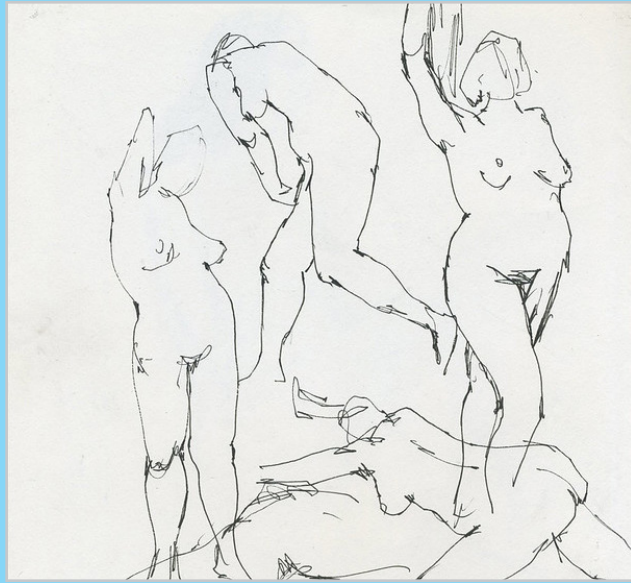


DRAWING PEOPLE

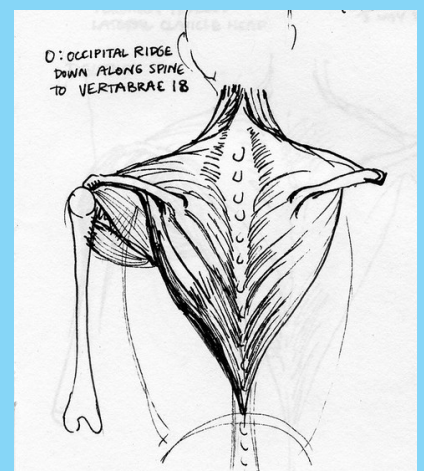
{sketching in public, and figure drawing}



One of the best practices that a visual artist to maintain, is to continue to draw the figure. Posed and unposed, nude and clothed, in the studio and out in the world, short and long durations, in large and small sketchbooks.

Art school, or attending figure drawing workshops, are a great way to practice. I had both going for years, beginning with basic figure drawing class at MCAD in 1982 before my first semester as a full-time student. I was able to render figures decently for a 19 year old beginner, but didn't consider myself to be a figurative artist. Knowing that the discipline is essential for gaining skill, I drew on. Like most beginning art students, there were no figure drawings worth saving from then. I was more invested in imaginative, visionary, abstract creations.

Flash forward to the Academy of Art years in San Francisco [1987–90] where a few good influences jumped me ahead in the realm of figure drawing. My very first class was a major favorite; Anatomy for artists, with Thomas Marsh — who is a master at classical figurative art. Excellent with teaching us every detail of the skeletal and muscular structure; their names, placements, and how to incorporate this medical knowledge into fig-



ure drawing. An essential and fascinating course for any artist.

The other, greater influence was from my new artist friends that I met at the Academy. They kept such amazing sketchbooks...daily, and most pages were mini complete artworks unto themselves. I had some ok sketchbook pages, but my colleagues helped inspire me to up the ante of their quality and relative personal importance. Carrie Galbraith was the best at the art of sketchbook journals — they were the end result rather than the means to another media form. She went on to master and then teach the art of the book. [A dear friend who is widely missed; who passed away much too soon in early 2018.]

Otherwise, I eventually found myself in the fun company of fellow Academy graduates and voracious sketchbook artists, in an informal group cleverly named as The Sketch Pistols! Sebastian Hyde, Dave Adams [who I believe started the group, circa 1988?], Kevin Evans, Richard Fong, and Carrie G who was instrumental in getting me acquainted with this loose net group. The idea is to meet in pubs and cafés, to drink craft ales, socialize, while we draw, draw, DRAW! Mostly sketching the people and environment around us, in all of its whirling, unpredictable motion. Challenging, and loosening to the artists eye and hand! And always loads of fun, whether the sketches were hit or miss.

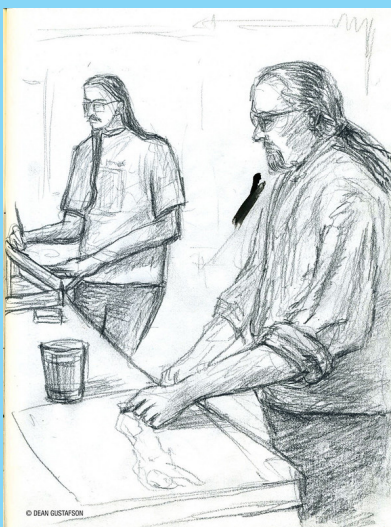


sketch pistols in the 90's

I joined up by the early 90s; meeting at interesting pubs, such as Edinburgh Castle, Specs, Vesuvio's, 20 Tank, Café Abir, and more. Often this would be coincided with events by the Cacophony Society when we'd end up at a pub at the end of the event. Good times, in my twenties filling up the sketchbooks.

