

Pathtowers

oil on canvas, 2007
31" x 25"



I've spent a lot of time gazing into this piece over the past few years, and it's become one of my favorites for several qualities.

I painted this in the house in San Anselmo near Fairfax in central Marin County. While living there I had the superb luxury of instant access to some of the most fabulous trails leading to Mount Tamalpais, winding through dense groves of young coastal sequoias.

I spent considerable time on those trails, on bicycle and foot. Awestruck by the beauty and character of these Bay area woods, influencing my artwork with the narrow vertically oriented trees. The paths snaking their ways into and out of these bursts of young yet very tall redwoods.

This was another world — Sacred realms of fascinating nature — that I adored for decades.

Another feature of those years, was my investment in observational astronomy! I used my hand made telescopes to view galaxies and nebulae located several million light years away. Mind blowing to say the least!

What this environment means to this composition, is easily seen by the narrow vertical forms, influenced by a specific passage on a trail near Fairfax. A tall grove of young Redwoods that the narrow hiking trail cascades in a sloping zigzag formation. The trees growing straight up, their tops indiscernible in the foliage above. Their vertical pole-like quality making a hallway of sequoias to walk through as if it were in Rivendell or some such Middle Earth fantasy zone. Speaking of zigzagging, I must have also been inspired by the Zigzag trail in Mill Valley, a not easy to find trail that I discovered and frequented in the 80s. Steep, with hundreds of young redwoods that the narrow foot trail climbs through, accentuating its verticality. That trail came earlier to me. These had the magical qualities that inspired the structures of "Pathtowers".

My approach was not to illustrate those sections of forest, but to render some dazzling textures and psychedelic colors, conjuring a new and surrealistic world.

I didn't resist incorporating celestial elements, as a space traveler via Dobsonian telescopes in my very active involvement! Galaxy forms and stars hover in formation, integrated through, over and beyond this unreal dreamscape. Cosmic scale is suggested yet defies physical laws in relative proportions and spatial logic.

Just what is this scene?

I enjoyed playing with convergent geometries, and unusual textures with reflective illusions that could be crystalline glass and water, and touches such as painted iron gates — I used some of the forms of the red gates of Strawberry Field in Liverpool, England — with some of these totemic forms looking like inlaid wood, minerals such as some type of malachite marble. Diffuse atmospheres contrasting sharp renderings in sections of translucent to opaque elements. A rich palette of dark, gemlike hues, with patches of deep space opening up unlikely chasms, while pointed elements give their own balance.

I like how the eyes are guided from one compelling area to another, from gaps of space and matter that seem to exist between and beyond the vertical forms, keeping this intriguing to look at for years of doing so.

~Dean Gustafson, November 2021