



**Backdrops; How to  
Blend into Mid  
and Foreground**



# Artist Experience

- I've been drawing since I was a kid
- Never had any formal art training
- Learned perspective drawing in high school and college
- Dabbled in mixed media art many years ago; colored pencil and oil pastels

# Backdrop Experience

- Started painting backdrops in 1993 in Kansas City. Started with simple shapes and forms.
- Detailed backdrop painting started in 2007 on one of my previous layouts.





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# Photo vs. Painting

# Photo Backdrops



## PROS

- Highly Realistic
- Many manufacturers to choose from
- Can create your own in photo editing software
- Can blend end to end



## CONS

- Can be a bit pricey for online backdrops
- Learning curve for editing software
- Challenging to install

# Painted Backdrops

## PROS

- Completely customizable
- Can be simple to highly detailed
- Less cost vs. online backdrops

I have over 120 feet of backdrop – VERY overwhelming to think about over the years



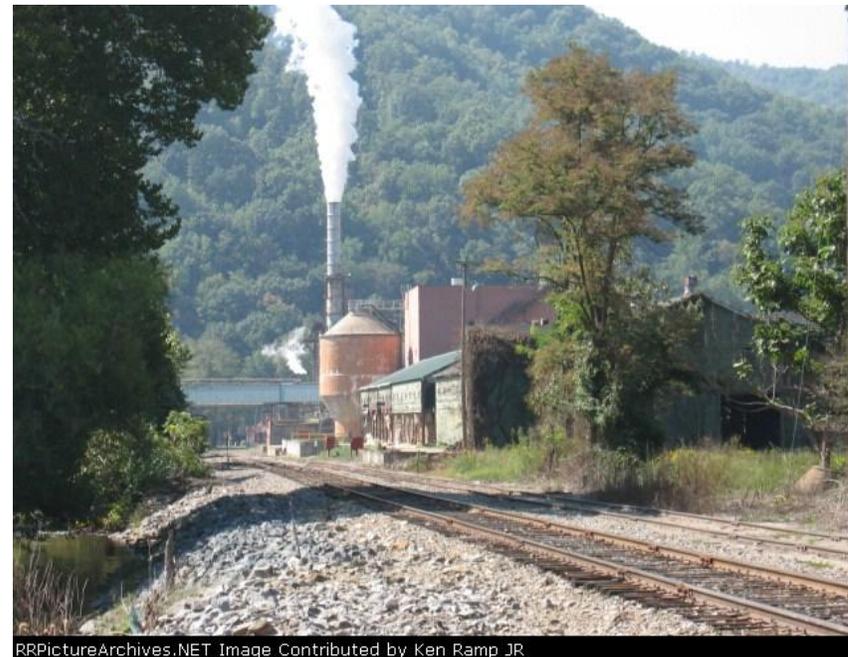
## CONS

- Intimidating if you're not an artist
- Can be time consuming
- May not turn out as you desire

# Viewing perspective

My goals:

- To walk in the layout room and feel like you're in western North Carolina in the Smoky Mountains
- Be as accurate as possible in creating my Layout Design Elements (LDE's)
- Be as realistic as possible
- Include backdrop images that help locate the scenes



# Combining Painted and Photo Backdrops

## REASONS

- Completely customizable
- Painting landscapes allows me to change the perspective without things looking “off”
- Allowed me to use my own photos or Google images



# Painting Techniques - Inspirations

James Michael Smith – Youtuber and hyper-realism artist

Mike Danneman – published, local N-scaler and artist

Tom Johnson – published model railroader and artist

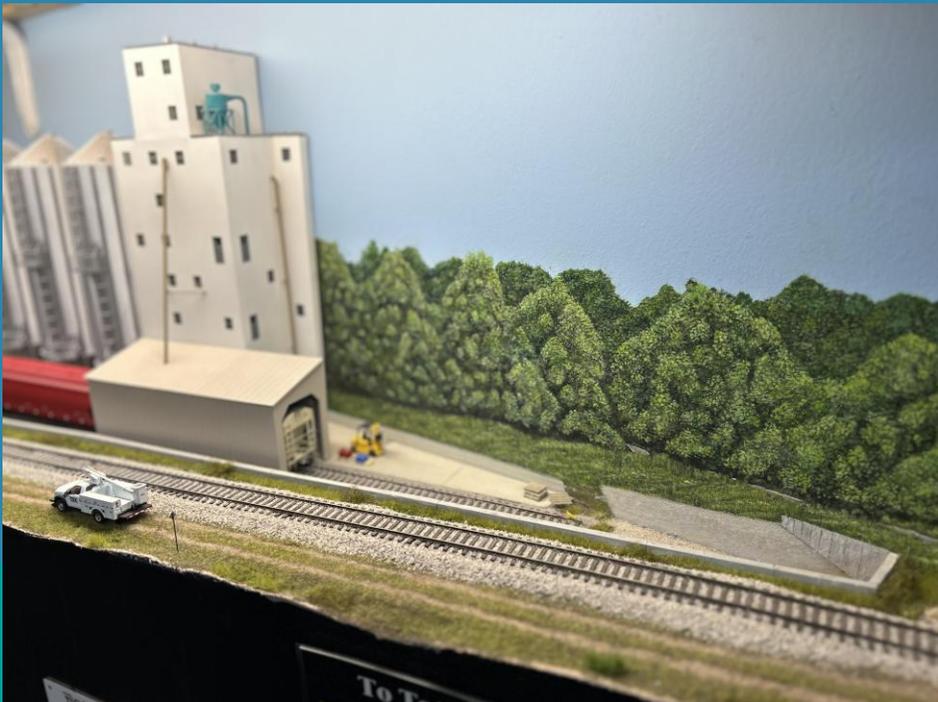


# How Do I Paint Backdrops?

Materials:

- Craft Acrylics
- Tube Acrylics
- Latex Paint – blocking
- Oils
- Brushes – I use cheap ones
- Colored pencils – used to highlight tree branches, pavement curbs, etc.

Doing “level painting” helps me to create a level of sanity in an overwhelming world of backdrops



# Blending into the Layout

Things to consider:

- Type of scenery material being used:
  - Ground cover
  - Trees and shrubs
  - Paving

I try to match the background color to the scenery color.



# Level 1 - Blocking



- Create basic shapes and forms
- Very basic contrast between light and dark
- Latex or acrylic paints that will be covered up at some point

## Level 2 – Adding Detail



- Mix colors to match scenery foliage
- Form tree canopies
- Create more color contrast between light and dark

## Level 3 – Final Details



- Create more defined canopies
- Create more defined foliage

# Blending Photos and Painted Backdrops



- Colors in photos are much brighter than you think
- Experiment with colors off layout prior to attempting on the backdrop

# Photo and Painting Blending



- Colors in photos are much brighter than you think
- Experiment with colors off layout prior to attempting on the backdrop
- Use trees and shrubs to hide seams

# Final Results



# Final Results



# Final Results



# Final Results



# Final Results



# Final Results



# Final Results



# Final Results



# Final Results



# Final Results





Let's Paint!