Moving ahead to the mid-90's, when most of us got into the new and exciting career in the digital arts — which also made us more money. Starving artists no more. I think that all of the time we now spent at computers had served a greater need to be practicing in traditional media for a combination of good reasons; Keeping our chops up for the new illustration/animation work, and maintaining our original intent to produce physical artwork.

Sebastian Hyde paved the way, by starting a figure drawing group every Tuesday evening at his spacious art studio space in Oakland. Hiring professional figure models from the Bay Area Models Guild. The cost was split by whoever showed up. ...so if 5 artists attended, it might be around \$6 each. I was at his first session, which I believe was the first Tuesday of 1996. Eileen was the model, who we drew several times that year. The usual setup was 7–10pm, in a series of 1 minute poses, followed by 2, 5, 10, and then 20 minute poses. Seb really knows how to throw a great figure drawing session! With craft ales, music, and way more social than the average figure group allows. Perfect! I was hooked, after not doing figure drawing from posing nudes since art college in the 80's.



Painting sessions were made on occasional Saturday's, for three hour single poses [with breaks to have mercy on the model!] Those were very focused hours, that often flew by rapidly...never quite finishing the work, but close enough.

Paul and Seb figure drawing on a Tuesday evening, 1996

Seb is a true figurative artist; who had been dedicated all along by attending other figure drawing groups and marathons. I was impressed by his exhibition of figure paintings at La Dolce Vita café on Divisadero street in 1991. Before then I didn't know how much he was involved in figure artmaking.



I made it to most of the Tuesday sessions of 1996–98, along with sweetheart Alisa who I lived with, Paul who often drove us from the Richmond neighborhood we shared, Marshall and Boyd from my work at Midnight Design, Richard Fong, Tim Gleason, Suzanne Onadera, Christian Ingle, and good friend Stewart Stanyard [who I met there then] plus a few other artists whose names evade me.

We enjoyed sharing newly discovered art supplies, and a fast favorite were Koh-i-noor Aristochrom 3400 pencils! With multi-colored pencil leads that gives good results. We all seemed to have discovered them at the same time. I bought mine at Flax on Market street near Valencia.



Ink was my favorite media; drawing without a net. Using fountain pens, or dipping a brush. All of this figure drawing helped my sketchbook journals to improve. By now, my filled sketchbook collection was needing more shelf space!

Draw til you drop

Moving to Marin county increased distance from Seb's, and so a long break from figure drawing occurred. I still kept busy sketchbooks, loaded with all sorts of imaginative explorations...but I'll stick to the story about figure drawing for now.

After big personal changes, I returned to more figure sessions at Seb's, and the years from 2010–2015 became my best for life drawing. Moving to Seb's house

in Oakland while transitioning during the recession certainly helped. By now his Tuesday sessions were a more popular tradition for new regulars. New friends were made, with increased figure drawing practice reaching new levels. Good friend and all-around mensch Lee Whitfield also lives there, at where he later coined as The House of Undying Fun [HoUF]; you can guess the reference.

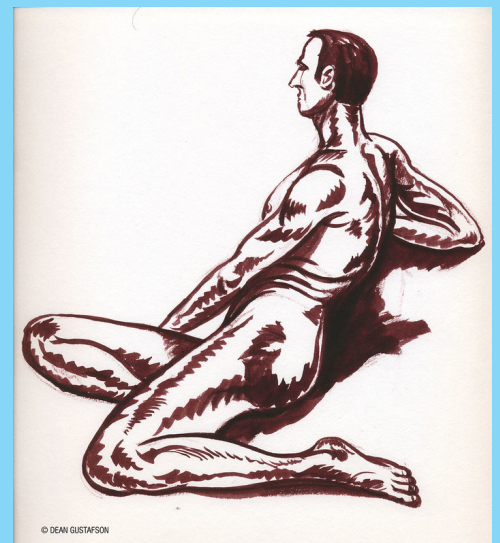


Seb throws great parties that would go all day into the late night. Complete with barbecue, home brew, jam sessions, bonfire, and sometimes following a figure drawing marathon. Undying fun indeed!



Being there every Tuesday meant helping Seb and Lee to set up the living room for the crowded session ahead. Shuffling tables, chairs, figure stands, easels; preparing snacks and beer and coffee, which now part of a blanket price of \$12 per person. [a great deal!] Attendees ranged from 15 to 25 artists, which would pack the space just enough. Again, music was playing, from Seb's enormous collection of fresh indie artists, making it a good place to discover new music while drawing! [Mekons, and Yo La Tengo were a few of my favorites in regular rotation.]

