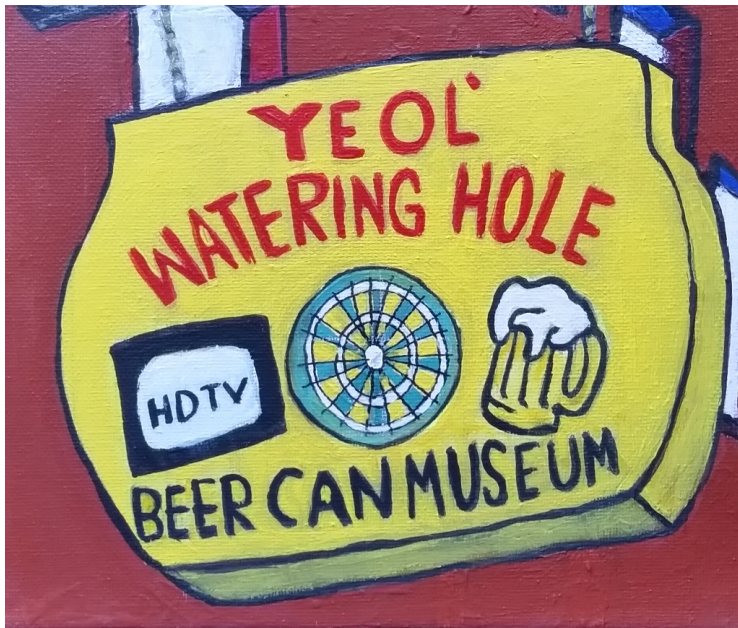


# Birds of Mars Digest

## Number Ten

January 2022



**The 8 by 10 Series**  
**January 2022 Collection [41-49]**  
**Paintings & Comments by Chris Gentes**

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## **Introduction**

It's January 29 right now. It is snowing. A week ago I was writing the introduction for the December 2021 *Digest*. Now here it is already time to get the next one together. I've got some paintings that are done and some that are almost done. I started writing comments about those this morning.

I was thinking earlier that maybe I should wait a month and make a January—February combined issue. The main reasoning being that I don't have any music interviews for this issue. But that doesn't matter. It would be nice if I had some interviews, but it really wasn't until last week that I realized that the interviews could be shorter. I had been thinking thirty minutes, but now I am thinking maybe just ten or fifteen minutes. Even thirty minutes is probably more time than most people have available for an interview.

So rather than delay until next month and have a combined issue, I've decided to spend the rest of this month ( a few days) completing the paintings that I'm still working on and getting the comments finalized, and just leaving it at that.

It's February 3 today. I decided to finish all the paintings I'm working on and have this issue for January and not wait to combine it into a January-February one. Today I finished the two Tim's paintings and now I'm motivated to finish the next ones. I hope to have this all done by Monday. This was a really important month for me for painting. Feb 6 now last wrap up. Feb 7 final edits.

Chris Gentes  
Northampton, Massachusetts  
January 2022

## **The 8 by 10 Series**

### **January 2022 Collection [41-49]**

All paintings are acrylic on stretched canvas except as otherwise notated in the main text. Size is either 8x10” or 10x8” (height is the first number, then width).

This collection of nine paintings made in January 2022 are interesting in that they show the developmental progression from a mainly clean edge style of painting (based on artwork derived from earlier styles) towards a looser drawing/watercolor style, showing elements of the process of the making of the art. Showing elements of the process involved in the creation of an artwork is a stylistic genre that I’ve used in earlier series of artworks, for example “Recent Stencils” (2014).

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19, 25–32: *Birds of Mars Digest Number Eight* (Nov. 2022)  
33–40: *Birds of Mars Digest Number Nine* (Dec. 2022)

## **The 8 by 10 Series [41—49]**

### **Comments by Chris Gentes**

I began painting **41 Color Study Four** back in December. I was planning on exploring color mixing experiments using green, purple, blue and red. I started with green. I designed a flower pattern and proceeded to start filling in the six inner petals with different greens. I put an inner circle where I mixed lighter values of green. It was all the greens together in one place. It looked horrid.

I reacted to this realization in a less than positive way. As art, having those greens together in that manner, within the composition of the painting in that way, didn't look appealing to me for some reason. It was pushing me away. I gave up on the idea of having it be a painting in the series. It didn't seem like art, and it created a negative feeling. Why would I want that to be art that I had made?

