

Inside Sierra Nevada's East Coast Brewery



# ALL ABOUT BEER

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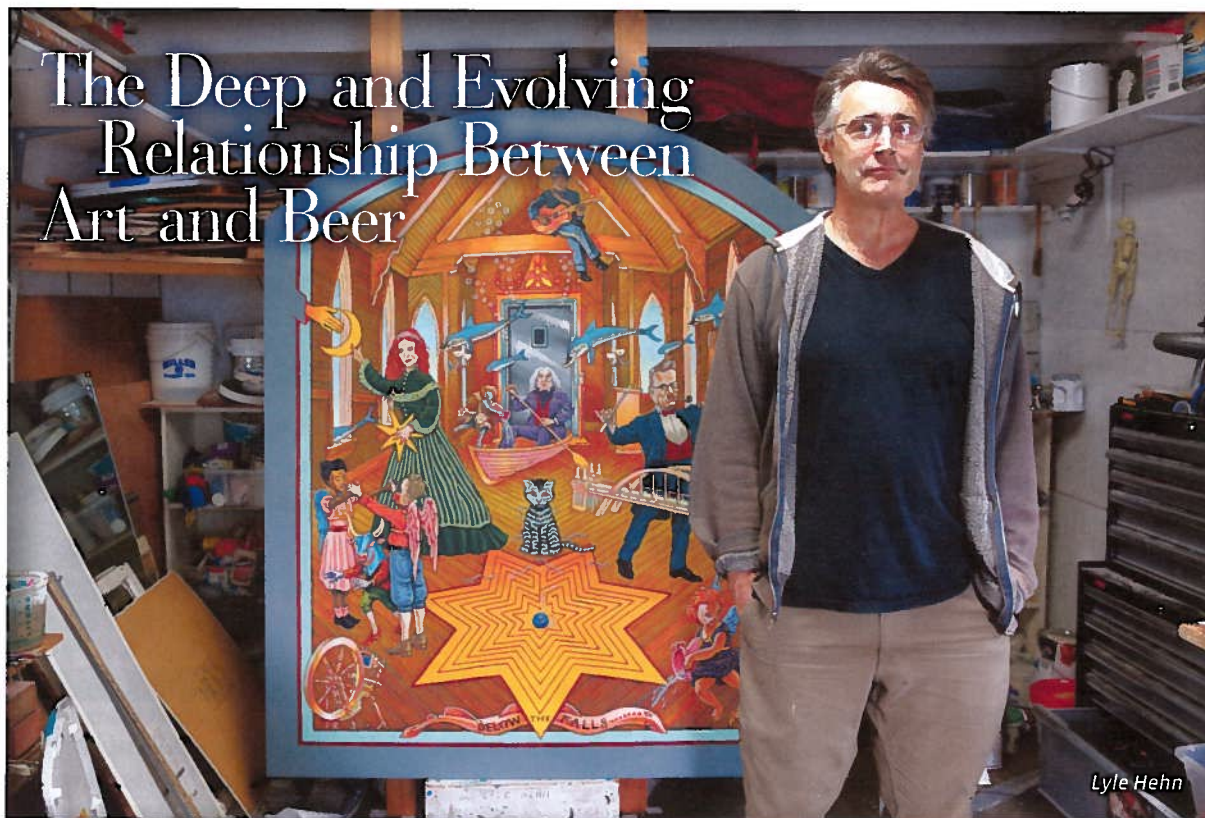
A Lyle Hehn  
painting on display  
at McMenamins  
Market Street Pub  
in Portland, OR

# Creating Masterpieces





# The Deep and Evolving Relationship Between Art and Beer



**E**ver since the McMenamins chain of brewpubs opened its first location, Barley Mill Pub in Portland, OR, in 1983, brothers Mike and Brian McMenamin have embraced art. For a time, the McMenamins even referred to their brewers, themselves, as artists.