Occasional Saturday afternoons were spontaneously scheduled in for painting a single pose, with only a few artists. Seb, Tim, Robert Kosai, Alex Rosmarin, and myself, were regulars. Good sessions, often followed with Lanesplitters pizza and binge watching Game of Thrones. Yes, we nerded out about the show.



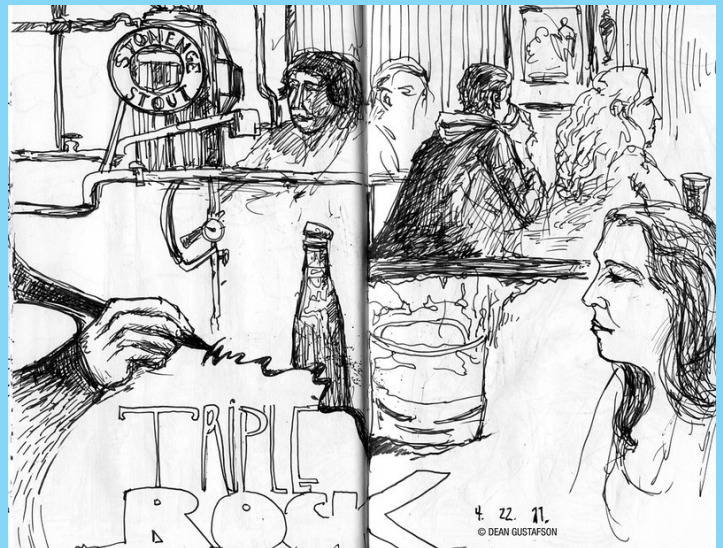


Another quality that I was exposed to at the HoUF, were the plethora of new comic books in their constantly growing collection. I had not much interest in them since junior high; but now I discovered a whole new world of 21st century sophistication. Of higher quality color, printing, paper...and artistic and story-telling variety. "Fables" was a fantastic favorite series at the HoUF. The excellent ink work influenced

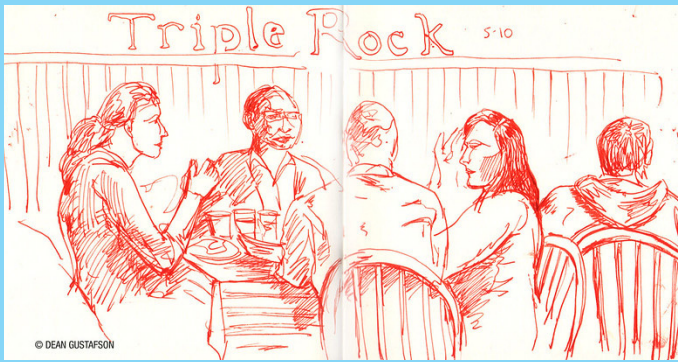
how my brushstrokes looked when figure drawing. A few of us even made a few comic strips during those years – which proved to be a lot of process.

Around late 2010 I was becoming more critical of the quality of ink I was using. I wanted to have it be more of a pure India ink black, unlike most pre-filled ink cartridges, while not clogging up the fountain pen. So that is exactly what I asked the clerk at Flax, who immediately pointed me to Noodlers brand ink. Their black was indeed a rich black and worked fabulously. Not only did their black ink work great, but they made a series of custom color inks that were irresistible; Antietam Red, Polar Blue, Cayenne, Los Alamos, etc. Seb took to them with fantastic results. We were sold ! They are wonderful to use with a brush too, which became a common way to work. For portability I loaded Noodlers inks into fillable watercolor brushes bought in Japantown; I was obsessed.

Another good discovery of 2010 were Hand Book brand sketchbooks found at Artists Crafts and Supplies in Berkeley. Ideal paper for ink washes, but at the time came only in small sizes. Great for sketching out and about, so the Sketch Pistols drawings from that period are exclusively in those books.



Adding to living in the east bay, was going to UC Berkeley every Friday eve-



ning for \$4 figure drawing at Kroeber Hall ! I loved those Friday nights, even though it would be crowded, I would arrive early by bicycle, usually when fellow regular friend Tim Gleason would arrive too [an excellent figure artist using pastels, and long-term regular at Seb's where we met in the 90's]. Seb would often show up a bit later.

I'd get a cup of coffee from the café across the street from campus, get a good spot in the drawing room, tune in to my own music choices on the iPod, and focus on figure drawing.



Afterwards, the fun would begin as we, as the Sketch Pistols, would convene usually at our favorite brewpub — Triple Rock ! it was near UCB, busy, a great ale and food selection, and ideal with plenty of subjects to draw ...all after being warmed up by figure drawing ! By these years, the regulars were new artist friends Jason Courtney, Melissa, and Jonathan, from the drawing groups. Joining was Academy colleague friend from 1989–90 and local Berkeley resident artist Carrie Rehak. And of course, Seb and Tim. Lee only joined us occasionally, and always good when he did. Add a few more occasional drawing group artists dropping by, and we'd have a full table.



