



SUSAN HARTUNG
Following a Line

September 18 – October 25, 2014

Susan Hartung

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Curated by Peter Dudek

The Teaching Gallery
Hudson Valley Community College
SUNY
Troy, New York

Tara Fracalossi, Director

Introduction

It's October 2007 and I am walking through the home and studios of Susan Hartung and her late husband, Antoni Milkowski. I met Susan through arranging the donation to Hudson Valley of a work by Milkowski. She had invited me and my then Gallery Assistant, Rachel Strilec, to New Lebanon, New York, where she and Milkowski had worked for many decades. What I see in those spaces — beyond Milkowski's finished works lying in the long field-grass, beyond the idyllic dream of an artist's country home — is The Marathon — the quiet, persistent accumulation of work from a decades-long studio practice: studies, drawings, abandoned pieces, finished pieces. The Work. His work. Her work. So much work.

Through jobs, and chores and children, and all that life sends one's way, there is the work ... amazing, beautiful, difficult work.

Still going. Never retire. Keep looking. Keep asking. Keep making. Stay with the work. Though she never actually said anything to me about it, this is the lesson Susan Hartung taught me that day. I hope this lesson rings clear for our students here at Hudson Valley.

Her humble, yet honestly curious way of going through the world reminds one to never rest on past success, to continue questioning, to keep

making, and to accept the lack of control we have in our art and lives. Her work encourages one to accept unplanned variation, mistakes and the unexpected. It encourages us to stop planning, stop talking, and just listen. This state of ceding the will to the work enables the work to grow beyond the confines we have unwittingly and inadvertently constructed for it.

Following a Line is one of those exhibits that I knew I wanted to present since I first saw the work and met the artist, Susan Hartung. As is too often the case, I met Susan later than I should have -- or later than I should have liked.

This exhibition would not be possible without the invaluable input of artist Peter Dudek, who introduced me to Susan and worked tirelessly to help organize this exhibit. I cannot thank him enough. Additionally, many thanks to Rosemary Starace who has contributed her time, experience and flat-out labor to this project and to Monika Sosnowski for her photographs.

Finally, the biggest thanks of all to Susan Hartung for gracing us with her work.

--Tara Fracalossi

Susan Hartung Painter, Poet, Artist

I'd like to introduce you to Susan Hartung. She [hales](#) from Milwaukee, took up residency in New York City during the tumultuous 1960s, pursued life on a boat off southern shores and, upon returning to land, came up north and raised a family in nearby New Lebanon, New York. One can say she took the scenic route here.

Her engagement with art began at Northwestern University, where she attended painting classes while majoring in English. Upon graduation, she heard NYC calling. It was 1962. The art world was small, the lofts were big, and Susan Hartung moved there.

New York often reinvents all or parts of itself every few years and, in the early 60s, the art world was feverishly trying to do just that. Warhol had just exhibited his soup can paintings, Oldenburg opened his "Store," Pop Art was definitely on the scene. But so was Minimalism. Frank Stella was already known for his "Black Paintings." Tony Smith and Donald Judd were making their boxy sculptures. Most of the abstract expressionists were still producing work. And if that wasn't heady enough, Op Art, Color Field painting, the

Fluxus movement and Conceptual Art were hovering about, ready to burst onto the scene.

Susan first lived in what was known as an English basement (an apartment on the lowest floor of a building, partially below and partially above ground) and then moved into a large loft on the Bowery. She started taking painting classes with Stephen Greene at the Art Students' League and, encouraged by Greene (who [Stella](#) had studied with at Princeton), she went on to Columbia for graduate school. There she continued studies with Greene, but also encountered Robert Motherwell. New York can be like that. One day you're in the Midwest far from the center of the art world, the next thing you know you're in a loft in downtown Manhattan and meeting major figures in American art. Or at least it was like that for Susan.

Finding her way as a visual artist also meant exploring the ever-changing cultural mix that defined the downtown art world of the 1960s. She worked for Something Else Press (founded by Fluxus provocateur Dick Higgins¹, and developed an interest in the alternative music and dance worlds. She heard the music of Moondog² and

¹ Something Else Press was an early publisher of Concrete Poetry and works by Fluxus artists.

² Moondog was an influential American composer who, dressed in Viking garb, often performed on the streets of NYC. "Moondog made more of an impression visually than musically. Nobody looked like that in Milwaukee." (Susan).

John Cage, visited the sound spaces of La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, attended the performances of Allan Kaprow and the dances of Merce Cunningham, Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown.³ While immersed in all that she discovered kindred spirits in drawing and painting.

The reductive lines of Ellsworth Kelly, the repetitive markings of Agnes Martin, the brushed strokes of David Smith that embrace chance as they unfurl across the page, all share Susan's pursuit of a delicate immediacy, a sense of touch, and drawing as an act of discovery. For Susan, drawing is not so much about describing as it is about exploring. It comes from a place of not knowing. For her, the not-known is a working space devoid of any need for resolution.

