



## June 1990

Maybe because I sleep beneath this favourite old painting made that month..but I woke up reflecting on that personally rich year of 1990. A time characterized by living in the Mission district of San Francisco, attending my final semesters at the Academy of Art, indulging in adventures of underground urban fun with the Cacophony Society, Mom beating cancer!, seeing Paul McCartney in concert in Berkeley (both shows!), riding my old Raleigh Olympian 10-speed bicycle (the one Dad got for me in 1983) all over SF—on every street I could find. Good discoveries were made, in love with the bay area, and I was only 26. I was only working a few days per week, home remodeling with Brian...which I could get away with by having low expenses (rent was only \$220 per month) plus student loan cash kept me afloat. I was far from flush, but life was very very good.

Spring '90 at the art college was buzzing with prolific output and experimentation. I was runner up for a contested grant, coming in 2nd place to a figurative artist (who sadly ended up not returning to the Academy, so no one got it, but I should have.) That bitter end to the semester didn't dampen my spirit to keep on painting. I was on the honor list as it was, so no complaints there.

I had painted a semi-realistic, frontal view of a Nordic longboats (not long from the front, but should have been taller), that—like many of my pieces—stemmed from a vision from a dream snippet I had of the old Norse boat (as an archaic museum version, with no sails or oars) rising up by being carried in a leafless tree. Kind of an archaeological fantasy, but of a stringent display. It had a I felt that a series of improved versions could be born.

So June, I was out of school, just back from Memorial Day weekend with Brian and good friend and roommate Jim, hiking Mt Tallac, drawing, building driftwood sculptures and relaxing in perfect weather. We were wandering the area of Vikingsholm, which also helped spark my Scandinavian interests of the time.



*On Emerald Bay at Lake Tahoe. 5-21  
Brian, Jim and I were hiking around  
on the beach and started to stand  
the logs laying around.*

Brian didn't need my help with construction that month, so I was a free man with art to make, bike rides to take and more I'll cover soon.

I made my now signature stretcher of 57.5" x 42", and began the first of the larger Norse ship paintings. Deciding to keep the stoic motif, with more accurate boat this time. I had been visiting Green Apple books and collecting various Viking books to facilitate this interest. The delightful Amelia—who was a fellow student and Cacophonist—worked there and gave me discounts on books.

I would love those sunny days riding my bike to the ocean, book store, then read on the old Spanish monastery stones in Golden Gate Park—then neglected in stacks near the Japanese tea garden and Stow Lake—in a blackberry patch. I often left with purple fingers.

Of special eventfulness was that months production of Wagners Ring at the SF Opera House. I heard this was

going to be a classically designed set, and so I became interested and tried out the standing room access at \$6 a pop.

'Das Rheingold' was nothing short of awe inspiring. I had to see all 4 parts..so I did! The set designs were like my favourite 19th Century romantic landscape paintings by Caspar David Friedrich.

I figured out how to get the best spots, up on the banister on 2nd floor balcony. You had to run with the crowds to get this. By show #2, an elderly gent was complaining (politely) about how he could never run to get a good spot,..so I took his coat and preserved a center place for him. He didn't have to, but he'd buy me a beer at intermission as a thanks.

(Media note: There is an official dvd out there all about this particular production, and there is a section where you can see the unmistakable me running in with the crowd on night #1! angular, fast and long blonde hair)

The romanticism of the opera influenced the painting. Though not so classical, I kept more current approaches, such as the flat geometry in the middle with the intuitively and vaguely astronomical wheel, the Ross Blechner influenced stars on dark background, and modern iron bridge in the background.

A semi-real, surreal scene was constructed. I always liked the motion and stillness combined in this painting. Those dynamics were really what this is about; the subject matter the original impetus but became secondary. That's how I remember about rendering this.

Other than the ongoing influx of Grateful Dead tapes, Robyn Hitchcock and XTC albums, and Beatles outtakes; music flavoring the times were the sweeping romanticism of Wagners Ring dominating that beautiful month, and I was also playing Elvis Costello's 'Spike' quite much that spring. [I caught the tour twice the previous September of '89.] I bought the new album by Boiled In Lead 'From the Ladle To the Grave', that roommates Jim and Joe also appreciated, so that was on frequently that summer (even saw them at the DNA lounge with Joe.)

