

New England HOME

Celebrating Fine Design, Architecture, and Building

Transformations

*BOLD BRILLIANCE IN
THE NEW YEAR*

Storyteller

Painter Charlie Hunter transforms the ordinary. BY ROBERT KIENER

Old gas pumps—the greasier, the rustier, the better. Yesterday’s railway stations. Abandoned train cars. Classic ramshackle barns with beautifully weathered clapboards. Battered and bruised road signs. Sharp-finned cars from the 1950s. These are some of painter Charlie Hunter’s favorite things. As he chats in his home in the mill town of Bellows Falls, Vermont, the award-winning, widely selling, and much-collected sixty-one-year-old artist explains, “My goal is to paint beautifully



ABOVE: *Adobe Church, Holman, NM* (2020), 24”H x 24”W, oil on muslin panel. **LEFT:** *Railroad Crossing* (2020), 30”H x 30”W, oil on muslin, mounted on aluminum.



that which is not traditionally considered beautiful.”

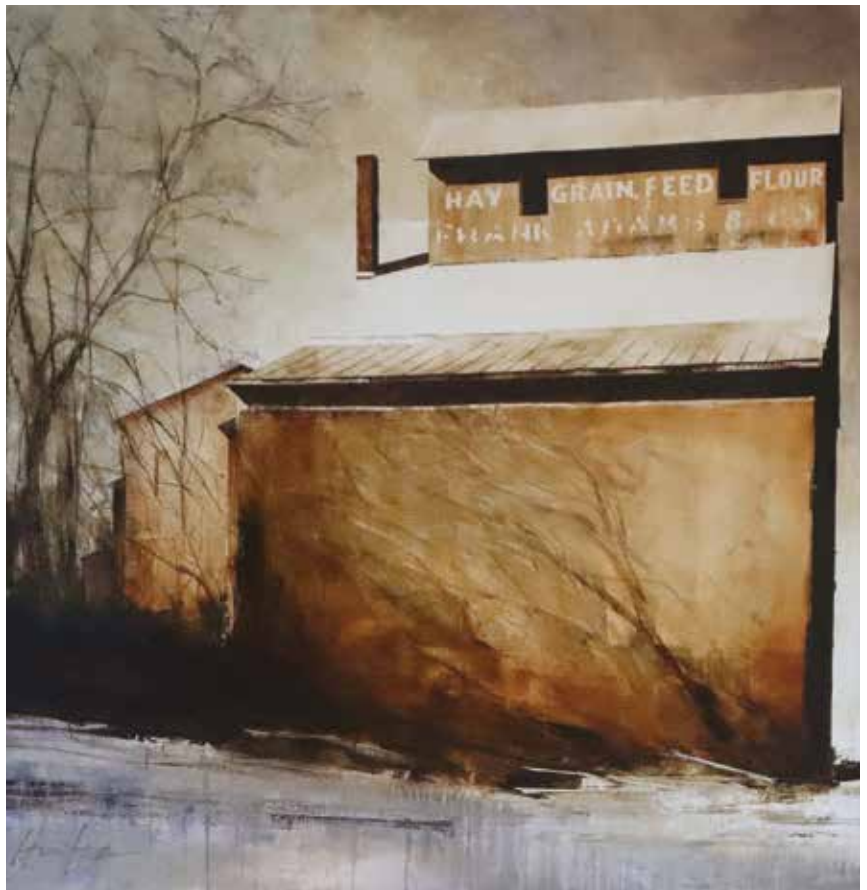
Hunter finds inspiration for his limited-palette, nearly monochromatic paintings as far afield as New Mexico, Montana, and Cuba, and as close to home as, well, his own backyard. “Monet had his haystacks; I have the Bellows Falls rail yard,” he says, his blue eyes sparkling. Hunter looks for scenes that resonate with him, and he seeks to tell a story with each of his paintings. “I am always making choices on what to emphasize and how to tell a story with my work,” he says. “I look for subject matter that says, ‘Come

here, you've got to see this. Isn't this neat?"

Although the Yale University-trained artist worked with a color-rich range of pastels, oils, and acrylics for nearly two decades, he abandoned his extensive palette in 2004. "I like to say that I just fell into the way I paint today," he explains. "I got to the point where I was really frustrated with my work. I felt that I was merely reproducing what I saw and thought, 'This is no fun.'"

He describes the day he "mushed" his paints together and produced a mostly monochromatic mix of understated browns and grays. "It worked," he remembers. "And it was well received. I was finding my voice and painting as truthfully as possible. It was all sinew and bone."

Hunter counts among his influences Andrew Wyeth and Edward Hopper, and late New Hampshire artist Richard Schmid, leader of the Putney Painters, was a long-time mentor. His work is much praised and



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: *Hay Grain, Feed Flour* (2019), 48"H x 48"W, oil on canvas. Painter Charlie Hunter in his studio. *P 106 959 (1951 Chevrolet, Havana)* (2016), 30"H x 30"W, oil on linen.

regularly exhibited at museums and galleries across the nation. Not bad, he admits with a smile, for someone who has become nationally known for producing what he wryly terms "drippy portraits of rotting American infrastructure."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Charlie Hunter is represented by William Baczek Fine Arts, Northampton, Mass., wbfinearts.com, and Bryan Memorial Gallery, Jeffersonville, Vt., bryangallery.org. To see more of his work, visit charliehunter.art.