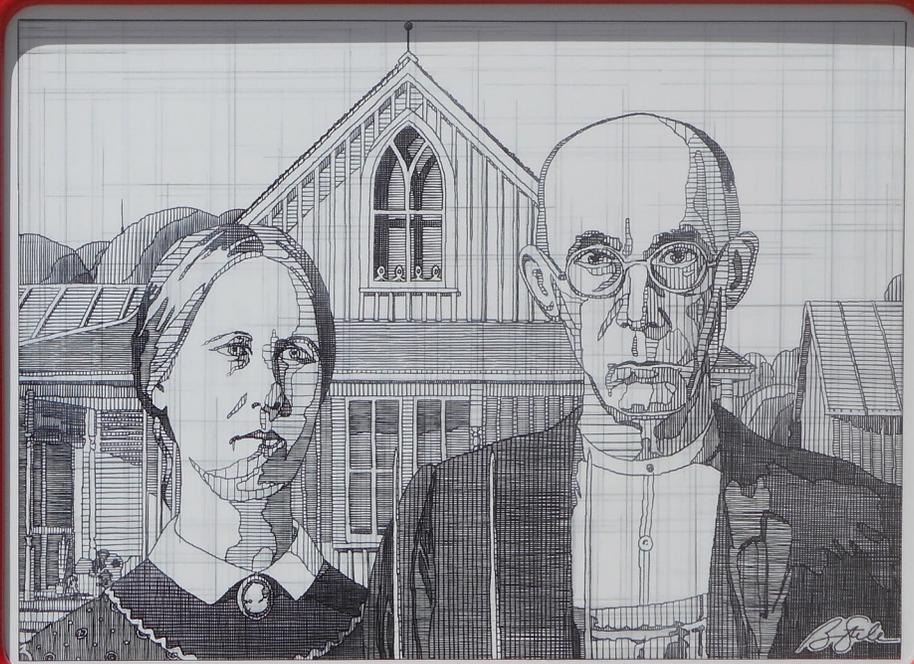


MAGIC Etch A Sketch® SCREEN



## BEN STEELE TAKES

ART SERIOUSLY WITH A DOSE OF HUMOR

**By Sabina Dana Plasse, SVPN Magazine**

Contemporary artist Ben Steele can be considered a pop artist, but he would say he's more of a "pop realist," challenging taboos with his still life portraiture often melding art history and pop culture references in his ever-changing process, but with the addition of some good, old fashion humor.

"I try to be mostly friendly-fun," says Steele. "There can be some sarcasm involved. In general, I try to have fun. I'm a positive, upbeat person and it comes naturally to me to have fun and keep my art and ideas somewhat playful. Many people who have my art, own it because they want to have something fun on their walls."

With a twist on iconography, which seemingly conveys a deeper meaning, Steele has had this approach to life since he can recall. "As a kid, I was always creating visual jokes, and my mother knew from an early age I would be an artist. It just fit me."

Steele's work connects with many people, from serious art collectors to art admirers and when Andria Friesen reached out to him, Steele could not pass up an exhibition in Sun Valley even though he was overbooked. "There are no guarantees in the art industry nor is there guaranteed money," he says. "We are overbooked because we are too scared with what the other way would be."

Steele bridges ideas, eras, and icons together whether it's the early work by artist Chuck Close or the iconic Samuel Adams beer bottle and emblem, which he has painted as it would appear throughout art history. His work can be found in many personal and corporate collections, including Kelly Ripa and Mark Consuelos, sportscaster Dan Patrick, Academy Award-winning film and television producer Michael Sugar, golfer Fred Couples, Raymond James Financial, the San Francisco Giants Executive Offices, the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation, and in multiple Delta Airline Sky Club lounges throughout the U.S.

With an education built upon classical training, Steele utilizes the processes of the old masters with a contemporary sensibility. He never stays in one place for too long, meaning his art is fluid and the result is a wide-ranging body of work. "Hopefully, I am making these works even more unique by pulling them out of different locations and bringing them together—it's a re-juxtaposition," he says.

References to other people, social issues, and the potential crushing of "old America" and its founders have been working their way into Steele's creative process and, of course, with some humor. "They don't necessarily fit in our modern times as being heroes of the past," he says. "Does this become toxic? It's certainly on my mind. The work should still be fun even though I do make my own type of comment."

Steele graduated from the University of Utah in 2002 with a BFA in painting and drawing. He continued his artistic education at the Helper Workshops under the instruction of David Dornan and Paul Davis, moving to Helper, Utah for a multi-year internship with Dornan. He has been living and working in the small coal and railroad town ever since with his wife, Melanie, and their two sons.

In recent times, Steele has moved into a new studio in Helper, Utah where he can process a great deal more creativity in his work with collecting inspiring items as well as including working in his new spray room. He cans his own oil paint into spray cans, which is another element to his work giving him access and the ability to create work on some more interesting levels. "It feels authentic when it comes out of a can," he says.

For his show, "Modern Reflections on Art History's Past," at Friesen Gallery, Steele will present his version of Sun Valley pop realism using iconic Sun Valley images with some cheeky humor involving a spray can and ketchup bottle. "I do love pop art but it's not all I love. If I am forced to pick, my favorite artist would be Vermeer," he says. "I love many things about different artists. It depends on how real I want things to be."

For more information, visit [friesengallery.com](http://friesengallery.com)



Top: Sun Valley Spray Paint | oil on canvas | 32" x 22"

Below: Tomato Ketchup | oil on canvas | 37.5" x 26"

Left: Etch-A-Merican | oil on panel & mixed media frame | 24" x 28" x 4"