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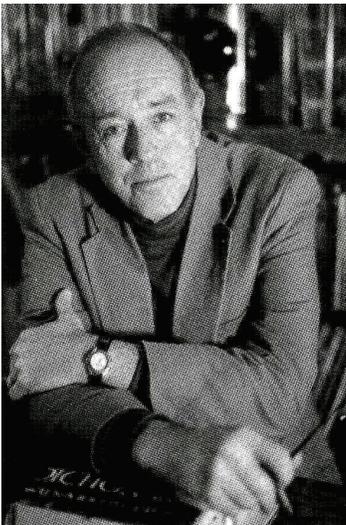


## Children's Books and Stamps: Studies in Design

### Ted Rose

By Phyllis Van Orden

Ted Rose had a life-long love affair with railroads; realistic watercolor paintings of trains were a central subject for much of his artistic work. Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1940, Rose earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree (with honors) at the University of Illinois, majoring in printing, with minors in printmaking and history.



**Ted Rose**  
Photographic portrait  
by Jennifer Esperanza

While still in high school, however, he rode the rails extensively. His early creativity found expression through the camera as he documented his travels with drawings and photographs. Between 1956 and 1962, he followed trains in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and Guatemala. His stunning, mostly black-and-white photographs taken during these journeys capture the last days of

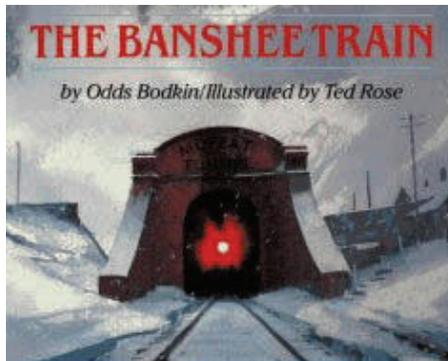
active steam railroading in America. Their quality also hints at an artistic impulse that began to be expressed several years later in his paintings. Ted Rose's

personal encounters with railroaders [he even worked for a while as a railroad switchman!], hobos, blues musicians, small towns, and isolated places and cultures inform his work, lending a sense of reality to his paintings that transcends simple documentation.<sup>1</sup>

After serving two years in the U.S. Army, including a year in Vietnam, Rose became a full-time professional artist in the 1980s. His career included that of layout artist, book de-

signer, and cartographer/graphic designer for the City of Santa Fe's Planning Department.

His "dramatic watercolor paintings of the American landscape and 20<sup>th</sup>-century industrial culture reflect the lives of people and places in an ever-changing world."<sup>2</sup> His work appeared in books and magazines, on book jackets, posters, and other graphic work, including an Amtrak calendar and on *New Mexico Magazine's* Distinguished Artist calendar in 1993. Rose received several awards for his water-



tercolors, and was accepted as a signature member of the prestigious American Watercolor Society (1993) and the National Watercolor Society (1999).

In his later career, Rose contributed illustrations for two children's books. *The Banshee Train*, by John "Odds" Bodkin, is set in the mountains outside of Denver, where a passenger train is saved from certain disaster by the ghosts from a previous wreck. A reviewer in *Publishers Weekly* wrote:

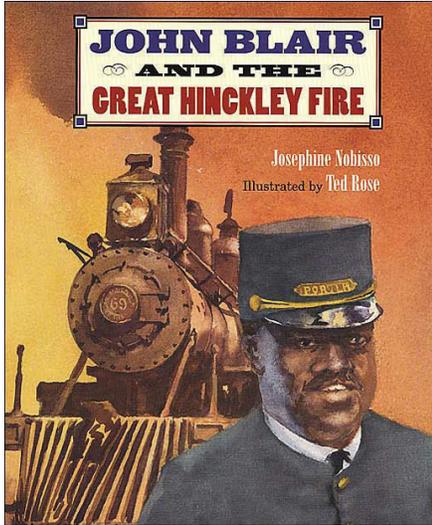
it is Rose who brings the nuances—silent, snowy landscapes; menacing skies—that richly compensate for . . . the occasional gaps in the narrative.<sup>3</sup>

