

PAPERWORK & PAINTING

The artwork of Jessica Glenn

STORY

Justin Franz

PAINTINGS

Jessica Glenn

*Northern Pacific
Locomotive 1818*
2019, 8 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
Gouache on Northern
Pacific Railway Co.
expense bill from the
Isdell Mercantile in
Pony, Montana

Red Grain Elevator
2020, 5 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 3 $\frac{5}{8}$ "
Watercolor on 1933
receipt from the Isdell
Mercantile in Pony,
Montana; grain elevator
in Zurich, Montana,
along U.S. Highway 2

EXPENSE BILL. FORM 1546 $\frac{1}{2}$. PRO. No. 210

Car Initials *Isdell Merc* Car No. *3807* W.-B. *879* Date *July 1919*

Station, *Pony* 190

To Northern Pacific Railway Company,
For Freight and Charges from *Isdell*

DESCRIPTION OF ARTICLES	WEIGHT	RATE	AMOUNT
<i>From Wagon KD No</i>			
<i>2 4 Bed cots</i>			
<i>2nd class</i>			
<i>1 Box</i>			
<i>1 Bag</i>			
<i>77</i>			





Consignor, *W. S. Isdell*

Received Payment for the Company, *W. S. Isdell* Agent.

The Expense Bill will be detached, and, on payment of charges, delivered to Consignee. The receipt for delivery of the goods will be signed by Consignee, and will be retained in book. *Jessica A. Glenn MTWS 19*

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Do not use this form for copies.—Form 1547 is intended for that purpose.

E. S. Adkins, Pres. Edna Elling, Vice-Pres.
Incorporated 1892

J. P. Erie, Sec. & Treas.
Established 1869

BOUGHT OF

THE ISDELL MERCANTILE COMPANY

General Merchandise and Miner's Supplies

Salesman _____ Pony, Mont., _____ 192_____

M _____

Address _____



J. Glenn

34

TO CORRECT ERRORS BRING THIS BILL

T. H. REISSUE PAT. MAR. 26, 1907. PACIFIC MANIFOLDING BOOK CO., EMERYVILLE, CAL. 3 1768

IN THE AUTUMN OF 2019, the Hockaday Museum of Art in Kalispell, Montana, hosted a railroad-themed art show called “Hear The Whistle Blow: Art of the Railway.” The exhibit, curated by Montana painters Jack Dykstra and Rob Akey, featured many pieces from notable railroad artists like J. Craig Thorpe, Gil Bennett, and Christian Oldham. It was arguably one of the best gatherings of railroad paintings in recent memory.

As I walked through the gallery, one piece stood out from the rest: a small, yellowed piece of paper that had been discarded as garbage decades earlier. While some people would see the ripped and tattered Northern Pacific Railway expense sheet as an interesting piece of railroadiana at best and trash at worst, Montana artist Jessica Glenn saw it as a canvas.

On that ragged old piece of paper, Glenn painted a Northern Pacific 2-8-2 steam locomotive—with the railroad’s distinct early twentieth-century headlight gracing the smokebox—in front of a white prairie grain elevator and with the road’s bright and distinct monad logo floating in the sky. I wasn’t the only one who noticed it, either.

“Some of the best moments of my railroad art collecting journey have been those when I have come across an artist who is approaching the subject in a way so accomplished, yet so novel or unexpected, that it really grabs my attention and draws me back to look at his or her work again and again. One such moment was seeing Jessica Glenn’s *Northern Pacific Locomotive 1818* at the Hockaday Museum of Art,” said art collector, Center for Railroad Photography & Art board member, and the eventual owner of the piece, Peter Mosse.

At the time, Glenn’s railroad piece was a one-off, something unique she came up with just for the Hockaday show. But since then, Glenn has jumped head-first into what she calls “old paper art,” painting old trucks, portraits, buildings and, of course, trains, on vintage documents.

Glenn has been an artist for as long as she can remember. When she was young, she would draw and doodle and paint whenever she could. She recalls that her mother was impressed with one early drawing of a tractor because she accurately portrayed all of the intricate details, from the big wheel at the rear of the vehicle to the corncob pipe hanging out of the farmer’s mouth.

“I was born an artist and I was always drawing things when I was young,” she said. “I guess I’ve

always been creative and being a painter is all I ever wanted to do when I grew up.”

Glenn went to the Kendall College of Art and Design at Ferris State University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. At the time, she was dabbling in all sorts of mediums and it wasn’t until she had a professor who encouraged her to focus on watercolor that she settled on one. Glenn notes that watercolor is not a forgiving medium—unlike oil painting, you can’t layer over your mistakes; if you mess up you have to start all over again. But Glenn notes that she is a patient and careful painter.

