



# American Gothic: A Life of America's Most Famous Painting

*Steven Biel*

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## **American Gothic: A Life of America's Most Famous Painting** Steven Biel

Is there anyone who has not seen the painting of the sturdy Iowa farmer with his pitchfork and his thin-lipped wife or daughter? Ever since it met the public eye in 1930, the work titled American Gothic has elicited admiration, disgust, reverence and ridicule - and has been reproduced hundreds of thousands of times, in every medium. Painted by a self-proclaimed "bohemian" who studied in Paris, the image was first seen as a critique of Midwestern Puritanism and what H.L. Mencken called "the booboisie". During the Depression it came to represent endurance in hard times through the quintessential American values of thrift, work and faith. Later, in television, advertising, politics and popular culture, American Gothic evolved into parody - all the while remaining a lodestar by which one might measure closeness to or distance from the American heartland.

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