I worked on a few more paintings and occasionally I would add a color to this one. I would fill in a petal here or there to see what happened. It evolved slowly. Then it looks good. I forgot to mention that when I had made the flower design and all of the petals I had also painted an outer area that was gray. Beyond that towards the edge of the canvas were areas where I had mixed different greens together to see if I could create a new green. Then I finished it quickly. I still plan to make more color studies with the purples and the reds and blues.

I decided to make a ring of magenta and red around the middle random color petals. Inside that is the ring of green pigments right out of the tube—two coats. Then a lighter mix of these greens closer to the center. I used black, white and different shade of gray to outline areas for comparison purposes. Toward the corner edges are little sketches—improvisations. I got the idea to make these bees instead of abstractions, but I just left them how they were because I wanted to finish the other paintings. It's all one big painting.



41 Color Study 4. 10x8". Acrylic on Canvas.

During and for a short time after the \$20 art sale of December 2021 I took a break from painting. Eventually, after a few weeks I decided to make three new paintings. The idea at the time was that I would make a few new versions of some of the previously made painting, but quicker. I felt and believed then that “Now, certainly, I’d be able to paint one in under two hours”—and that would make it a sustainable effort. It would be worth the time. So I started right away on **42 Boathouse 4**. What eventually happened was it took longer to paint than I had anticipated or hoped for.

The same thing for the next painting—*43 Alvin 2*. Eventually, toward the end of January, I figured out what happened. I had figured out what was preventing me from making these paintings quickly. It is a rather simple explanation, but it wasn’t apparent to me at the time.

The reason why it was taking so long to make these paintings was that the manner in which I was painting them, that is to say the actual application of paint in specific ways a specific number of times, was in such a manner that it actually took that long to paint them. It took that long to do it. I couldn’t paint it in less time unless I physically painted it quicker. I’d have to paint quicker or paint for less time.

So I realize now that was the reason. It may seem obvious now, but it wasn’t then. So I had to adjust to that.

I was also having all of the usual ‘boathouse painting troubles’ with this one. The sides of the buildings that are in shadows. They always seem troublesome. I never know

what to paint. I end up working that area over and over. The same thing with the windows and the doors on the front of the buildings. I painted over that a bunch of times trying to get it to look right. It was taking too much time. I left out a lot of the smaller things like the chimneys and wind vanes. I also left out the people walking on the path. Otherwise I like how it looks. There is a lot to look at. Eventually I felt like it was done, but it seems that if this was to look a certain way I would have to continue working on it some more and add some more detail.



42 Boathouse 4. 8x10". Acrylic on Canvas.

**43 Alvin 2** was another painting that I thought would take a few short hours to make, but it ended up taking a lot longer. And even with all of that extra time it hardly seems done now. I painted over parts of it quite a lot. The window above the marquee was painted a few times. Eventually it got completed. I really think this painting has a lot of nice parts to it. I love how it looks right above the doorways where there is hint of light from chandeliers being cast through that window.

It is weird writing about this painting. What is there to say? I added a landscape on the upper left. Usually this is a building. Is it the sun or is it the moon? Is that a reflection? Is it dusk or early morning? Is it dusk and the moon isn't quite full yet? The sun and moon both in the sky at the same time—both about as round as they can be. Or maybe that is the sun. There is no actual answer. I didn't have anything in mind as I painted that part of it other than a few fleeting notions. Something was occupying my thoughts at that time, but it wasn't a definitive anything.

This opens up the doorway into something I have written about extensively [see *Birds of Mars Reader* (2019)]. It has to do with whether the viewer needs to know anything about the intention or mindset of the artist when looking at a work of art. The answer is no. It isn't necessary. The answer is also yes, sometimes it may be desirable.

One reason is that whatever it is the artist experienced can never be fully communicated. There are



always pieces that will remain unknowable. It is a problem of the logistics of communicating information. But, it doesn't matter. A person looking at a painting will have their own unique reaction, completely distinct from that of the artist. If the artist wanted to communicate a specific thought or emotion how would they do this? They could just say what it was other than relying on the art and hoping the viewer would figure it out. It can be a lot of other things too.



