



EMBRACING THE DIGITAL AGE

BY
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USING NEW TECHNOLOGY TO DEVELOP
TRADITIONAL AVIATION ART



Over the past 30-years, my neighbors have seen me in the front yard with set-ups like this — an aircraft model placed on a stand, table, or box, on a specific heading and time of day, ready to be photographed. At this stage, concept sketches have been approved by the client. Painting will depict the moment of launch as a Navy RA-5C leaves a carrier deck from the number three, or forward port bow, catapult.

In the mid-1960s, I entered the rigorous Foundation Year program at New York's Pratt Institute as the next educational step in becoming an "artist." My classmates and I were beginning our careers in many different genres, although I dare say I was the only one intent on aviation art. Today, however, we would all be known by a different term — for we are now "natural media artists."

What does this rather ambiguous term actually mean? Basically, it translates to people who create artwork by squeezing paint out of tubes, and then using brushes to manually apply that medium to a piece of stretched canvas. How antediluvian!

To be fair, airplanes that were once riveted together and flown with vacuum tube radio and navigation equipment are now built with composites and navigated by satellite, so why would artwork depicting today's digital-age marvels be created with obsolete methodology? My personal answer is "to each his own," meaning that yes, digital art looks fantastic, and the stringent requirements of today's high-tech aerospace industry dictate the need for having that imagery in both technical illustration and rendering.

However, to meet the demands of discerning aviation art collectors, "natural media" still has a valued place in the contemporary world.



Replicating a late-afternoon launch from USS *John F. Kennedy* during its first operational cruise in 1969, the Trumpeter 1/48th-scale RA-5C Vigilante kit provided all the basic information relative to color, shape, and lighting needed to compose the scene. The correct markings for recon squadron RVAH-14 "Eagle Eyes" will be added-in later along with other structural details either missing or incorrect on the model.



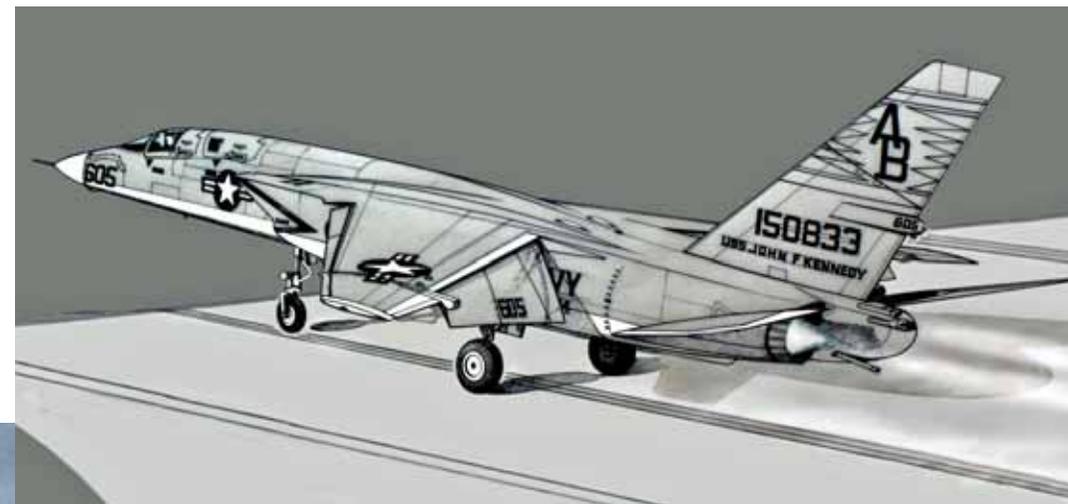
With the model image placed into Photoshop, I begin the process of "building" the carrier's forward flight deck and prow. Although this will be taken only to the mock-up stage here, blocking-out basic shapes, colors of the sea, and sky, and overall atmospheric becomes important as the composition evolves into final form. Detailed photos of the USS *John F. Kennedy* will be used to construct the bow and flight deck.

It is in this context that I share with *Air Classics* readers the step-by-step process used for producing a fine art painting by employing a judicious combination of digital technology and natural media. The inevitable analogy would be



today's hybrid automobiles that combine electric and internal combustion motors for propulsion. (I'll leave the inevitable question of driverless cars equating to robotically-produced aviation art for another time, however.)

This is the 50%-actual size Preliminary Engineering Drawing that becomes essential for the next step in the process — researching a real North American RA-5C Vigilante. There is simply no substitute for studying the real airplane in detail, and this drawing will be taken along and marked-up with comments and corrections from observing the RA-5C aboard the USS *Midway* Museum in San Diego, California.



Few USN aircraft from the time period were more attractive or potent than North America's mighty Vigilante. Unfortunately, the type's history has been poorly covered. RA-5C BuNo 156608 was assigned to RVAH-7 "Peacemakers of the Fleet" off USS *Ranger* (CV-61) when photographed in 1979. Vigilantes were officially retired in September 1979.

