

lost & found

PAINTINGS BY ADAM NORMANDIN



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JAN 18–FEB 22, 2024

J. WILLOTT | GALLERY

73300 EL PASEO, PALM DESERT, CA 92260 760.568.3180 JWILLOTT.COM

finding a voice

WE MUST TRAVEL TO BE LOST.

RAY BRADBURY

On first examination, Adam Normandin's paintings have the specificity associated with a photograph: showing us the kind of space that's seen through a lens, rendered skillfully in meticulous detail. Strongly-horizontal compositions, many three by six feet or more, seem to be seamless, offering views of deserts edged with distant mountains that serve as backdrops for isolated freight cars covered with vivid graffiti. Often portrayed in his paintings with their doors open, the car's long rectangles become frames within a frame, like portals into another world: drawing attention to a view of a distant, shimmering landscape. Then there are anonymous cityscapes, in which other examples of rolling stock—a box car or engine, even a caboose—are framed by the rectangular forms of corrugated steel and cinderblock warehouses. Brightly-colored tags layered on both buildings and trains suggest a different kind of horizon line, in places so specific they seem as though they could be mapped.

Yet all of these detailed, highly-realistic scenes are, in a very tangible sense, imaginary. Each represents a combination of details from many photographs, taken by the artist and then later assembled on his computer screen, moved around or cropped or clarified. Neither a documentarian nor a preservationist, his goal is to embody the feeling that a place evokes for him when he encounters it—whether that is while walking the streets of industrial East Los Angeles, his home for many years, or during his sojourns to the desert of the American West. Wandering without plan or preconceived notion of what impressions he will find or keep, he allows himself “to listen only to the creative voice in my head...my heart speeds up whenever I see the way shadows can drape across a surface, or the majesty of a spray painted message, layered among the rust and rail coding.”

Once he has established a composition that feels right, Normandin begins the lengthy process of developing the image over weeks and months as he works his way from sketch to finished painting. he deliberately allows each picture to take on a life of its own, dictating its own course in a process that he values even more than he does the completed canvases. As he puts it, “No matter how challenging things can get, the journey is what matters above all. It is where we learn, grow and discover the most valuable things that life has to offer.”

Interested in artmaking since his blue-collar childhood on Long Island, Normandin set out to teach himself how to paint in his twenties. From the beginning, he has been attracted to an exacting depiction of what he describes as the utilitarian—the buildings and storefronts of the East LA neighborhood where he lives and works, and especially, to the trains that still populate the district. Though they are far from the only thing he paints, freight cars have dominated Normandin’s subject matter for over two decades.

Featured in literally hundreds of popular songs and easily as many stories, trains have been a constant presence in both the history and the mythology of the American West. For Normandin, they have offered a ‘canvas within a canvas—’ implying movement and time even as they stand still: a history, present in the layers of graffiti and the scars of use. From the beginning, he has been drawn to that evidence of age, and to the challenge of capturing the patina conferred through use on both places and things.

Normandin’s neighborhood is rich with that history. A commercial hub full of warehouses and now an arts district as well, this part of the city offers the painter new vistas of traveling freight daily. Train cars park on narrow side streets, pass through rail yards, cross bridges. Always alert to possibilities, he sometimes has to shoot pictures on his phone, as the cars might have moved on to their next stop by the time he returns home for his camera. Works like *Lifeboat* (Figure 1) or *Ransom* (Figure 2) have that sense of temporary respite—rolling doors open to empty, dark interiors, waiting for the next payload and destination.

Figure 1

LIFEBOAT

oil and acrylic on canvas
22 × 45 inches



Figure 2

RANSOM

oil and acrylic on canvas
22 × 45 inches



Figure 3

SURRENDER

oil and acrylic on cpanel
22 × 45 inches



Recently, he has been experimenting with other subjects. Abandoned cars have appeared in his desert landscapes in the past, their stripped metal skeletons covered with fading painted ‘tags,’ but a long-simmering fascination with the unique challenge of painting fire has led him to the creation of a series of works featuring vehicles subsumed in flames. In *Surrender* (Figure 3), smoke billows outwards from a pickup truck, its front end white hot and glowing against the soft gray of the desert at twilight. The flames are also reminders of the wildfires—not only California, but across Canada, and now Hawai’i as well, that are the consequences of a combination of global warming and terrible land management.

The shapes and dimensions of water towers offer a different set of issues. The curved surfaces of *Rumor's* (Figure 4) elevated storage tanks are wrapped with letters and images, and more cover the warehouses below. In *Descent* (Figure 5), a passing biplane invokes the idea of movement and travel, even as the massive tower—the tiny graffiti on its side highlights its scale, anchors us to the ground far below.

