

AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVE GALLAGHER

Steve Gallagher is an artist with origins in the American Midwest, now based in Sussex, UK. Here, Steve discusses his transition from editorial fashion photography to fine art, and the process of capturing intricate details in 3D lenticular images, bringing nature to life.

CG Your work is noted for its detailed and skilful composition. Can you walk us through your process for capturing such intricate details, especially when working with 3D lenticular images?

SG Working with the lenticular 3D process has been a real learning curve, and a fascinating one. Subject matter is key to producing the right quality of image, as it is not always the flowers I expect that create the striking visual impact that I am looking for.

I spend considerable time selecting and testing different flowers to ensure that the final image will produce a high quality 3D lenticular photograph that I am happy to put on display. Depth is very important so a lot of my process is centred around the choice of lenses and lighting, and I will spend many hours making sure I have maximised the impact of the lighting for the image I am working on.

I've been working with various aspects of design and composition for a large portion of my life, so I do believe a lot of my process is second nature by now, and not something that I can readily explain. It's a very immersive process and a really interesting way to see the world. And when I get it right, that first view of the final image can be breathtaking.





CG How did your upbringing in Iowa, the American Midwest, influence your artistic journey and photographic style?

SG I was born the sixth of six children in a small Midwest town to a blue collar family. My father died when I was very young, and my mother had to work three jobs to keep a roof over our heads. Ironically, that gave me a freedom as a child and teenager that I would not otherwise have had. According to one of my sisters, I was keen on photography from a young age, but I don't think I knew that photography could be a career choice at that time.

That early independence meant that I was well-prepared when the time came to leave for Iowa State university, where I began to study Engineering, before switching to Pre-Med. During that first year, I made some lifelong friends, among them a guy from Chicago, five hours away, whose family was prominent in the city and who introduced me to the arts and culture in a way that I had never previously experienced. This influenced me to apply to the prestigious School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where I graduated with a degree in Visual Design and Photography, before becoming an editorial fashion photographer with fashion magazines such as Vogue Latin America.

CG How did your experiences as a fashion photographer in major cities like Chicago, Miami, and New York shape your approach to fine art photography?

SG As a fashion photographer, I had always experimented with lighting and composition. I often shot outdoors and used interior lighting techniques to create drama and contrast. I was interested in harnessing the play of light and shadow to highlight and enhance the finer points of the model and their clothes, and used different framing techniques to bring important details to the fore. This experience has translated across

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to my fine art photography, where flowers are now my models, and the natural world is my canvas. I am still fascinated by detail, and enjoy focusing on the intricate, multi-faceted beauty of single blooms, bringing their complexity and fragility to life in carefully-lit and composed portraits.

CG What led you to transition from a career in advertising and digital design to focusing on fine art photography?

SG Since leaving the world of fashion photography behind, I had been focused on my career as an advertising Creative Director in Miami and then London, where I moved to with my British wife. As our children got older, we moved to West Sussex, in the south of the UK, and then to the coastal town of Worthing in 2019. We bought a house by the sea, with an artist's studio in the garden. While I continued to run my design agency, I also started to think about the studio and how I might use it to start taking photographs again.

Then the Covid-19 pandemic hit, and while I was still working on design projects for clients, I had a lot more time on my hands. I decided I would use this time to unearth my old professional cameras and revisit my love of photography. The pandemic gave me the



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ability to focus on photography for hours at a time, day after day, and it limited my creative focus to only two subjects - flowers and the sea. This constriction of space and expansion of time was a huge gift, and was the launchpad for my career today.

CG When did you begin to combine traditional fine art techniques with contemporary 3D photographic methods to create your unique pieces?

SG I was visiting Miami on a family holiday in 2022 when I saw a lenticular 3D photograph on the wall of a restaurant we were in. This piqued my curiosity and I then looked into lenticular printing techniques, discovering to my surprise that one of the leading international lenticular printing companies was located only an hour from my home. I could see the creative potential of combining my fine art techniques with a 3D photographic printing method to produce something quite unique, and decided to test one of my images - Fire Within - to see if I could translate the depth and multi-layered characteristics of this beautiful dahlia into a 3D image. The resulting artwork was so stunning that it not only exceeded my expectations, but opened up a whole new creative process to explore.

CG How has living in Worthing and the beauty of the Sussex Downs influenced your photographic style and subject matter? Can you share what draws you into these subjects?

SG The choice of my subject matter was entirely the result of the first Covid-19 lockdown. I was confined to our home and one daily walk. As we live so close to the sea, I started to take photographs of the sea. The only other photographic subjects I could easily access were the flowers in our garden. I have continued to photograph the sea in all of its many moods and to create floral portraits from cultivated and wild flowers ever since. I find them both endlessly fascinating.

CG What do you hope viewers take away from your intricate floral studies and how they highlight the complexity of the natural world?

SG My aim is always to introduce the audience to a different way to view the subject, to look closer and to begin to see and appreciate the detail and complexity behind the obvious beauty of the flower. I want the viewer to pause, reconsider what they are looking at; and to allow themselves to be drawn into the intricacy of pattern, colour and texture on display. My belief is that great art is unique in its ability to give the viewer something new to see each and every time they look at the subject - be that a sculpture, a painting or a photograph. An investment in art should be a pleasure for years to come.

CG Your works interplay between stillness and dynamism. What role does this play and, is there a specific reason behind your choice of flora species and compositions to engage viewers?

SG I am very deliberate in my choice of subject matter, particularly when I am considering a new lenticular 3D image. The ability to

successfully turn a 2D image into a 3D representation is predicated on the original flower being suitable for this treatment. In the simplest terms, there needs to be a depth and textural richness to the flower, so that even as a 2D image, it draws the eye in and offers a sense of dynamism and movement.

When this is then processed into a lenticular image, that inherent dynamism is translated into a moving image that highlights the multilayered and complex detail of the flower. This can be further enhanced by the original lighting and background colour I use for the image, which means that the whole comes together to create something uniquely captivating to the viewer.

CG Looking forward, how do you see your subject matter or technique evolve?

SG I'm currently exploring more options and subject matters using the lenticular 3D technique. There are primarily two types of lenticulars. The process I'm currently using is a 3D depth type of print, where the subject is produced by one single 2D photograph. I'm planning different applications within this but also dipping into the motion lenticular process which can involve multiple images that move as you interact with the artwork.



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