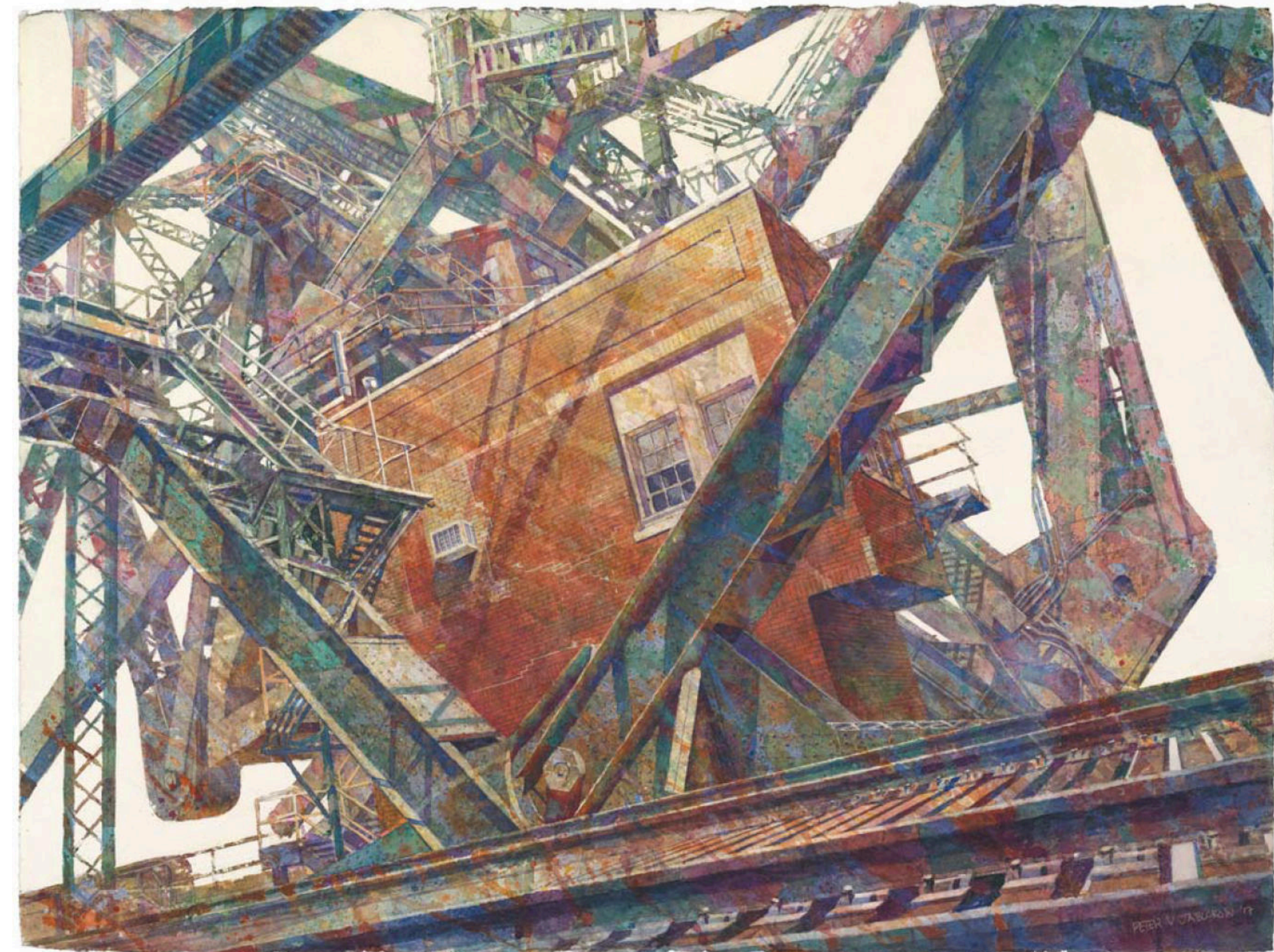
Jablokow begins to work into the image carefully using a brush. He pays careful attention to the logic of the light as it falls onto surfaces or is reflected back from other surfaces. He's also aware of the color shifts across surfaces, particularly the interplay of warm and cool. The intense colors of his underpainting patina help this process. "I'm afraid of creating something gray and muddy, so I throw the color in," says the artist. "It's easier to add an opposing color to dull something than to try to brighten an already dull color. The layers of color seem richer than trying to mix a correct color from the beginning. And then I just like playing with the colors."