Not counting these brewer artists, McMenamins currently employs three full-time artists and several others on a contract basis. Walk into any of over 60 McMenamins locations sprinkled throughout Oregon and Washington and you will see fantastic art painted all over the walls in a uniform style, which staff artist Lyle Hehn refers to as “historical surrealism.” “I look at old advertising art for inspiration, so there’s an old-fashioned look to everything,” Hehn says. He has been working for McMenamins for 20 years and designs everything from the paintings that cover the walls to beer labels, signage, T-shirts and graphics. “I’m here to promote the company,” he says of his longtime role at one of America’s most successful brewing companies, “but I try to have fun doing it.” The historical aspect of his work is a reflection of the image of McMenamins, which has chosen many historic buildings to house its operations.

There is an intersection where art—the physical manifestation of creative minds—and beer—the liquid creation of skilled artisans—meet in the mind as the senses of sight, smell, taste and touch come together. Beer and visual art

are very much connected, and some in the industry as well as consumers are passionate about both and find ways to join them.

While McMenamins may have been working with artists for 30 years, there has been a remarkable surge recently in breweries discovering that they fit within the tapestry of the various arts. The collegial and supportive brewing community is now simply spreading its support to forms of art beyond the art they already brew.

## A Kaleidoscope of Art Forms

Many people are now realizing the strong connection between brewing and other arts. As painters and sculptors mix colors and shapes and use strokes and form to communicate visually, brewers use grain bills, hop blends, yeast and other ingredients combined with traditional and innovative brewing techniques to communicate. Both sets of artists start with a blank canvas and use their chosen medium to create a work of art expressing a creative vision that cannot be expressed orally. Both sets of artists evoke

By DON TSE



emotion from their audiences.

Some artists are even taking the bold step of actually combining the two media more directly. Mike Brenner, for example, got a degree from the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design in 2000. He started an artistic not-for-profit within days of graduation and started his own art gallery a few years later. "I was sleeping in the back of my art gallery. I realized that this was crazy. I needed to re-envision how to support the arts. I was homebrewing in front of my gallery a few days later when the idea hit me. In the arts, you are always working with philanthropists, and in Milwaukee, the philanthropists come from a beer background, so I realized that I could use my beer to drive my art."

In 2013, Brenner founded Brenner Brewing Co., a production brewery with an attached 1,800-square-foot gallery housing 12 to 18 artists. He promises to shake up the beer scene in the same way that he shook up the art scene.

"In my heart as an artist, I just want to do weird [stuff] that freaks people out," he said. "But as an artist, I always did some works that were more accessible before seeing how far I could push it. People could get familiar with my work and then would be more comfortable and trust me when I presented something more out there."

Brenner plans to use the same approach with his beer. In the conservative Milwaukee beer market, he will brew some accessible beers, but after hooking drinkers with these, he plans to expose them to more interesting brews, including sour Belgian-inspired beers aged in a 20-barrel French-oak storage tank he



Eric Steen

recently acquired. The connection is not just bringing art to beer lovers; it is also bringing beer to art lovers.

While Brenner is actually planning to provide space to artists, Gigantic Brewing Co. of Portland, OR, works with artists in a different way. Since opening just a few years ago, Gigantic has made connections to the art world and has leveraged artists into its marketing plan. One of its early investors was Rob Reger, an internationally known comic artist from Berkeley, CA, and since opening, Gigantic has developed a connection with Hellion Gallery, a Portland art gallery whose stated goal is to seek out undiscovered artists and bring them to the world.

Gigantic has only one regular beer, an India pale ale; all of its other beers are one-off, limited creations. Working with Reger and Hellion, Gigantic selects an artist and commissions a unique work of art for each one of its beer labels. The tie between Gigantic and the art community is so deep that when Gigantic supplies beer to Hellion for show openings, people in the arts community ask for beers not by the names of the beers, but by the names of artists who created the labels. As with Brenner, Gigantic's connection to art is helping spread the gospel of good beer beyond the realm of beer geeks.

The connection with Hellion has also resulted in Gigantic being the only brewery in Portland (and there are a lot of them) to participate in a citywide mural project that is seeing local artists paired with an international artist to create public works of art throughout the city.

Perhaps nobody has combined beer and art more successfully than Eric Steen. In addition to organizing



In 2009, Chad Kennedy (formerly of Laurelwood Brewing) brewed a beer inspired by *Homesteaders*, a painting by Arthur Ranquist.

