Designing for the Elements

KATRÍN SIGURÐARDÓTTIR IN CONVERSATION WITH FRANCES RICHARD FEBRUARY 2020

As part of our new, occasional series of conversations, artist Katrín Sigurðardóttir talked with associate editor Frances Richard about the ways in which built space and organic forces interact with systems of representation; the seductions of the model and the mock-up; and the slippery distinctions between art and architecture. Their conversation was conducted by email, and edited for publication.

Metamorphic, 2017-ongoing. Gypsum, resin, epoxy, craft paper; dimensions variable. Installation view, Walter and McBean Galleries, San Francisco Art Institute, 2017. [Gregory Goode]

Frances Richard: I'm writing to begin our conversation, Katrín, about art-making — specifically, your own practice in sculpture and installation — and to think together about how that practice explores ideas embedded in or coded by architecture and design.

In fact, we began this conversation long ago, in 2005, when you took part in the exhibition "Odd Lots: Revisiting Gordon Matta-Clark's *Fake Estates*" that I co-organized (with Sina Najafi and Jeffrey Kastner) for *Cabinet* magazine. We've since extended the discussion many times, when I've visited your studio and written about your work, and just recently when we met at your eponymously titled exhibition on view at the MSU Broad Museum, at Michigan State University in East Lansing.

I hesitate to open with a giant, unanswerable question. But I can't help it, because as a writer I'm always brushing up against a fundamental sense that language is baffling, as if I can't make lasting peace with the proposition that words refer to things, that semiotic signs float around mediating our experiences of embodiment and matter and phenomena like weather — yet are not embodiment or matter. All the while, my sensations pass through language almost as they pass through my body; life without language is not only unthinkable, but for me barely palpable. I'm constantly forgetting, or losing track of, what *is* language and what *isn't*. It's not surprising that you and I have talked about architecture as a language — an idiom that you adapt to "speak" sculpture. As we were preparing for this exchange, you wrote to me:

> In architecture, everything is named; you could even say that architecture begins in language. In order to be designed and created by the human mind — and for issues of safety and classified function — everything is defined within a semantic system.

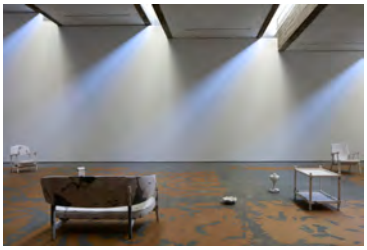
I don't think you're being metaphorical. Isn't it Hegel who says that the Tower of Babel was the fundamental architecture, because it gathered people into a society? Until, of course, they sinned through architectural hubris, and God shattered the earthling language community into mutually unintelligible camps. So, I want to ask: when you say "architecture begins in language," what do you

mean? Is it too easy to say that architecture is useful (concerned with "safety and classified function"), and art isn't? Except, of course, insofar as soliciting or containing aesthetic and conceptual attention, which is what art does, is useful …

Katrín Sigurðardóttir: It is fitting that the comparison we are discussing here between language and architecture emerges in response to Matta-Clark, whose work exemplifies the intricate connections between language and architecture.

The cyclical relationships between language, embodiment, and matter are things I think about a lot too … language about space, embodiment in space, and matter as space. In order to draw a space, to draw a function — in the literal sense of drawing on paper (or, of course, on a screen), but also in the larger sense of projecting or planning a space or a function — in order to make such plans that can be shared with or executed by others, one relies on concepts, forms, logics that have passed through language. In this way, everything in architecture is named. Architecture relies on semantic systems, although I guess one could argue that language — the use of words — is only one part of that system.

I like to think of architecture and design as "prospective" practices. You draw something that will then become an actual form in actual matter. It begins as a drawing; it is in the language of the drawing that you visualize and conceive the design. Then there is the retrospective drawing, where matter and tangible forms are brought back into language by being described, or entered into a history or taxonomy. When I talk about retrospective drawing, I am usually referring to archaeological practices. And this then begets more drawing, more language, and so on.



Metamorphic, 2017-ongoing. Walter and McBean Galleries, San Francisco Art Institute. [Gregory Goode]

Metamorphic, 2017-ongoing. Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, 2019. [Eat Pomegranate Photography]

FR: What you're calling "prospective" is another way of saying that architecture and design, even in conceptual states or stages, are premised on use, on practical function, right? There's a symmetry here with the fact that one way of defining art — after the readymade, anyway — is that it's functionless. Or its functions are irrational, gratuitous. (In what I'm pretty sure is a riff on Duchamp's *Fountain* [1917], Matta-Clark says, "one of my favorite definitions of the difference between architecture and sculpture is whether there is plumbing.") In that earlier note to me, you go on to write:

> As I borrow from all the fields of spatial record in my work, including architecture, archeology, and geography, I am keenly aware of this aspect of human-made structures. Natural and

> elemental processes come before human language, and I am increasingly interested in the pairing of unnamed reality with named reality in space.