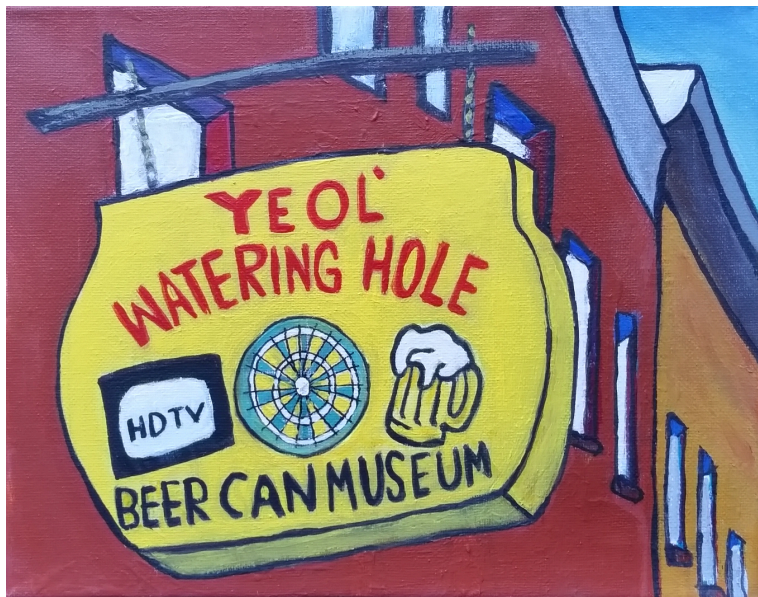
43 Alvin 2. 8x10". Acrylic on Canvas.

I made this painting, **44 Beer Can Museum**, because during the \$20 painting sale a few paintings I had made of this image were popular. This one took a long time to make. It is a close-up of part of those popular paintings so I had to rework the composition. That took a lot. And since I was painting a painting of my own art I had to remind myself that I didn't have to recreate it exactly. It just had to look good. What I had done when I had made the initial painting from the photograph was to eliminate a lot of the detail. A lot of that was just arbitrary decisions in the moment anyway. So I was recreating something that was arbitrary, and not even an accurate representation of the actual sign or the buildings.

I just kept repainting over this a few times. Each time it would get more refined. I would glaze over the sign in yellow and then darken all of the letters and pictures again with opaque pigments. Then in the big areas I would add some painterly yellow. I would just keep doing that, and if I had done it a few more times it would really get a crisp look. But this is a look too. I spent a lot of time getting the yellow on the bottom of the sign to look a certain way. Duller.

None of this painting makes any sense. There is the big iron bar holding the sign. But it seems to be floating. It doesn't seem attached to the building toward the left. And what is holding the sign? Are those chains or metal rods? The windows are all messed up. There is a blue area—the top of the window frame, and then red area next to that (sometimes). Plus it is all muddy looking. The yellow is all

muddy looking. I personally like how that looks. I painted it like that on purpose. It kind of reminds me that it is art. Anyway, my hope was that this painting would only take a couple hours and that somebody would quickly buy it. But what happened was that it took over six hours to paint, and as of now I haven't found anyone to buy it for even just \$40. So it seems that \$20 really is how much people like to spend on art. I really knew that I had to figure out how to make these paintings quicker.



44 Beer Can Museum. 8x10". Acrylic and Ink on Canvas.

What I thought was that I would try again and make a quick painting of **45 Tim's Books**. And it was going to be such an easy quick endeavor that I would make two at the same time (see also *46 Haymarket & Tim's*). What happened of course is that it took forever to make these two paintings, and even before they were anywhere close to being done they looked bad. But I had put in way too much time to consider starting over.

Meanwhile I had figured out that it was my process of painting which was causing the paintings to take too much time while creating them. In the back of my mind I was thinking about how I could solve this imbroglio. I decided that I should just paint smaller paintings. Instead of 8x10 inches I should maybe just paint 5x7 inches. This was less than half the surface area. It should take half as less time. So I started planning for that.

Meanwhile I still had the two *Tim's Books* paintings to finish. Too much detail. Way too much detail. That was the problem. They didn't look right. I wanted to be get started on the new painting idea—the 5x7 idea, but instead I still had these paintings to finish. They were holding everything else up.

