



The Sun

56 x 31, oil on canvas
1996

Summer solstice of 1996, I was driven to ride the mountain bike to the top of Mt Tam from the Mission. I then lived on 23rd & South Van Ness, where I moved into a few months previous, by way of friend Lory Hayward who along with two of the other tenants, were looking to fill the fancy front room of this antique Victorian flat. [wish I had photos. It had floral wallpaper peeled and revealed in sections, possibly dating to the 19th century.

High, decorated ceiling, marble fireplace (not functioning), and a previous tenant printed a phrase on the wall with rubber stamps that read : "ou est le neige d'antan?" Artistic.]

The rent was extraordinarily cheap for the year, being affected by a new, booming digital economy. I had been looking for almost a year before then, confronting long lines of competition, and burgeoning prices that were much lower in '94.

I was very glad to be back in the city where I belong, after over a year in Concord staying with family just after a major 3 month trip through Europe.

Also of life changing impact during that year, was the rapidly developing romantic connection with Alisa that soon led to her moving in with me in just over a month later, finding our own apartment soon afterwards [alongside Golden Gate park]. Life and love and my career in digital multimedia design were all on the upswing. I had been loving my work with Midnight Design that year, starting in the spring of 1995. Learning 3D animation and all sorts of new digital media, while able to work mostly from home, into the wee hours every night while playing my favourite music. This was the life for me!

Remember that this was a time just before cell phones became ubiquitous, and websites were not yet commercial based. Game design and educational cd-roms were in the industry lead for my work, and it felt so new and with a relatively small amount of people working with this digital technology. I got involved at an early stage, in 1994 working for Mondo Media, along with other artists friends who also experienced the wave of technology boosting careers. Starving artists no more!

So I'm 31, falling totally in love with my future wife (well, ex-wife years later, but that story doesn't apply here), an exciting new career that was gaining lucrative legs, living in a fantastic antique room in San Francisco, and I had a new mountain bike! Good impetus to charge across town and across the Golden Gate bridge, around the eastern side of the mountain, passing Mill Valley, going on the path alongside the canal near Corte Madera, through the affluent neighbourhoods of Ross, to enter the park system around Phoenix Lake, where the Eldridge Grade trail starts its winding and rocky climb up my favorite mountain.

The Eldridge Grade trail is one I've bicycled up many a time. It is not an easy trail by average standards, but is the most direct climb up from the northeast side. I loved the challenge of getting there all the way from the city in good time enough to return while it's still light out; at least to the ferry back across the bay from Tiburon. The longest day of the year had afforded me a late start.

The trail passes through a fabulous variety of terrain, mostly in dense groves of coastal redwoods, occasionally popping out to sweeping vista's. By then I was familiar with every section's details ; from redwood frond coated grounds, rocky sunbeaten patches, easy switchbacks, and steep gravel crusted inclines. I charged up without taking a break, reaching the top in one of my record times of just 3 hours total all the way from my Mission flat! This was a great solstice, and the sun was still high above the ocean horizon - blazing magnificent across the entire bay area, seen from this fantastic viewpoint. Mount Tamalpais is where the 4 corners of the Earth meet.

I thoroughly enjoyed being up there for a packed lunch, whipping out a sketch, being invigorated by the awe inspiring view (like always when there.) With the sun having its day in full flight, I now get around to writing about the painting! I had a fresh new vertical blank canvas back in my room, and I was now inspired to paint the sun! Celebrating this beautiful, triumphant summer solstice in style.

I took off for home, flying down the Railroad Grade trail on the more open south side of the mountain and less steep with even ground, allowing a faster descent. Through Mill Valley to the marsh path to Sausalito, the bridge, across town and back to the Mission - with the sun still out!

I showered the days sweat away and broke out the paints, giving a high energy start to this painting.

This was overdue during a time when I spent far more hours creating computer graphics than working in my preferred medium of oils on canvas. A good few hours were spent into the night, forming the very centered composition of sun rays blasting over ocean waves. I was probably spinning the Lizard album by King Crimson, which dominated my turntable that June.

This became finished a few weeks later. Influenced by Edvard Munch. It signifies, to me, one of the very most optimistic and promising seasons of my life, energised by highly welcome changes. .

A year later, my mom's cancer sadly returned, proving to be terminal. She loved having this piece on display in her room, facing her bed. I wanted to offer a healthy dose of optimism

during that difficult time, and the sun painting was probably about the best I had.

This is now owned by friends Dhaivyd and Diana in Minneapolis, where they live just around the corner from the house that my Dad grew up in back in the 1920's near Lake Nokomis. Diana is from California, and Dhaivyd has been a great friend since 1982 back in my twin cities days. He moved to the Bay Area in 1991 where we hooked up for a number of fantastic bike rides up Mt Tam. So the energy that drove this painting has made it to the right hands. And Dhaivyd's birthday is not long after the summer solstice !

Dean Gustafson, January 2021

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Addendum

I just found an earlier writing about this painting. More details !

The Sun

1996

Summer solstice of '96 I was driven to ride up Mt Tamalpais on the mountain bike. I was living in a very old and classic victorian on 23rd & South Van Ness in the Mission. Fully charged with energy I bolted to the Golden Gate, doing the roads of fastest travel: Valencia street, to the Haight up Page st, through Golden Gate park, up Masonic, Presidio,

tearing across the bridge. Into Marin, down to the wetlands path to Bon Air, into Ross to Phoenix Lake. I took the Eldridge Grade trail up up up, over familiar rocky passages and through dense redwood groves in the switchbacks. To the top of the east peak, all in the blazing sun on the longest day of the year!

The weather gave fantastic clear views from up there. I was sporting my Swatch chronograph to time this intense bike ride, which took me only three hours!

Bouncing speedily down the Railroad Grade trail, then back, i was home sooner than expected.

Even after getting an Azteca burrito on Church st on the way, I was back before dark!

Showered, with energy to spare, cranking The Beatles Anthology 2 [release of the season!], I started this painting that evening to herald this triumphant summer solstice! This was worked off and on for a few months until it took this shape. [there was no seascape at first]

It's really more about energy than depicting anything I had actually seen. Inspired partially by the sun paintings by Munch and Van Gogh, and I always wanted to give it a go.

The following year, in early 1997, harsh news struck about my mothers lymphoma cancer returning. So I loaded this in the VW bus, and brought this for her to hang if she wanted, as a piece with optimistic power – and she absolutely loved it! It was in front of her bed during that last year of her life. I'm glad I could contribute something like this, which came from a positive source. For my artist Mom from her artist son.