Do you feel that architecture also contains "unnamed reality in space"? But contains it "differently"?

And, suppose we flip this, and go back to social and spatial operations as named and structured by the semantic system of building — with its doors and floors and walls and furnishings and gardens — and even more specific details like 18th century *boiseries*, or Baroque tiles, or midcentury-modern teak living-room sets. What happens to these interlocking systems of functional design when you pull them over into realms of noninstrumental contemplation, realms friendly to the unnameable, that for lack of a better word we call "art"? Are you distorting design logics? Emptying them out? Reifying them? Dreaming them? Is "translation" a good way of describing what happens when art borrows architectural syntax — making an "art text" instead of a "building text," which "reads" differently because its terms are different?

KS: I think this goes back to what I mentioned earlier about architecture versus archaeology. An early art-school assignment has stayed with me throughout my practice; in fact, it was the starting point for *Metamorphic*, one of the works in the exhibition in Michigan. It came from an English class — it began in language — where we were asked to describe a room. In some ways, I feel I have been describing places ever since, trying to spin these descriptions in ever-new ways, and to go further into the implications of this practice; what it means to describe a place. What began as a written exercise has segued into a number of sculptures and installations, works with dimensional, material form. These places are commonly architectural, although not always.

Unbuilt series, 2005-2015. Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, 2019. [Eat Pomegranate Photography]

Sometimes the "description" is autobiographical; sometimes it deals more with a collective, historical memory of a place. Often it deals with how we as a culture remember and describe places, and what strategies come into play in presenting the past. Going back to the distinction between prospective and retrospective spatializations, my work concerns itself with the past, but often with how the future was envisioned in the past. That is where the *Unbuilt* houses — sculptures modeled on archival blueprints that were never realized as buildings — deal with architecture, with prospective drawing.

You bring up the issue of function; I do think of architecture as being concerned with solving functional problems. So, in a post-readymade fashion, we could say that I am not concerned with solving functional problems. There is no "plumbing" in my work, to use Matta-Clark's term.

I also think of Matta-Clark as negotiating the past and future in built spaces. His word "anarchitecture" seems a very fitting name for his emptying out of architecture. Even if material has been taken away or structure altered, the void is framed by material structure; the void is the shape of an action of taking away.

1501 N Grand River Ave, Lansing, MI, USA, 2019. Digital chromogenic print, 164cm x 127cm.

Namesake, 2019. Handmade paving-stones in Icelandic clay; dimensions variable. [Aaron Word/MSU Broad]

FR: What you say about anarchitecture does seem close to what seduces me in thinking about semiotic systems — whether language or architecture or art — and how semiosis, the process of making communicable meaning, rubs against or frames or cloaks matter as such. The relation is anarchic.

Let's turn to the specific works in your exhibition at the MSU Broad Museum, where so many of these issues are being explored. There are three works on view: *Unbuilt* (2005 – 2015), *Metamorphic* (2017 – ongoing), and *Namesake* (2019). You made this particular version of *Namesake* specifically for this exhibition. It's a subtle piece, sited outdoors, in what is now the middle of winter — and, when you and I and the MSU Broad curator Steven L. Bridges went to visit it along the banks of the Grand River in Lansing, we found it completely under water. That's a pretty dramatic statement about function and functionlessness. So perhaps we could talk about this work first.

KS: In early 2018, I started going to the west of Iceland to dig holes, and then used the unearthed earth to plug holes in the United States. The MSU Broad installation is the third iteration of the project, the first two having been installed in various outdoor locations in Cleveland, and Akron, Ohio, in 2018.[1]

As part of the journey from the ground in Iceland to my studio in New York, and on into the ground in these midwestern cities, the material was processed; I filtered sand and gravel out so I had usable clay. Then I cast small bricks or paving stones. The stones were laid in simple patterns, to fill potholes, repair pavements, etc. In Lansing, a small, flat, muddy place along a path beside the river was paved. But the pavers were not fired, and over a few weeks they dissolved. A brick can be seen as a metonym for architecture, and perhaps more generally for human intention in nature. But here the Icelandic earth that I had consolidated into units merged with the mud in Michigan.

