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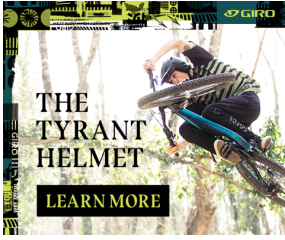
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CHRISTOPHER RUSSELL'S ART RAMBLER IS A MOBILE PAINT STUDIO

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REPORTAGE

# Christopher Russell's Art Rambler is a Mobile Paint Studio

BY: CHRIS RUSSELL

MAY 16, 2019

Christopher Russell's Art Rambler is a Mobile Paint Studio

Photos by [Krishna Muirhead](#) and Words by [Chris Russell](#)

We were on a ride when I told Alex the idea.

Thinking about an art piece while pedaling was nothing new, many of my paintings can be linked back to a long ride or a short bike tour. Spending most of the day in the saddle gives me the opportunity to clear my head, observe the landscape, brainstorm, and talk with friends; it's the perfect social activity for the semi-recluse artist. I can be silent for hours, and when there is something to say we talk.

"Alex, I want to make my bike into a mobile painting studio so I can bike out and paint the landscape. A custom rack that could turn into an easel would be awesome, and I'm hoping you can fabricate it." This bike setup would eventually be the narrative foundation of my next art show.

At the time, I was already in the queue for a custom [Taggart Cycles](#) frame and racks. I was figuring out a few fit issues with Alex Brey, the framebuilder behind the Taggart name before he started mitering tubes for my dream bike. Alex enthusiastically agreed to take on yet another project for me, even though neither of us knew what it really entailed.

As is true of many Portlanders, I have both a day job and a creative job. Thankfully, in my case, I am passionate about both. I work as a bicycle mechanic and a visual artist. Riding my bike is key to my current paintings—stylized landscapes full of the plants, lichens, rocks, and fungus I observe on rides. However, I have always painted inside, working from sketches and photos. I construct large paintings that balance the realistic representation of places I've seen, with the improvisation of abstract painting. With this project, I wanted to make a bike set-up for painting '*en plein air*' (a French term for painting outdoors) – a bike that can be used to make paintings for my upcoming show, while also symbolically represents the symbiotic relationship between riding in nature, and my painting. Since working towards an



art show full of paintings takes countless hours, I aim to create an artistic process that necessitates spending time outdoors, something vital to my general well-being.



The bike I've dubbed the Art Rambler

Ramble can be defined as a walk for pleasure, typically without a definite route.

Rooted in the Middle English word *Ramen* (to roam), it roughly translates to *Randonnée*, in French, a term commonly used for long distance bicycle rides.

Sometimes, an old bike is the perfect bike.



Although I envision the custom Taggart frame as functional art, I decided my current commuter bike—a 1983 Specialized Stump Jumper which was born the same year as me, was the perfect candidate to become the Art Rambler.

Stout tubes, long wheelbase, and fat 26-inch wheels make it the perfect chassis for carrying my supplies and heavy box of paint. I got the Stump Jumper frame on Craigslist; it had the original headset, 180mm cranks, and nothing else. The guy I got it from was the second owner and used it as his primary transportation for years, changing out parts as they wore out. I honestly preferred that it was incomplete—I had a handful of parts that were waiting for the right frame, and this way I didn't feel tied to keeping a vintage bike original, or period correct. I tried the long 180mm cranks, but my knees didn't agree, so they went and all that is original anymore is the headset. With a 67-degree head angle, the front wheel really flopped when I first added a large Wald Basket, but the wheel stabilizer, pieced together out of a stout door hinge spring and a braze-on derailleur adapter, does wonders.



Starting with sketches, I tried mocking up a bike-mounted easel with zip-ties and whatever I had lying around. The real design breakthrough came when I found I had a random baking sheet in my kitchen that happened to fit perfectly on top of my Wald 139 basket. The baking sheet was made in the USA by Nordic Ware and even has a plastic lid that allows me to cover a wet painting for safe transport-Yay MUSA!



I came up with an easel design that works like a decaleur mixed with collapsible tent poles. Alex had already made some racks designed around carrying a Wald basket, so we were off to a good start.

For painting, the canvas mounts to sleeved stainless steel poles on adjustable brackets I made using eyebolts from old cantilever brakes, a Campagnolo QR nut, and the arm of a Paul Neo-Retro brake that bent years ago in a crash caused by an arrogant driver of some Audi sports car.

Alex did an awesome job adding details like mini pannier mounts and internal routing for my Schmidt Dynamo light, all while keeping things pleasing to the eye.



The rack was coated by CC Coatings in a metallic powder coat that is a nice match to the dull metal finish on my rear Nitto rack.



When the easel-rack was done, I called upon my friend Geoff of [Warning Ware bags](#) who quickly designed and sewed up a custom basket bag for my supplies. Even on the tight timeline, I gave him, he went above and beyond using leftover fabric to sew ditty bags to keep things organized. He even made a whoopie sling, guy-wire that keeps the easel from bouncing when I paint. Everything works better than I had hoped, and it all packs neatly into the basket.

The bike is on display along with my paintings at [Russo Lee Gallery](#) in Portland, Oregon through the end of May.

I think many cyclists can relate when I say that my bike is not only a tool for transportation and exploration, but it is also an expression of myself; showing my particular aesthetic, guided by the history of cycling, painting, DIY, and fun with friends. As someone whose time is split between working as a bicycle mechanic, painting and getting outdoors, I think this bike is the closest thing to a self-portrait I have ever shown in a gallery.

The Art Rambler was a collaborative effort and I can't express my gratitude enough to everyone who helped put it together. Special thanks to my good friend Krishna Muirhead for taking the photos, everyone at Russo Lee Gallery for trusting me enough to display my old bike in their gallery, Aley Brey of Taggart Cycles for making all the metal parts, and Geoff Thorp of Warning Ware for the bags.



*Additional notes: These photos were taken a few days before I had built up my dynamo wheel, so the critical eye might notice the light wire going to a non-generator hub, a blasphemy that was soon after alleviated. The small portrait of me on the back of the seat-tube is a painting by my friend [Dustin](#).*

See Chris' Art Rambler at the Russo Lee Gallery until the end of May

[Russo Lee Gallery](#)

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