I found a unique 1972 album by Swedish musician Bo Hanson 'Music inspired By Lord Of The Rings', at a record store in North Beach on Grant Street. Like a Swedish Pink Floyd, ala 1970 style. [I just put it on the turntable for the first times in ages!]

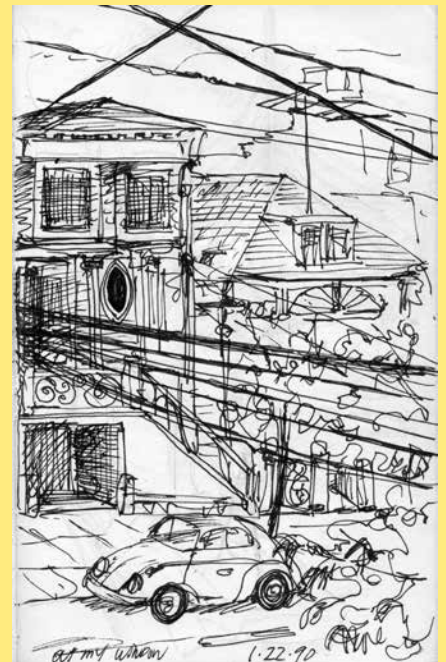
There were many more albums spinning at the time, but those were distinctly from that month. Music recalls memory so strongly..every season of my life has a set of associated albums. (most of you certainly know what I mean)

Artwise, I was spending more time in the De Young and Legion of Honor museums, loving their collections, and dramatic locations. there's nothing like going in to view 'The Assuaging Of The Waters' by John Martin, then heading to the cliff edges at Lands End to have a similar real life view of a bursting sunset over the wildly crashing waves on the rocks below. I felt like the most fortunate person alive in those moments of pure frisson.

Bicycling back to the Mission in a twilight lit Golden Gate Park, though the Haight, over the hills, through the Castro— often stopping at Azteca taqueria on Church street @ Market for a most fulfilling favourite burrito of the city. [sadly long gone now, since 2010. I went there regularly from 1990 to then.] Then home to the Bryant street pad where paint brushes and turntable awaited.

Throughout Spring semester, I was making these dark, navigational, astronomical painting and sculptures— which didn't always work, but were influenced by my Dads WW2 navigating history in the South Seas.

Dad turned 70 that May 13th, so I gave him a large, dark triptych of an icy scene through a porthole which could be



Greenland or Antarctica, with a sextant, and night deer on the sides. I told him it may be too dark, but works well to darken the bedroom or sleeping in hot Concord weather! It's dark Pthalo Blue color was inspired directly by the deep inky blue look of the bay just moments before sunrise, that I absorbed on a super early April morning bike ride I took to Marin. Rare that I would depart that early, but I woke up before dawn inspired to catch the sunrise by the time I was on the Golden Gate bridge. The sun was over the east bay hills before I got to the bridge, but it was a glorious, magic day, complete with visiting friend Mike DeMaeyer at his Tamalpais home of interesting antiques and pet ducks walking around. I got in some hiking the Zig Zag trail area and back on the ferry by twilight.

April I was still mainly painting on the third floor studio of the Academy more than at home.

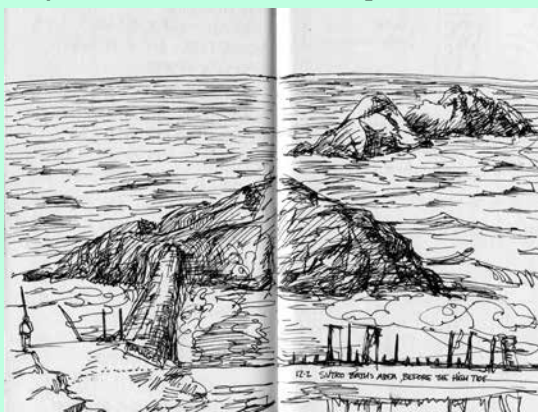
Back to after the semester ended, painting at home...

By day I would love to get a huge lunch at the Scandinavian Deli, on Market street also in the Castro. Not only were the portions huge for the price for a fish lunch, taters and greens,...but the Danish beauties who worked the cash registers would have me all a-flirting. I tried to get them to show up to my art shows, or some event, but they would just smile and carry on. Regardless, they were inspiring.