Gather (Figure 6) suggests a different kind of flight. It pictures an ancient billboard, silhouetted against pale blue sky, its rectangle tilted rakishly as if it is poised to take off. This sensation is only accentuated by the edges of successive layers of sun-bleached paper peeling away like the surrounding sky's wispy

clouds, or— even more improbably—the white caps of waves. Only the tagger's handiwork remains legible. Graffiti has been a near-constant element in Normandin's compositions—a fact that makes sense in the context of train culture. The practice of making marks on cars' sides originated in the late 1800s, when a transient culture of train hoppers would draw their distinctive signatures with chalk to communicate with each other. Today's ubiquitous use of spray paint originated during the '60s and '70s, when the subway trains of New York City began to be exploited as a moving canvas for the graffiti artist's work—if one that was frequently cleaned. Work on freight trains, however, can remain for many years, traveling back and forth across the country.

More widely seen than almost any gallery show, and certainly by a more geographically diverse audience, such marks fascinate Normandin, who often interpolates an image seen on one train onto another completely different car. He has been contacted by various 'freight writers' who have seen images of his paintings posted online and recognized their work. To him, the layers of graffiti he interpolates into his paintings are like a record of hands touching a car, or tattoos on old sailors. Each port of call has added another mark.

Normandin has mentioned the supreme American realist Edward Hopper as an influence. Like Hopper, who sometimes 'adjusted' his compositions, Normandin seems less interested in an absolute truth than he is in creating powerful and evocative images. More than simply landscapes centered on empty train cars or industrial urban scenes, these are pictures of a West that may have always been a fantasy: an empty world, onto which we can inscribe ourselves. As Hopper himself once observed, "The painter paints to reveal himself through what he sees in his subject."

MARIA PORGES, 2023

Figure 4

RUMOR

oil and acrylic on canvas
22 × 45 inches



Figure 5

DESCENT

oil and acrylic on canvas
22 × 45 inches



Figure 6

GATHER

oil and acrylic on canvas
22 × 45 inches



DISSOLVE

oil and acrylic on canvas
38 × 50 inches





INTROVERT
oil and acrylic on canvas
36 x 72 inches



LIFE BOAT
oil and acrylic on canvas
22 x 45 inches

GATHER

oil and acrylic on panel
24 x 36 inches





RECLAIM
oil and acrylic on canvas
22 x 45 inches



RANSOM
oil and acrylic on canvas
22 x 45 inches

SURRENDER

oil and acrylic on panel
24 x 36 inches





FRAGMENTS

oil and acrylic on canvas
22 x 45 inches



SPELLBOUND

oil and acrylic on canvas
22 x 45 inches

BILLBOARD IN PROGRESS

oil and acrylic on canvas
48 × 72 inches



**PAINTING PENDING
COMPLETION**



RUMOR

oil and acrylic on panel
20 x 30 inches



CARNIVORE

oil and acrylic on canvas
30 x 60 inches

EXHALE

oil and acrylic on panel
36 × 36 inches



biography



SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2024

Lost & Found, J. Willott Gallery, Palm Desert, CA

2020

Wanderlust, LewAllen Galleries, Santa Fe, NM

2018

Small Works, Bernarducci Gallery, New York, N

2017

Travelers, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, New York, NY

2014

Yard, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, New York, NY

2011

Still/Motion, George Billis Gallery, New York, NY

2010

Crossing Paths, Evan Lurie Gallery, Carmel, IN
Path, George Billis Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2009

The Paintings of Adam Normandin, George Billis Gallery,
New York, NY

2008

The Paintings of Adam Normandin, George Billis Gallery,
Los Angeles, CA

2007

Freight, Gallery 33 East, Long Beach, CA

2005

Between the Lines, Metro Gallery, Pasadena, CA

SELECT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2019–2021

Gallery Artist Exhibition, J. Willott Gallery, Palm Desert, CA

2018–2019

Gallery Artist Exhibition, Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montreal, Canada

2018

New Precisionism 2, Bernarducci Gallery, New York, NY

New Precisionism, Bernarducci Gallery, New York, NY

2017

Photorealism in the Desert, Imago Galleries, Palm Desert, CA

2016

Photorealist, Urban Landscapes:

A Historical Overview, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, New York, NY

New Paintings, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, New York, N

2015

Summer Group Exhibition, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, New York, NY

New Paintings, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, New York, NY

Winter White, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, New York, NY

2014

Contemporary Realism Biennial

Fort Wayne Museum of Art Fort Wayne, IN

2013

Summer Sights, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, New York, N

Valentine, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, New York, NY

BMG First Look, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, New York, NY

2012

Beyond Realism, Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montreal, QC

Space/Form, Breeze Block Gallery, Portland, OR

City Scape II, George Billis Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

