

A few drawings, with their brief stories



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A psychedelic surreal drawing with a Striped Boxfish, and nondescript aquatic forms rising up to bursting rosebuds.

An exploration with my pen, drawn in early 2009, when I began working as a docent at the California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park. I'd been going since 1984, as one of my favorite museums in San Francisco to spend substantial time exploring. A science center to be astounded by! I can't say enough good things about how enriching that place had been for me, but this was the new redesigned version of the CAS, finally finished by September of 2008 — an extraordinary remodel, taking over five years. Thanks to friend Carol Strauss — who I knew through John Dobson's classes - she had connections to the Academy by years of docent work there, gaining an early tour of the redesign — before the general public! Lucky me - I was invited along!

It was so advanced — high tech architectural sophistication, new categories ; the fun rainforest dome! and the aquarium complex was astonishing! The 212,000 gallon coral reef tank had me positively floored. The variety of colorful, vividly weird fish mesmerized beyond what I'd seen before. When your peripheral vision is encompassed by coral reef aquatic life, proved to transport me to a vivid dreamlike state. I was hooked! Who needs LSD (though I did one of my last acid trips in the old CAS in '93. It was marvelous!)

Determined to get a job there - I had been applying everywhere within my field of multimedia design with no luck during the recession. This was the change I needed.

Astronomy is my thing, so I tried to get involved in the planetarium. (*see my astronomy book for a more in depth story on the topic.) I did get involved as a volunteer docent guide, doing astronomy on the roof on clear Thursday nights! When cloudy — half of the year in fog central — I worked the aquarium, instead of showing planets and the Moon.

The CAS gave me a class on the aquarium that started a useful and enriching educational year! My brain was growing! This affected my sketchbook, reflecting biological life - and this organic exploration is a favorite page of that mindstate.

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## Abstractions





These are not depicting anything recognizably illustrated, but energy! Energy of rhythmic lines, contrasts, negative and positive spaces, and forms.

I don't remember much about where and when they were drawn — being the most free form drawing I did in my sketchbooks as a playground where anything can happen. I was just pushing ink around, in experimental mode.

The purple one has a lot going for it — motion, texture, starts and stops, rising and falling, forceful and disintegrating. I dig it! Drawn somewhere in 2008. I'm thinking it was when in a café in Seattle that summer. Using a Waterman fountain pen with disposable purple ink cartridges. (i preferred refillable)

The square page was done in 2016, using a portable ink brush that I scored in Japantown, San Francisco. I was living with ALS then, yet could still handle a pen, drawing as often as I could.

This seems to be about a kind of neural energy - of active neurons radiating electricity. Interesting.

It has a good amount of motion!



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One of many diverse animal skulls on display from a special exhibition at the California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park.

This was an exhibit of Ray Bandar's untoppable collection, and the second showing at the CAS that I had the privilege to spend hours drawing. The first for me was in 2002? Up for an entire year before the big remodel. This one is from the exhibit of 2014, when I lived only a few luxurious blocks away! So I went often, filling sketchbooks with the most outlandish skulls, from Ganges river dolphins, elephants, frogs, birds, and plenty of mammals like this wild Babirusa!

In the 20teens, I was really into using portable ink brushes with pen and wash, to good results in my favorite brand of sketchbook for that medium, — Handbook Sketchbooks.

Drawing still objects make it far easier than moving subjects, obviously, yet the forms of some of these bizarre animal skulls is challenging to capture, adding to the fun adventure! The tusks of this one could rapidly go wrong to

draw! What I like about this is the deep red brushwork, using Noodlers brand 'Antietam red' ink, in a portable watercolor brush I bought in Japantown.

I enjoyed teaming up with good friend and skull artist extraordinaire, Sebastian Hyde — who incorporates animal skulls onto his figurative paintings, bringing those human figures to new levels. He too can't get enough of drawing! Good company for this activity. We'd draw as many skulls as possible until they shut down for the day.

