

Madison Manning
Review of Susie Ganch's *Different Land | Different Sea*
On view at Penland Gallery, Penland School of Craft, North Carolina
April 13 - June 20
Opening "reception" Zoom lecture occurred Thursday May 6
madisonmanning@me.com / www.madison-manning.com

Susie Ganch Engages In The Sonic Generational Divide: *Different Land | Different Sea* review



Image credit: Madison Manning

There is never a good way to say it but: I don't really care about the environment. I DO, of course. But there are, like, at least five other social issues that monopolize my time. I'm a lesbian living in the South, in a country where police kill black children so my emotional capacity cannot accommodate for a minute by minute inconvenient truths. Caitlyn Jenner doesn't support trans children playing sports and that sentence in itself is so much to unpack that I can't even get to the literal fire that is our planet because I'm so exhausted from metaphorical dumpster fires so I turn on the same sitcom I've fallen asleep to for years to drown out the waves of classic millennial existential dread.

As galleries are opening up again, the last thing I want is a reminder of the negative consequences for my actions. When I'm depressed I eat and it seemed something happened every day in 2020 to make me ready for comfort food. The amount of plastic and styrofoam I produced alone from all the Doordash would surely shock and disappoint any eco-feminist.

Susie Ganch's *Different Land | Different Sea*, on view now through June 20, at Penland Gallery doesn't make me feel ashamed. An eco-feminist in her own right, Ganch is a jeweler, sculptor and educator who has been a star in the Craft world for decades, first emerging onto the scene as a Penland School of Craft resident from 1999-2002. Much like my relationship to 'the environment', the art world's relationship to 'craft' has always been fraught; there are many sides to the rift. I argue that capital-C-Craft is not accepted as capital-A-Art because of craft's origins in 'women's work.' Aside from a few exceptions like painter Artemisia Gentileschi (the Billie Eilish

of the 1600's, if you will.), painting and sculpting were originally trades for men, barring women from apprenticing to gain formal training. Women were encouraged (re: allowed) to use textiles to fulfill their need for creative expression. The generosity of 'giving' women their 'own medium' is about as generous as receiving coal - with a bow! - on Christmas. Of course, there are endless additional arguments to be made that the difference between Craft and Art is found in technique, material, execution, etc. Ultimately it's up to the individual viewer to decide if the work is Art or Craft - or if it matters either way.

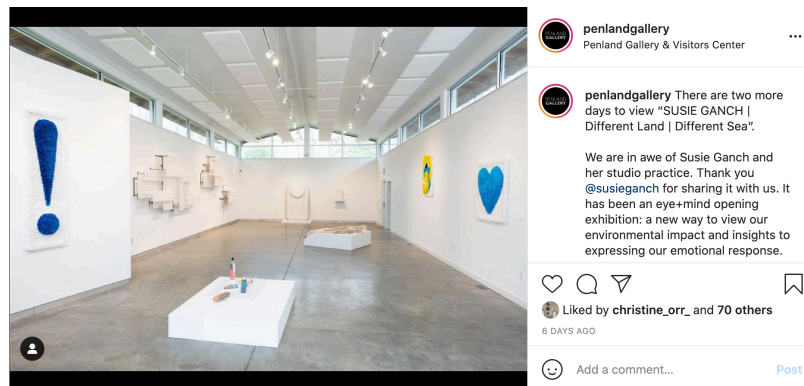


Image credit: Penland Gallery Instagram, @penlandgallery

As I sit on the floor, listening to *Drift*, Ganch's first ever sound installation, there is no 'either or', rather 'both'. If not for the windows lining the perimeter of the gallery in the sweet space where the wall turns to ceiling, I would not know I'm on the grounds of a historic craft school. On the wall hang three large steel-mounted pixelated clouds that hold over 500 pairs of white cord earbuds. Made of plexiglass scraps Ganch grabbed moments before the fate of the dumpster, the clouds are not silent. The earbuds push multiple soundtracks at once through the 1,600 square foot gallery. The sounds, harnessed from recordings of her day-to-day taken over several months on Susie's rose gold iPhone SE, make me feel at home. Not home as in a familial dwelling but home as in that one special song that comes on shuffle and suddenly you've Bill & Ted-time-traveled back to any and every moment you've felt happy, warm, full of love and life - and then your email dings.

I am not supposed to feel this deeply comforted by most of the sounds Ganch has created together but millennial existential dread is inescapable. I can't fall asleep in silence. The soundtrack (or the "collage" as Ganch calls it) sounds like every morning I've woken up to an open window with the day already started outside.