PHOTOS COURTESY ERIC STEEN. PHOTO LEFT BY VIVIAN JOHNSON. PHOTO TOP BY THE NEW SCHOOL.



art and beer pairing events in Portland, OR, Steen is the man behind Beers Made by Walking. With Beers Made by Walking, Steen arranges for brewers to go on organized hikes, gathering ingredients along the way that are then used in a brew. The resulting beer is then a liquid "portrait" of that hike. In the same way that a photograph or painting can represent the hike visually, the beer represents the hike in beery fashion.

Breweries in Oregon, Washington and Colorado have brewed hiking beers, including big names in the craft beer business such as Deschutes Brewery and Ska Brewery. Deschutes brewed Sage Fight IPA with juniper and sage, a flavorful portrait of Whyhchus Canyon Preserve, while Ska brewed Cerveza de las Animas Perdidas with juniper, yarrow and chokecherries, a delicious portrait of the Animas River in Durango, CO. Because the beers are brewed with found ingredients, they tend to push the boundaries, but then, all art, in its time, does precisely that. Beers Made by Walking is not just about connecting beer and art; it is the ultimate presentation of beer as art. Ansel Adams has got nothing on these liquid landscapes.

"Beer and art projects are a fun way to mash together my two passions," says Steen, laughing as he realized his unintended pun.

## Brewing up Art

The artistic aspects of Angel City Brewery of Los Angeles are apparent as soon as you see the Art-Deco-inspired labels on the brewery's bottles. As a member of the Downtown Los Angeles Arts District, Angel City has supported the artistic community in which it lives ever since reopening under current ownership in 2012. Emily Hope, events and marketing manager, explains that the company's "mission is to be involved with our community, and our local community happens to be filled with artists."

In addition to having a rotating art gallery in the brewery taproom with opening nights coinciding with Los Angeles' monthly art walks, Angel City supports the local arts community through its Heritage Festival, a mixture of beer fest, food fair, art show and music concert. Heritage Festival was first hosted as part of Angel City's grand opening, but it will be an annual event, with part of the profits going to Art Share L.A., a warehouse providing community

space and subsidized live/work lofts for artists.

Equally laudable, Fort Collins Brewery of Fort Collins, CO, recently supported the arts by funding a brewery of another kind—the FCB Art Brewery, a partnership with Downtown Artery. Artists were chosen to work at the art brewery on their own projects and to create some beer-inspired art. The artists retained ownership of all of their work, and other than using some of the art on labels for one-time-only beers, the brewery received no direct benefit from the art produced.

"Creativity is a fundamental driving force of Fort Collins Brewery," says a spokesman for the brewery. "Visual artists are right in that area, and supporting them allows us to show the connection between beer and more-traditional art."

## Beer Festival Meets Art Fair

While Angel City Brewery and Fort Collins Brewery may be providing financial support to artists, many others are celebrating the connection between beer and art in other ways.

Last year, Victory Brewing Co. of Downingtown, PA, was looking for a fun way to host brewers from around the nation who would be congregating in nearby Washington, DC, for the Craft Brewers Conference (CBC). Victory brewmaster and president Bill Covalesski decided that Victory would host a beer and art pairing event and reached out to longtime friend Sam Calagione of Dogfish Head Brewery of Milton, DE,

## Some favorite beer and art pairings

Unibroue *Quelque Chose* and the "Spatialism" paintings of Lucio Fontana (1899-1968)—Fontana was an Argentine-born Italian painter famous for monochromatic paintings with slashes in them. The slashing was revolutionary since it broke the surface of the canvas, bringing a third dimension to painting, traditionally a two-dimensional art form. Similarly, Unibroue's *Quelque Chose*, which can be enjoyed either cold or hot, revolutionized beer by adding temperature as a dimension to its enjoyment. While temperature affects the flavor of all beer, *Quelque Chose* is one of only a few intended to be heated. Enjoying the beer hot surprisingly enhances its effervescence and causes its flavors to dance throughout the mouth in a manner different from other beers. One can almost visualize the flavors not just covering the tongue in two dimensions, but also fluttering through the mouth in three dimensions.