This playful attitude toward color lends Jablokow's work a warm, saturated look in which the color remains

Brushing Up

"In my classes, I try to show how important the amount of water and paint you have in your brush is at any given time—and that the amount you need changes depending on what you're trying to accomplish. Every brushstroke has to be calculated. With practice, this becomes second nature. I had so much trouble early on with paint just wandering everywhere that I try to explain why that's happening."

—Peter Jablokow



active at every point, never sliding into a dead gray. “I’m partly just afraid to have boring color,” he says. “If I paint more than an inch with one color, it’s already looking too uniform, so I change colors or add something to vary the color I’m using. I do complicated, detailed things with a fair amount of contrast. They tend to be value-driven, so the color seems secondary. I often just use colors I like, sometimes a warm/cool combo of some kind.”

To make efficient use of his reference photography, Jablokow works at a broad, flat desk facing a large computer screen. “I can zoom in on details or look at photos from other angles to understand what’s going on,” he says. “I pick up the paper often to run the paint

OPPOSITE
Kinzie Street Train Bridge
(watercolor on paper, 22x30)

BELOW
Scissor Bridge
(watercolor on paper, 29x41)

“I’M BETTER AT REACTING TO WHAT I’VE DONE THAN GETTING IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME.”

around, but I don’t permanently angle my paper. In the early stages, I place it vertically against the back of a couch and throw paint at it. Large washes are poured onto the paper on the floor.”

Discussing washes, the artist says that he never wets down areas of the paper before applying a wash. “I worry that I won’t be able to see which parts of the paper are wet,” he says.

In taking on such complex imagery, Jablokow naturally finds himself making corrections. When he wants to return an area to white paper, he takes a toothbrush and scrubs into the surface. If he needs to work to a clean edge, he masks it out and scrubs right over the edge of the mask. Before he starts to repaint the erased area, he’ll add a small amount of sizing to it to reduce the absorbency of the scrubbed surface.

As he approaches the completion of the painting, Jablokow continues to work across the image, making hundreds of minute adjustments and changes. He finds that using granulating pigments helps the look of the painting, enriching its overall feel. “I’m aware that the viewer is going to look at every corner of the piece,” he says, “so I have to make sure that everything reads.”

Formulating Light

In part, Jablokow’s taste for precision, and his concern with perspective and the fall of light on planes, stems from his more than 20 years working as an architectural illustrator. Trained as an architect, he found himself employed as a renderer during a business downturn and stayed with it.



“Architectural illustration is exacting; everything is clean and in sharp focus,” he says. “I’ve always loved figuring out perspective as well, so I enjoyed the work. I had to render all the angles, planes and details correctly, or the architect would call right away. Since what I was painting didn’t yet exist, I had to construct formulas for how light worked in shadows, and with reflections on different materials and forms. This really helps me understand how to translate odd things happening in reference photos. In my painting, I still like to figure out all the planes and forms—even if they’re all in shadow or mostly hidden in a large, dark shape—so they’re lit correctly. I find that resolution comforting.”

In spite of the success of this approach, Jablokow still hankers after looser, more adventurous painting. “The big downside is I’m way too stiff and exact,” he says. “I need to keep moving away from that. It will come when I’m ready.”

