



Genetic Evolutionary series

1984-85

It's high time to pull out the wayback machine and showcase my very first series of paintings made when I was 21.

Ambitious, experimental, psychedelic, weird, biological, mythological, illustrative, comic books, cubistic, metaphysical, occult, sci-fi, scientific, surreal...

These are loaded, perhaps with too much, yet I appreciate the excess! Done at an impressionable young and formative year, between my freshman year at MCAD and around my first summer discovering Europe.

I don't know if I saved the original pencil sketches that launched these bizarre figures, constructed with odd, dynamic forms. A blend of abstract and recognizable shapes. I was aiming for originality and striking weirdness. I spent a year making these off and on when I was in Minneapolis. After being in the San Francisco Bay area for a while, returning to find out that I can no longer afford to continue going to MCAD.

So I got a job cleaning the college at nights, focusing on making these paintings by day. The custodial job allowed me to take a discounted class or two. Illustration was one.

Meanwhile when I was in San Francisco, I found a popular art gallery specialising in contemporary Russian surrealist painters. The detail and imagination blew my young mind! Those paintings influenced the styles of my new series, but not the content. Refined illustrated works, with smooth lack of thick brushwork at first.

The content began by drawing these strange seven pointed star faces with DNA enzyme shaped limbs. When I started the paintings, I worked from the top down, refining as I went one section detail at a

time, not going back over them later. Unlike the way I eventually painted, which became a less rigid way of building the whole surface with layers.

What happened was like placing puzzle pieces in paint, one area at a time from the top of the figure to the bottom.

Greetings from the Genetic Evolutionary

60" x 36"

[see image below, on the last pages*]

The first one is floating against a flat sky blue, an indistinct environment.

The figure came out strikingly, alarmingly odd, dominated by the oversized hand! I liked it. Creatively out there! I'm making more.

The High Priest of Genetic Evolution

69" x 49"

[see image below]

The next was more grounded, our alien mutant figure seated in an earthy green place. Anatomically strange again, this time posed as a holy mutation of evolution. A series concept is now apparent. The high priest of DNA! Seasonally depicted, this represents summer, painted that spring

The Genetic Evolutionary in Autumn

69" x 49"

[see image below]

The showpiece of the lot, and easy to see my advancement with painting after I spent my first summer in Europe!

The Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam was an eye opener! And the Dutch masters of the Rijksmuseum, artworks of Germany, France certainly expanded horizons, such as Matthias Grunewald's Wisenheimer altarpiece in Colmar — a northern renaissance masterpiece of tone and colour, with expressive figures, anatomically studied. All of this advanced exposure boosted my

drive to paint better.

I threw myself into this one with more concentrated effort, to good results. The features that make this a series remained, with attention paid to the dazzle of a vibrant autumnal environment. Again I painted from the top down, leaf by leaf, and the figure too. This is more meditative, our evolutionary figure in introspection. The textures of water reflections, transparent reflective materials, mutating transformational elements, grounded in an earthly environment, were all very interesting challenges! I completed this in under a month. Painting daily before bicycling to clean MCAD. It was a very good month! [September - October 1985]

Listening to Bach, Tibbetts, XTC, 80's King Crimson, Yes, Grateful Dead, and the new album by Todd Rundgren: A Capella.

The Genetic Evolutionary in Winter

69" x 49"

[no image available]

My least favourite of the series of five, details get out of hand, taking on a more distraught quality. It goes in a direction that led me to minimize more.

I'd been adding details like a daily sketchbook of random ideas, in disparate doses of imagery..

Who knows, this might be the most interesting one? What do I know.

Transcendence of the Genetic Evolutionary

69" x 49"

[see image below]

Time to end this odd series with a minimalist evaporation of forms, in kind of a new age spiritual trip. Of a fantasised transformation of the creatures "spirit".

What a difference a year makes in style. This was less "puzzle piece" painting, being a more rapid, atmospheric based approach, leading to future styles of paintings.

This is the only one that sold, to Chris Nelson of Pleasant Hill, CA.

After these were finished, I had them all in a solo exhibition in the second floor gallery at MCAD, as a farewell Minnesota show before I departed for Europe, then California!

(I also had a few of these in a group show months previous at NeoNewavo gallery near MCAD, which went over quite well.)

My solo show went great! At the end of spring semester of '86, so there were students around. With help from Joni driving dad's car (I was not yet interested in driving), we picked up a beer keg and case of wine at Surdycks, with Jarlsberg cheese in time for the art party! Good crowd of friends, family, and colleagues, and people in the area stopping by who possibly saw a posted flyer.

In addition to the big five in the gallery room, I hung smaller, minor paintings in the hallway. Not as impressive, but added volume to the show.

Feedback was positive, ranging from being awed by the details, delighted with the enchanted environments (the autumn piece!) seeing how my own daily mythology is weaved into the whole, to hearing "pretty weird, Dean!"

Artist friend Rick Wright couldn't make it, but left a note, praising the mingling of eastern and western philosophy's and sciences. I was reading Stanislav Grof when painting some of these in '85, thanks to my good, influential friend Anthony Schultz, who I met at MCAD in 1984. He turned me on to some of his books on 'Ancient wisdom and modern science' that influenced the work, and other eastern philosophy based reading, which is Tony's specialty.

At the exhibition, his then partner Denise remarked about my series : "Dean, I think these are self portraits !"

Perhaps.

~ Dean Gustafson, August 2021



Greetings from the Genetic Evolutionary
60" x 36"



The High Priest of Genetic Evolution
69" x 49"



The Genetic Evolutionary in Autumn
69" x 49"



Transcendence of the Genetic Evolutionary
69" x 49"
[no hi res image available]

** for pdf formatting purposes, images fit better at the end.*