So I waited. I put off working on them until I figured out how to finish them. Eventually I had another realization. It is fairly simple. I thought that maybe I should not use small brushes. That way I wouldn't end up painting smaller and smaller details as a painting progressed. If I limited my brush size to, say a "0", then I would limit how small I could paint. No way to paint tiny

marks. *This* is what was making them take so long to finish. So I had that idea in my mind as I sat down to finish the two Tim's Books paintings. Bigger brush in hand. It made it easier suddenly.

As I looked at the half-completed painting I wondered what I should do. The form was there. The colors were there. I decided to do some glazing with white, mid-gray and black. I would glaze over big areas of



45 Tim's Book. 8x10". Acrylic on Canvas.

color with one of these shades—but thinly, and just to slightly lighten or darken the underlying colors. So I started doing that and it was working. Then I did other painterly things that naturally followed. Everything was going right and I quickly finished the painting.

As mentioned previously, **46 Haymarket & Tim's** was supposed to have been a quick painting. It ended up taking a long time. Plus, at a certain point, it was holding up my forays into the newer style I was hoping to begin working with—the idea of painting a 5x7 inch image on the 8x10 inch canvas using only a “0” or larger sized brushes. And to also leave a lot of space and to show parts of the decision making process within the art itself. And to have it look more like a drawing than a painting, or to have it look like a watercolor maybe.

Having figured out to use no smaller than a “0” brush, and having decided to experiment with glazing using various densities of white, gray and black paints, I sat down to finish this painting. I no longer was worried about painting tiny details. The brushes were too big anyways. It simplified everything.

I want to mention how I went actually went through all of my brushes and physically removed the tiny ones and put them out of view. Now I wouldn't accidentally use one or think of a reason why I would on purpose. Everything had changed in a good way. I was finishing the *Tim's Books* paintings without too much difficulty, and I had a new approach to next two paintings—the ones with the 5x7 images. So I just wrapped it up at a certain point.



46 Haymarket & Tim's. 10x8". Acrylic on Canvas.

Here's an amazing synchronicity that happened as I was painting the two *Tim's Books* paintings. I partly decided to paint them because my friend Julia Adamo [see *Birds of Mars Digests Number Five & Six*] was working there one summer. Well, the book store had recently closed in January, so I felt I should make a few paintings to document that it had been there, plus maybe, I thought, Julia would like one of them.

So one day in the middle of working on the paintings I went over there to get a closer look at a part of the building, and I noticed that they had taken the big yellow sign down. Now uncovered and visible was the remnants of the sign of the store that had been there previously: *Adams—Jewelry & Sculpture*.





But the sign, now weathered, read as if it was “Adamo”—the last name of Julia who used to work there, and whom had also submitted works to previous *Birds of Mars Digests*. An amazing coincidence! I plan to make a painting of this.

Also in *Birds of Mars Digest Number Three* there is a whole section that Julia contributed describing a series of synchronicities that she had experienced while reading *Ghost Town* (2020). These had to do with serendipity regarding songs called *Ghost Town* references suddenly appearing, in particular relating to The Specials’ song *Ghost Town*.

There are so many examples of synchronicities that I have written about in previous books and digests that at a certain point I decided to stop writing about them, since they sometimes occur moment to moment, and documenting them would just be documenting each minute of the day. But sometimes a synchronicity, like this one, is so amazing that it warrants documentation.

I wonder though if this is a synchronicity per se. It is more like a revealing. The whole time Julia was working there, there was a hidden sign on the store which closely matched her name. That part is cool, but was hidden. Eventually, while I am painting a painting of the bookstore, this was revealed. It is kind of more of a curious coincidence than a synchronicity. Even more curious is how the s on the sign looks more like an o, thus matching her name. I definitely want to make a painting of this photo showing all of this in the newer style.

I like to keep track of how much time I spend painting day to day and on any specific painting. **Z01 January Time Board** is the first time I kept track of this information on a gessobord; usually it is on a drawing sheet of one kind or another. The thing with keeping records in that manner (on the paper sheets) is the actual keeping of the records—that is to say the actual writing down of the information on that particular piece of paper, can become something in addition to the painting. An additional task that can become annoying and influence the art creation. I finally got the idea to keep all of that info on one of these gessobords. I only seem to be painting a dozen paintings a month so all of the information is easily contained on one.

