

# THE PHANTOM BRIDGE



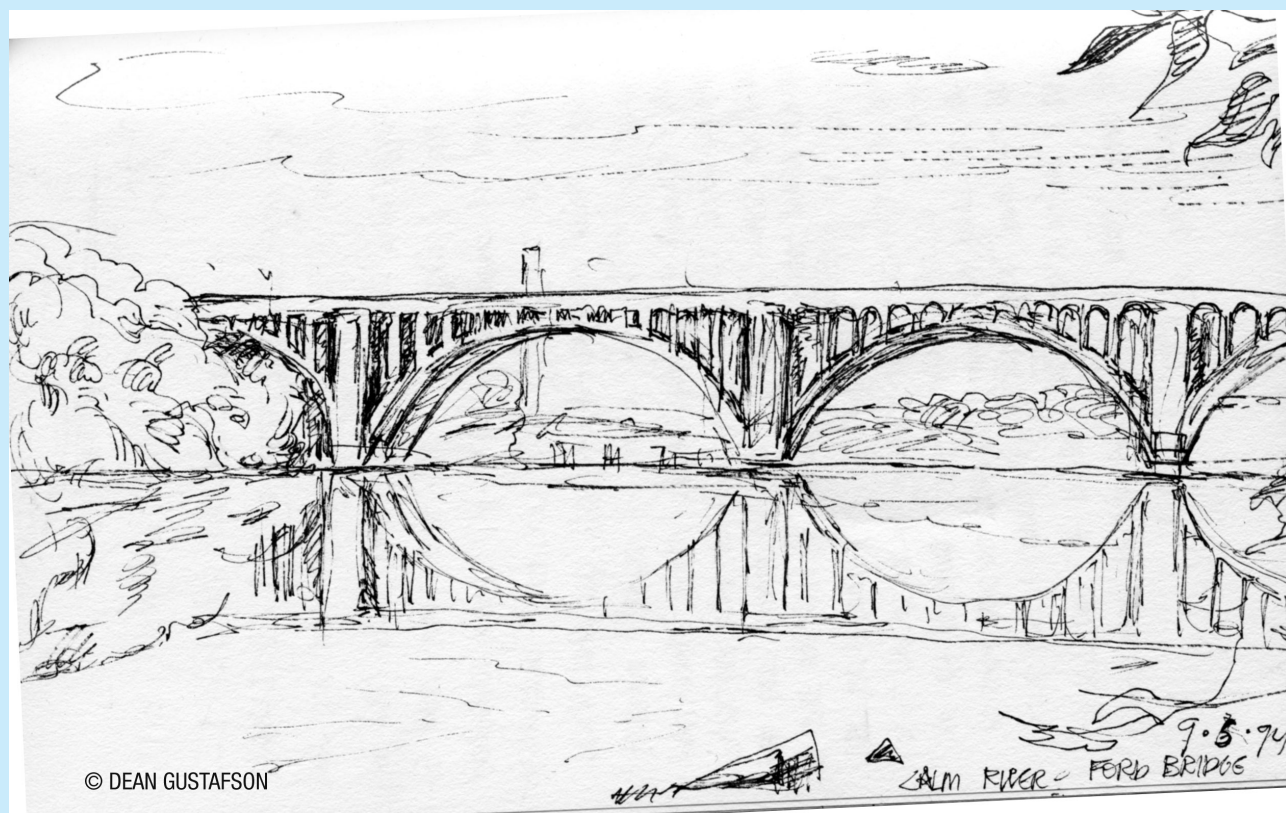
[38" x 42", oil on canvas, 2004]

The main inspiration for this oil painting comes from a series of recurring dreams I'd been having. The theme was of a mysterious old bridge in the twin cities area, crossing the Mississippi River. A bridge that is dream based, that within the dream I apparently haven't ever known and so I wanted to see it close up. Crumbling, dangerous, long out of commission; a relic of the Industrial Age. In the dreams I would be curious to investigate this massive behemoth of stone and iron, and try to climb into it. What always occurred was that I could never quite reach it, as if chasing a rainbow. It seemed to be drifting away on its own, like some kind of ghost ship. This quality made it all the

more appealing, fueling the muse enough to make a painting.

Representationally, this does not depict a snapshot from the dreams, but acts as a distillation of the essence of the bridge ideal involved. My fascination with Industrial Age stone arch bridges began as a young wee kid being brought to the river by my parents, beholding the spanning architecture over the mighty tug of the river below. Relatively, these were the largest structures that my young eyes had ever seen by that point...so they made a grand, long-lasting impression.

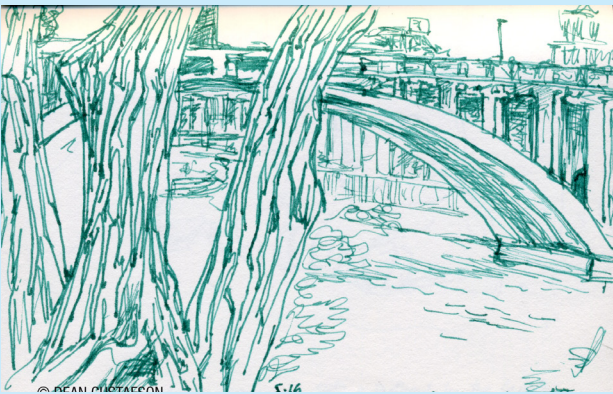
Flash forward from then by a few years when I was a teenager, eager to explore these bridges with the sense of adventure found by illegally climbing them. Dangerous for sure; but when doing so with a few peers helped to make this activity irresistible. We climbed into the bridges and out on the huge support pylons of the old train bridge near Franklin avenue, and the highway bridge near Fort Snelling. I loved it. If perchance a slip would happen, could mean falling to a grisly death. We were risky youth.



All of the big local bridges fascinated me; they were like towering gothic cathedrals of the river. 50th street bridge over the Ford lock and dam; High bridge in St Paul; the enormous span of the Mendota bridge. ... and specifically I recall the old 3rd avenue

bridge, before a new one was reconstructed while in deconstruction mode. Downtown, spanning across the old part of Minneapolis, including the amazing St Anthony falls surrounded by old industrial buildings of historical importance, and the then defunct Stone Arch bridge [originally for trains, then neglected for years, and now a great walkway/bike path. ]

The style of those two bridges made it into the painting. The large phantom bridge with its wide arch and vertical stresses; and a much less defined representation of the stone arch train bridge seen low in the fog. It's placement doesn't make much sense, used as a compositional element.



There are a few added features that digress to my California life — San Francisco fog and astronomy. Like I mentioned previously, this painting is not a direct image of the bridge dreams, though this is thematically dominant. Overall, this is kind of my 19th century landscape, influenced by the work of 19th C German painter Caspar David Freidrich. He specialized in the depiction of old stone ruins being taken over by nature. Beautiful in nocturnal moods yet illuminated by fantastic, subtle light. I was fortunate to have seen most of his best work throughout Europe.

*Abtei im Eichwald*  
(C D Friedrich)  
1810



In my piece, the solitary figure is me, looking up at the phantom bridge. A Friedrich-like touch, and appropriate for the concept and sense of scale.



*Gebirgslandschaft mit Regenbogen*  
(C D Friedrich)  
1810

There is something special about tapping into what has made huge impressions, ...impressions that haunt our dreams. In this case, old, dilapidated river bridges and their affect on my subconscious mind.

Currently the painting is owned by my good friend Jack, who having grown up on the river [directly in the heart of the old bridge zone — on Nicollet island] who immediately identified with it, fully!

– Dean Gustafson, June 2020