FR: A form is also broken, though not literally dissolved, in *Metamorphic*. This project centers on a set of furniture from your family's home in Reykjavík. You cast the chairs and loveseat and table and so forth in plaster — this non-load-bearing, inappropriate, blank material. Now, as part of the ongoing process of the piece, you ship the works in normal art-handler's crates to wherever they're going to be

displayed. The material is such that it's almost impossible to transport the sculptures without damage. So upon arrival at the exhibition venue, you unpack the broken works and painstakingly reconstruct them, repairing the cracks and replacing pulverized bits with more resilient structural fillers. The *Namesake* bricks are allowed to melt into invisibility, but the *Metamorphic* objects keep reasserting their form even as their materiality alters.

Namesake, 2019. Handmade paving-stones in Icelandic clay; dimensions variable. [Aaron Word/MSU Broad]

Metamorphic, 2017-ongoing. Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, 2019. [Eat Pomegranate Photography]

In an interview with Constance Lewallen, on the occasion of *Metamorphic* at the Walter and McBean Galleries at the San Francisco Art Institute in 2017, you discuss the work in relation to the Japanese practice of *kintsugi*, where broken pottery is mended with gold seams; other discussions of this project relate it to the mythical Ship of Theseus, which was rebuilt piece by piece until every timber was new. In the interview, you add, beautifully, that the patches of filler are also comparable to the striations in marble, traces of metamorphic mineral change. The chair has been under pressure yet remains itself, while at the same time reappearing as a model, a copy, a representation, like Plato's Third Bed in *The Republic*, or Joseph Kosuth's famous artwork *One and Three Chairs* (1965) — although *Metamorphic* is more sensual, more curious and wistful about instability.

The paving stone in *Namesake* is different, in that it isn't cast from an "original" paver. But in both cases, you're experimenting with the stand-in, the version of the thing that is-and-yet-isn't. It's tempting to say that this obsession with in-between status is an artist's prerogative more than an architect's, since a building that denies its function too fully will be uninhabitable. Matta-Clark worried that, as he said, "people live in their space with a temerity that is frightening"; he wanted ordinary people to take charge of their living conditions, whether spatial or economic or interpersonal.[2] Still, the word-idea anarchitecture denies architecture as an ordering principle for social space. It denies the ambitions of architectural or urbanist problem-solving, and embraces failure and absurdity instead. It's an artist's word.

KS: I agree with you that asserting an in-between status for materials and structures is the artist's prerogative, but this is also the prerogative of nature and time. Think about ruins. What makes them so rich for the viewer is exactly this thing that is-and-yet-isn't. And in *Namesake* I am thinking specifically about the dissolution of form and structure in architecture, how nature and time engulf human intention.

You are right that the clay paver is not a copy; the reference lies in the material's origin. The plaster in

Metamorphic is of an unknown origin — but in *Namesake*, the extraction of the Icelandic clay is key.

The *Metamorphic* objects started as nonfunctional copies; they looked like chairs, but if you tried to sit in them, they would have broken. As they move and are repaired, they are "metamorphosing" to functional objects, chairs that will hold up and support a body. They tell a story of home, a place to rest, but are also becoming objects on which you really can sit. Plaster is traditionally the material of the copy — think of plaster casts of classical statues. In *Metamorphic*, the plaster objects copy the real furniture in one specific room in the house where I grew up. They begin as a memory about a home that's been left behind. They end up as another home, a new resting place.

I am using the trope of the Ship of Theseus to differentiate between iterations, shifts in an object's identity. When does an object become a copy of itself? When have reconstruction and replacement begotten a new object? When I started *Metamorphic*, I had completed the *Unbuilt* series, which also involved mending and rebuilding — in this case, scale models of houses that were designed for various clients in Reykjavík in the 1920s, but never realized. I constructed the models according to plans sourced from the Archives of the Association of Icelandic Architects. Then I deliberately "ruined" them, by smashing, dropping, burning. And then I rebuilt the ruins, piece by piece.

Unbuilt series, 2005-2015. Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, 2019. [Eat Pomegranate Photography]

From the time of *Unbuilt*, I was already thinking about kintsugi. In Japanese aesthetics, kintsugi originates in the appreciation of impermanence. A broken thing is mended with lacquer that is then leafed with gold. The crack is celebrated, and the object's cataclysmic history raises its aesthetic value. The damage adds depth, integrity — an idea contradictory to the western precept that things are perfect when new.

