

Provincetown Banner

A HAPPY STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND

Susan Danko explores new terrain at arts center summer residency

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Susan Danko, summer artist in residence at FAWC.

Visual artist Susan Danko is exploring new terrain this summer, on a number of different planes. As the 2013 Fine Arts Work Center's Ohio Arts Council artist-in-residence, Danko is engrossed in preparing for her solo exhibition of new works created during her stay here. As a life-long "inlander" from Cleveland, she is joyfully acclimating to the never-before experienced natural beauty of the Outer Cape. And as a wife and mother, she is suffering the pangs of separation from her supportive artist-husband and teenage daughter whom she had to leave behind for three months. Artistically, Danko's residency has been an enormous success — but she misses her family acutely.

"New Terrain," Danko's solo show, opens with a reception from 5 to 7 p.m. Friday, Aug. 23, in the Hudson D. Walker Gallery at the Work Center, 24 Pearl St., Provincetown. The show runs through Aug. 29.

Her exquisitely original paintings and prints reflect Danko's affinity for the deep mysteries of hidden landscapes — not the scenes that immediately pop out and demand attention but the subtle nuances of sea-wrack and objects found at water's edge, or the greenery that defines Beech Forest's ponds.

Danko brings an installation artist's touch to her compositions, and she makes optimal use of her earlier background in graphic arts and design to create visual reflections on nature's impact on us all. She combines the precision of a printmaker with the creative brilliance of a pure colorist to reveal new approaches and angles drawn from everyday scenes. As an observer she is fascinated by the contrasts and conflicts inherent in land and sea and by any potential extreme weather. Thus, she writes in her artist's statement, "My paintings are informed by my thoughts and responses to the state of our contemporary natural environment. With them I examine the power and fragility of nature caught in a state of flux between destruction and renewal. When formally observed the environment is full of opposition."

In a number of her new works Danko has created an exhilarating three-dimensional depth to her images by combining stenciled patterns with overlays of contrasting hues. Favoring acrylics on paper, she delights in unconventional methods of deriving specific colors and tones. With this layered effect light bounces from every image even as the viewer is pulled into closer observation.

Danko describes her work as “landscape-based, semi-abstract paintings that are created through the filter of ‘me.’ Constructed from memory and observation, they are influenced by my thought and responses to the natural environment around me.” She adds that her work has evolved from being “decorative and graphic” to pieces that are “more complex and process-oriented.” In particular she notes, “I’ve been experimenting much more with material lately, spilling paint and allowing it to lead me in new directions. Somewhat recently I’ve also begun to make installations art as side projects in between my painting commitments. It’s an interesting avenue that informs the paintings and vice versa,” she says.

During a recent Banner visit to her Work Center studio, Danko enthused about her residency and all it has provided her. “The residency is a collaborative arrangement in its 19th year, funded by the Ohio Arts Council with great support, studio, living quarters, community and much, much more provided by the Fine Arts Work Center. . . . I have 24-hour access to my studio here and all of the wonderful programming connected to FAWC. I also got to choose and participate in three of the summer workshops. (I chose all printmaking as a means to refresh my printmaking for future pursuit back in Cleveland.) I am free to work as I like. . . . FAWC is providing me with a supportive environment which is allowing me to be immersed in my art without interruption.”

A “stranger in a strange land”? Yes, but very happily so.