

Charlie Amos

Master Painter

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Charles, or Charlie as his friends call him, is a man of many accomplishments and foremost among them are his skills as a painter of trains, a delayed passion that grew to fruition over the last three decades. Fascinated by trains at an early age, he had plenty of opportunities to observe and sketch them at his home in Lutherville, Maryland. “I was sick a lot as a youngster. To amuse myself, I would draw on paper that my father provided. As I began to sketch trains my mother observed, ‘You can see the beauty in steam locomotives.’ That thought carried with me, even to today.”

Charlie’s parents recognized their son’s talent and made arrangements to enroll him with Erma Davis, an art instructor in Lutherville. “She taught me all the basics, including the use of perspective and spacial relationships. After a few years, Erma informed my parents that they should enroll me in a good art school to further my education.”

The next step in formal training occurred at the Marjorie Martinet School of Fine and Commercial Art in Baltimore. As a 12 year old, Charlie wasn’t too thrilled about spending summer days and school term Saturdays in classes. Three

Every time Charles Amos’ brush touches the canvas, he recreates the world around him, a world where the industrial power of railroading meets the fine art of painting.

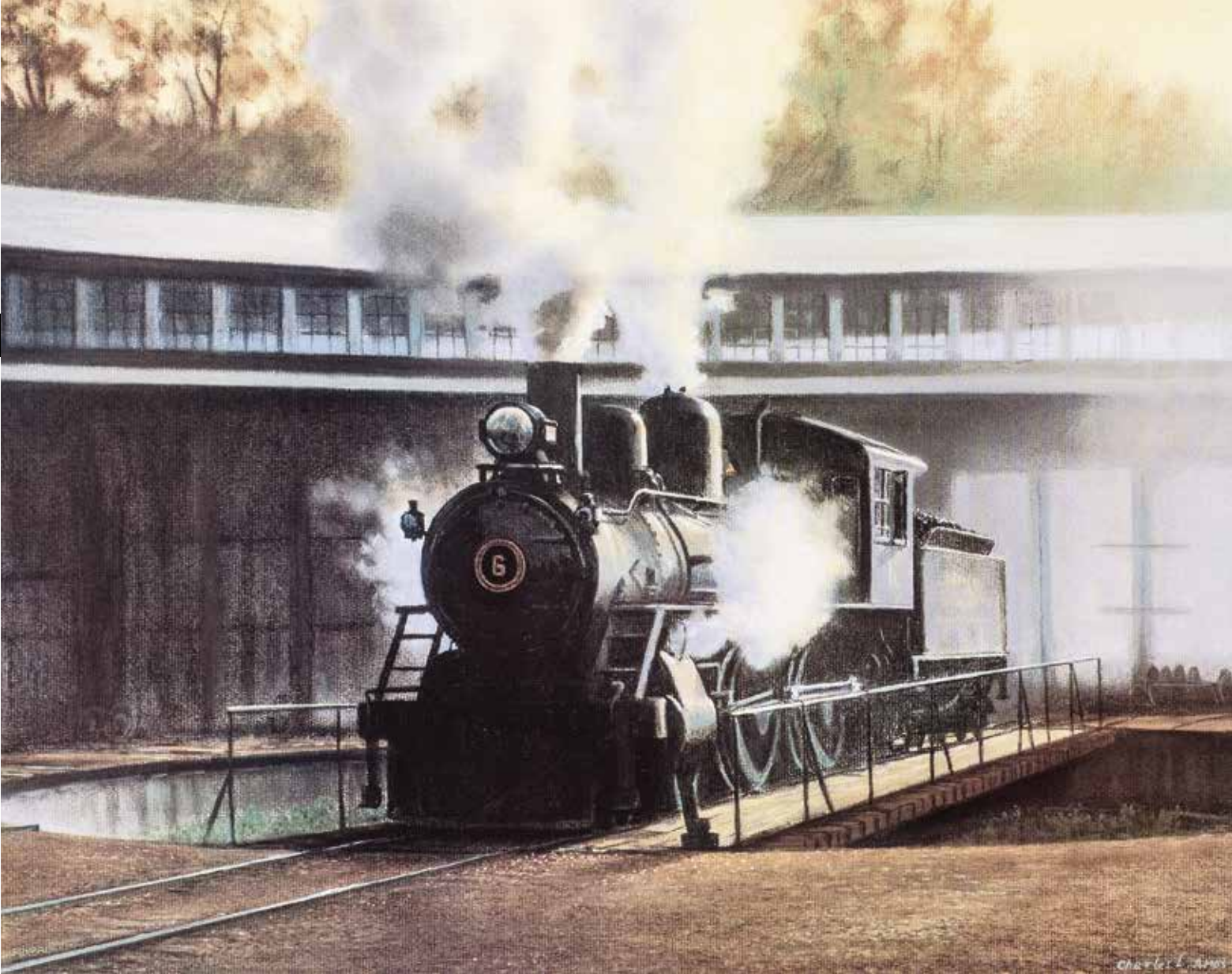


Charlie in his studio on the third floor of the Allegany Museum at 3 Pershing Street, downtown Cumberland, MD.

