



Externsteine
1999, oil on canvas.

Externsteine may look fantasy, but it is a real place—in northern Germany, in the Teutoburg forest near Detmold.

In 1985, visiting brother Grant, who brought me here on the summer solstice. A beautiful day in the greenery of the Nordrhein-Westfalia district. Located in a national park like setting, walking up the path from the parking lot through trees, you suddenly see these bizarre stone formations towering over the field, trees and a pond. These are at least two stories tall, with ancient temples and steps carved into them. There was nothing else there but forest, so they seem alien by contrast. I was transfixed!

The history was interesting as a prehistoric Teutonic site. Climbing into the worn steps provided the mystique of entering an ancient domain. Much older than this 22 year old Minnesotan had ever experienced.

At the top of one of the towers was an altar with a round window that looked out over the trees. I found out that this is aligned with the sunrise on the spring equinox, making this a sort of German Stonehenge of seasonal significance.

I became very interested in neolithic structures, and this was a major favourite!

The stone textures provided inspiration for a number of paintings a few years ahead.

The place attracts mystics, who were chanting atop the other tower. I approach it more like an art and archaeology scholar, but the new age mysticism adds a fascinating and fresh vibe to the place.

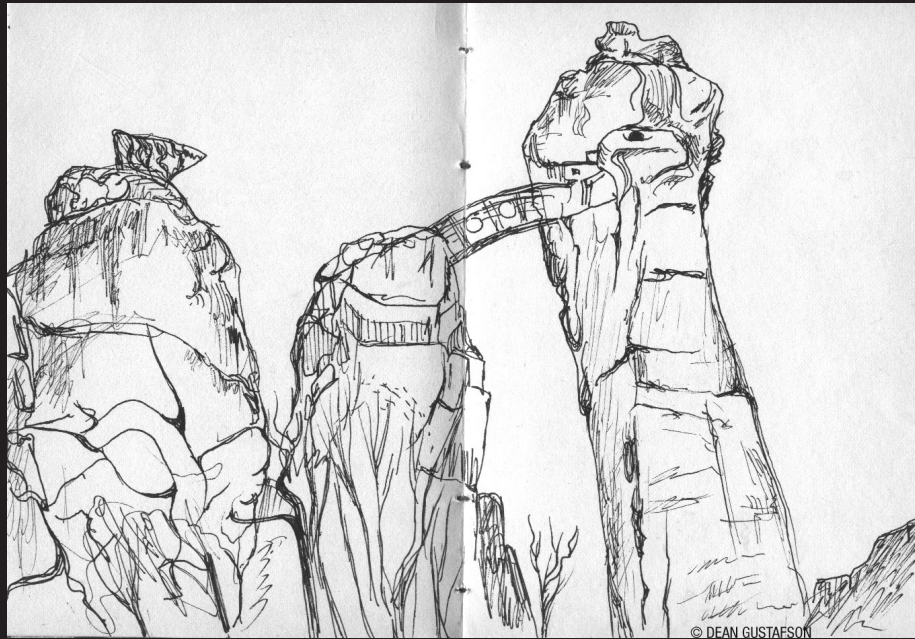
Grant and I returned a few times that summer, and during the following year when I went back to Europe. So we decided another summer solstice visit to Externsteine was a good plan! Though this time, we arrived to find police car, and blocked access to the stones. Apparently there was a rumour of a neo-nazi gathering to be held there, and that is not taken lightly.

This didn't stop the new age hippies from enjoying their night from sneaking around and behind the stones. So we joined them! They brought a harp and poetry. Fun, aerie-fairy mysticism under the full Moon. The antithesis of any fascist quality, with no signs of nazi types to be found.

I returned solo in 1994 on a wet winter day, and arrived to find the steps to the temple above was gated off. Oh no! I was determined, anticipating being back up there after a long journey. So, like a good San Francisco Cacophony Society member, I riskily climbed over the slippery metal gate and made it up and into my destination! I was fueling my sketchbook on that trip, and made several good sketches.



Later back on the ground, I was appreciating the beautiful sound of women singing into the resonant lower caverns. Sounding very Gregorian. I later complimented them when they stopped to see what I was drawing.



The painting was made in 1999 when I felt like doing a landscape, influenced by nocturnal 19th century romanticism, with the bordering section incorporated for adding post-modern touches.

The deer was added to give it scale and a sense of wilderness. The figure seen by the door is from an actual carving near the doorway there. I brought this "keyholder" to life in the misty grounds of the painting, just for fun.

– Dean Gustafson, reminiscing in 2018

