

## Steve R. Coffey Artist Statement 2019

I've always thought of the Canadian prairies as a place loaded with visual intricacies resulting in what has become this lifelong exploration to capture it's power on canvas and in song. Regarding my painting practice: I was trained as a sculptor but my voice wasn't being fully realized in the three dimensional world for this one reason: My trips back and forth over the provinces (born in Manitoba, raised there and in Alberta, trained in Alberta and in Saskatchewan) and recalling people's comments of those 'boring' rides that offered them so little to look at. This made no sense to me whatsoever and that was the beginning of my need to express what I was seeing and feeling and perhaps convince the skeptics otherwise. And that was also when I realized that paint would have to be my medium.

My paintings are mental snapshots. I don't paint from photographs and I seldom paint plein air. Essentially I'll see something that strikes me, file it away in my head and draw on it in my studio. These mental files I call 'Memory Polaroids'. This process all lends to a certain impressionistic surreality by mingling varied visual moments and emotions in any one painting thus offering me the freedom to step outside a more 'traditional' palette into what I consider to be the real nature's abstraction. My process and my search for this expressive accuracy continues to evolve.

Regarding my music practice: Much of what I've discussed above can be applied to my music career. The reaction, gesture and implied metaphor that seems natural to my musical compositions are equal in my approach, perception and creation of my painted canvases. The only real differences there being is in my training and tools. Whereas I'm a fully trained visual artist I'm a staunch self taught musician and songwriter. This I credit to my early need for guttural expression (as any kid has really) and my dad who was a self taught steel guitar player that believed that trusting in your ear was the key to expressive uniqueness or 'finding your style' as he'd put it. Throughout my pursuit of art degrees I leaned on the organic purity of my songs to balance what I thought then was a hard edged, formulaic, academic approach to art learning & making (intense studies of theory, art histories etc lent to this misconception). This pure musical expression that lived in my back pocket eventually made me realize that it was a well rounded tool box (or art tickle trunk as I like to call it) that I acquired from art school, nothing more. Thus I began to push away art speak and 'isms' and taught myself to paint with the same freedom and purity I've always had in my music. Without the musical exploration there would never have been the visual exploration. And vice versa. Hence why I've always said that 'it all comes from the same place, the only difference is the tools'.

My natural shift over the early years of awkward attempts at the aforementioned 'art speak' was to adopt and utilize the language of music in the creation and discussion of my canvas: Tempo, Lyric, Melody, Rhythm, Verse, Chorus etc. and of course vice versa when writing and playing a musical composition: Hue, Tone, Contrast, Line, Weight etc. Thus- Painting my song and singing my painting.

My philosophy (with a tint of opinion) is that art derives from a personal place and must first pass that inside test before it is let loose to speak publicly. But for me the completion of a work of art is simply a remnant of that moment of expression. At that point the piece is no longer as important to me hence why it is easy to let it go and to move on. A physical painting or recorded song created yesterday gets in the way of the perceived one being created today. The only value to draw on is what may have made yesterday's work of art visually or sonically successful enough to let it enter the outside world. It is the informant that instigates progression. Nothing more. It is no longer mine as such but an echo of my voice speaking elsewhere in the world, in wherever it ends up and takes on a new role as some sort of purveyor. Now, hopefully, important to somebody else for whatever reason. A collector's/ listener's perception then becomes a collaboration or what I call 'the dance' between viewer/listener and the artist. What is art without the viewer or music without the listener? The truth is: Art that comes from that natural need to express will find it's place organically therefore should travel carefully through superficial realms such as contests, awards and competitions. There, there is little more than judging the 'flavor of the day'. Unless they are designed with integrated teaching tools, competitions and contests risk belittling true expression rather than encouraging it by suggesting that only a select few can do it well and ultimately, can set a poor precedent for our aspiring future artists. With art making there is no right or wrong. My process is an ongoing artistic refinement using intuition, instinct and inspiration gathered from what's around me and those I hold dear and without any public voice saying: "you should create this". I don't rely on other's artistic approval. Just my own.

I have been driven to create art all of my life whether it be painting or music. I don't analyze why so much as simply feeding the need. Visual Arts and Music are my chosen languages and my end goal is to perfect them. Something no artist ever really does, hence the painter that dies holding the brush. It's much more than a passing interest. It's a way of life. It's forever learning.

In the end I would hope that my work triggers the feeling of familiarity, that somewhere at sometime the viewer has seen or felt this; a familiar mystery that lives on the tip of the tongue. I would hope that my work is accessible for simply what it is; a painting or a song left to the viewer's interpretation with no tricks.