Conveying Excitement

Jablokow’s works have a feel of heightened or augmented reality, an impression of things experienced at a pitch of concentration and comprehension that almost amounts to sensory overload. We’re aware of a sense of glorious splendor and dazzle in the world, and we’re all the more surprised that it’s elicited from images of decay and abandonment.

With this in mind, the artist recalls a reaction that he liked from a viewer. “She said that my subject matter is uninteresting, kind of just old stuff, but that when I paint it, it seems to be much more interesting,” Jablokow says. “She was able to get a sense of what makes it exciting to me. I do believe that’s what I’m doing—trying to express what’s exciting about these things to me. I’m not thinking about someone wanting to buy it; I just want to enjoy painting it. It’s a lousy business model, but enjoyable. Kind of a luxury.” **WA**

John A. Parks (johnaparks.com) is a painter, a writer and a member of the faculty of the School of Visual Arts in New York.

Meet the Artist



Peter Jablokow (peterillustrator.com) was born and raised in La Grange Park, Ill. His mother, Alla Jablokow, is a professional artist, and he has fond memories of coming home from school to find her working away at the kitchen table. He enjoyed painting as a child, but when it came time for school, he trained as an architect at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. Jablokow worked for more than 20 years as an architectural illustrator in Chicago before the advent of computer rendering changed the nature of the business. Since 2008, he has been a full-time painter, teacher and workshop instructor. His work has earned many awards, including the American Watercolor Society Joan Ashley Rothermel Memorial Award in 2017 and the Transparent Watercolor Society of America (TWSA) Founders’ Award in 2012. He’s a signature member of TWSA, the American Watercolor Society and the National Watercolor Society, and a TWSA board member.

Artist’s Toolkit

PAINTS

- **Daniel Smith (particularly the granulating paints):** aureolin yellow, quinacridone gold, quinacridone sienna, cobalt violet dark, quinacridone coral, quinacridone rose, ultramarine blue, cobalt blue, manganese blue, diopside genuine
- **Holbein:** bright violet
- **QOR:** transparent pyrrole orange

SURFACE

- 300-lb. Arches hot-pressed

BRUSHES

- **Smaller brushes, up to size 16:** kolinsky sable, Cheap Joe’s Dragon’s tongue, Dick Blick sable
- **Larger synthetic brushes:** Escoda Versatil synthetic sable, up to size 22, 3-inch hake brush, Escoda Reservoir Liner

PALETTE

- John Pike palette with the paint wells divided in half

MISCELLANEOUS

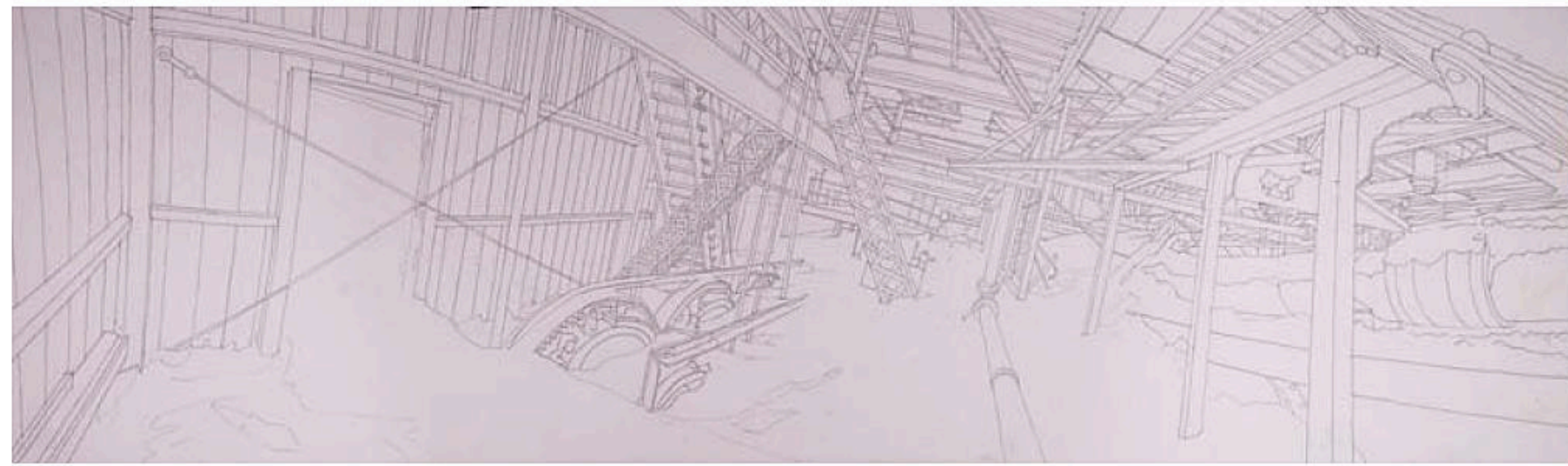
- drafting tape and wide painters tape made for house painting, mouth atomizer from Dick Blick, Pebeo Drawing Gum, Holbein Multi Sizing

