



**Steven Leahy**

FINE ARTIST

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## Artist's Statement



I have a compelling urge to capture the attention of everyone viewing my paintings. The world around us offers an absolutely incredible amount of visual information that we simply allow ourselves to tune out in everyday overload. My goal with each painting is to capture that moment, and slow the viewer down long enough to take in the world of details and colors that are always there but seldom noticed. Each painting becomes an entire landscape made up of these seemingly plain, everyday moments. In order to accurately translate that visual information, I have chosen the vibrancy and permanence of waterborne automotive paint for my work. The primary tool used to apply this paint is an airbrush. I have found few

other tools that match the airbrushes ability to fade and blend colors. This control of paint, seamless washes of color and the absence of brush strokes, allows me to push the limits of realism in all of my work. Three pieces that represent my current direction and vision all examine complex patterns in simple everyday objects. 'Good Dram' illustrates twelve different colored bottles and explores the incredible refraction and reflection of light through and off them. In 'Taylor's Cache,' stacked and worn gears create a short but powerful sense of depth while the oxidized metal creates some truly spectacular textures. Finally, 'Jody's Jewel' pushes detailed miniature airbrush painting to the extreme, in this case the painting is reduced to an image size of only 1-3/8 inches by 2-1/2 inches. All the detail of a larger painting packed onto a tiny titanium substrate no bigger than a business card. I feel very fortunate that both my ability and choice of medium have allowed me to translate my visions onto canvas and various substrates.



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## Artist's Biography



Steven Leahy is a photorealistic airbrush artist who specializes in working with waterborne paints. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Massachusetts. He is the author of "How Airbrushes Work", published in 2008 by Wolfgang Publications, and his works have been published in Airbrush Magazine, Naval Aviation News, and Airbrush Action Magazine. Steven is also a lead instructor at the Air Brush University

airbrush classes held annually in Easton, Massachusetts.

In addition to having his work commissioned by the United States Navy and Warner Brothers Publishing, Steven has garnered awards from the National Association of Acrylic Painters, the American Association of Aviation Artists, and the Experimental Aircraft Association. He has also displayed pieces at the Society of Illustrators Annual Exhibit and the Smithsonian Museum.

In his current work, he is exploring in-depth, complex still life subjects on many types of surfaces, from Bristol board, canvas and titanium, to custom bike painting.



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## Questions and Answers

What is photorealism and why paint in that style?

Photorealism is a term that was coined by New York gallery owner Louis Meisel to describe work that was so lifelike and complete in every way that it looked as if it could have been taken with a camera. Photorealism transcends realism in that it incorporates additional visual devices to give the illusion of depth. These techniques include using out of focus areas and lens flair. The question that frequently arises with this style of work is simply why not simply take a photograph of the subject. The answer is more obvious than most see. Consider the quality and impact of a photograph of a great piece of art. No matter how good the photo is, there are always elements and emotions that cannot be captured by the camera. On the same very basic level, photorealistic painting surpasses photography in a similar way. Photorealistic painting takes subject matter and infuses life into it that is difficult to achieve photographically. On a more complex level, photorealistic paintings do not need to be derived directly from a single piece of photo reference. Often in my work many pieces of reference come together to form the image on the canvas. The ability to accurately see and create colors and effects are what ties the work together into a believable image.

What tools and medium are used for your work?

The vibrancy, strength and durability of waterborne paint have replaced the use of most of the other types of paint in my studio. Waterborne paint was developed as an environmentally friendly alternative to solvent based automotive paint. Because it is intended as a paint to be used in rapid collision repair, a large amount of tints were introduced that were very readily intermixable, making it excellent as an artists' paint. In addition, the paint is a fluid with binders and flow mediums that aid its ability to atomize when sprayed. This makes it an excellent paint to be used with an airbrush. The airbrush is the primary tool that I use to apply paint. This tool offers an incredible amount of control in the application of paint. Seamless washes of color and the ability to subtly adjust tone and value are the hallmark of the airbrush. Use of this tool in addition to traditional paintbrushes gives incredible flexibility.