Granted, marble has often served as a kind of trophy of European conquest, to illustrate the far journeys of those who acquired it. Nevertheless, marble is metamorphic: the mass breaks, and minerals of different colors migrate into it. When you look at marble, you are looking at material that has undergone pressure, disruption, disintegration — and exactly this fact is what has made it more beautiful. The aesthetics of mending in *Metamorphic* and the *Unbuilt* series go alongside a wide-ranging inquiry into the phenomenon of fragmentation in my other works during the same period.

FR: Let's talk about scale. You choose these design objects — furniture; blueprints — but as they pass through your mind and hands, their usable-ness falls away. At the same time, the histories or uses they imply are exaggerated, made hypertrophic. I think this holds true even if what you've literally done is to make the designed thing smaller.

The *Unbuilt* works, for example, are dollhouse sized, with all that this suggests about a child's fantasies of immersion in and control over miniature worlds, so that when you smash or set fire to the houses, the sense of violence is tempered by that toylike size. Or maybe not; maybe the destruction of the little houses implies all the terror and surreality of childhood nightmares. Still, the size of the houses affects their emotional register. (Compare this to other artist's projects based on the recreation of dwelling spaces, a Rachel Whiteread house, or a Do-ho Suh house.) A dollhouse is a mini-theater of domesticity — and here's a good place to reference one of my favorite Matta-Clark anecdotes, which I'll quote because he tells it better than I could paraphrase. It's in an interview with the architectural historian and fellow Cornell School of Architecture grad, the aptly-named Donald Wall:

> Wall: A strong image that is forming in my mind has to do with doll houses, with the peeling away of barriers, where sides are removed with the exposure of hidden and denied activity ...
>
> Matta-Clark: Now we are getting very personal. Actually, the first birthday present I can ever remember insisting upon and getting is a doll house. And, well, I wanted to be a voyeur ever since I was four years old .... That's when I got the doll house. The thing about voyeurism and the doll house has to do with confronting secrecy and being in control secretly.[3]

Your *Unbuilt Structures* don't have open fourth walls. Yet these kinds of play with revelation, theatricality, intrusion, spatial bewilderment, and perceptual surprise do occur all the time in your work. Can you talk about these emotional or social feeling-tones, and the ways in which they arise from architectures that aren't behaving as architecture "should," or as architecture must? Would you use words like "voyeurism" or "control" to describe what you're interested in? Or is it less about voyeurism, and more about exploring the fantasies inherent in spaces that are distant, imagined, inaccessible, vanished?

KS: Let me begin by discussing another set of projects related to these topics, that were made within the timespan of the ten *Unbuilt* sculptures, between 2005 and 2015. In 2010, I made an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where I focused on boiseries in the museum's collection. These are wooden wall panels that serve as ornamental skins in interiors, and are treated in historian's terms much like antique furniture. I was drawn to boiseries through thinking about museum strategies of display, specifically the period room.

The period room is a fantasy device. In a museum, it is usually presented as portraying the intimate way of life of a specific person or family. But these rooms cull from many sources — so even if they appear historically correct, they are not authentic, in that the objects rarely derive from one original room, house, group of inhabitants. It's this deceptive presentation of integrated life — this implicit, but denied fragmentation and dispersal — that drew me in.

SLIDESHOW Boiserie (Hotel de Cabris), 2010. Painted MDF, mirrors, steel – dimensions variable. Installation view Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2010.

For the Met, I made two works. *Boiserie Hôtel de Crillon* is a polyhedric chamber built in a slightly reduced scale, hermetically sealed so that the viewer looks into it from impossible vantage points. These are essentially the vantage points of the wall against which the boiserie panels would be installed, views that would be "seen" by the building itself. Inside the chamber I built, all the components of the period room were copied: hand-carved furniture, upholstered seats, woven carpet and curtains, chandeliers, and so on, all re-fabricated in same materials as the original objects. The windows and doors offer no view or entry. Instead, the viewer looks in through multiple mirrors that adorn the chamber — these were part of the original décor from the room, a boudoir in the Hôtel de Crillon. But I replaced the mirrors with one-way glass. The impossibility of this view into the closed room is then accentuated by the empty reflections in the mirrors; you're looking through the back of something, through a surveillance mirror, from a space you should not be able to inhabit, and the mirrors reflect each other ad infinitum without any trace of the viewer. Matta-Clark's analysis of the dollhouse as voyeuristic is appropriate for this work: "confronting secrecy and being in control secretly."