engineers came to the rescue by allowing Charlie to ride in the steam engine cab during commutes from Baltimore to Lutherville. “The engineers had a profound influence on me not only because they provided an incentive to attend art classes but because they allowed me to observe the intricacies of steam locomotives.”

It was during the early years of formal schooling that he developed a style of painting generally referred to as “realism,” a style that favors attention to detail and depictions of subjects as they appear in life. While his instructors favored the impressionism style, they did not try to influence Charlie’s choice of subjects or style.

Graduating from art school in 1949 did not result in an immediate foray into the fine arts. “Realism was not popular



“The Little Train” is one of Charlie’s favorite paintings.

at the time and I didn’t want to be a starving artist. I decided to pursue a transportation degree from the University of Baltimore School of Business, Industry, and Management. I figured it would be easier to pay my bills as a railroad man.”

Charlie’s figuring paid off as he steadily worked his way up the Western Maryland Railway ladder from entry level positions to Assistant Superintendent within 18 years. Next stop on the railroad career path was a position with the Federal Railroad Administration, where he advised administrators on train operations and rules. Three years later a move to the federal Department of Transportation brought with it the responsibilities of a congressional relations officer in charge of promoting President Ford’s

deregulation plan for railroads. Appointment as Executive Director of the American Association of Railroads was his last full time industry position before the interest in painting rekindled after a three decade hiatus.

“Mary and I were celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary over dinner. We were wondering what we could leave our kids. I suggested a painting for each of our children, so I dug out the paint brushes and completed paintings for each one. My sister, who was active in the Baltimore Civic Opera Company, said they were classics and urged me to exhibit them. So, I exhibited ‘Bluebird Lane,’ a path in the woods scene. A woman inquired about the price and because I really didn’t want to sell it, I told her it cost \$1,000. She bought it and that got my attention. I later



Charlie Amos' painting, "Metropolitan Special."

participated in another exhibition where I displayed a charcoal sketch of a locomotive. My cousin liked it and advised me to draw locomotives because they were not as common as landscapes and other subjects."

Charlie created more paintings of trains with an eye for detail that enthusiasts appreciated and demanded. Wheel arrangements, valve gears, steam whistles, numbers and other components of locomotives were part of his experiences growing up in Lutherville—Charlie understood trains.

A big break came when Bill Howes of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad commissioned five paintings for a company safety program. The commissions led to additional work that kept him busy day and night while trying to maintain full time assignments with the railroad association. In 1985, Charlie resigned the railroad position to become a full time painter. "I was 54 years old at the time and the transition was scary. At first it was tough to pay the bills, but 300 commissioned paintings later I can say that I made it."

Charlie Amos has indeed "made it" and enjoys acclaim as a nationally recognized railroad artist. The late Walter Rich, President of the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railway, described Charles Amos as the foremost railroad painter in the United States.

What makes a good painting? According to Charlie, composition and placement are crucial. "A painting can be compared to a book that has a plot and subplot because there is a subject a viewer sees first followed by the eyes moving to other objects. The viewer is part of the picture."

It is also important to study the basics of drawing. "You have to take time to learn. Some artists don't want to go through all the preliminary, formal steps but expect to paint a "Rembrandt" after a few lessons. It doesn't work that way. Good drawings reflect formal training."

What defines Charlie's paintings? "I paint what I see and not what I know. I know the sky is blue but it may be gray or orange when I am painting it. I also like to capture the look of rainy night scenes because of the shimmer and reflections."

Favorite subjects of the artist include the late transitional era in railroading when diesels replaced steam locomotives. That time period allows the artist to capture the classic era of both forms of transportation. While rail transportation is Charlie's primary subject matter, a more recent request for a portrait also sparked an interest. "I was pleased with the results of my first portrait and I now enjoy painting them as much as trains."

Whether the subject is transportation, landscapes, seascapes, or portraits, Charlie takes the same painstaking preliminary steps to insure that a realistic rendering of the subject is accomplished. And attention to detail has resulted in accolades and acclaim for a railroad man who never forgot the beauty that may be found in a dirty, old steam locomotive.

Charles Amos' studio is located on the third floor of the Allegany Museum located on Pershing Street in Downtown Cumberland.