Are you a man or woman?

Yes.

Is the Moon waxing or waning?

Yes.

Are we coming or going?

Yes.⁴

Drawing

Its immediacy, its deftness, came to occupy a central role in Susan's art. And, as for others in her generation, the grid became a foundation to build upon. In the grid (structure, regularity), Susan

injects gesture and chance. Lines freely moving, not strict or exact lines, but expressive and loose, conveying thought or feeling (Figure 1). We see this throughout her major works: the Beauforts, the Runes, the Notations and the Line Fields.

Painting

Susan approaches painting and drawing in a like-minded manner; they are of one piece. Their making is intuitive and probing, open to possibilities. If there is a difference, it is how in the paintings color can be more pronounced, but most often the paintings are conceptually analogous to the drawings. Their function, their approach, their vocabulary is mutually shared and equally beneficial. The paintings and drawings cannot be separated. Their identities are interchangeable.

Are they drawings or paintings? Yes.

Size

It's a personal thing. Much of what Susan has made is measured in inches, not feet. Everything is within an arm's reach. In her paintings, as in her drawings, size reinforces an intimacy. Through calibrating size, she maintains the ability for her hand to move across the entire surface with pencil or brush without a dramatic shift in body posture. Here we experience post-painterly abstraction at work. (Figure 2)

³ Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer participated in the Judson Dance Theater. The company (a loosely based collective of dancers, poets, artists) was initially formed at Judson Church in Greenwich Village, which was a hub for avant-garde performance, dance and music.

⁴ Susan Hartung, Inclusion, *An Elephant Tree House Book*, 2011, p. 13.

Poetry

Included in the brochure and the exhibition are snippets of Susan's poems. Painting and drawing fuel her creative drive. Poetry rounds it out.

The Exhibition

This is a survey exhibition of Susan's life as an artist. Meant to introduce as thoroughly as possible her creative evolution, it is divided into three sections on two floors.

On the ground floor, is The Introductory Space, a mix of recent bodies of work that illuminates her current practice. On the second floor, there are two spaces: The Discovery Hall, small works and ephemera that, in some way, made the other works possible and The Dialog Room, a variety of works from throughout the years, where they all meet.

The Introductory Space

This room contains a broad selection from several series: the Notations, the Runes, the Beauforts and the Unmapped.

The Notations gather billowy tendrils and loose ends that tremble and flutter toward the bottom of the paper or canvas. They are simultaneously abstract and evocative of the natural world, while also maintaining a personal touch and presence. (Figure 3)

The Runes evoke Nordic lettering from the runic alphabets. These curled, suggestive and rudimentary inscriptions capture a certain awkwardness that exists in any initial attempt at communication. (Figure 4)

The Beauforts accumulate windy rivulets of graphite and color. "Organized" into mostly horizontal and interlacing patterns, they continue and expand Susan's utilization of directional mark-making. (Figure 5)

The Unmapped are prints and photo-related works that came into being alongside the other series, but don't fit into those categories. Important to include and singular in their presence, they widen our view of Susan's practice.

The Discovery Hall

This space was created to hold an assortment of odds and ends. Misfits, false starts, discoveries. This collection of things, (scraps of paper, poetry, rough drafts, swatches of paint) functions like an open notebook. Modest in size, they permit an intimate look at Susan's explorations and ideas (casual, imprecise and profound). Here, photography also comes into play. For Susan, photography is often a way of sketching or seeing. A simplifying, a restructuring and a working out of what's been seen. Through her working process, she amends

⁵ Which were used to write various Germanic languages before the adoption of the Latin alphabet.

⁶ The Beaufort Wind Scale measures wind velocity (important during her years on the boat).

images (footprints in the snow, fishing nets, vines) into something less familiar, something not yet fully comprehended, not yet able to be named.

The Dialog Room

The works in this room are from the past 40 years and are being presented together for the first time. Included are pieces that predate the work on the ground floor and encapsulate a vision. Collectively, this gathering suggests a path, meandering perhaps, with connecting threads. Susan's creative life has been a long, circuitous and picturesque one. This room embraces that journey.

I'm feeling no I'm not leaving yet and
how strange that is. Thursday,
I don't remember Thursday. Friday I
painted the studio floor,
Buttercup yellow. Saturday watched
Wings of Desire with Stefan.
I too have felt touched by angels, have
weighed
the possibilities of observing against
plunging right into the thick
of messy thumping life,

It's been a pleasure introducing you to Susan Hartung. Somehow I have known her for the past 30 odd years and it has been a rewarding experience seeing this show come together. To be able to reminisce with Susan, rummage through her studio and discover the history within the work has been a unique curatorial experience for me.