How do you choose the subjects for your work?

I try to view everyday objects with an eye toward composition, color and perspective. Things that we glance at in our everyday lives and dismiss without a thought, often become the best subjects for my work. My goal is to present and capture the viewer with a familiar object and draw them in to the incredible variations in colors, textures and beauty that are found in these subjects.

How long does it take to create a painting?

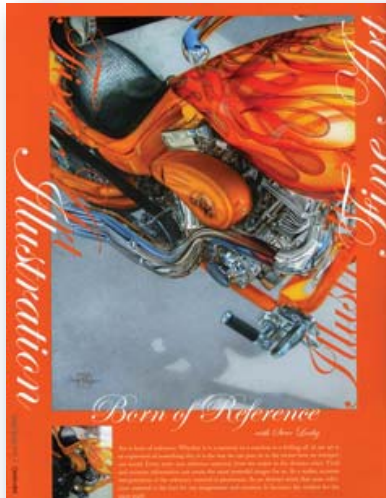
The painting determines the answer to this question. Complex paintings can take hundreds of hours. The goal is to have the patience to work through all the elements in the image with equal attention. Seemingly simple objects can have very subtle yet complex surfaces and colors. The translation of those elements accurately is what solely determines the quality of work.



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*"Every day of our lives we are bombarded with many experiences; so much so, that we often miss miracles in the overload. In my artwork, I capture many of those magnificent moments and offer the viewer the opportunity to stop and experience the miracles as I have. Every work is in fact, a translation of a small piece of time through my eyes. The resulting composition fills the surface with detail that demands and receives our attention in a way that is impossible in the actual moment."*

STEVEN LEAHY, AB MAG AIRBUSH MAGAZINE, 2007

*"I started writing to [Steven] after seeing his airbrush work on the web, many years ago. To make extraordinary works as the ones Steven makes, it takes not only exceptional talent, but also patience, dedication, absolute concentration while working, color knowledge and artistic sensibility. Executing details as Steve does, even in the smallest dimensions, implies total control of the airbrush. I consider Steve to be one of the best airbrush artists that I know."*

ALBERTO PONNO, FINE ARTIST

*"Seeking out the colors in the reflected light on the underside of an F/A-18 is the same as seeking out the colors in the reflected light on the side of a face. Each painting has its own challenges, and all have their rewards."*

STEVEN LEAHY, NAVAL AVIATION NEWS  
MAGAZINE, DECEMBER 2002



Steven Leahy has been working as a professional illustrator since graduating in fine arts from the University of Massachusetts in 1981. His love of depicting photo-realistic themes has earned him top awards at the AirVenture show in Oshkosh, Wis., in 1997, 1998 and 1999, the Publisher's Award for Artistic Excellence in the 1998 American Society of Aviation Artists Forum in Wichita, Kans., and inclusion in the 23rd Society of Illustrators show in New York. He has two paintings displayed in the National Museum of Naval Aviation, Pensacola, Fla., and an interview in the April 2001 issue of *Airbrush Art and Action* magazine. Aviation and art have always been a part of Steve's life. He grew up in a town situated in the flight paths of two airports where planes flew overhead daily. His artistic bent was influenced by his father as Steve learned how to produce mechanical drawings, and by his uncle who is a retired Marine Corps helicopter pilot and combat artist.



Opposite, Hornet High; top, F/A-18; Hornet; and above, Uncle Art at Penned.

Steve summed up the essence of his art: "Every day of our lives we are bombarded by an enormous amount of experiences, so much so that we miss most of the miracles in the overload. In my artwork I capture some of those magnificent moments and offer the viewer the opportunity to stop and experience them as I have. The paintings transcend photo-realism in that every work is a translation of that small piece of time through my eyes—compositions that now fill the surface with detail and finally have the ability to demand our attention."

