

ROBERT BLITZER

Sound Bridge, 2016
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 51 x 51 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

EDWARD PORTER

Right Now

Bill's wife, Cindy, was being a pain in the ass, and it was killing him. It was my fault. I'd been out with them and a bunch of other folks Saturday night, and at one point we were at the bar together ordering and she dropped another hint about wanting to know exactly how Bill spent his Sunday afternoons with the boys, because she was afraid it was a different kind of train going into a different kind of tunnel, ha ha ha. So I offered that she come by and see what we were up to—whatever she said, our gang wasn't stag by any means. As soon as the words were out of my mouth, Bill looked at me like, "Are you *insane?*" and I knew I'd fucked up.

We were in my basement, Bill and Cindy, Eloise, Pete, and me. I was pretty proud of my layout—I'd been working on it for years. It was your basic figure eight, with detours on both loops. The tracks ran through a town on one end, and went up onto a hill and around a lake on the other. Along the way there were overpasses, road crossings, a water and coal station, and a farm with its own stop. I'd put a lot of work into the details: the cars, the cows, the manger scene in front of the church. Lots of time with foam core, an X-Acto knife, tweezers, and Crazy Glue. Lots of money on Revell and Testors. Today, we were going to run Eloise's stock on my line. Her engine was a Legacy two-truck Shay, classic black with silver-and-yellow detailing. The Legacy features included DynaChuff and Real-Time Quilling Whistle, and we were keen to hear them, but before Eloise could even get her log cars hooked up, Cindy started in.

"Why is it all fifties stuff? The cars look like Elvis movies."

"That's just how it is," said Bill.

"You should have modern trains. You should have a bullet train. One side to the other in half a second. Peyoww!" She made a zooming motion with her hand. Her other hand had a beer in it, and she spilled a little onto the pasture. I'd have to blot that very carefully after she'd left, then seal it and respray. Not that it would match perfectly.

"It's not really about speed," Bill said. "It's more about the journey."

"Really? So where does the train go?"

"What do you mean?" I said.

"What's its *purpose?*"