I would like to thank Tara Fracalossi for following up on my initial suggestion to exhibit Susan's work and for making it more than I had envisioned.

Special thanks go to Rosemary Starace for her assistance in helping to sort through and organize the work and to Susan's son, Stefan, for photographing the work.

And, of course, to the lovely Monika for her unerring editorial guidance.

Peter Dudek



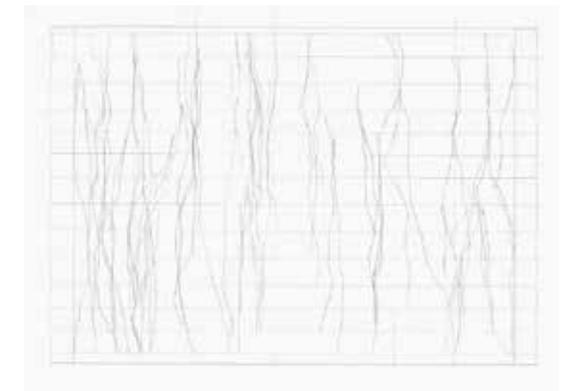
Front
1987, acrylic on canvas
9 x 9 inches



Grove
1992, acrylic on canvas
28 x 28 inches



Susan in her studio



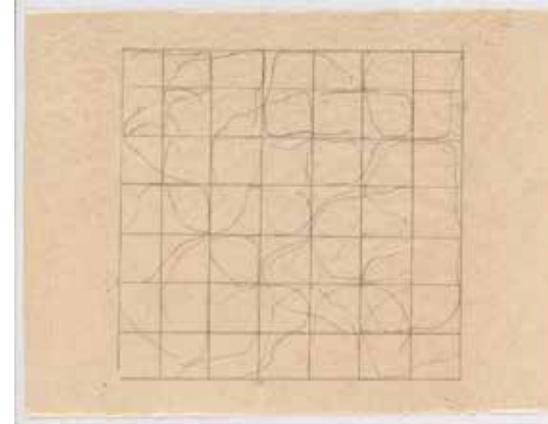
Restless Inquiry 1
1993, graphite on paper
22 x 30 inches



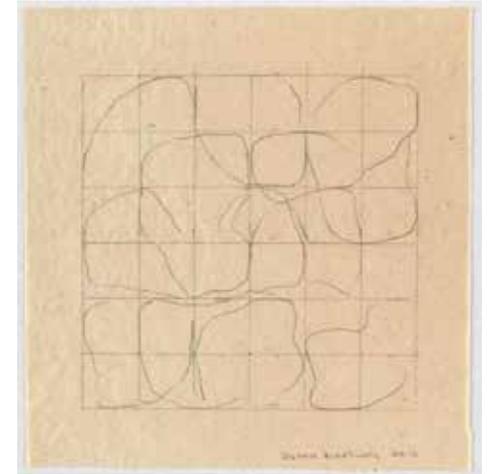
Beaufort Five
1997 graphite on paper
23 x 18.5 inches



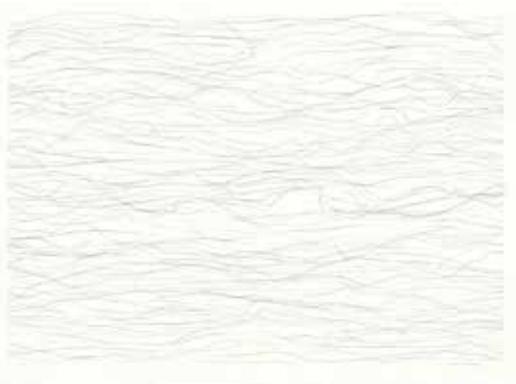
Studio2



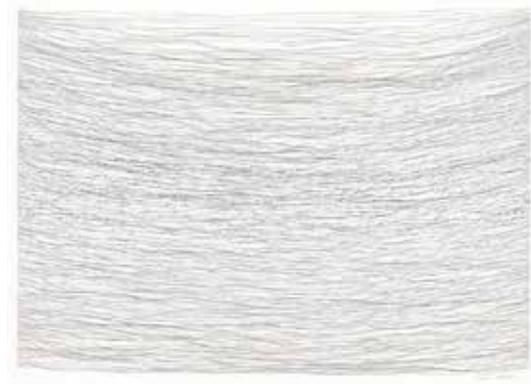
Rune untitled
2009, acrylic and graphite on paper
22 x 30 inches