Turn for a demo



Abandon(ed) Ship

Peter Jablow combines architectural precision with colorful drips and spatters to pay homage to a bygone dredging vessel.



Step 1

I drew a clear pencil outline on the painting surface based on the panoramic reference photo.



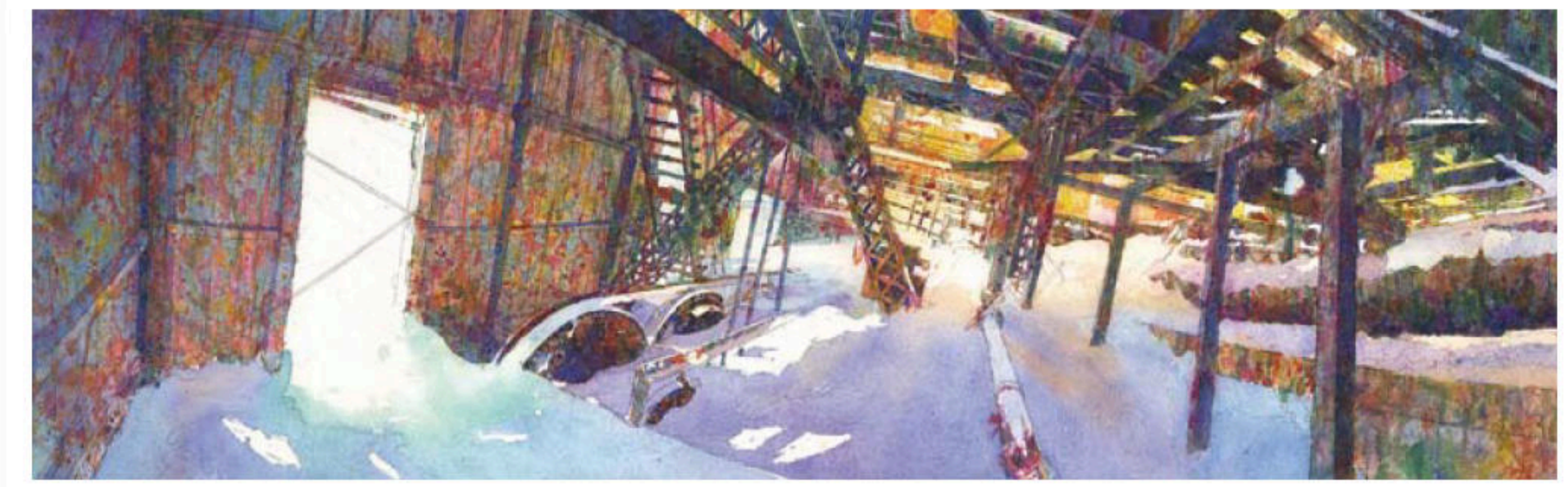
Step 2

To preserve white areas, I used mask (blue areas) and semitransparent painter's tape (yellow areas) trimmed to the line. I placed a little mask underneath the edge of tape to prevent paint from bleeding. Then, I spattered and dripped red, yellow and pink paint onto the surface.



