

A Journey Full of Laughter

written by Debra Usher

Steven Lamb's art is escapism at its most pleasant. Taking us away from the daily grind through a joyful and picturesque fusion of Balkan vitality, German precision and French artistry.

Born in Bulgaria, the son of two teachers, Steven studied in Leipzig and eventually settled in Montreal. He has been a painter for most of his life. His grandfather painted in watercolour and oils, and inspired in his grandson the urge to paint from a young age. Indeed, as a child of two, Steven had already started down the path to his career as an artist. Even then, he was endowed with a delightful sense of humour that has never waned.

Years later, on his way to Cuba for a solo exposition, Steven's life took a significant turn. When they landed in Gander, Newfoundland to refuel, he left the plane with his wife and three-year-old son and asked for asylum for himself and his family. He was accepted. But the plane left with his paintings, which today are hanging somewhere in Cuba. Thus started the beginning of his Canadian journey.

In a truly unique way, Steven Lamb combines all mediums in an effort to create his own world. One where humour mingles elegantly with serious themes, giving his works more life and meaning. His art is peppered with the interesting and the mundane in a portrayal of the human condition. His people – always comic, distorted and exaggerated – are immediately recognizable. What is typical about Steven's art is his keen observation of popular culture and understanding of human nature.

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previous spread, Café on the Ark street II, mixed media on canvas, 36" x 24"

above, Resting in the metro, mixed media on canvas, 16" x 16"
right, Two on the sidewalk, mixed media on canvas, 24" x 18"



Inspiration

Steven's inspiration comes from movies and real life scenes – such as a situation in a coffee shop, bar or restaurant. Festivals, markets and comedy shows also add to the flavour. He sees the world from a comedian's viewpoint.

Steven loves Cirque du Soleil for their gifted costumes and the magic of life they portray. Interesting photographs of places not travelled inspire different locations in his paintings. In his studio are prints and imagery from Honore Daumier, Toulouse Lautrec, Corneliu Baba and Normand Hudon. Each artist shares a unique and vital sense of humour and view of life.

"I love to look at the work of artists who see a world which is similar to my vision," says Steven, "and they inspire me to keep painting. Botero, Lautrec and Degas also help to keep me motivated."

Viewing the World

When Steven is not painting, he is out and about viewing material for his next canvas. Going to the gym, the cinema, or just strolling the city sidewalks allows him the ability to soak in the scenery, and observe human interaction and follies of day-to-day life.

He shares, "In most of my works, I take inspiration from the beauty of Old Montreal, its streets, buildings and people. Walking down the streets is a rich experience providing a wealth of imagery for my work."

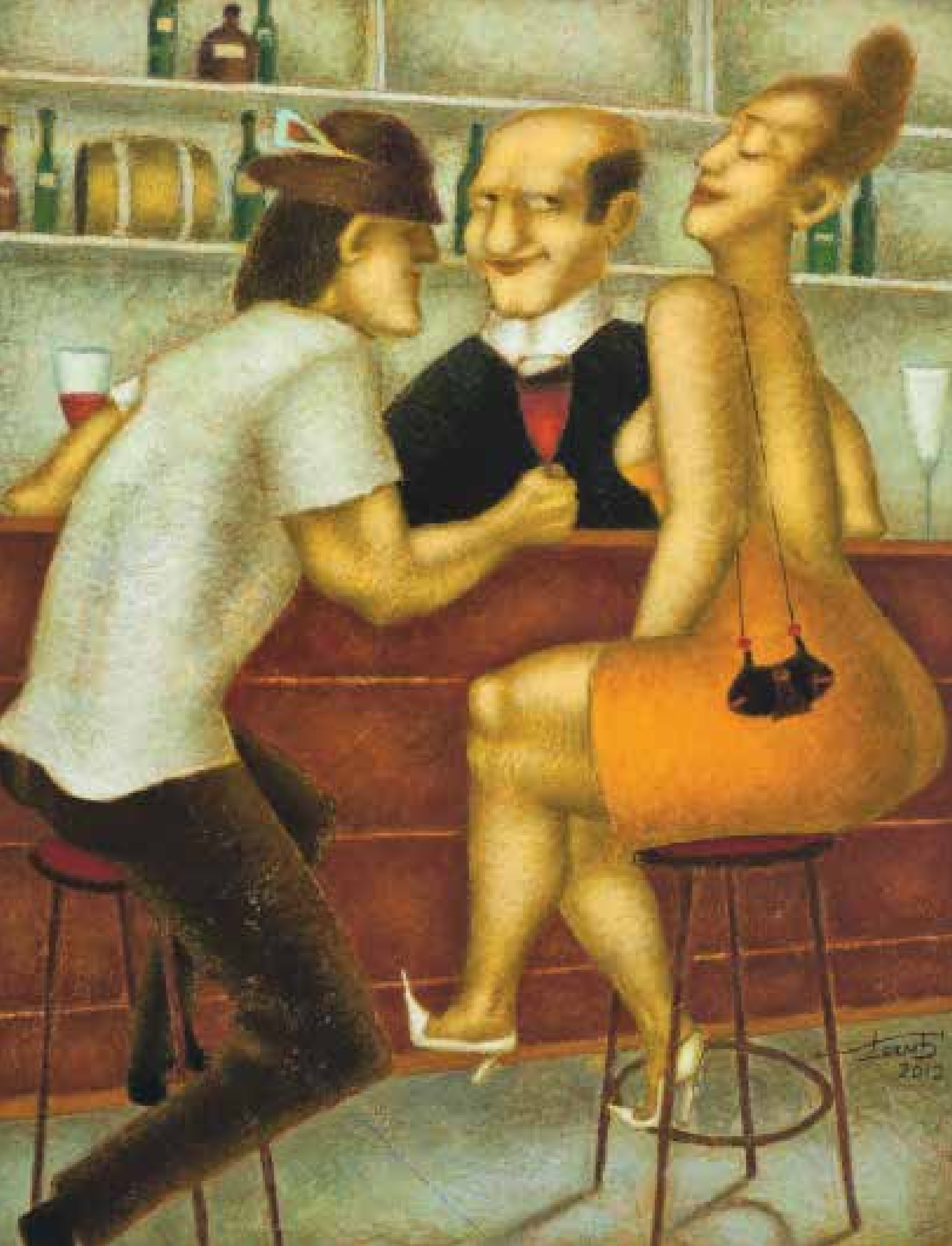
Watching clowns, magicians, singers and artists perform is equally as exciting as documenting them. Sometimes, even places as such as the Montreal Casino are important inspiration sources for his work. Using his camera, Steven tries to capture every possible scene, and then change the images slightly to alter the viewing