I smile when I hear the chirping birds, instantly imagining them looking like Woodstock from The Peanuts playing in a small fountain. A woman can be heard gently telling someone to hold on. I imagine a nice mother asking her toddler to be patient as she hurries to snap the perfect 'on the big kid slide' photo. There are some dump trucks. Nothing heavy duty, but enough to make me think, "Is it already trash day?". Before I can answer that, I'm snapped into panic as the 500 pairs of headphones emit the sound of an iPhone vibrating on the table. I sat in the gallery long enough for this to happen three times and without fail every time my heart dropped out of my butt in fear someone was calling me with something majorly urgent. The specific vibration recordings Ganch uses seem angry, like you just *know* from the denseness of the buzz

that it is your boss and yes you did do something wrong. In the moments of Woodstock-fountain-splashing-calm I have to continually remind myself that these are not birds, these are tweets and pings from Susie’s rose gold iPhone SE; sounds that don’t mean what they used to mean. In her Zoom lecture hosted by Penland Gallery on May 6, Ganch stated that she began to record the sounds that would later become *Drift* after realizing she could not name ten trees in her neighborhood, her ecosystem. “If I could make my ears squint a little,” she said, speaking of the oceanic sounds that radiate from the highway behind her studio.



Image credit: Susie Ganch Instagram, @susieganch



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I know these are not happy sounds for Ganch, a fourth-generation jeweler and first-generation American of Hungarian heritage. In her home studio, Susie keeps two pairs of earrings; one pair belonging to her mother, the other to her grandmother. Both were made by her grandfather before he died at Mauthausen. Ganch often speaks of endurance in her work; acutely aware that her materials that will live beyond her lifetime, just like her grandfather’s goldsmithing.

(gold or silver?) Later in her lecture, Susie said, “In order for my health to thrive, the environment has to not thrive.” This is a mic-drop bummer statement.

Susie Ganch does not have millennial existential dread because Susie Ganch is 50 years old. A Gen X'er, Ganch feels solastalgia. A not-yet-in-the-dictionary term (if 'bromance' made it in, there is hope!), solastalgia describes a form of emotional or existential distress caused by environmental change. Solastalgia is *seeing* that the stage you are about to perform on is both on fire and melting but *knowing* the show must go on. Solastalgia is hating the effects of plastic bags but meticulously and traditionally crafting tapestries made from the very same plastic bags in an attempt to respect the material. The Yves-Klein-blue emojis are weaved with plastic from the New York Times, an institution centered on solastalgia that caters to those who suffer it. I mention Susie's age, not as a comment, but rather as a marker. Susie remembers a time when tweets were sounds that came from birds. I don't have the same memories of stillness in sound. Solastalgia is a sound installation that activates a sonic generational divide.

Ganch famously co-founded Radical Jewelry Makeover, “an international community jewelry mining and recycling project focused on education and collaboration.” I vividly remember holding a giant plastic cold brew when I saw Susie approaching. I'd been spotted. “*This is why we have nice mugs from our ceramicist friends, Madison!!*” I was not standing anywhere near a trash can and what was I going to do, litter? Without question, without judgment, Susie was excited to see the plastic monstrosity in my hand. “Ooooooh can I have that lid?!”

Different Land | Different Sea is a deeply compassionate exhibition created by not only an artist, but an educator and craftsperson. *Nurse Logs* is small floor relief sculpture placed at the start of the exhibition. Water bottles are wrapped in colorfully woven plastic, some sink into the surface of the platform. While the viewer can turn their back to *Drift*, the collage of sound does not let up. A nurse log is a fallen tree that, in its decay, offers nutrients to the ecosystem around it. Susie, when speaking of nurse logs found in nature, referred to their dying generosity as “the ultimate act of love. Throwing, giving away your youth and energy.” *Nurse Logs* does not immediately read as a self portrait and much like the difference between 'craft' and 'art', interpretations of this piece are endless. Ganch's long - but far from finished - career is filled with moments of asking for the lid on the plastic cup you are holding. Susie's solastalgia acts as nurse logs to the audience. Despite fears of corporeal and planetary health, Ganch makes the best of what is in front of her, offering a pleasant soundscape of birds, children and waves for those feed off from her many gifts.

As she passed through, I asked Gallery Director Kathryn Gremley how the sound makes her feel. “I don't feel anxiety, but I feel heightened,” she said. Call it millennial dread, call it solastalgia but Ganch's work made me feel *something*. I was worried I had lost the ability to deeply connect to work over the last year, but, in this moment, staring at a giant, perfectly crafted *Necklace for a Narwhal* as the waves from a rose gold phone fill the room, I'm not worried anymore.