Barley wines and Mark Rothko (1903-1970)—Barley wines are big beers that engulf the taste buds. Their presence in the mouth commands your attention. Simi-

larly, the large paintings of Russian-born American artist Mark Rothko, which are often displayed in a room covered with his art, envelop the viewer both physically and emotionally. The paintings are abstract, with nothing more than a few large shapes of color, but their size and the emotions they evoke draw in viewers in a manner identical to the way barley wines pull in drinkers.

Dogfish Head's Saxony-Anhalt Ale and a beer recipe collage—The Province Ale Project—Dogfish Head has made something of a niche in reproducing historical beers. For this, it resurrected 12 antique recipes, including Saxony-Anhalt Ale, brewed with deer antler. Saxony-Anhalt Ale was Dogfish Head's contribution to *Amber Waves*—The Art of American Craft Beer and was served alongside a collage made from reproduced pages of the brewing journal from which The Province Ale Project beer recipes were taken. While the beer and the collage were works of art unto themselves, the pairing created a complete picture, taking *Amber Waves* attendees back in time better than either the beer or the collage could alone.





Rawi Nanakul organizes a beer festival that celebrates beer's role in the world of art.

PHOTO BY RAWI NANKUL

## Brewers Supporting Artists

Realizing that not all art comes in liquid and fermented form, breweries across the globe are embracing artists, helping foster talent and expanding customers' horizons. Here are a few doing their part to fuel creativity.

In June 2013, Founders Brewing Co. of Grand Rapids, MI, introduced a new beer, Inspired Artist Black IPA, with proceeds going to ArtPrize, an art competition that covers three square miles of downtown Grand Rapids. But the new beer is not merely a token gesture among many other community support initiatives. Inspired Artist Black IPA is the first beer of a five-year annual commitment made by Founders to ArtPrize.

A lot of brewery taprooms hang local art on the walls, but Phillips Brewing Co. of Victoria, British Columbia, takes it one step further. It formally rotates the work of a local artist through the brewery tasting room and throws an opening reception in support.

Likewise, Steam Whistle Brewing of Toronto hosts monthly art exhibitions in its gallery at the brewery. Local talent is featured, and no rent or commission is charged to the artists.

Collective Arts Brewing, also of the Toronto area, was founded in 2013 and continually calls for artists to submit work via its website. Selected works are featured on Collective Arts' bottle labels, artists are paid for use of their work, and the brewery then promotes the artist through social media and events.

The movement to support the arts is not limited to breweries in North America, though. Little Creatures Brewing of Fremantle, Australia, is the title sponsor of the Fremantle Arts Centre Print Award, supporting contemporary printmaking in Australia.

Even Asahi Breweries, headquartered in Tokyo, established the Asahi Beer Arts Foundation in 1989 to support arts of all kinds. It opened a museum in 1996, has organized festivals and the Asahi Beer Art Awards since 2003.

who immediately jumped on board.

"I'm always thinking of ways to connect craft beer to other things that people enjoy in life," Covalleski said. "I knew that artists, with their creative mind-set, would be able to appreciate the diversity of beer, so I wanted to connect these two things."

Thus was born "Amber Waves—The Art of American Craft Beer," which saw 25 art-loving breweries from across the United States showcase one beer paired with a piece of visual art from their own collections. After the event, all of the works of art were auctioned, with proceeds going to The Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund, a charity supporting wounded military personnel.

Calagione, the head of arguably one of the most creative breweries in the business, was rightfully proud of the results. "Thirty years into the craft beer renaissance, it's amazing that we can still come up with new and exciting events. Only now is beer being recognized for its complexity and character. An event like Amber Waves [was] such a great opportunity to hammer home the idea of beer as an art form itself." Brewers from across the nation in town for the CBC attended the event. Industry veterans, who attend beer festivals all the time, universally enjoyed the artistic twist to Amber Waves.

In a similar vein, Rawi Nanakul organizes The Art of Beer, a beer festival in Sacramento, CA, which for three years has celebrated beer's role in the world of art. Nanakul, a photographic artist, creates 6-foot by 8-foot photographic portraits of breweries printed on metal. The festival started as a means to showcase his beer-inspired work, but has grown to host two dozen

PHOTO © SALVADOR DALI MUSEUM, INC.