The second *Boiserie, Hôtel de Cabris*, is a set of some 50 folding panels, where I meticulously copied another period room in the Met's collection, which came originally from the Hôtel de Cabris in Grasse, in the south of France. I've manipulated the scale, so that viewers enter through a set of doors at full size, but as they begin to move through the installation, the panels shrink and the successive doorways become harder and harder to pass through. The work goes from full scale down to a miniature at about 5% scale. It is experienced both as an architectural environment and as an object. I was interested in bridging the gap between how we commonly relate, on one hand, to immersive installations — or, for that matter, to "actual" architectures — and on the other hand to sculptural objects. As in the *Hotel de Crillon*, this work plays tricks with perception.

FR: That interest in perceptual trickery is notably absent from *Unbuilt*, which is completely up front about the kinds of destruction and reconstruction the models have undergone — right up to the fact that you show photographs of the models after they've been broken and before they've been repaired, so your viewers can see how devastating the damage was.

KS: I don't agree that perceptual trickery is absent in *Unbuilt*: the scale model and the period room are both devices of perceptual trickery. But my manipulation of the strategies they employ is different between, say *Boiserie Hotel de Crillon* and *Unbuilt*. The scale standard in *Unbuilt* varies from one work to the next and is arrived at more through a qualitative process than a quantitative one. One model might be 1:25 while another is 1:32.736. Still, I always think of these works as categorically related to scale models. You mention the dollhouse, which is perhaps the originating object for both scale models and period rooms. One could say that both the period room and the scale model provoke desire and a sense of control. It's all nicely evasive, because miniaturization means that details can't be fully precise. Scale models in design often serve to sell a client an idea. But I tend to think about scale as a metaphor for distance, temporal or spatial. When a miniature is not made for the purpose of selling a proposed design, but in order to look back in time, then it allows for a comfortable fantasy about the past — just as a conventional scale model allows for fantasy about the future.

When I break the model, I intend to break the possibility of forgetting its objecthood, of submitting to its seductive play, where the viewer or the model-builder can arrange the world according to their objectives. When I place the viewer *behind* the boiseries in the museum, in a non-space where you are able to view the back of the panel in a way that you never could in an actual room, I am trying to deconstruct this display, to draw attention the fact that both the period room and the scale model are strategic viewing devices. Thinking of the period room as a puzzle arranged from disparate parts — and having made broken scale models that then are puzzled back together — I started to compare the fragmentation of the two. I read George Perec's *La Vie Mode d'Emploi* (1978), where a parallel is drawn between solving a jigsaw puzzle and telling the collective story of lives in an apartment building in Paris, one room at a time. This led to a series of other works based on the operations of a jigsaw puzzle. [4]

FR: It's not insignificant that the reference here is a novel. Maybe an artwork made of language isn't precisely a "viewing device" — and I don't mean to deny distinctions between looking at a sculpture, or being in a building, or walking through a landscape, and reading a book. But narrative and history are language-based systems that order our experience. Words and stories are "devices," and if you pay attention, the relation amongst their parts — in relation to fact and symbol, belief and evidence, presence and absence, and so forth — is deeply puzzling. As puzzling and slippery as the relation of Icelandic mud to Michigan mud, or the relation of a sculpture you can see to one that has dissolved and slipped downriver.

KS: In 2013, I made a large work for the Icelandic Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, titled *Foundation*, that was also designed as a gigantic puzzle. It was paradoxically lacking a foundation, in a similar way as the boiseries at the Met were lacking their original built containers. The Biennale piece presented a faux 18th-century pavilion floor of hand-cast concrete tiles, which like the boiseries could be understood as an ornamental skin that delineates a fictional architectural space.

Foundation continues the observation of ornamental surfaces in *Boiseries*, and also manipulates viewers' spatial experience. In Venice, it "floated" half inside and half outside an old laundry building at a real 18th century palazzo in Dorsoduro. Because the faux floor was raised, visitors had to make their way through a door which had been halved in height. As is common in archaeological excavation, a floor can be found underneath a floor, and different architectural footprints overlap. *Foundation* floated through the present-day building like a ghost.

SLIDESHOW Foundation, 2013. Concrete tiles, wooden platform, 387 x 537 x 32 inches. Installation view, Reykjaví´k Art Museum, 2014.

The footprint of the old laundry was smaller than *Foundation* itself, and the piece and the real floorplan weren't the same shape. To accommodate the differences, the floor was interrupted by cutouts that broke into the tile patterns. As the exhibition went on, I replaced these pieces step by step with a neutral cementitious material. This was the first time I put my work in relation to the philosophical paradox named after the Ship of Theseus.