The result was that I must have drawn every skull in that exhibit, often more than once each. (except for the wall of seal skulls. Too similar.)

A sketchers dream!

On a separate occasion at the CAS I met Ray Bandar - the famous ultimate skull collector whose vast collection made up these exhibits and worked for the CAS as the bone expert. I showed him some of my skull drawings and he dug it! Fascinating fellow, who is no longer alive. I'm grateful for his collections influence on my drawings! I have many more pages of these to frame, from both 2002 and 2014 exhibits.

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**Café drawing of people - woman writing, 2011**

A favorite pastime was sketching — or trying to sketch — people in cafés and pubs, unaware that they are my drawing subjects, while they go about doing their café activities, such as reading, socializing, or writing as this main figure is attentively doing. Often the best subjects since they're usually sitting still while working. (I have hundreds of these challenges, with plenty of awkward mistakes!) This young woman here is one of those still enough to capture a decent sketch of with paced pen strokes. And I drew mostly with ink; drawing "without a net"!

I like the economical lines that define the face, with a balanced look of concentration. I also like the spatial setting, and it's only a bit fussy in parts. The hands may be off scale, but the gestures are natural — being the dominant success over less distracting slightly incorrect proportions.

I drew this in 2011 — a good year for figure drawing in the east bay area. This may be in Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco, or Seattle, I don't recall. I was always drawing during those years., with frequent outings as one of the Sketch Pistols! \* (see my essay titled "Drawing People" for more details about that group of artist friends.)

This is actually only half of a facing page drawing, and this half holds up best by itself, as you can see by this scan.

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Rye, England 9/7/05

From one of my favorite weeks ever, thoroughly enjoying England by myself for my birthday season.

This is of a street in the rustic, well preserved town of Rye, near the English Channel south of London. I went there for a concert by the

legendary Robin Williamson, of Incredible String Band fame. Fortunately, Rye turned out to be incredibly picturesque with historical detail. One of the best towns of Britain with intact old world buildings and streets, and very sketchable! I walked and drew to my best content that beautiful September day before the show.

You can see the sign for the Mermaid Inn, a classic old inn and with a restaurant where I had an early dinner.

I drew this out front around 6pm or so. The scene is so picturesque, like a slice of perfect 17th century! Irresistible.

As I sketched, a bloke approaches me to see the artwork and say hello. I recognized him from inside the inn, about my age with long dark hair, who was dining with an attractive woman. He likes the sketch as we chat. He's enjoying getting away for a romantic holiday with his wife, who are from somewhere up north, I forget where. He's in a Black Sabbath /Led Zeppelin cover band. I told why I'm there, for Robin Williamson down a few streets at the Rye Community Center in a couple hours. He didn't know this and wanted to go!

I wish him luck, feeling good about sharing that info with a fellow music enthusiast! He goes inside no doubt to tell his wife and see if she's interested too.

I wrap up the drawing to a satisfactory conclusion, - yes, the slanted curves in the architecture accurately are that organic! Then I wandered on, digging each step of the way through this baroque medieval Dickensian fantasy of an English town.

The show deserves a detailed, separate account, and was wonderful! But I didn't see my new friend. Sold out? Or they had a night at the fanciful Mermaid Inn that was not to be spoiled. I'm guessing the latter.

I got to meet my favorite legendary celtic Scottish bard between and after his sets! Who got me to visit this beautiful town in perfect weather, where I made several good drawings - like this one!

I felt great.

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## Thorn and Tor

This drawing was made in Glastonbury England, from Wearyall Hill, 2005. From the hill where the iconic Thorn tree stands, — a mythology loaded tree with legends surrounding its importance. I doubt stories about it being ancient with divine interventions keeping it alive. Still, it's a fabulous little gnarled with character tree, with a fine view of the tor across the town that provided a good scene to draw.

I love how this came out. By leaving out a large section of landscape details, the tree appears to suspend the tor aloft!  
A good favorite.

