

*Blast Furnace Yards,*  
watercolor, 1954.

One of the earliest  
works in the exhibit,  
this painting predates  
Jess Hager's association  
with U. S. Steel.  
He worked with Rayart  
Studios when he painted  
these slag cars in a  
local mill yard.

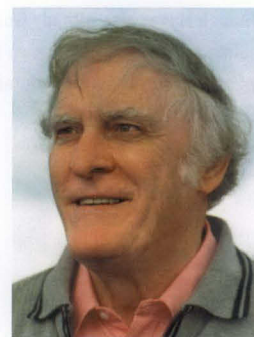
Courtesy of Jess Hager and  
World West Galleries



# Art of Steel: The Work of JESS HAGER

By Anne Madarasz, Museum Division Director

Following World War II, Americans were ready to once again purchase items denied during wartime. The steel industry boomed by providing the key material needed for such consumer items as automobiles and appliances. By the 1950s, the sales of U. S. Steel, the leading national producer, were double that of its nearest rival, Bethlehem Steel, and triple that of Republic and National Steel. The company's production continued its rise through the 1960s, and U. S. Steel marked its dominance by building a new corporate headquarters in downtown Pittsburgh: U. S. Steel Tower. Constructed of COR-TEN steel, the 62-story skyscraper became not just a local landmark when completed in 1971, but the tallest building between New York and Chicago. Documenting the company in these boom years, and the decades that followed, was Jess Hager.



Artist Jess Hager, c. 2000

Courtesy of Jess Hager and World West Galleries



*Teeming Ingots*, watercolor, 1965.

Though Hager was already working at U. S. Steel, he painted this piece on his own time. Using a photograph as source material, he detailed worker and machine in concert creating steel.

Courtesy of Jess Hager and World West Galleries

Hager began his career in steel in 1960 when he signed on with U. S. Steel as a senior illustrator and designer in the corporation's art department. Hager was born in West Virginia but grew up in Western Pennsylvania. He enjoyed sketching and drawing, and a meeting with artist Malcolm Parcell convinced him to pursue a career in art. When the war intervened, Hager enlisted in the Air Force and served with a unit that trained bomber crews for the D-Day invasion. He continued to draw and paint in the service, documenting aircraft in battle and adding a large mural to the war room of the Army Air Base in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

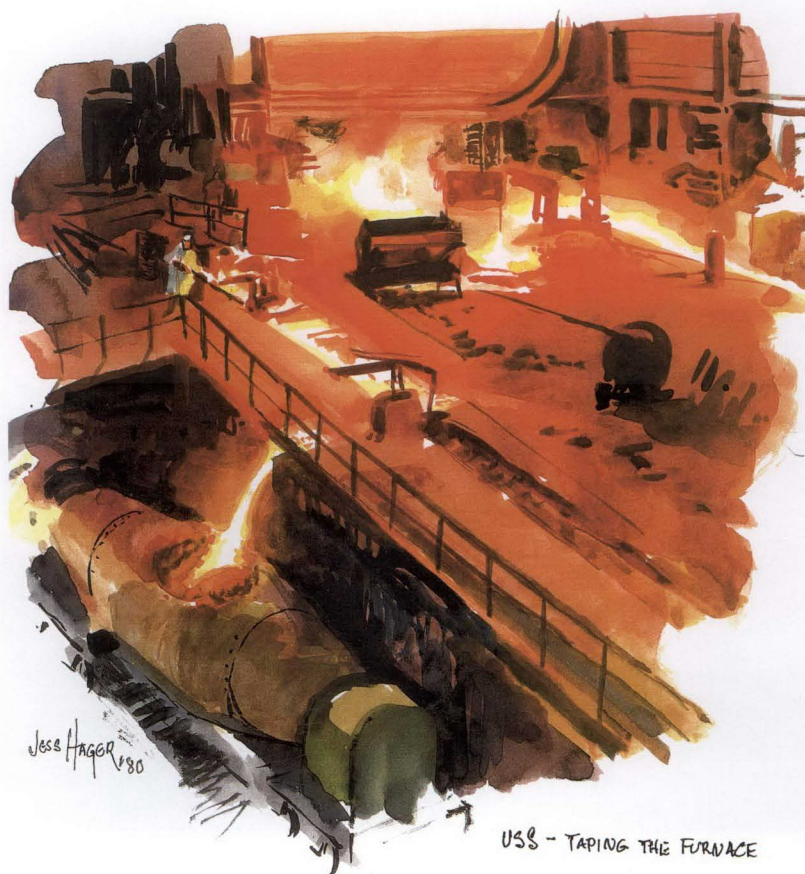
After the war, Hager studied graphic design at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, then took a job as a commercial artist and illustrator, working at the city's top ad agencies. He painted covers for annual reports and other corporate publications. Later, Hager re-allied himself with the Art Institute, serving as a faculty member and assistant director.



**Top: Coal Mining, watercolor, 1978.**

**U. S. Steel used this artwork to illustrate a brochure on the company's mining interests.**

Courtesy of Jess Hager and World West Galleries



**Left: Tapping the Furnace, watercolor, 1980.**

Hager painted this piece from life, possibly at the Edgar Thomson Works in Braddock, Pennsylvania. Using quick brush strokes, he created a more impressionistic painting.