Hyperrealism – A Moment In Time, Mark Gallery, Englewood, NJ

A Rolling Stone, Porter Contemporary, New York, NY

From What I Remember/From What I Forget, Principal Gallery, VA

2011

The Buildings of New York II, George Billis Gallery, New York, NY

2010

New York Moments, George Billis Gallery, New York, NY

100 GRAND, Sullivan Goss Gallery, Santa Barbara, CA

2008

Adam Normandin and Steve Frenkle,
Finer Things Gallery, Nashville, TN

An Anonymous Collection, Ruby Green Gallery, Nashville, TN

Neo Realism, George Billis Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

Summer Salon, George Billis Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2007

Art Auction XII, Long Beach Museum of Art

An Evening & Art & Architecture, Gallery 825, Los Angeles, CA

Pop Realism, George Billis Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

The Gem Show, Gallery 825, Los Angeles, CA

2006

Summer Showcase, Finer Things Gallery Nashville, TN

2005

Van Bankston, Chris Eckert, Keil Johnson and Adam Normandin,
Finer Things Gallery, Nashville, TN

2002

New Blood II, Finer Things Gallery, Nashville, TN

ARTRAGEOUS!, Finer Things Gallery, Nashville, TN

2001

Endless Summer, LA Art Seen, Marina Del Rey, CA

2000

ART 2000: Applauding Revolutionary Talent, Millard Sheets Gallery,
Pomona, CA

ART FAIRS

2022

Art Miami, Scott Richards Contemporary

Art Market San Francisco, Scott Richards Contemporary

2021

Art Miami, Scott Richards Contemporary

2018

Pulse Art Fair Miami, Bernarducci Gallery

2017

Scope Miami, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery

2016

Art Miami, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery

2015

Art Miami, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery

2014

Art Context Miami, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery

Art Silicon Valley, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery

2012

Art Hamptons, Evan Lurie Gallery

San Francisco Fine Art Fair, Evan Lurie Gallery

Art Palm Beach, Evan Lurie Gallery

2011

Red Dot Fair, Miami, George Billis Gallery, Evan Lurie Gallery

Art Hamptons, Evan Lurie Gallery

Art Chicago, George Billis Gallery, Evan Lurie Gallery

2010

Art Chicago, George Billis Gallery

The Los Angeles Art Show, George Billis Gallery

2009

The Los Angeles Art Show, George Billis Gallery

2008

The Los Angeles Art Show, George Billis Gallery

2007

The Los Angeles Art Show, George Billis Gallery

LECTURES & HONORS

2020

In the Studio with Adam Normandin, Virtual Presentation,
The Center for Railroad Photography & Art

Board Member, Artist Representative, Arts District Los Angeles,
Los Angeles, CA

2019

Fine Art Juror, TOCA, South Bay Festival of the Arts, Torrance, CA

2017

Guest Speaker, Center for Railroad Photography & Art Annual
Conference, Lake Forest, IL

BIBLIOGRAPHY & REVIEWS

2022

Fine Art Connoisseur, “Art & The Railways, The Mosse Collection”

2019

Hyperallergic, “A View from the Easel”

2017

“Utah Style & Design House Tour, Here-and-now livability in a Mod
Century Home”, by Brad Howe

2017

“Photorealism in the Desert”, Imago Gallery, Newington-Cropsey
Review

2017

“The Train represents Humanity” by David Lester, Railroad Heritage Magazine, Issue 48

“Reflecting Time”, American Art Collector Magazine, Issue 139

2016

“Photorealist Urban Landscapes, A Historical Overview”, Frank Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, NY

2014

“Adam Normandin: Yard”, Leah, Guadagnoli, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, NY

“Adam Normandin, Yard”, American Art Collector, Edition 107

2013

“Seven Bridges,” Volume 2

“Railway Art Today,” Alexander B. Craghead, Railroad Heritage, Number 34

“Adam Normandin,” Abby Merrick, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, Exhibition Catalog

“Summer Sights,” Marina Press, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, Exhibition Catalog

2011

Trust, feature film Directed by David Schwimmer

Poets and Artists, Vol. 4, No. 2

“Jewel of a Collection,” American Art Collector, Edition 63

2010

“Lights, Camera, Collector,” American Art Collector, Edition 62

“Show Review/Path,” American Arts Quarterly

“Waiting Between Trains,” American Art Collector, Edition 55

“Preview,” Art Scene, Volume 29

2008

“Neo Realism,” American Art Collector, Edition 33

“Sold,” American Art Collector, Edition 31

“Trainspotting,” American Art Collector, Edition 30

2006

“Front & Center: Emerging Artist,” Calabasas Magazine, Issue 5

2004

Cover artist, AAF Contemporary Art Fair, Exhibition Catalog

2000

ART 2000: Applauding Revolutionary Talent, Millard Sheets Gallery, Exhibition Catalog

EDUCATION

1987

Bachelor of Arts, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY

Credits

Catalog © 2023
J. Willott Gallery

Design by BLOSS

All paintings ©
2023 the artist

Photography by
Jeff McLane Studio

Inside front cover

SURRENDER
Detail

Inside back cover

GATHER
Detail