(for more of my writing about Glastonbury, see my essays 'Glastonbury Tor' and 'Chalice Well').

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Guitarist sketch -- 2016

I've sketched many many musicians over the years, loosely and tightly. This is more in the former category, loosely drawn rapidly with the energy of the lines making this live - not accuracy of rendering, this is not a modeled illustration. What I appreciate about this one is the freshness of whipping it into gestural form in moments. And a live music sketch in the moment is how it feels.

This is of Michael Dawes, the young guitar virtuoso performing with Justin Hayward (of the Moody Blues) who I caught with friends at the beautiful Napa theater in 2016.

A fine evening of excellent music!

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### **Dickens fair drawings - a few corsetry models and a musician**

Ahh, the annual Dickens Christmas fair at the Cow Palace south of San Francisco. (Daly City)

I went nearly every year for years, becoming more addicted to this anachronistic, fabulously faux 19th century British wonderland. Donning vintage top hat and coat, this was the place to see and be seen!

After a few years of dazzled familiarity, realizing there are several drawing options here for the practicing artist, and brought sketchbooks.

It got better with each year, and these few selections are from 2014, being what I consider my last good year, still relatively able, living in the Inner Sunset, teaching at the Academy going strong. And when the Dickens fair began, starting the first weekend after thanksgiving. I was on it, going one day per the four weekends that year!

The place is transformed into a 19th century fantasy London /anachronistic Christmas fair, with detailed themes everywhere; sounds of active live music, crowds and barkers, the strong, attractive scent of cinnamon almonds and roasting chestnuts fill the air, the decorated shops and theaters, and most prominently are the hundreds of costumed characters everywhere, playing their parts like actors in a real live play — and I was one of them!

It was rich pageantry exemplified



For drawing, my subjects were of four categories : musicians, who were all around playing traditional music varieties that matches the era. Costumed characters, where they're bound to be still enough for a minute or more (usually in the bars). Occasionally I'd join the Pre-Raphaelite artists club, to draw posed vignettes, though I preferred drawing on my own. And then the posing corsetry models that pose like mannequins in the bay windows of the Dark Gardens corset shop! Excellent sketching opportunity. They would be adorned with a theme for every different model, rotating every 45 minutes or so. Irresistible beauties inspired my pen and paper!

The poses average time was 5 minutes or less. It's not easy for them to remain still for long - particularly when holding an object up. Challenging for me was drawing around all the activity - crowds were always attracted to this feature, inevitably blocking my view, causing me to miss finishing or work more rapidly. Results would be rough and tumble most of the time, yet I reveled in the challenges, sketching around everybody. Often distracted by admirers, who I'd remark, "we sketching artists must draw rapidly in competition with Dr Flockmachers new invention of the confounded cam-er-ahh! "

All great fun!

This was near the sailor shanty bands, alternating with carolers, with Mad Sals Dockside stage on the other side. So it was very active there indeed. The drawing of the accordion player is from one of many musical groups both staged and randomly scattered throughout. I have many more.

Drawing at the fair wasn't my primary Dickens fair involvement before 2013, because I went with dates. I realized that by 2014 my sketchbook is now the date!

As the stained glass in the very ornate Officers Club displays the phrase "Ars Longa, Vita Brevis".

Adding a note. At my very final Dickens fair, I knew my abilities were dying and doomed. So I wanted to bow out generously, framing select drawings of specific models and musicians who I'd seen there for year after year, giving them a good drawing each, of ones I thought worthy. They loved it, and I found gifting them to be quite fulfilling.

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Lion statue in Bremen

In northern Germany, a highly ornate town of fantastic medieval mixed with baroque details, well preserved after the war, and where my brother Grant moved in the 70s. He moved to Herford a few miles away in the 80s, yet still had friends in Bremen, so we'd go there when I visited in 1985 and 1986.

