

On the Right Track

*Accelerating My
Visual Art Career*

By

Matthew Jablonski

An artwork can easily find its way to a much wider audience, far beyond its creator's anticipation. In early 2025, I completed a rendition of the Western Maryland Scenic Railway's (WMSR) Station in Cumberland, MD (fig. 1), corroborating that theory. If you're interested, I've authored an in-depth article explaining my artistic process [here](#). Once I finished it, I emailed it to WMSR's Executive Director, Wes Heinz, a keynote speaker for the Western Maryland Railway's Historical Society's (WMRHS) annual 2022 convention in Cumberland.

He responded asking if I would postpone my artwork's publication with promotional ideas for their September RailFest 2025, a series of railroad-related events, held in Cumberland. "Yes!" I replied. He connected me with his marketing person, TJ, who agreed my style had huge potential. But his idea of a promo poster had a photo of their steam locomotive, text underneath and with the Maryland flag in the background, symbolizing WMSR's diversity and historical initiatives (fig. 9.). Unlike his photo, my rendition had diesel locomotives. "How could we combine my style?" we pondered.



Fig. 1. Here's my rendition of the Western Maryland Railway's Cumberland, MD Station.



Fig. 2. This photo was my primary reference during its creation. I used my Stylized Perspective Survey & Blind Visual Study—Combined method, explained [here](#).

Fig. 3. The Western Maryland Railway offered freight and passenger service in MD, WV and PA from 1852 until 1973. It was absorbed by Chessie System to later become CSXT. Since 1988, a 15-mile remnant of its right-of-way has been used as a tourist railroad, between Cumberland and Frostburg, MD.



Due to the steam engine's long length, there is nowhere it can be reversed on the WMSR's right-of-way. Inadvertently, my artwork's vantage point is the exact opposite to how one may view the steam locomotive in front of the station in any good promotional image. Furthermore, revising my current train consist, by hand-drawing it, would be a massive undertaking. Despite this, we came up with some fascinating ideas, before reaching an even better solution.

TJ noticed something about my chosen perspective I'd completely overlooked: Its vantage point could be inverted while retaining its station's features (fig. 5.), with just revising only the background to a bare minimum. If we found a photo of the steam locomotive, portraying it from a similar perspective (fig. 6.), I could simply trace the engine's outlines, omit the "negative space" and digitally paste it into my artwork. Then we could work from there (fig. 7.), we first thought.



Fig. 5. Here was TJ's brilliant idea of inverting my original artwork.



Fig. 6. This is my 2017 photo of Engine #1309, before transforming it from raster to vector, then tracing it in Photoshop.



Fig. 4. In the early-stages of our project, I made this preliminary promo poster, thinking that it might satisfy both of our endeavors. Note that, despite having the steam engine vectorized (like my style), its photographic appearance didn't change enough to flow with my artistic process.



Fig. 7. We found my style with a photo-like feature just wouldn't harmonize.

Imagery with ample compression in the features' colors yet retaining their distinguishability and a wide color contrast work the best with my style. Because of the steam locomotive's complexity, we thought my transforming an existing jpeg photo of it into my vector style, simply using a jpeg-to-vector app, would be the easiest solution. Once digitally cut out and laid on top of my version without the diesel engines, its photographic appearance remained, because of its intricacy.

Not quitting quite yet, I tried to mitigate the engine's realism, by adding my own vector steam (fig. 8.). Both of us easily saw where this scenario was heading, concluding that any simplification of such a feature, using my vector style's method, would result in visual disconnection. By then, we knew ANY photo's features just couldn't be compressed to our favor.

At the end, we decided to use BOTH of our original versions, as is (fig. 9-10.). My image may have very well occurred at their station in the late 1960s, while his steam locomotive would have depicted now, or late in the first half of the 20th century. Our decision to use both—authentically—showed our collaboration, working to our advantage, and how the Western Maryland Railway's colorfully unique history still thrives today.



Fig. 8. With my optimism, I tried making one more version by mitigating the realism, by adding my own steam but without much luck.



Fig. 10. This opportunity showed me how I can be a successful artist while working with others in a completely new perspective.



Fig. 9. TJ decided to use his original image of WMSR's steam engine for a portion of promoting the event (shown here), while my rendition would represent the Western Maryland's diesel era.