FR: All these works deal with site, shelter, location, histories embedded in a built space or a particular piece of ground — and, simultaneously with transit, disorientation, disruption, damage, as if we can't contemplate place without confronting placelessness. You're always dealing with fictions on some level, and with the ways in which the process of detaching a space, a room or a circumscribed piece of land, from its matrix in a house or a city or a terrain, isolating it and reframing it — how this reframing is what we do in memory in order to preserve a place we've lost. But it's also an act of destruction. We understand this theoretically, in terms of the fact that memory is selective and unreliable. But you present us with a kind of dreamlike physical result, as if our memories had been turned into sculptures.

KS: Locality and transit are an elemental pair in so many of my works. The *Boiseries* mock up rooms that are actually across the Atlantic. And the interlocking panels of *Foundation* were constructed in my studio in Long Island City to become one continuous floor — a place — that moves. It was conceived as a triad of installations for Venice, Reykjavík, and Long Island City, and each time this floor is installed in a new location, it shows the scars where it was cut for the buildings that housed it previously, and has since been repaired. Over time, this scarring becomes the true pattern, contrasting with the tile patterns of the floor — which are fictional in that they are my interpretations of baroque floor patterns.

Namesake also deals with transit, fragmentation, transformation. The brick shape is the simplest, most straightforward and functional I could come up with. Laid in the ground, the paving stones draw out a grid; they suggest architectonic integrity. But they only *appear* as pavement. As soon as they are stepped on or rained on, their form gives way.

All the works, including *Unbuilt*, emphasize the fragility of the art object, the object that is experienced primarily through sight, even when it suggests physical utility. Confronted by the body, forces of nature, and logistics, the objects break down — which is just when architecture is most expected to hold up, to provide stability and shelter.

Unbuilt 10 – N. Manscher Residence, Garðastræti 37, Reykjavik – Architect: Einar Erlendsson, 1929 – 1, 2015. Digital chromogenic print, 85 x 115 cm.

Unbuilt 10 – N. Manscher Residence, Garðastræti 37, Reykjavik – Architect: Einar Erlendsson, 1929 – 2, 2015. Digital chromogenic print, 85 x 115 cm.

FR: I brought up translation at the beginning of the conversation, and I want to mention it again. There's a way in which translation could be the name for what's going on in all these works. It could also be called iteration, generation, version, migration; it could be called transdisciplinarity or collaboration. But you are literally a bilingual, bicultural person, and as you say, one of the core modes of the work is that it's restless; it doesn't ever seem to arrive at one place and stay there. Can you talk about translation as a practice, an operation, a way of understanding what you're making, what you're causing materials to do, how you're using spaces — and, more particularly, using furniture and interior design and architecture?

KS: The Latin word *translatio* means to carry across, and in the context of the show at the MSU Broad, particularly *Namesake* and *Metamorphic*, translation is a particularly poignant description of what I am doing. I am literally carrying materials across from Iceland to the United States. There is also a carrying across of meaning, of utility and purpose. The plaster objects that begin as copies of furniture little by little become functional furniture. The mud takes on a rectilinear form and builds a simple square, or a floor, and then returns to nature's forms — which are too complex for the human eye and mind to capture. These are all translations.

FR: What has it been like to collaborate, as it were, with the Met, with the city of Venice, with Paffard Keatinge-Clay — who in 1963 designed the Brutalist extension to SFAI's Italianate campus, where the Walter and McBean Galleries are housed — or with Zaha Hadid, who designed the MSU Broad Museum in 2012? Each of these settings is fundamental to the works sited there. At the same time, as we've just said, the works aren't made to be "at home" in these buildings, in the sense of being anchored to these sites. Can you talk about how the literal architectures, and the institutions they represent, inflect or shape your projects?

And what about the architects of the *Unbuilt* houses, or the Icelandic designer of the furniture set? These too are your collaborators, albeit in different ways, given that the houses weren't realized, and the furniture (or at least your iteration of it) is destroyed and transformed — that is, translated. How do you think about your engagement with these designers and what they've made?

KS: Your question brings to the foreground the fact that in so many of my works I take other people's designs as my subject. I read the Hadid and Keatinge-Clay buildings in terms of how, in very different ways, they pay tribute to nature — or rather how these two architects look at nature and interpret it through their designs and building processes. At the MSU Broad, I think about the shapes and volumes, and to a lesser extent the appearance of the material. I think you can see in the building that Zaha Hadid was also a painter, inspired by natural form, who had a genius for translating a painterly geometry into a built structure. The forms in the building make it easy to forget that this building, like every other, is firmed down by gravity; the design suggests suspension, dynamism, where everything feels as if it's flying off the ground. I find it to be a very visual experience, being in this building, and I don't think that's a given in architecture. Sometimes, even, the embodied and visual experiences are at odds. One can admire the drawing in the building as an elegant abstraction of a natural topography, and at the same time experience, physically, the same hesitation as when navigating a natural cave, where you have to "learn" the space to feel safe in it.