This watercolor is from 1994, years after my brother moved to the east coast, USA. I stopped there for a few days between Paris and Hamburg, staying with friend Hans Wilhelm, loving the details of the town all over again — while fervently drawing this time!

This is only one of very few watercolors I made along the way, usually preferring black ink pen.

The lion statue is one of a few that sit on the front steps of the medieval, romanesque style Bremen dom, or cathedral, that dominates the fantastic town square.

These are some highly original lions that stand out, with a lot of character — for public lion art, I think they have the most character I'd ever seen! So I made this watercolor of one in my burgeoning sketchbook from the first few weeks of that amazing trip.

This is obviously incomplete, but I like the way the prominent profile of this stylish lion head sits within the empty paper.

From early October of 1994, on my grandest three month tour of Europe. I was in my element, drawing constantly as the main objective.

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**Minneapolis bridge** - partial view of the 50th Street bridge over the Ford lock & dam, in green ink.  
2002.

From one of many visits to my hometown. Upon landing in decent weather and timing, I would prioritize a monster bike ride on my favorite sentimental route around south Minneapolis!

I'd arrive, telling Craig and Karen that I have a bicycling mission to first fulfill. Hopping on Craigs bike, I'd soon be along Minnehaha Creek, on very familiar trails that I grew up around. To Lake Nokomis, more Creek to the

fantastic Minnehaha Falls — a centerpiece of Minneapolis! Not far is the mighty Mississippi River, always causing spine chills upon first seen tugging it's way through the land like a larger than life Midgard serpent. It's a force to behold!

It's around there that I stopped to whip out this rapid sketch of a bridge section, with impression of the lock monitoring tower.

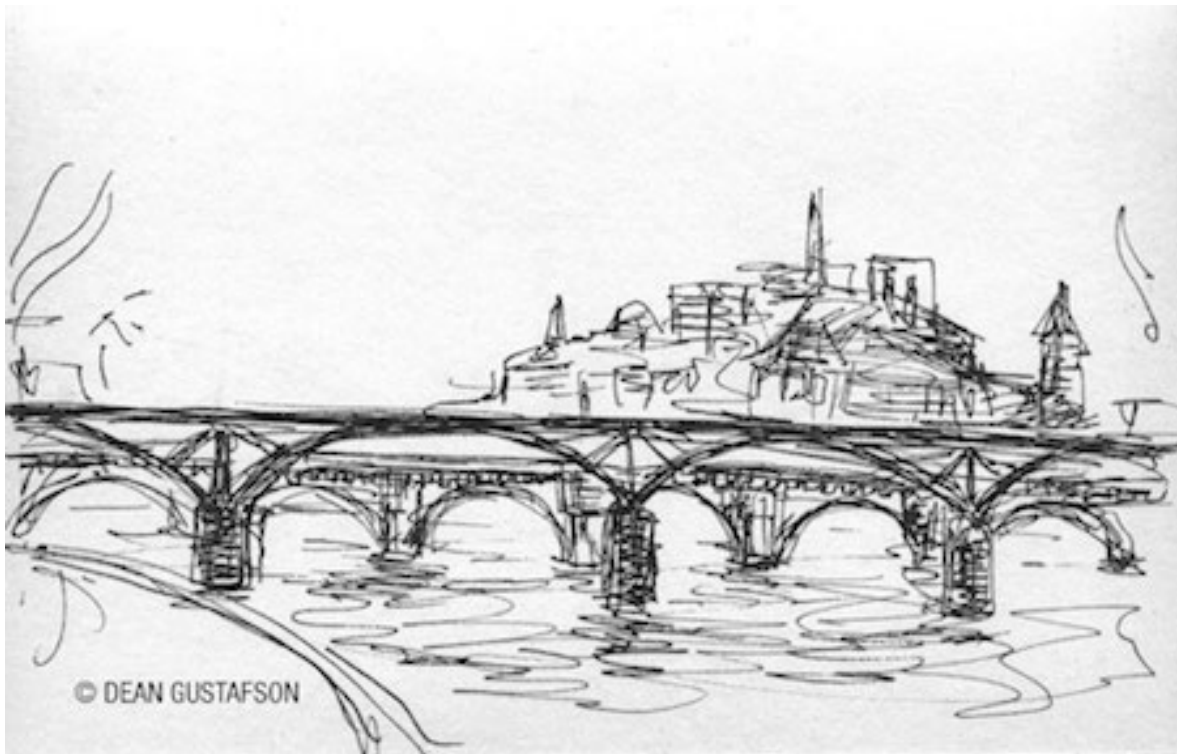
What I like about this drawing is how much I didn't draw! It has just enough information. It breathes.

