

Susan E. Evans | Artist Statement

I was born Denise Jane (Juana) Ramos to a “Hispanic” father and mother of Northern European descent. As an infant I was put up for adoption and later renamed Susan Eileen Evans and raised in a white middle class family. I always knew I had been adopted and throughout my youth I speculated on my actual cultural background, spending hours staring into the mirror in search of physical clues that I could associate with a culture other than that of my adopted parents. It would not be until 1997 that I would open my adoption file and learn of my true ethnic background. Now I struggle to understand a culture that I was separated from both physically and socially at such an early age. I question my identity as a Mexican-American artist and strive to comprehend the experience of a minority woman in America and the depth of spiritual, political, and cultural icons that form this cultural heritage. Searching for traces of this legacy within myself, my most current work is about visualizing those ideas that reflect the “Hispanic” side of my heritage. I attempt to acknowledge and honor to a history that I have not yet known.

Since the early 1990s I began using text and iconic forms and symbols in my photographic work as a means to explore the application and contextualization of images in relation to the categorization of data, visual language processing, and as a means to investigate our own cultural and social conditioning. Over the years concepts of visual language and the semiotics of photographic images have become the key component in my method of working. In a broad sense I deconstruct, filter and reconstitute ideas, beliefs, concepts and theories commenting on current social, political, cultural and historical structures in an effort to prompt dialogue and at times humor in the viewers. As a society we are bombarded with a continuous stream of disparate sensory stimuli, we multi-task, cross-reference, sample, and appropriation and I rarely limit myself to one project or medium. I choose to work on multiple projects concurrently which serves to inform and cross-pollinate the others and incorporate photography, digital imaging, installation, performance, video, or sculpture. While my projects are often conceptual in nature they reference narrative, documentary, experimental, formalist, minimalist, abstract even sculptural strategies, all depending on what is appropriate for each individual project.

There are three major themes in my current work:

Race, Identity, Gender and the New Physiognomy

I question established beliefs, cultural and familial history, memory, discrimination, gender and religion in an effort to understand and define myself as well as the world around me. I am fascinated with ideas of both individual and collective identity. I also explore boundaries, either real or created either by ourselves or society.

Deconstructed Landscape

My adopted parents were both Forest Service employees, and throughout my youth I have been closely associated with natural environments and remain interested in the landscape as it is perceived and defined. This work examines and reflects on the notion of the picturesque, photographic and visual beauty, as well as the analysis, description, and classification of space. I explore the commodification of land for social gain, science of conservation, and both historical and cultural connections to the landscape.

Sociopolitical Themes

I am motivated by current events that shape our collective memory and define us as people, a culture or civilization. In these projects I explore societal contradictions, cultural expectations, formation of history in an effort to confront my audience and encourage debate.