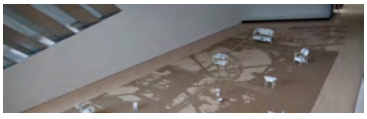
Metamorphic, 2017-ongoing. Walter and McBean Galleries, San Francisco Art Institute. [Gregory Goode]

Metamorphic, 2017-ongoing. Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, 2019. [Eat Pomegranate Photography]

In Keatinge-Clay's gallery at SFAI, the natural properties of concrete are manipulated much less; the shapes and volumes of the space feel a lot less "drawn." Hadid's building speaks to me about how the human eye (Hadid's eye) sees and draws nature. The SFAI building states to me that the material has its own nature. I'm thinking specifically about the presence of exposed cast concrete, where Keatinge-Clay does not go nearly as far in disguising the material and its natural properties. Hadid's concrete, even if it's also exposed, is much more refined, transformed. And, generally, there is a lot more visual illusion at work in Hadid's building than Keatinge Clay's. Looking at Keatinge-Clay's concrete, you never forget you are looking at concrete; it's been cast, and it's taking on the patina of time, along with everything that occurs at an art school. In this way it is minimalist. The material and technical processes, and the natural attributes of the material, are not disguised.

There is also a difference in that the objects themselves as exhibited at the Broad have changed, have broken and been mended twice more since San Francisco. And the floor design is different. When installing exhibitions, it's futile to think that the objects and the architecture live wholly unrelated lives. I try not to compete with the space, or prioritize my sculptures over the spaces they are in, because when they are together they will inevitably dialogue with each other, affect each other — and this specific dialogue greets the visitor. In this, the art and the architecture are dependent on each other, and as an experience they become one and the same thing.

Metamorphic, 2017-ongoing. Walter and McBean Galleries, San Francisco Art Institute. [Gregory Goode]



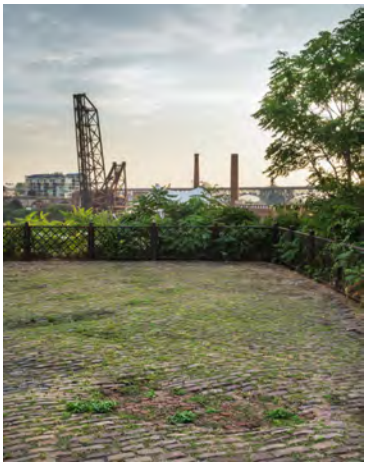
Metamorphic, 2017-ongoing. Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, 2019. [Eat Pomegranate Photography]

It's also important to acknowledge that the floor work in *Metamorphic* is produced by international students at the respective institutions, SFAI and MSU. The original occasion for making *Metamorphic* was an invitation from SFAI to produce a work in collaboration with international students, and since SFAI is my alma mater, I chose that same assignment from my first week there in 1988: to describe a room. I completed the assignment myself by producing (or reproducing) the furniture from a room in the home I grew up in, and the students contributed drawings and photographs from their own homes outside the USA. I merged these into an abstracted composite artwork, a large-scale cutout in brown craft paper, that is mounted on the floor and serves as a "carpet" under the furniture. The process at MSU was the same. However, this work can be understood as a new commission each time it's exhibited, in collaboration with the foreign students of each respective institution.

Then there are the designs of the seven Icelandic architects in *Unbuilt*, and the furniture designer in *Metamorphic*.[5] In each instance, I am retracing the designer's work, although in *Unbuilt* I am using a quasi-architectural process, the making of a scale model, and *Metamorphic* lends itself more to archaeology. My project is the restaging of a space from the past, through plaster copies of its interior topography, furniture and objects. It's not drawing into the future as is more customary in design.

Through the experimental processes these objects undergo, cataclysm and reconstruction, one might think of a forensic aspect of them as well. You read history through the material composition, through cracks, tears, holes ... and the secondary materials, the wooden structural supports in *Unbuilt* and the multicolored fillers in *Metamorphic* become part of the work itself.