Over the years, Glenn has focused on all sorts of subjects for her paintings, from landscapes to portraits. Paintings of places like Glacier National Park are often popular in galleries in western Montana, where she currently lives. Her work has been exhibited at numerous shows over the last decade, and she’s won a number of awards, including honors from the Montana Watercolor Society. It was at the watercolor society that she met Dykstra, which is how she ended up in the railroad show at the Hockaday.

Dykstra said he and his co-curator, Rob Akey, knew that Glenn was an accomplished watercolorist and thought she would be a great addition to the show. Besides her being a Montana-based painter, they wanted to have at least one woman’s perspective in an exhibit of railroad art, a field that is often dominated by men. Although she had never painted a railroad subject before, Glenn gladly accepted the challenge and began thinking of what she wanted to produce.

Initially, Glenn thought of painting a landscape with a Great Northern Railway train near Glacier National Park—after all, the Hockaday often focuses on Glacier-related art. But then she thought back to a box of old papers she had recently found while antiquing with her husband. The paperwork had come from an old mercantile in Twin Bridges, Montana, and in it was an expense receipt from the Northern Pacific. Glenn thought it could be the basis of a unique piece. She admits that she is not a railroad expert, but she loves to do research and make sure that her paintings are accurate. That is plainly obvious when looking at her NP piece.

“I love going down rabbit holes,” she said of her research process. “I want to make sure the locomotives and the logos are accurate.”

The piece was an immediate hit. Dykstra said it was a favorite for many at the show and was certainly one of the most unique.

Following pages:

Portrait of artist Jessica Glenn by Faye Maddox Photography

BA&P Number 18
2020, 9¼ x 8½ inches
Gouache on vintage
conductor’s report;
document and black-
and-white reference
photograph found in an
antiques store in Butte,
Montana



Western Star
Streamliner
2021, 3 1/8 x 4 3/4 inches
Gouache on vintage
Great Northern
Railway label

Santa Fe Locomotive
2019, 5 5/8 x 8 1/4 inches
Watercolor & gouache
on vintage Atchison,
Topeka & Santa Fe
Railway Co. freight
delivery receipt

FREIGHT DELIVERY RECEIPT. Form 1872-B Regular

CONSIGNEE: *The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Company*

Freight Bill No. 191

Received from The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Company.

WAY-BILL		CAR		FROM	Original Point Shipment and Consignor
DATE	NUMBER AND SERIES	INITIALS	NUMBER		
<i>5/6</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>		

THE FOLLOWING PROPERTY

WEIGHT	RATE	FREIGHT	ADVANCES	TOTAL
		<i>4.00</i>		

LOCATION: *Santa Fe*

DELIVERY: *Transfer to consignee*

BY: *J. Glenn* MTWS

Agent will require Consignee to date this Receipt.

Total Charges, *4.00*



“It combines art and railroadiana; it’s great,” Dykstra said.

Glenn said she was inspired by Native American ledger art (an art form created by the Plains Indians during the nineteenth century), which used old documents as a canvas as well as contemporary artists who do collage work with old photos and papers, or paint directly on photos. While Glenn had initially thought of the NP piece as a one-off, exclusive to the Hockaday show, she started doing more of what she dubbed “old paper art.” She often will comb antique shops and eBay looking for paperwork, and in 2020 she produced a show exclusively of the paper art at the Lewistown Art Center in Lewistown, Montana. In the last few years, she has done more than a dozen old paper pieces, including railroad paintings on paperwork from the Butte, Anaconda & Pacific; the Great Northern; and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway.

Glenn often uses gouache paint, a water-based paint, because it often sits better on the old documents. (If she uses her normal watercolor paints, sometimes the paper will start to wrinkle.) She always paints with the paper completely flat so the paint doesn’t run.

One of the reasons Glenn likes painting on the old documents is because they are often beautiful in their own right. Glenn said corporations, including railroads, often put a lot of thought into what their documentation looked like, even something as simple as an expense bill or internal paperwork.

“I like that I am able to give new life to these old historic documents,” she said. “Instead of having these papers just sit in a box forgotten somewhere, I can paint on them and get them back into the public eye.”

“These pieces really stand out,” she continued. Working on them “is just really different than painting on a white canvas.”

While she has done many non-railroad pieces, the ones with trains are among her favorites. She even thinks she might slowly become a railroad enthusiast.

“Jack [Dykstra] is always telling me that if I keep painting these I’m going to get hooked on trains, and I’ve told him, ‘I think I already am!’” she said. •

To see more of Glenn’s work, visit her website:
www.jessicaglennart.com

