



USA

OIL

STEVE SCHEURING EXPLORES THE SHEER BREADTH AND DEPTH OF ARTISTIC INSPIRATION

From flicker of fantasy, to reality

Where does inspiration come from? Sometimes it hits me - a contrast of lights and darks, warm and cold. It can come from a particular repeating shape. It may come from an object that brings back a strong childhood memory. It can be born from the excitement of visiting a new place. Or, inspiration can be created.

Sometimes, fully exploring one idea or theme evolves into others. Sometimes I'm attracted to the inspiration of others - "standing on the shoulders of giants." And, sometimes, it can come by accident. Wherever inspiration comes from, it must be matched by perspiration to take flight. After all, vision without action is no more than a daydream. In this article, I plan to show how I convert the flicker of an idea into my reality on canvas. □

A Pile of Soldiers, oil on canvas, 48 x 60"

In my recent work, I've been drawn to compositions that can be viewed and interpreted different ways, depending on if I'm feeling nostalgic or consumed by realities of adult life. Playing with my kids has stirred many ideas. Toy-soldier memories are vivid. The large G.I. Joe's are similar to ones I used to play with when I was a kid. I borrowed some comic books from my uncle featuring covers by my childhood idol, Frank Frazetta. And, couldn't resist including and posing the little green army men, another childhood favorite. I wanted an all-over composition that drew the viewer into the detail of the painting.



my art in the making

Crash

This idea was born from another painting, "Jam", (which placed 3rd in Issue 69's Still Life competition), which featured a more orderly alignment of cars. Wanted to do a similar painting with repeating shapes, yet arrange them haphazardly. Was going for a Jackson Pollock-like abstract composition, but couldn't resist drawing the viewer's eye to the monster truck. "Crash" can be seen as a nostalgic, simple celebration and freedom of smashing toy cars. Or, it can be viewed as a darker, more adult-themed car crash.



Crash – Reference and Maquette

This still life was composed on my dining room table. I used photography, the live composition, and individual toy cars in my studio as reference. I created a grid on a home-printer copy of the primary reference photo. Notice the edge of the reference copy began to fray from repeated use.



Stage 1 grid drawing, inky washes and background

A standard #2 pencil was used to draw a scaled-up grid on a prepared canvas. Grids on larger paintings help ensure perspective and proper placement. Then, I blocked in inky washes of the car base colors. At this stage, I wasn't too concerned about nailing the right temperature or value - just wanted it close, knowing glazing adjustments could be made later. I left the background until later, knowing those areas wouldn't require as many layers and some gridlines needed to remain exposed for fine detail placement.



Sweet Rides, oil on canvas, 24 x 36"

When on a family vacation in California, I went to a 1950's nostalgia and candy store. Found a few toy cars with candy logos on them - liked the colors and decals - thought they would be fun to paint. I've completed some other toy car paintings - in those, I focused on shape. Here, I wanted to pull in a little closer on the cars and feature the decals and detail. My favorite - love the ice cream truck.



New York Corner Market, oil on canvas, 10 x 20"

I painted this from a reference photo taken during a late-night Manhattan walk. I've always been fascinated by the markets on nearly every New York street corner. Love the bright fruit and market's inner glow, contrasted against the dark street, awning, and foreground figures. Originally planned this painting as a "quickie" - loose brushwork and light on detail - but was having too much fun and got caught up creating the detail.



Stage 2 glazing

Once this first pass properly dried, I adjusted value and temperature with glazes and refined detail starting at the bottom right, working to the top left - I'm left handed and didn't want to drag my hand/brush through finished work.



Stage 3 color tactics

The painting began to take form. I used cars with complementary colors like blue and orange and ones with high contrast of lights and darks in the foreground. I also used cars with analogous colors like blue and green and low contrast in the background so they would recede. These tactics help move the viewer's eye throughout the work.



◀ **Apple Harmony,**
oil on canvas, 19.5 x 47"

I felt motivated after a family apple-picking excursion, so I snapped reference photos of a formal apple composition. After shooting, I laid the apples on my kitchen table - just threw them there randomly - and reviewed shots on my camera. All my fussing with the apple composition resulted in stiff, disappointing photos. Collecting my thoughts, I happened to glance up. Glad I did. What awaited me was this interesting, haphazard apple pattern and strong patio-window light reflecting off the kitchen table, which created these wonderful blue, green, and purple highlights. Just goes to show - sometimes the best compositions are accidental and good lighting is available when you least expect it.



◀ **Wonderland Swing,**
oil on canvas, 15 x 30"

Wonderland Pier - any kid who's been to Ocean City, New Jersey, has blown some time on their rides. My favorites are the carousel and giant swing. Never tire of watching the time-honored tradition of kids scrambling to track down their flip flops when the Giant Swing slows to a stop.



Friday Night, oil on canvas,
10 x 30"

I'm a fan of Philadelphia's boxing scene - created this painting from reference photos taken at Philly's New Alhambra club. It's easy to find inspiration when people-watching at the fights. At Alhambra, some seats are "standing room only," so attendees have a unique opportunity to mingle with lots of different people. Putting the main interest point, the boxing ring, off-center works to draw the viewer into the crowd and emphasizes the overall boxing experience.

about the artist

Steve cites Salvador Dali, Chuck Close, and Andrew Wyeth as his favorite artists, "but I've been influenced to some degree by every painting I've seen." Steve remained relatively self-taught until his last semester in college. At that time, he enrolled in a painting class at Penn State University and immediately fell in love with the medium of oil. The ability of oils to capture subtle contrasts in light and temperature pulled Steve into a concerted effort to learn, understand and explore this medium.

Steve lives near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with his wife and three children - the models and inspiration for many of his paintings. Steve's work has been featured in shows in the Greater Philadelphia area and New York City.

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Stage 4 attention seeking

Notice the cars in the bottom left point the viewer toward the monster truck, the main point of interest. Also, I saved my lightest lights and darkest darks for the monster truck, again to draw in the viewer.



Stage 5 finishing touches

Here I put finishing touches on the painting. I recently switched to extra-long filbert brushes for finer work to help create crisp, straight edges and maximize paint loading.