Step 3

After building the color further to create a multicolored patina, I removed the mask to reveal the preserved white areas. Then, I used a brush to develop some of the darker areas and to build washes over the spattered and dripped areas of the painting.



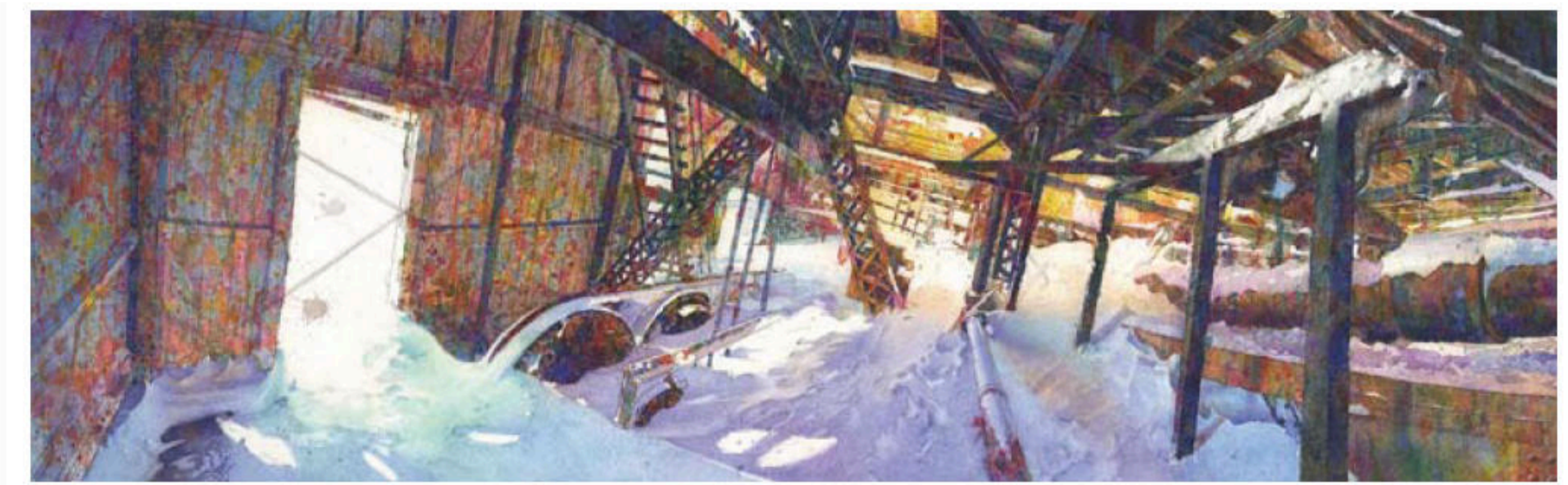
Step 4

I built the shadow colors on the snow at the base of the building. I pushed the color, alternating violets and turquoises in the shadow, and adding a little yellow orange to the edge of the light areas. I enriched the colors and began to develop the subtle play of light across some of the surfaces.



Step 5

Next, I developed the detailed texture of the snow in the foreground.



Step 6

After determining that the beam on the upper right was too dark, I scrubbed it back to white using a toothbrush. I'll also address the two splashes in the doorway to the left in the same way.



Final

I repainted the beam on the right using more active color, and then I worked back through the whole image to increase the subtlety and richness of the color in *Quincy Dredge Doorway* (watercolor on paper, 12x41). **WA**

"I'M AWARE THAT THE VIEWER IS GOING TO LOOK AT EVERY CORNER OF THE PIECE, SO I HAVE TO MAKE SURE THAT EVERYTHING READS."