So this is the ‘time board’ from January 2022. I started using this earlier in the month, before the 9th, but it was on the 9th that I painted over what I had previously written, and came up with this format of keeping the info. Initially I was going to start a new numbering system (22##), but then I decided to just continue with the other numbering system since it is the same basic series of paintings. The main reason for doing this is to track how long it takes to make a painting. Alvin 2 was 300 minutes—five hours. Beer Can Museum was 6 hours. Etcetera.

The two Tim’s paintings were started in the old style. The old style takes more time. They are transitional paintings in that they were begun in the old style, and then halfway through I experimented on them with the new style, and then quickly finished them.

3=180 4=240  
5=300

#	TITLE	1=60	117	114	
	JULIE	080	125		
2201 (220)	BOATHOUSE	105	160	15, 5, 15, 15.	1. DRAW 7. GRAY
2202	TIMS BOOKS 1	105	175 160	10, 10, 6, 25, 55.	3. color 4. shade
2203 (300)	KALVIN 2	80	220	40, 15, 25.	5. DETAIL 6. WHITE
2204 (350)	YE OLD BEER	165	295	30, 15, 10.	
2205	1/11 HATMARK □		70	35, 35, 75, 30	1MS
2206	1/16 GUILLOT 2	5	10	45	4 5 6
2207	1/17 PACKARDS	10	15	15, 25, 50.	
2208					
2209					
2210					
2211					
2212					
FROM JAN 1-22 NOT IN USE ↑ ↑ 1/29 2/3					
45	TIMS BOOKS	335	30.	15.	
46	TIMS + HAYM.	245	25.	10.	

Z01 January Time Board. Acrylic Marker on Gessobord. 14x11 inches.

Meanwhile I had started with my new idea of the smaller image size on a new painting: **47 Guitar 2**. The idea was to just cover a 5x7 inch area with the image. To create a whole new look. I had done a lot of contemplating and had devised a new working method. I would allow myself just two hours for these paintings. Thirty minutes each: Drawing, underpainting in gray, colors, and then details. That was the plan. It is good to have a plan, but it is ok to abandon it if it isn't working out, which is what I ended up doing in this case.

But, unfortunately, after a few days it seemed to be taking just as long to paint it. It wasn't going to be done in two hours, that was for sure. Eventually I realized that the reason the paintings were taking so long to paint was that I was still painting the details in a photorealistic way and that takes a lot of time. And I was using small brushes. I decided to not use small brushes. This was my big revelation.

And this changed everything. Now I was approaching the painting with a larger minimum size for detail. I would have to hint at small details in different ways. The smallest brush I am using now is a "0". Having the image in the center really freed up my brushwork as well. I could paint the image out of the edges, or I could paint the background in. It is dynamic. There are more ways to be painterly and have it look like art and to show some of the process involved in making the painting.

So, about two hours into this painting I shifted gears and worked with the larger brushes. Everything went well. I spent an hour working on it one morning. There were a lot of things that were wrong still, but fixing them was just an academic formality. While looking at the painting I realized that I had put in enough time and that it was done. I discovered that by turning it upside-down it looked like art in a very unique way. It didn't have to register as photo-realistic. I also considered signing this one since it seemed like there was enough space.



47 Guitar 2. 10x8". Acrylic on Canvas.

**48 Masonic Street** is not the first artwork I've made of this location. In 1997 I made a version of the laundromat. I've also made paintings of Packards, and of course the Woodstar which is also on Masonic Street. I've painted the old firehouse too. And of course the *History of Women in Northampton* mural. That has shown up a number of times in my artwork through the years. There is one painting I made of Packard's and the mural is reflected in the windows.

This painting was made along with *47 Guitar 2* in that both were started and finished at about the same time. Also, this painting is similar to the guitar painting in that it was begun with the image being smaller toward the center of the canvas, though still otherwise being painted with small brushes. As mentioned previously, half-way through this painting I didn't use a brush smaller than a "0". That meant a lot of painting over things and loosening up the way things looked. It freed me up in a lot of ways. Details were no longer on my mind. Details take time. I was now free to really focus on tonal ranges and compositional elements. And since I was using larger brushes I was covering more territory on the canvas quicker, and it was taking less time to move the painting toward completion. And that was great since it was one of my goals.

