

Charlie Hunter Artist



Photo Credit: Jason R. Henkel

Charlie Hunter
"drippy paintings of rotting american infrastructure"
This is not the Vermont of fall leaves and covered bridges the tourists come to see, but the Vermont of abandoned Plymouths, lost industries and declining family farms. And, Hunter captures that everyday beauty with realism and sympathy, his eye eager for the telling detail, the unusual viewpoint, and the unexpected angle. —Robert Smith, Art New England
Hunter Studio, 17 Rockingham St., Bellows Falls, 802-463-3669, hunter-studio.com.



I grew up in Weathersfield Center in the house built by my great, great, great-grandfather. It was idyllic, with ponds for swimming, pigs, chickens, sheep and startlingly accessible ways to injure oneself in the barn. Then, like most of us with an ounce of gumption, I moved away for a while. Not that there's anything wrong with Vermont at all; it's just that when you're 20, you've got to see the wider world. So I did. And when I was done, I moved back to Vermont.

I chose to settle in Bellows Falls. Bellows Falls is an old mill town on the banks of the Connecticut River where International Paper was founded in 1890, left in 1920, and it was pretty much downhill after that. Every region has a town that becomes the butt of jokes. When I was growing up, it was Bellows Falls.

By the time I moved back, there were some interesting alterations to the landscape. A fellow who had purchased a house in Bellows Falls back then and had moved up was now working hard to show the economic necessity of a thriving arts scene in a town. And some motivated beer-heres were banding together with the motivated come-heres and making a vital, quirky little arts scene that was blending seamlessly into the blue-collar ethos of the town.

Bellows Falls, in short, has pretty much everything I like in a place—smart, engaging people devoid of pretension, a defiant quirky attitude leavened with a self-deprecating sense of humor, great 19th century architecture, no traffic problems to speak of, no strip development, a daily Amtrak train running south to New York and up to Burlington, affordable housing for artists, families and anybody else, a spectacular Square (it looks like Italy), locally-owned hardware and clothing stores, big-screen movie house and a really nice diner. And so on.

Some of us started putting on concerts, and pretty soon we had a reputation for being one of the live music hot spots in the region. Another crowd got together and formed a community radio station (WOOL-FM, 100.1, "Black Sheep Radio"—see what I mean about a sense of humor?), where you can now hear everything from Democracy Now to Fundamental Bluegrass to Japanese Pop Music (that last is deejayed by two 13-year-old girls). And we've just started the fourth year of our Farmers' Market, which takes place every Friday afternoon, and has become the place to relax and socialize at the end of the workweek. In the evenings, we've got two open mics, a song-critique group, a drumming circle, several poetry collaborations, frequent touring-artist concerts...there's too much to do, actually.

A typical Friday could start with a Cyndy Wrap at Cafe Loco (a Cyndy Wrap is a New England take on breakfast burritos of New Mexico and Colorado. Cafe Loco is a most excellent bistro located within the fantastic greenery and produce The Last Stand, Dan Harlow's exquisite organic farm-stand). Work at the desk for a few hours, breaking for lunch at Fat Frank's (their burger is amazing, hormone-free, all-natural, very large and amazingly seasoned. If you like french fries, they hand cut theirs and a lot of people swear by them) or Vermont Pretzel (Turkey Reuben if it's on the menu, or a BLT) or Boccelli's (whatever Sharon thinks you should have), then head down to the Bellows Falls railroad yards for some painting. The Bellows Falls rail yard is great—an actual, functioning junction of two rail lines—

Photo Credit: Marjorie Menner

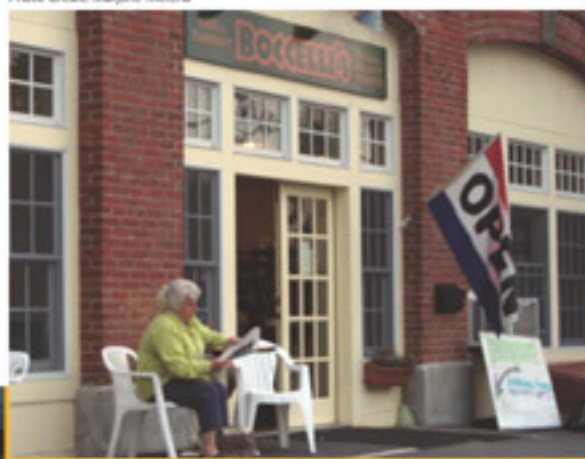


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filled with chugging engines, shuttling cuts of freight cars, the seasonal Green Mountain Flyer and the daily Amtrak VERMONT at noon and 6 p.m. It's a great place to paint—Edward Hopper would like it a lot. Late afternoon, it's time to break and head over to the Farmers' Market, catch some live music, socialize a bit, stock up on the week's groceries and bike home. Usually in the evening there's either a gathering at someone's house or a show at Boccelli's...and you can bike or walk to just about all of this. There are times where I won't start my car for three days in a row. Heading into town? The choice is to hop on your bike (leaving the house



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Train Depot, Bellows Falls
unlocked) or find the damn keys, try to find a place to park and so on. Get a bite to eat? Aside from Subway and Dunkin' Donuts, you can't get a franchise meal in town. Buying groceries for the week? You can get just about everything at the Farmers' Market, except for olive oil, salt and seltzer, and you can get those for cheap over at the Dented Can across the river. Clothing? They have it at Sam's (and there's free popcorn). Gotta go to New York? Would you rather fight traffic all the way from Brattleboro south or read a book on the train? You're welcome to sit at our table, anytime.