Rune 6x6
2010, graphite on paper
7.75 x 8.25 inches



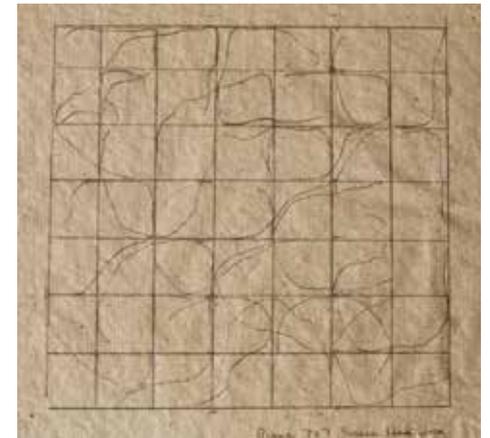
Beaufort Navigate
circa 1998, graphite on paper
22 x 30 inches



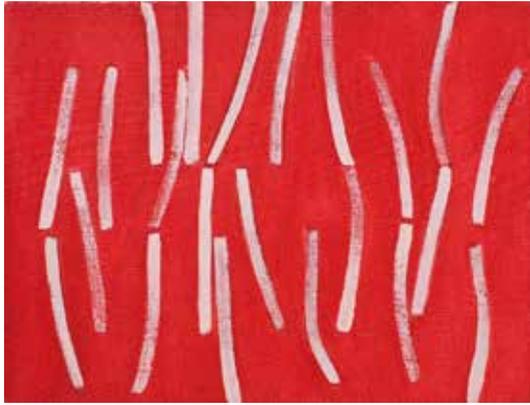
Beaufort Modulate,
circa 1998, graphite on paper
22 x 30 inches



Studio 1



Rune 7x7
2010, graphite on paper
8.25 x 10.75 inches



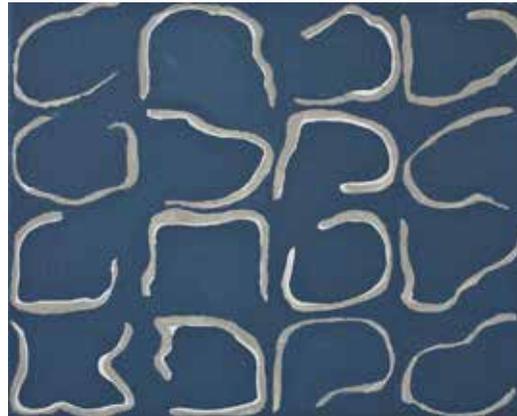
A Formal Feeling
2000, Acrylic on canvas
10 x 12 inches



Pulse
2004, Acrylic on Canvas
23 x 28 inches



Listen
2007, watercolor graphite and colored pencil on paper
22 x 30 inches



Four Blue
2011, acrylic on canvas
9 x 11 inches

Context

Outside the moaning Con Ed power station,
the composer stamped the hands of his invited audience,
in black ink, in caps: LISTEN.

And on a barge in the harbor, Staten Island at night,
he stamped our hands: LISTEN.

He named a piece American Can
and floated aluminum lids
on the sail boat pond in Central Park,
for guests to hear silence as ground
to the clinking of colliding disks
cut loose from function, from context.

Walking a beach, I once found
the bleached cross section of a bone.
once serviceable, a support, a blood nest,
then the center of a meal.
Sun and wind have softened the butcher's cut,
a symbol now, of passing time,
an object of beauty, to turn in your hand.
A Brancusi washed ashore.

-Susan Hartung

Susan Hartung

Susan Hartung began painting as an undergraduate at Northwestern University. She continued studying at the Art Students' League in New York and earned her Master of Fine Arts degree at Columbia University. Selected exhibitions include solo, group and two-person shows at the Painting Center, NYC; Exit Art, NYC; Time & Space Limited, Hudson; The Albany Institute of History and Art; Five Points Gallery, East Chatham; Lichtenstein Gallery, Pittsfield, ~~Ma~~; The Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, Ma; and Hunter College, NYC. Her work is held in many private collections, as well as the collection of the University Art Museum, University at Albany. She lives and works in the Berkshires.

Founded in 2001, the Teaching Gallery presents work in all media by emerging and mid-career artists of regional and national standing. Annual student exhibitions, visiting artist talks and performances complete the programming. Located in the award-winning Administration Building, the two-story, 2000 square foot gallery is a central location for students in gallery management classes to study the theories and practices of gallery management, exhibition development and artist relations.

Gallery exhibitions are supported by the Department of Fine Arts, Theatre Arts and Broadcast Communications with assistance from the Office of Cultural Affairs. All exhibitions are installed and assisted by students in Gallery Management classes.

Staff:

Chair, Department of Fine Arts, Theatre Arts and Broadcast Communications:

Dorothy Reynolds

Gallery Director: Tara Fracalossi

Program Assistant: Alice Busman

Cultural Affairs Coordinator: Maria Zemantauski

Student assistants:

Gallery Assistant (College Worker): Brittany Fedorchak

Students in the Gallery Management and Gallery Practicum classes.

Special Thanks :

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Hudson Valley Community College: Office of Cultural Affairs, Physical Plant, Viking Video Services

Book and Exhibit Card Design:

Elisa Pruden



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