My remaining bike tour went along River Road into downtown >Kenwood neighborhood >Lake of the Isles >Lake Calhoun >Lake Harriet >back along the Minnehaha Creek where I started >Craig & Karen's backyard before dark. Satisfied mission accomplished, until next time — which may have been tomorrow again, with more sketches!

This was late September of '02, when I flew out for the Paul McCartney concert in Saint Paul! Good friend Tony scored good floor tickets, and gave me one!

A splendid time was had by all!

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Paris, December 1994

Nearly Christmas day and I'm back in Paris after a magnifique three months of traveling Europe, exploring exquisite cities, museums, people, history, and all of the rich cultural details one might expect from such a tour. I felt satisfied on several key levels, I saw so incredibly much, it seemed enough to fill more than one lifetime. I felt blessed and strong in my abilities to make it happen in the extreme way it did.

This sketch doesn't sum any of that up, but it's one of the last I did before flying back to the bay area. A quaint little quick sketch of the Seine, with the bridge of the arts (?), Pont Neuf, and Ile de le Cite beyond.

After spending days with the worlds greatest impressionist paintings in Musee d'Orsay, this rapid sketch would naturally be... impressionistic! Rough and fast, and I'm surprised to a degree that I still had energy to draw anymore. I filled sketchbooks, drawing Europe to my driven arts content. I was positively drenched in art history by the end. Overwhelmed yet very satisfied. I did my dream tour by myself. Who cares if I was totally broke. A grand success that actively influenced everything following!

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### **Venice drawings, December 1994**

The smaller one of the circular bridge reflections on the narrow canal is actually my handmade postcard I sent to my parents. (the backside has my words, and stamped, addressed. It got there through the post just fine) I like how it turned out, with true Venetian details, the strong circle anchoring the composition.

It was a sunny few days I was there when I made these. Delighted every step of the way in this most picturesque town. It truly appeared that it was

not possible to find an uninteresting inch throughout Venice, from the moment I walked across the first bridge, into this Italian wonderland of waterways, narrow sidewalks with old apartment buildings towering, and boats with zero automobiles. And the fantastic central architecture, museums and dancing light patterns, history, textures, sculptural public art of the Renaissance and more! I was absolutely loving it. It's a town that's best to get lost within, which I enjoyed thoroughly. Eventually emerging from narrow walkways alongside narrow canals, out to the large wide main canals and open sea. It is beautiful.

Which leads me to this other drawing of the more open spaces of Venice, with the swirly boat docking poles in the foreground, and long bridge beyond that. Another very different from the other scene, yet essentially Venetian.

I drew this on my last morning there, not interested in lazing in the hotel, it was sunny out and I aimed to soak more in of this splendid city.

While I drew this scene, nearby someone with a Pavarotti toned voice was singing Italian opera — sounding excellent! It seemed to be from someone working. On a boat, bakery or building? It really set the stage.

What I like about this drawing is the way the foreground poles lead the eyes in with contrast and motion, with the bridge drawn evenly, then distant buildings lightly sketched. Spacious.

I might have spent a leisurely 15 minutes on this before wandering on.

A great three day visit!  
I loved Venice.

~ Dean Gustafson, March 2022,  
written and compiled during the first stretch of the long awaited sketchbook  
framing project.  
There will be more!