For a change of scenery — or if Triple Rock was too full; often by sports fans during a big game — we'd meet at Albatross, the Trappist Belgian ale house, Lanesplitters, Kato's, Barclays, Jupiter, and other local pubs. Again, great times, with drawing as the *raison d'être*.

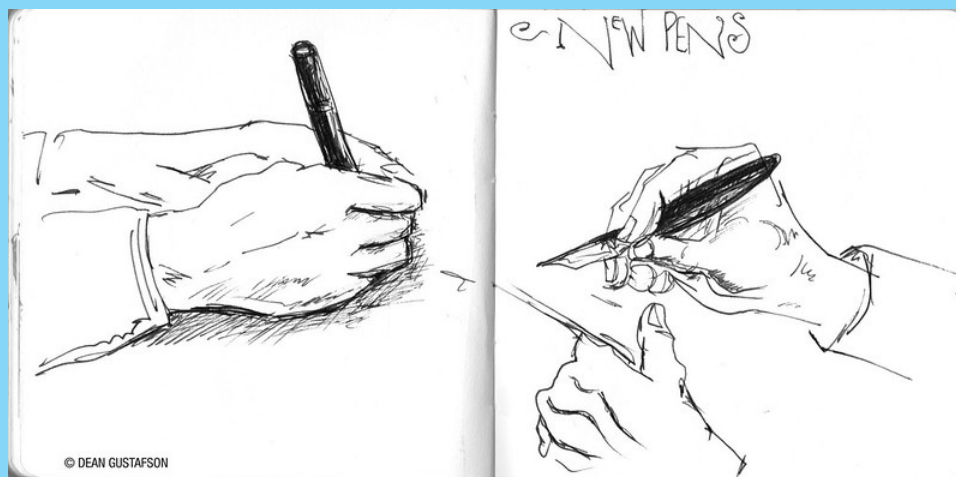


Much of my writing here covers group activity; however, most of the drawing I did was alone when in cafes, concerts, on public transportation, and at home. I have been fortunate enough to have had decades of daily drawing experience, evidenced by the shelves of filled sketchbooks. I've scanned and posted the vast majority of them, which currently are up on Flickr; over 6000 drawings from life and imaginative explorations.

Seeing them now — especially the ones from traveling Europe — bring me back to the time more effectively than photos do. Because the act of drawing an interpretation of something in front of you, forces us to absorb the view with more time and concentration than a snapshot. This is true for even the most rapid, sloppy sketch. The hand/eye coordination translates proportions, light/shade contrast, line quality, mass, balance/imbalance of composition, proximity of relative elements, and expressiveness/gestures...all culminating in the experience of drawing from life. I was healthily addicted!

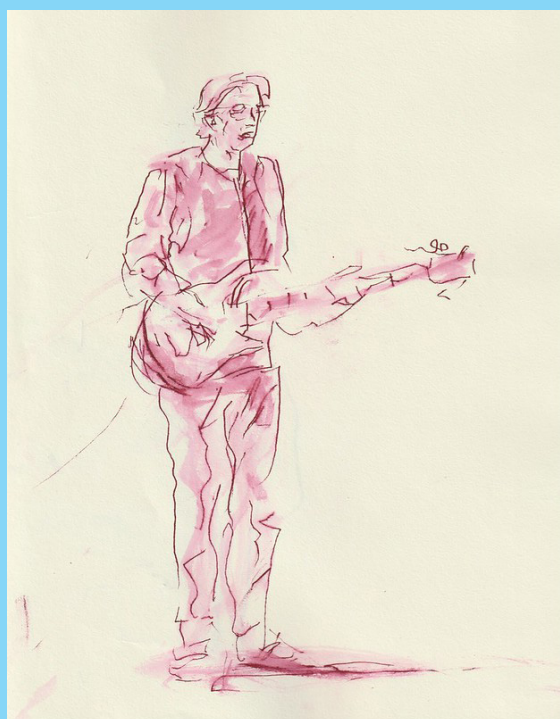
My final drawings were made at Terrapin Crossroads, mainly of live musicians, until mid-2019.

Unfortunately I can't draw anymore. ...but rather than focus on the tragedy, I'm very glad that I involved myself as much as I did. With a lot to see, representing good years of living. With no regrets.



Special thanks to Sebastian Hyde, who got me and many others back to figure drawing after art school!

And a dedication to the memory of Ethyl Ketone [Carrie Galbraith] who really loved the value of keeping active sketchbooks.



– Dean Gustafson, July 2020