The rest of the artist, mixed media on canvas, 16" x 20"



Slow dance, mixed media on canvas, 28" x 14"



left, Another one, mixed media on canvas, 30" x 24"

above, Why not me, mixed media on canvas, 16" x 20"

perspective. That is when his process truly starts and is on its way to becoming a painting. "My method of work is a combination of old masters' technique and some newly devised ways of achieving my objectives," says Steven.

The Process

From a photograph he's taken of an interesting scene, Steven makes a series of different sketches – changing variations of the theme, changing the source, until he is satisfied. It is then that he starts the painting.

He explains, "My experience as a printmaker and illustrator also contributes to the richness of the technique. For instance, the use of sand in my work comes from the aquatint as a part of intaglio technique. I combine all media in an effort to create my own world."

What he considers critical to his art is his keen

observation of popular culture. Steven uses the grotesque as a tool for social commentary, not to criticise but to amuse his audience. At the same time, he is also trying to blend humour with serious things in an effort to give his work more life and meaning.

"When working I like to use a combination of photographs, watercolour pastels, acrylic, oils and oil pastels," says Steven. "This combination of all the mediums produces some surprising effects." He usually begins his work with coloured pencils, creating a rough sketch and refining it with a black pencil to achieve a precise line. This is inspired by an animation technique called 'clean up'.

After that, he applies charcoal lines on the back of the image to prepare it for the next procedure. He then transfers the image onto a specially prepared canvas. "This technique was used in the past," says Steven, "in the process of mural





previous spread, Carousel, mixed media on canvas, 40" x 60"

above, Restaurant la Piata, mixed media on canvas, 24" x 24"
right, Dancing with ball, mixed media on canvas, 16" x 12"

painting, and is important for the precision of the details in my work."

Once the outlines are defined, he proceeds to apply different textures on previously determined places. To create a rich texture he uses three kinds of sand.

The third step is to cover the textures with colour gesso. In this process he uses up to seven colours and, when he is finally satisfied with the result, he then highlights the volumes using white tempera. Another old masters' technique.

The fourth step is to apply acrylic paint to the largest surfaces, proceeding from the general to the particular. The fifth stage involves removing some parts of the acrylic paint with a special thinner. "This way the colour base of the picture is revealed," says Steven, "and that is how I create the vibration and harmony of the colours. After that, I accentuate the details. In the final

part, I am using watercolour pencils, dry pastels and, if necessary, oil colour to complete the work. The order in which these steps are applied is extremely important for the professional execution, precision and quality of my technique. Finally, to secure a long-lasting artwork, I cover the picture with a special UV protection varnish."

A Continuous Journey

Steven believes in the power of life-long learning; that although the basics are very important in your craft, it is always important to further educate yourself on a continuous basis – through books, workshops, lectures, DVDs – anything that can help you grow as an artist.

"Don't rely on your talent and originality, because a lot of effort is required," says Steven. "My personality allows me to be unique in how I see the world, and this makes my work different





left, Expecting the best,
mixed media on canvas, 20" x 16"

above, Bistro II,
mixed media on canvas, 16" x 24"

bottom, Chatting in the local restaurant,
mixed media on canvas, 30" x 30"

from that of other painters. But I still have to keep learning and obverting to make my craft even better. My exploration of sculpture, and use of almost all mediums on each individual painting, gives my paintings a really different and interesting effect. I truly appreciate all the people that buy my work and share my vision of the world. My goal is to give people positive energy and put a smile on their face."

You can find the work of Steven Lamb at the following galleries:

Le Balcon d'Art
St. Lambert, QC
www.balcondart.com
450.466.8920

Tutt Street Gallery
Kelowna, BC
www.tuttartgalleries.ca
250.861.4992