Ernst was the name of the older guy who seemed to run the place. He had the nordic stoicism down to an art. He would dish out the food, always with a stern expression. I recall asking him not to give me the salad (since plate was almost overflowing) and he shoots me with a stark: "Vhat, you don't vant a salad!"

The sweet Nordic beauty queen waitresses may have been warned to stay away from us crazy Americans.

This was a fairly short hop from where I lived, but would often take off for Corona Heights or Twin Peaks to burn off the huge lunch. Discovering unique views along the way, with sketchbook in the backpack. [Scanned and posted on my Flickr account, imperfections and all.]



Events of the times. Early in June was the 2nd Atomic Café with the Cacophony Society! Held in a warehouse near the Mission and South of Market.. it was a total blast, with the Haight Ashbury Free Band, before I joined them as their main drummer. A good crowd; we had to enter a U Haul blindly not knowing where we were being taken, and let into the building not knowing where it was! Clever planning by Sebastian Melmoth!

Not to be confused with good longtime friend Sebastian Hyde; fellow Academy alumni, a brilliant illustrator and figurative artist. I was impressed by his figure paintings at Café La Dolce Vita that season in the Western Addition.

He was getting us interested in the then current Star Trek: The Next Generation, by

having a get together for the season finale of the famous Cap'n Picard as a Borg episode cliffhanger.

I wasn't interested in the show before that, and so I spent the summer catching up on earlier episodes. Part of that summers mood.

Once a week I'd take laundry to Concord where family lived. Often a Sunday evening. yes, Mom and Dad were around, nearby, and alive! Mom had been suffering from battling Cancer, which was the horror of earlier in the year...but she was cured and the chemo worked! So it was always good to be out there visiting. Mom loved making dinners and having us kids all be around the old round table. It was always comforting and reassuring that they were only a BART and bike ride away.

The summer art shows I were in was at the 'A Gallery', South of Market, briefly owned by Academy student from Dusseldorf, Eva. (I do not recall her last name). She liked my neon with painting in sculptural stretcher bars. It was a dark, very late night place, which suited her personality.

I played doorman in tuxedo with tails as the irreverent artist amongst the serious crowd of smoking, artsy SOMAR knowitall critics. I recall one guy ripping my work apart... think I told him, "well look away and enjoy the wall next to it instead!"

I think cacophony was helping me to make fun of the pretensions involved. {A few years later, I took artsy hyperbolic bs to a higher satire with a mock group critiquing of the doorknobs, humidity detecting machines, and door hinges, etc.}

I also was in a show at Design Center, also So of Market. My large crucible paintings looked good, but the director told me I should change my style. I immediately gave rebellious words...even though he was correct only in that my style changed by proxy anyway. Just thought he had the arrogant kind of patronizing nerve to tell me what to do.

Another local gallery owner criticized my work saying I rob from Rembrandts palette. Well, what's wrong with that? It's pure oil painting after all!

I learned quickly that the art world is a despicable arena for young, new painters..and soon gave up caring and made art anyway. Those jaded pejoratively inclined people in charge of galleries are not why I create. You have to be stubborn to own that realization and persist beyond it.

The shows were good to be in. I credit Brian for his valuable help in transporting the artwork to and fro, since I did not drive, and he had the construction van at the time. We'd often top off the work with a Mission burrito and/or good ales somewhere fun!

1990 grew in legendary status. At the end of June we had the Burning Man up at Baker Beach, ready to ignite by sundown...but the cops caught up early enough to prevent this. I had my drum set in the sand. Power drumming away to my hearts delight, as I did well during those years as a soloist. It was especially inspiring to be synchopating on the Ocean! with the Marin headlands in front of me on a gorgeous day.



As we all know, the Burning Man event joined Cacophony's Zone Trip to the Black Rock Desert, and the rest is history. I still maintain the esteemed position as the only drummer to have played to the burn, solo. That was a peak experience! Brian had a new Jeep we traveled up there in, with Jill, and had a great time. My birthday week, and when returned from Nevada refreshed and rejuvenated, was my graduation show on my actual bd. A fine event! This new painting was on display. Not everyone liked the show, but it went over well enough.

