

ABOVE COURTESY CHARLES DISCHINGER / BELOW COURTESY ROGER WATT



About That 17-to-1 Ratio...

NOVEMBER'S COLUMN described the greater popularity of one artist's lighthouses versus his train portraits as commercially viable subjects. The ratio of James Mann's lighthouse to railroad art is 17-to-1. The column drew an immediate and higher-than-average reader response, which I cite below.

Here, then, are four unconventional works of railroad art that, with others like them, demonstrate that subject and an innovative treatment can have a broad general appeal, one that spans generations and genders. Yours truly's youngest daughter, for example, has a work by Rail Yard Studio displayed prominently — how else can you describe art made of ties and rail — in her home.

The hybrid photograph to the left, taken by American Society of Railway Artists member Charlie Dischinger, started as a photo of a train backed by a brilliant blue sky. Before the train had finished passing, the sky had turned into what you see here. Capturing the exact same scene off a tripod — sans train — with the “new” sky, he was able to impose the train onto the new image with dramatic results. The work sold to a woman wanting a large piece to hang in her living room. She framed the picture with an old window, so it appears you are looking out at the approaching train.

Then there is Canadian graphite artist Roger Watt's *Going Underground 1* (below left), which sold at Plus One Gallery in London, a “leading hyperrealism/photo realism” gallery on “the prestigious Pimlico Road in London.” Roger's work is at once authentic and imaginary.

Finally, consider two works from Robert Hendrick at Rail Yard Studios presented on pages 66 and 67, where scrap rail, ties that didn't pass inspection, and discarded rolling stock are being turned into art in response to demand.

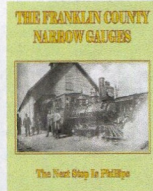
One More for the Record

Herb Treger, a reader quoted below, once introduced me to a regional craftsman, a woodworker who had created a series of six beautiful, full-size interpretations of hand tools used by 19th century farmers. I tried, to no avail, to induce the artist to apply his skill to tools used by early trainmen, both

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operating and ground crew. To date, he has declined to do so. I have no doubt there would be a ready, willing — and broad-based — market for such artwork.

Readers Write

As for those early reactors to the “lighthouses vs. locomotives” puzzle, here’s what they had to say:

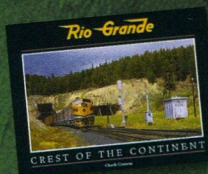
Tom Burg: “I have to think that a greater number of people can identify with depots rather than locos. Every town had one, and it was the front door to the community. We restored the Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway depot at Potlatch, Idaho, with a grant from the state. It might be the most important thing we could have done. There is a locomotive in the park, and other items possibly, but that depot tells so much more of the story.”

Don Harms: “I think you may be looking too closely at the subject of each painting and overlooking the context. The train painting depicts a crowded, industrial, urban setting. How many of us (other than hardcore train fans) have warm, fuzzy memories of vacationing in a crowded, industrial, urban setting? How many more of us have warm, fuzzy feelings about vacationing along a seashore, hearing the lovely sound of the surf against a rocky shore line, enjoying clouds out over open water and contemplating the beauty and expanse of



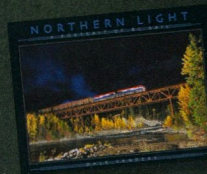
ABOVE and RIGHT: Two works from Robert Hendrick at Rail Yard Studios, where scrap rail, ties that didn’t pass inspection, and discarded rolling stock panels are increasingly being turned into art in response to demand. The artwork on the right incorporates graffiti, which is a hot button issue for many railfans who perceive graffiti as a defacement of property and not “art.” **ABOVE:** SOLO, COURTESY OF ROBERT HENDRICK / **OPPOSITE:** BOXCARS IN A RAIL YARD, COURTESY OF ROBERT HENDRICK

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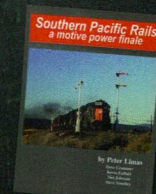
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the ocean — all elements of Mr. Mann's lighthouse painting."

Dave Smith: "I don't believe that there is broad appeal for pictures of trains beyond the railfan. There are a few exceptions, however, such as a steam locomotive pulling a train through a snowy mountain pass or perhaps as a backdrop in another scene of natural beauty or human interest. The key point is the train is not necessarily the focus of the picture, but serves an important role nonetheless by setting the tone, or by enhancing the picture by adding contrast, depth or other subtle influences."

Herb Treger: "Lighthouses are generic and timeless. Locomotives are not a good comparison to a lighthouse. A rural depot, another generic and timeless structure, would be a better comparison. A railway station, a barn, a lighthouse — these are all unique, but are, for the most part, geographically unidentifiable structures that provide a neutral backdrop in decor. A locomotive clearly does not."

In Closing

I'm hoping the examples presented here demonstrate that there are elements of our railroad passion which, when presented in surprising, even unconventional ways, can capture the attention and hold the interest of a broad array of potential patrons who ordinarily would not consider trains as

an art subject. Everyone? No. Many? I'd argue, yes.

For more innovative work by these artists, visit charlie-choochoo.com to see the original version of the Dischinger work shown here; watt-art.com where the first image in the Portfolio tab will satisfy any doubt you may have that Roger Watt's works are drawn, not photographed; and railyardstudios.com for an extensive array of pieces that speak to the variety of artistic expression one can conjure with imagination and common railroad materials.

P.S.: Robert Hendrick called several websites to our attention. They deal with non-traditional expressions of creativity. Of special interest to readers are the selections, sprinkled throughout, that deal with railroad graffiti: (1) Legends Thursday (www.itgraffitipodcast.com), presents podcasts devoted to railroading and railroad graffiti among the 142 podcasts cataloged; (2) the Facebook page of Emmanuel Jarus (<https://www.facebook.com/jarusone>), where you'll have to scroll down to the entry of September 13, 2015, and beyond to find railroad art; and (3) the artist Retna (<https://www.artsy.net/artist/retna>). 📧

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