California breweries and hundreds of beer and art fans.

"We partner each brewery with an artist," says Nanakul. "The breweries make a beer that is intended to be tasted while enjoying the associated art. The breweries really enjoy that aspect about this festival. It gives them an opportunity to tell a story beyond the liquid."

As Nanakul points out, connecting beer and art allows the brewer to add an emotional dimension to the liquid. The beer need not be merely hoppy or malty or sour. When paired with art, beer can evoke joy, cause reflection or incite passion.

The established arts community also recognizes this and is embracing the artistic aspect of beer. The Dali Museum in St. Petersburg, FL, for example, is home to the world's most important collection of Salvador Dali's paintings. It annually hosts Liquid Desires, a beer festival held at the museum where more than 50 beers are served among the Spanish surrealist's most-famous works.

"It's been fun to find the tie-ins between Salvador Dali's work and craft beer. In 2010, Bell's Brewery [of Kalamazoo, MI] featured a reproduction of Dali's famous 'Persistence of Memory' on its Oberon mini-keg with the melting watches replaced with Oberon logos," says Carly Meek, marketing manager for the Dali Museum and organizer of Liquid Desires. "Cigar City Brewing [of Tampa, FL] brewed a beer called Surreal Ale for the grand opening of the Dali Museum's current location. Of course, all the experimentation with flavors that craft brewers do is very much in the spirit of Dali."

The success of these events would come as no surprise to beer lovers in Portland, OR. Residents of this Pacific Northwest city, known colloquially as "Beervana," are highly educated in the artistry of beer. In fact, Portland's principal public art gallery, the Portland Art Museum, has twice hosted Art & Beer, a beer and art pairing event, in 2009 and 2010, organized by Eric Steen of Beers Made by Walking.

Brewers from Coalition Brewing, Hopworks Urban Brewery and Rock Bottom Brewery in 2010 and from Laurelwood Brewing, Lucky Labrador Brewing and Lompoc

Brewing in 2009 toured the museum's collection. Each selected a work and brewed a beer, drawing inspiration from the art. Patrons were then able to sample the beers alongside the art at the Art & Beer event.

Events like these allow brewers to interpret a work of art created by someone else and connect it to their own work. One of the most interesting aspects of art is how it affects people differently. You can learn a lot about people by seeing how art affects them. By connecting beer, which is a social lubricant anyway, with art, beer acts as a catalyst for a discussion about art, and how it is reflected in the beer and about the brewer's own artistic background. The art allows patrons to enjoy the beer more deeply.

**Don Tse** is a freelance beer and whiskey writer from Calgary, Alberta. He enjoys art of all kinds, from abstract expressionism to imperial stoutism.

## How to Pair Beer with Art

While beer and food pairing is now a familiar concept, beer and art is less obvious. But the same way dinner can be enhanced by music and candlelight, so, too, can any artistic experience be enhanced by another. Here are some tips for enhancing your beer with visual art.

**Work with the color of the beer.** The beer itself has color, of course, but don't be limited by that. Think of flavors as having color. A beer with grassy flavor can be thought of as green, tropical-fruit flavors as yellow and heather as purple, for example.

**Think about size.** Big beers work with large paintings and sculptures. Lighter beers work with smaller works.

**Pair simple with simple and complex with complex.** That barrel-aged imperial stout brewed with nine different malts will

work well with detailed, intricate paintings, while a classic German helles would work better paired with a simple, balanced abstract work.

**Texture adds another dimension.** Levels of carbonation and viscosity contribute to a beer's texture. Work that dimension into your art pairings, with silkier beers working with flatter or amorphous abstract paintings and effervescent beers working with textured paintings or sharp sculptures.

**Think historically.** Art of all kinds is a reflection of our society. So, historic beer styles work well with old art while cutting-edge beers work with contemporary art.

As with beer and food pairing, there are no wrong answers. Some pairings work better than others, but art is meant to bring you pleasure. Have fun experimenting!



The Liquid Desires event at The Dali Museum