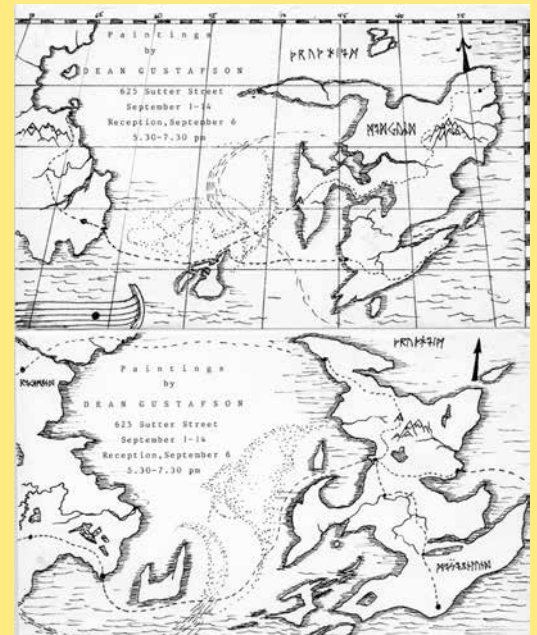
I had handdrawn imaginary maps as flyer invitations, which gave the navigational theme. I had fun with that.

What else? Lots!

Todd Rundgren's 2nd Wind sessions at the Palace of Fine Arts in July. Many 'Midnight walks' with Cacophony through urban zones between pubs, with new friends met along the way: Phil B, Ronn, M2, Peter D, Louis, Nancy, Melmoth, Mr Science...

I could write onwards about the friends met at regularly occurring Cacophony events enjoyed that year. Brian and Jill were regularly involved by now and having incredible times.

To mention a few highlights: The Exquisite Corpse event at the Victoria theater, in the Mission on the saturday near Halloween. The audience types the play, one paragraph at a time..then becomes acted out by the actors onstage soon after. Big fun! I helped paint some crazy sets for that, along with some other artists from the Academy. I hated my work, but all else looked good.



Earlier that month, October 17th at 5:04pm, we invaded the abandoned Embarcadero freeway bridge for the one year anniversary of the big earthquake. Followed by drinks at one of our favourite meeting pubs: Edinburgh castle. [Back when it had old 45's of jigs in the jukebox, and plenty of antique Scottish collectibles on its walls.]

For more, consult the brilliant book 'Tales of the San Francisco Cacophony Society'.

That summer, Joe, Jane, Ann, and Lawrence showed me how to make home brewed stout. I took off well as a homebrewer that year and made several batches! Seb soon caught on and became an expert, cranking out the goods to this day. [I stopped brewing by 2007, having peaked with refined state-of-the-art Belgian styled ales that would take over a year of waiting.]



Ended the year with a successful, full house glögg party at the Bryant pad, on the coldest night of the year. [ponds froze over in GG Park.]

1991 was another remarkable year! Deserving it's own report sometime soon.

# ROUGH DRAFT

#45  
JUNE 1990

The Official Organ of the  
San Francisco Cacophony Society

The Cacophony Society is a randomly gathered network of free spirits united in the pursuit of experiences beyond the pale of mainstream society. We are the organized anarchist infiltrators of the status-quo, exposing minds to alternative reality. We dig artifacts in the Museum of Jurassic Technology. We read Incredibly Strange Films. We march to the beat of a different din. You may already be a member! Anyone can submit ideas for events.

## MIDNIGHT DANCE AT THE ATOMIC CAFE

Have you mutated yet?

When: Saturday, June 2nd, 9:00 pm  
Meet: Bouncers Bar, 64 Townsend St.  
Maximum Occupancy: 160 persons

Once again, the Atomic Cafe opens its doors for a single evening of fun, food and music in another underground bombshelter somewhere on the San Francisco peninsula. You will be taken to an industrial site where you will be guided through a toxic wasteland and descend into a hidden passageway. After a brief decontamination and weapons check, you may enter the Atomic Cafe. Once inside, you will experience post-apocalyptic dining at it's finest along with live dance music provided by the new Mutant Band. Bring food and drink with a 1 year shelf-life and also rollerskates if you have them. The doors will remained closed until midnight (or perhaps longer in case of nuclear attack). Your hosts for the evening are Jack Armstrong and Zymbot.

