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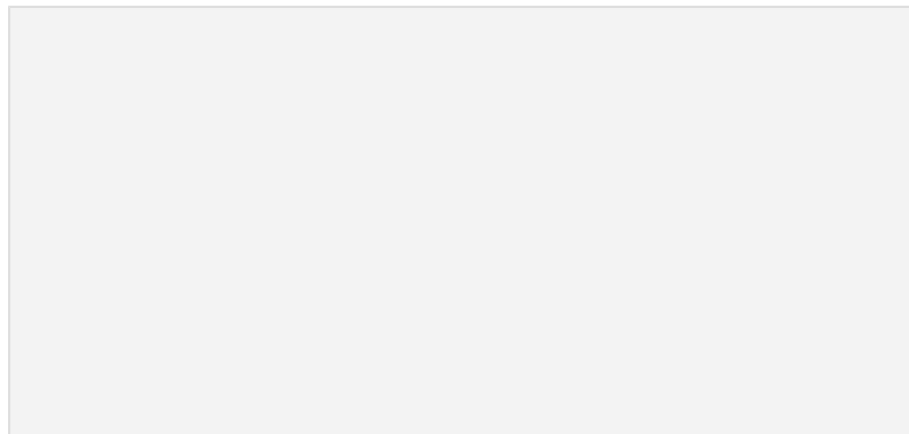
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Posted on January 3, 2009 by revieweditor

An online review of *Art in the Age of Steam: Europe, America and the Railway, 1830-1960*



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Paul Delvaux, Belgian, 1897-1994. "The Iron Age," 1951. Oil on canvas. Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Oostende. Part of "Art in the Age of Steam" at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri, through January 18. All images courtesy of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

[The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art](#)

Kansas City, Missouri

September 13, 2008 – January 18, 2009

by Blair Schulman

The 19th century emerged as an era of many firsts for humankind, but the railroad embodied our determination to link all souls together, near and far. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art hosts an exhibition of this triumph and audacity with more than 100 paintings, prints, drawings, and photographs loaned by more than 60 museums and private collections. Kansas City was selected for *Art in the Age of Steam* after its showing at Walker Art gallery in Liverpool, England, appropriately because of our city's crucial role in westward expansion of the United States.* The exhibition depicts the progress of the steam train: its breadth, daring, fortitude, and pitfalls.



Thomas Proudley Otter, American, 1832-1890. "On the Road," 1860. Oil on canvas. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Purchase: Nelson Trust, 50-1.

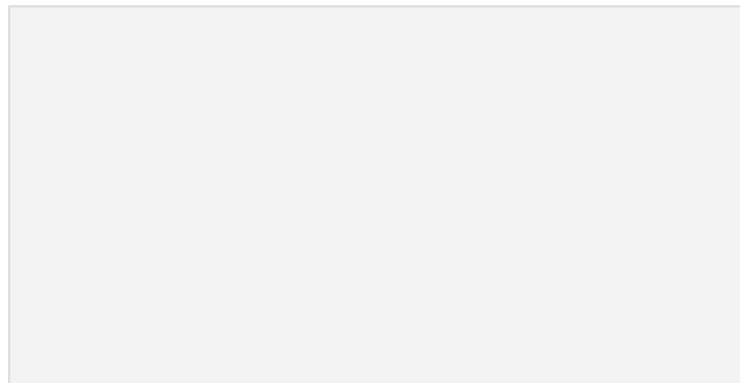
At the beginning: a John Cooke Bourne pencil drawing of the construction of the earliest underground railway is illustrated with white Chinese tempura paint: *Hampstead Road Bridge, 1836*. The whiteness eerily depicts a gritty clarity reminiscent of a Jacob Riis photograph; all the nooks and crannies are nakedly exposed to the light of day. The implication is that of a new dawn for travel.

The scope of work demonstrates how Man readily gave himself up to the scale of his invention, in examples like Gustave Caillebotte's *On the Pont de l'Europe* (1876-77) and Claude Monet's *Gare Saint-Lazare* (1877). The railroad's intrusiveness becomes obvious in works such as Reginald Marsh's *Pavonia-Jersey City* (1924); not everyone was pleased with the trains' barreling through their towns, either, as seen in Theodore Kaufman's *Westward the Star of Empire* (1862).




Edouard Manet, French. 1832-1883. "The Railway," 1873. Oil on canvas. Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., gift of Horace Havemeyer in memory of his mother, Louisine W Havemeyer.

Dickensian references are seen in Marcus Stone's work (after the style of William Powell Frith) *The Railway Station* (1862) and in Joachim Sorrolla y Bastida's *Another Margeurite!* (1892). In lieu of theatre, life itself is both drama and comedy as seen in Abraham Solomon's *First Class: The Meeting ... and at First Meeting Loved* (1885).





Adolphe Mouron Cassandre, French, 1901-1968. "Nord Express," 1927. Color lithograph. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Modernism Collection, gift of Norwest Bank Minnesota.

The work in the exhibition also causes one to observe the intrusion of the train in ways more psychological rather than physical, such as depicted in Rene Magritte's *Time Transferred* (1938). The inherent romance of living with the steam train, however, is the sentiment most frequently offered, such as with Edward Hopper's *Railroad Train* (190 ) and Edouard Manet's *The Railway* (1873).

Even a great romance, with all its shortcomings — like the strict adherence to

the timetable (note James Tissot's circa-1872 *Gentleman in a Railway Carriage*) — must come to an end. Fittingly, the finale of this exhibition is O. Winston Link's *Hot Shot Eastbound, laeger, West Virginia* (1956), a black-and-white photograph of relaxed Americans in large cars viewing a fighter jet on a drive-in screen while a locomotive, already obsolete against the automobiles escalating tailfins, comes roaring past, sending plumes of smoke into the night, demanding one final gasp at attention, aware its time has already gone.



Pierre Fix-Masseau, French. 1905-1994. "Exactitude," 1932.

Color Lithograph. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Modernism



Collection, gift of Norwest Bank Minnesota.

***Andrew J. Russell, *East and West Shaking Hands at Laying of Last Rail*, photograph taken at Golden Spike Ceremony at Promontory Summit, Utah, when the Union Pacific and Central Pacific lines celebrated the first transcontinental railway on May 10, 1869. Even today, Kansas City is the second-largest rail-hub in the United States, with four Class-I railroads: Union Pacific, Burlington Northern Santa Fe, Kansas City Southern, and Norfolk Southern.**

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