Naval Aviation News November-December 2002

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*"Not only can he draw, he can feel. We would have a brief discussion... and he would come back with a drawing that totally summarized the chapter. Unlike a lot of artists, he is grounded. He meets deadlines. He understands the business of art."*

DOM FAMULARO, AIR BRUSH ACTION, APRIL, 2002

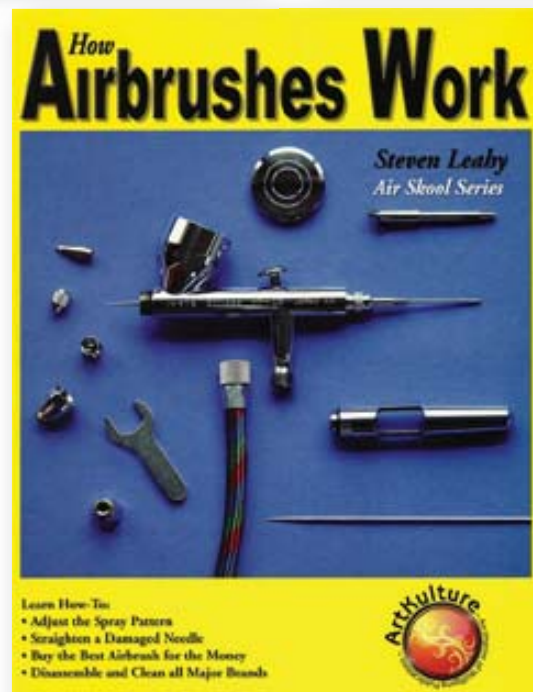
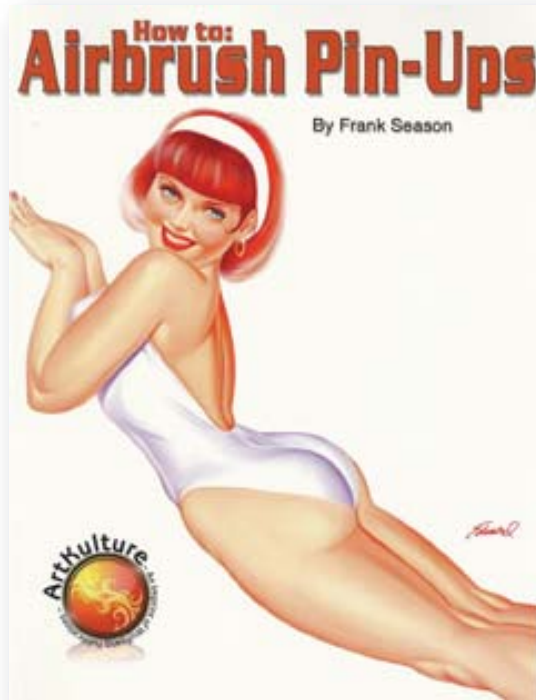




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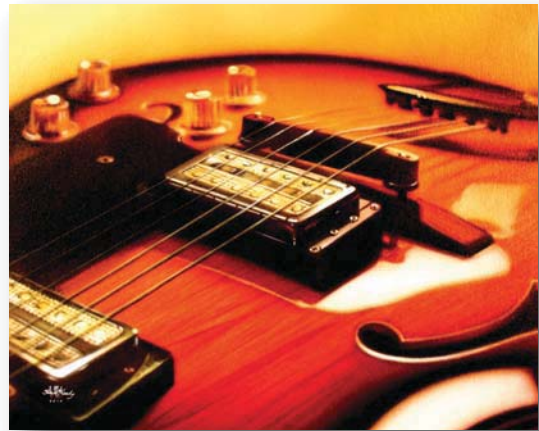
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Taylor's Cache waterborne acrylic on canvas  
12" x 9" © 2009



Third Set waterborne acrylic on board  
© 8" x 10" 2010



Good Dram createx on board 20" x 24" © 2007



Eb acrylic on board 20" x 15" © 2002