*John Blair and the Great Hinckley Fire*, by Josephine Nobisso, the second children's book that Rose illustrated, tells the story of a brave African American porter who helped save many lives when the train on which he was working was caught up in a horrendous fire-storm near Hinckley, Minnesota, in 1894. Rose's watercolor illustrations are mostly double-page spreads that feature lots of smoky

gray and hot-orange backgrounds and impressionistic renderings of the suffering, terrified people.

In both children's books, one can almost sense the illustrator's strong interest in railroading through his concern for accuracy, his eye for detail and use of vivid colors, and the sense of a train's movement that Rose conveys so ably. His capture of the mood of the story through his illustrations only adds to the telling.

These same characteristics are evident in the "All Aboard! Twentieth Century Trains" stamps (Scott 3333-37), issued by the U.S. Postal Service on 26 August 1999. They feature five classic streamliners.



The Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee wanted

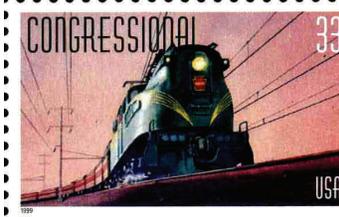
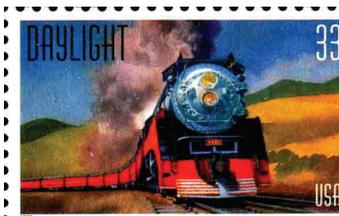
dramatic, three-quarter views of engines coming toward you, as in travel posters of the 1930s and the 1940s, with mountains or rail yards, etc., as part of the setting.<sup>4</sup>

William Withuhn, the Smithsonian Institution's curator of transportation and the author of *Rails Across America*, which Rose also illustrated, recommended the artist for this particular philatelic assignment. Withuhn wrote the text that was printed on the verso of each stamp. For Rose,

the biggest challenge was simplifying the designs so that parts did not get lost at stamp size. . . . The documentation of all [his] photo references was also a time-intensive project, which probably took ten times as long as the actual paintings.<sup>5</sup>

Numerous private and corporate collections include paintings by Ted Rose, and his work has been regularly exhibited at the Zaplin-Lampert Gallery in Santa Fe and at the California State Railroad Museum Store in

Sacramento. Most recently, the Haggerty Museum's Center for Railroad Photography and Art in Madison, Wisconsin, mounted an exhibition titled *Railroads and the American Industrial Landscape: Ted Rose Paintings and Photographs*, which places Rose's work in a broader



historic context. The exhibition, which closed on 29 May 2006, included 27 watercolor paintings and 22 photographs.

Ted Rose died of cancer in July 2002. With his passing the world lost a prolific artist who painted more than 1,000 paintings in less than 20 years.

Those of us fortunate enough to see in person any of the magnificent machines that Ted Rose painted, know how successful he was in triggering fond memories of waiting for and watching (in my case) the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Limited whiz by on its run between New York and Chicago. For railroad fans, young or old, Rose's children's books and train stamps create an invitation to enjoy both.

United States  
Sc3333-3337

## Endnotes

1. *Something about the Author*, Volume 93 (Detroit, Gale Research, 1997), page 178.
2. *The Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps*, 28<sup>th</sup> Edition (New York: HarperResource, 2001), page 454.
3. *Something about the Author*, 178.

4. George Amick, *Linn's U. S. Stamp Yearbook, 1999* (Sidney, Ohio: Linn's Stamp News, 2000), page 195.
5. Ibid., page 196.

### **Cited Books Illustrated by Ted Rose**

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- Nobisso, Josephine. *John Blair and the Great Hinckley Fire*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Withuhn, William L. *Rails Across America: A History of Railroads in North America*. New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1993.

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