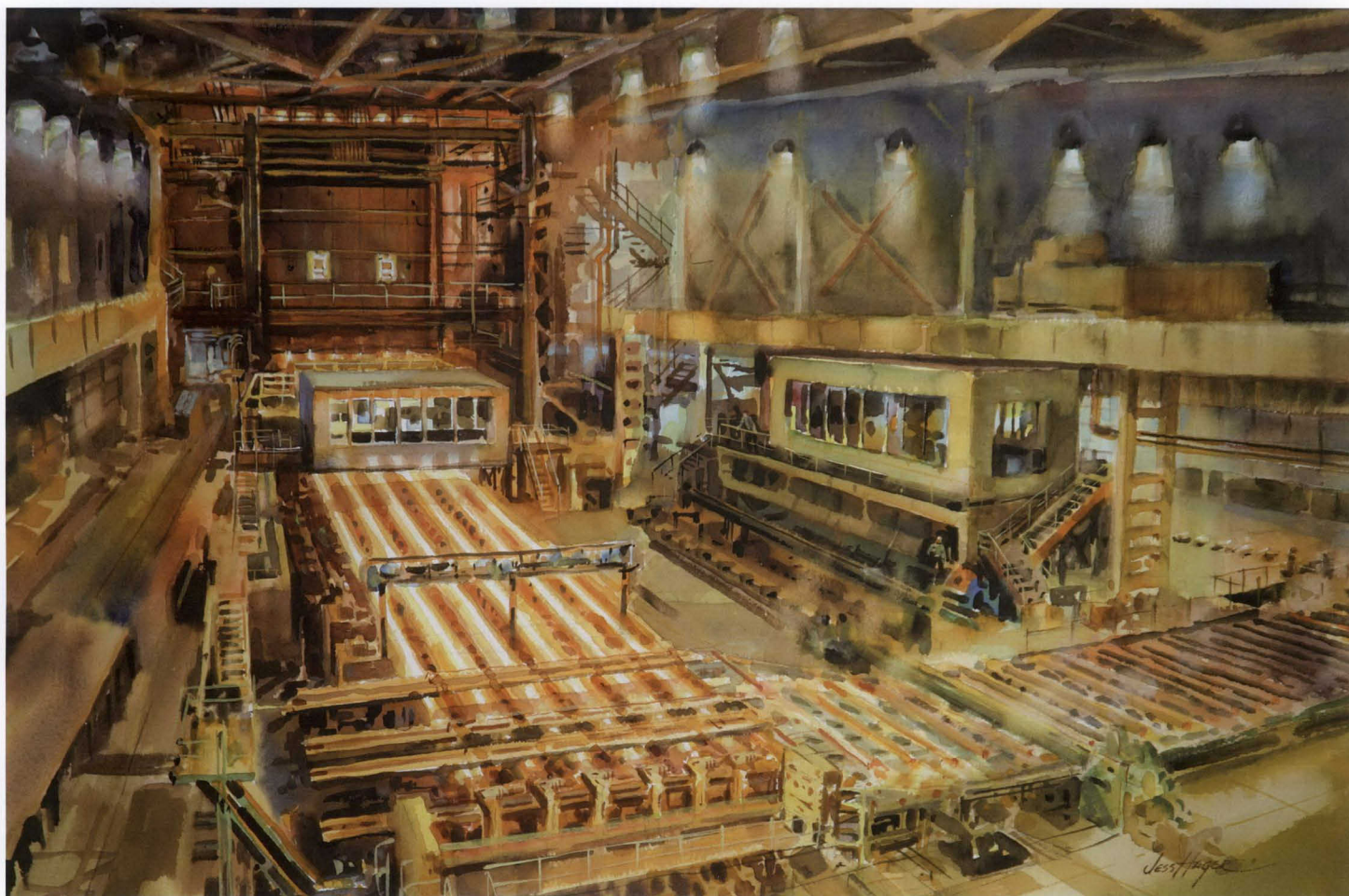
Courtesy of Jess Hager and World West Galleries

*Oil Rig*, watercolor, 1983.

Image from the *1983 Steel News*  
showing the company's  
diversification into oil.

Courtesy of Jess Hager and World West Galleries





*Continuous Casting*, watercolor, 1983.


Featured in the *1983 Annual Report*, this painting's dramatic composition and use of color captures the size and energy of the mill.

Courtesy of Jess Hager and World West Galleries

The desire to again pursue a career in commercial design led Hager to U. S. Steel. He spent over 20 years heading the corporate art department, a team of eight illustrators, designers, and artists. This group produced the illustrations for U. S. Steel's annual reports, brochures, and calendars. Hager specialized in painting the steel process, sometimes working on-site in factories and company facilities, sometimes painting from photographs or memory. His work provides a visual document of the steel industry at its

peak in the 1960s on through the challenging years of the 1970s and early '80s. Hager's final project at U. S. Steel was the *1983 Annual Report*, illustrated only with art.

The History Center's new exhibit, *Art of Steel*, features about 50 watercolors and mixed-media works created by Hager while at U. S. Steel. The pieces provide a visual record of the steel industry but also document the people, processes, and business of steel. Several artworks were completed for the corporation's internal publication, *Steel News*;

others were created for brochures, employee educational materials, and magazines. A particularly compelling group that survives from the *1983 Annual Report* details the breadth of the industry and the diversification of the company into areas such as oil. 

Since retiring, **Jess Hager** has focused on documenting Pittsburgh by painting noted personalities and historic scenes in a series titled "Moments in Time." Hager's images are published nationally by Mill Pond Press, and he is represented locally by World West Galleries in Washington, Pennsylvania.