



Susan Mikula, American Vale #17

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EXHIBITION INFORMATION

American Vale: Recent Photographs

by Susan Mikula

at Ferrin Gallery

437 North Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201

Exhibition Dates: June 26 – August 1, 2010

Opening Reception: Saturday, June 26th, 4:00 – 6:00 PM

Gallery Hours:

11:00 AM – 5:00 PM Daily, June 21st through September 5th

Gallery phone number and email: 413.442.1622; www.ferringallery.com ; info@ferringallery.com

PHOTOGRAPHER SUSAN MIKULA TO PRESENT

**American Vale: Recent Photographs
at FERRIN GALLERY, PITTSFIELD, MA**

PITTSFIELD, MA – Photographer Susan Mikula will be exhibiting **American Vale: Recent Photographs**, the debut solo showing of her work in the Berkshires at the Pittsfield, Massachusetts-based Ferrin Gallery, 437 North Street, from June 26 – August 1, 2010. The gallery will be hosting an opening reception for the artist on Saturday, June 26th, 4:00 – 6:00 PM.

The images that make up **American Vale** were shot in the valley between the Berkshire and Taconic mountain ranges in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, a city that grew on the spine of the massive industrial facilities of the General Electric (G.E.) Corporation. Pittsfield's G.E. facilities are fast-disappearing, with some of the buildings Mikula shot for this show torn down and the rubble hauled away even before the last photos were taken. Others in the show are still active and thriving – though they survive on the fragile entrepreneurial cusp that is American manufacturing today.

Mikula's photographs in **American Vale** strip away detail and soften edges, only to better reveal the underlying and essential strength and form of these massive installations. Shot exclusively with Polaroid cameras and – of necessity – expired Polaroid film, Mikula works only with available light, manually controlling exposures to create painterly, almost impressionistic imagery. The resulting images are neither cropped nor retouched as they travel from camera to final print.

Using cameras and films made by a now defunct former giant of American industrial innovation further connects the subject of **American Vale** and this body of work. Even as remnants of the

old Polaroid Corporation are auctioned off piecemeal to satisfy creditors, the products of their industry continue to produce works of power and substance in Mikula's hands.

"Once Pittsfield and G.E. were synonymous, with each other and with a thriving, vital community. Now you can drive through town a million times and not even know that these massive facilities are still there" says Mikula. "Now they're hidden behind layers of security and obscurity, like an old skeleton in the family closet. But places like these had and still have such a powerful impact on our landscapes and our lives, and I'm so drawn to the sense of story that hangs over them, and to their sheer, physical beauty."

Highly abstracted, and in a tight chromatic range, the images in **American Vale: Recent Photographs** continue to place form significantly more front-and-center than in many earlier bodies of her work. Mikula shot the 17 images that make up the show over a period from summer of 2009 to spring 2010.

Thirteen of the images in the exhibition are printed at large scale (40"x41" and 28"x29") using archival, pigment-based inks on archival paper made by Crane & Co. of Dalton, MA, mounted on anodized aluminum with an integrated brace/cleat system on the back that allows the work to hang flat, yet "float" about an inch off the wall. Four images will be presented on ceramic plates and repeated inside pocket watch-sized locket.

With **American Vale**, Susan Mikula continues a story first seen in her show **American Device** which depicted working plants on the arid coasts of southern California and the Texas Gulf, finding the unromanticized, present, physical beauty of industrial sites and the landscapes they shape.

As part of the exhibition of Mikula's work, the gallery will be hosting a DISH+DINE – "the perfect pairing of local art and local food" – where a local caterer and or restaurant is invited into the gallery to present a dinner where the featured artist is the guest of honor. The chefs of Mezze Bistro in Williamstown, Massachusetts will be creating the menu for the evening. In addition to local food, local potter Frances Palmer, will be providing the tableware for the evening. MSNBC political commentator Rachel Maddow, who also is Mikula's partner, will be curating an historical cocktail for the evening using spirits provided by Berkshire Mountain Distillers. The DISH+DINE will be held on Saturday, July 10th, 6:30 – 9:00 PM. Reservations are very limited and may be made by calling the gallery at 413.442.1622.

In addition to displaying work at Ferrin Gallery during Summer 2010, three images from her series **Until We met the Solid Town** are currently part of the **2010 Landscapes Exhibition** at William Baczek Fine Arts in Northampton, MA. Prior to **American Vale: Recent Photographs**, Mikula exhibited her first west coast solo show, **American Device: Recent Photographs**, at the George Lawson Gallery in San Francisco in February-March 2010, where her work is also included in the current "New York" show, running through July 10th.

Mikula has also received acclaim for her landscapes, female nudes and super-sized diptychs. Critics have described her photographic art as "alluring," "full of ominous beauty," "complex" and "arresting." Not content to simply 'print and frame' as a photographer, Mikula's display of work has incorporated industrial materials (nylon mesh), household objects (Melamine dinner plates) and handmade wax and resin finishes.

In Fall 2009 **bearings** was presented at the TJ Walton Gallery in Provincetown, MA., and seven of her **sic transit** images and four of the **Pier 40** series made up the solo show titled **sic transit** at the CHC Gallery in Chelsea, New York City in December 2008/January 2009. In conjunction with that show, Luxxus Press published "Susan Mikula, Photographs, 2008" - a monograph of recent work.

In summer, 2007, Mikula's disquieting photographic installation of fifty Polaroid original photographs—landscapes, portraits, abstract images, and scary mean little animals—printed on Melamine plastic dinner plates, titled **omnivore**, was on view at the Boston State House. September 2006, saw the opening of **9 Portraits**, her unique installation of nine color Polaroid portraits printed on nine-foot-tall swathes of industrial mesh.

Other solo shows include **still, moving pictures** (2005), **Civil Twilight** (2003), **New Beauty** (2002), **After Reprimand** (2001) and **Lux in Tenebris** (1998). She curated **Viva! Polaroid**

(2004), a group show featuring the experimentation and innovation of eleven New England photographers. Her work has also been shown at the Armory Art Center in West Palm Beach, Florida; the San Diego Art Institute; St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery in New York City; and State of the Arts '98 in Oregon. Her work has been selected for national juried exhibitions, and she is the recipient of three artist grants from The Northampton Cultural Council, part of the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

Mikula lives in rural Western Massachusetts and New York City with her partner, Rachel Maddow.

For more information about Susan Mikula and images of work, please go to susanmikula.com

Ferrin Gallery, established in 1979, is one of the nation's premier ceramic art and sculpture galleries. The gallery program presents changing exhibitions featuring contemporary art, photography and sculpture from throughout the region along with nationally known ceramic sculptors and studio potters. The gallery is located in downtown Pittsfield in the heart of the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts, an area known for its cultural offerings - music, theater and museums. Pittsfield is just over three hours from New York City and a little over two hours from Boston.

NOTE TO EDITORS: Hi-resolution images from American Vale: Recent Photographs, as well as portraits of Ms. Mikula, are available to accompany editorial and may be downloaded at susanmikula.com.