At one point this painting was all grayscale. A gray underpainting. I had already put in a few hours of time working on it. The time had come to add color. So I started doing that and the painting slowly changed. I glazed over some areas with color. I put the colors on

opaquely in other areas. I spent an hour doing that. When it was finished I hung it on the wall and looked at it. I decided that it was finished. Sure, there were things that I could change or improve, but I had just spent an hour adding the colors, and if these were going to be two hour paintings then that is how long I would have had to have done what I just did. So I think it is good enough how it is. Plus I was ready to move on to the next painting.



48 Masonic Street. 8x10". Acrylic on Canvas.

I had finally finished the two previous paintings—the transitional paintings from the old style to this new style. I had a new plan and was ready to put it into action. I started **49 Beer Can Sign** with everything I had decided upon in mind. I wasn't going to use a brush smaller than a "0". As I painted I would think 'drawing/watercolor' for the underpainting. Then I decided to think of the first stage as an 'under-wash' not an 'underpainting'.

So I approached this painting in this new way and it felt pretty good, like I had finally figured something out. I had a more focused intention, with a deeper awareness of time and what could be achieved with less of it. I painted a quick under wash and it looked good.

Then I decided to wait until I had finished all of the other paintings before working on this one some more. Finally I was caught up and was able to look at it. I decided right away to start adding color since that big sign was right there in the middle of the painting waiting for some yellow. Then I added some blue for the sky. Then I added the colors of the buildings—yellow ochre and burnt sienna. Then some green lines for the awning. After only thirty minutes it looked good. It had a certain style. After thirty more minutes it seemed finished. I spent a little bit more time working on the lettering and then cleaned up the transitional areas. And then it was done. I had achieved my goal—a nice painting in just over an hour. I already have one commission lined up so now I just have to continue.





49 Beer Can Sign. 10x8". Acrylic on Canvas.

## **Drawings [01-35]**

January 1—31, 2022

This section is a list of the ‘drawings’ that I made in January 2022. I use this method for creating and documenting ‘drawings’ in lieu of sketchbooks or other random methods. This method developed through the years. The current system is to use 8.5x11” regular copy paper to document any idea, study, drawing, or whatever—a ‘drawing.’ I date and number each one sequentially and keep them organized in a folder. Then I list them in the digest. Eventually I scan them too. It keeps everything organized and accessible. I have forty old sketchbooks of various sizes and there are hundreds of drawings and artworks in those and I don’t remember much of it. It would be nice if all of that had been created in this manner instead. Everything would already be organized.

Anyway, most of the drawings last fall (2021) were studies for paintings in the *8 by 10 Series*. By mid December I had stopped making new paintings so I also stopped making new studies. As 2022 began I was focused on trying to find a way to paint paintings quicker. Since I wasn’t making studies or new paintings I had more time on my hands to devote to something else. I decided to focus on music in some manner. I ended up starting a month-long project of writing out chord progressions to songs I was performing, writing out the lyrics, putting the chord progressions in numeric format, and subsequently putting all of this data into a grid for more analysis. This is an ongoing activity. Here is a list of those sheets from January 2022.

- 001 Tubs Index
- 002 Misty
- 003 Here's That Rainy Day
- 004 It Don't Mean a Thing...
- 005 Autumn Leaves
- 006 Misty 2
- 007 4 Bar Forms
- 008 Cherokee
- 009 Out of Nowhere
- 010 Sugar
- 011 My Funny Valentine
- 012 Set One
- 013 Alice in Wonderland
- 014 April in Paris
- 015 A Silly Song
- 016 Blue Bossa
- 017 Ruby My Dear
- 018 Harmonic Progressions (Kostka/Payne)
- 019 In a Sentimental Mood
- 020 Limehouse Blues
- 021 All of Me
- 022 There is no Greater Love
- 023 So What/All Blues/Minor Blues/Blues Forms
- 024 Autumn in New York
- 025 Dear Old Stockholm
- 026 Body and Soul
- 027 Girl From Ipanema
- 028 Don't Get Around Much Anymore
- 029 My Romance
- 030 Angel Eyes
- 031 Easy Living
- 032 My Favorite Things
- 033 Ornithology
- 034 10 by 8 Paintings Sheet
- 035 Painting Concept