FR: The cracks, after all, are the results of chance, and in this case, another name for what we call chance is natural process. When you drop an *Unbuilt* house made of plaster or concrete and it shatters, that's because gravity has taken over; when you take one made of wood and set it on fire, wood and fire react to one another according to their own elemental rules. When you ship *Metamorphic*, you could say that you're relying on the logistics company as an intermediary, but it isn't their fault that the work breaks. (It's not because it was put on a truck in inadequate packaging, as was famously the case with Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass* [1915-23] and its celebrated cracks.) This is most explicit, again, with *Namesake*, where you invite the river and the weather to consume the architectonic form. Could you talk about this collaboration with organic forces? How does that interest relate to what we've said about art and architecture, and language and drawing, as systems?



Namesake, 2018. Handmade paving-stones in Icelandic clay; dimensions variable. Installation view, Detroit-Superior Bridge, Cleveland. [Field Studio]

KS: I am glad you bring this up, as this issue of natural forces is such an important counterpoint, and not only to the designs and structural form of these works — time and the elements are also the relentless counterpoints to all architecture. The ruin reverses the presumed hierarchy between nature and humans. To quote Georg Simmel, "what was raised by the spirit becomes the object of the same forces which form the contour of the mountain and the bank of the river."[6]

I am always hesitant to describe what I do as destructive, because "destructive" is a qualitative, value-based term, and implies an objective, a human intention. I like to think of my processes as more like designing a program for the elements. Setting up certain parameters so that when an object and gravity interlock in unexpected ways, really all that happens is that our pretexts about that object, what it is and how it should function, are put into question. I am sure that many architects can attest to this as well. Perhaps architecture is exactly that, to design a program for the elements — to a functional, purposeful end. My "design program" leads the expected function and purpose to be questioned, analyzed, and eventually reinvented.

NOTES

1. *Namesake* was installed in the FRONT International Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art, July 14 – Sept. 30, 2018. ↩
2. Donald Wall, "Gordon Matta-Clark's Building Dissections," *Arts* 50, no. 9 (May 1976): 79. ↩
3. Donald Wall, edited transcript of an interview with Gordon Matta-Clark, 1975 (18). On deposit in the Gordon Matta-Clark Archive at the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal. ↩
4. *Ellefu Series* (2011-2015). Works in this series map sections of a residential building in Reykjavík, and can hypothetically be puzzled together to constitute the entire building. ↩
5. The furniture quoted in *Metamorphic* was designed by Árni Jónsson (1929-1983). The architectural drafts quoted in the *Unbuilt* series are as follows: Ólafur Briem Residence, Fjólugata, Reykjavík–Architect: Guðmundur K.Þorláksson, 1926; Bjarni Jónsson Residence, Sóleyjargata 13, Reykjavík–Architect: Einar Erlendsson, 1925; Kristján Gestson Residence, Skothúslóð, Reykjavík–Architects: Einar Sveinsson, Gunnlaugur Halldórsson, 1930; Magnús Th. S. Blöndal Residence, Sólvellir 18, Reykjavík–Architect: Einar Erlendsson, 1925; Dentist Hallur Hallsson Residence, Bergstaðarstræti 73, Reykjavík–Architect: Sigurður Guðmundsson, 19...; Þorsteinn Árnason Residence,Bræðraborgarstigur 23A, Reykjavík–Architects: Sigurður Pjetursson, Þorleifur Eyjólfsson, 1926; Carl Olsen Residence, Túngata 14, Reykjavík–Architect: Einar Erlendsson, 1929; Doctor Gunnlaugur Einarsson Residence, Sóleyjargata 5, Reykjavík– Architect: Sigurður

Guðmundsson, 1926; N. Manscher Residence, Garðastræti 37, Reykjavík–Architect: Einar Erlendsson, 1929. ↩

6. Georg Simmel, "Two Essays," *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Autumn, 1958), 381. ↩

CITE

Katrín Sigurðardóttir in conversation with Frances Richard, "Designing for the Elements," *Places Journal*, February 2020. Accessed 18 Feb 2020. <https://placesjournal.org/article/designing-for-the-elements/>

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Artist Katri´n Sigurðardo´ttir was born in Reykjavi´k, Iceland, but has lived and worked in the United States for many years; she represented Iceland in the Venice Biennale in 2013.

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Frances Richard is Associate Editor of *Places*.

ART & DESIGN The New York Times

ART REVIEW

Cleveland Triennial Is an Artistic Scavenger Hunt With Civic Pride

By Will Heinrich

Aug. 13, 2018

CLEVELAND — The first-ever Front International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art here, conceived by the collector Fred Bidwell and directed by the artist and curator Michelle Grabner, is organized like a scavenger hunt. In addition to more or less self-contained shows at places like MoCA Cleveland and the Akron Art Museum, the festival includes a number of unusual stand-alone installations that seem designed to guide visitors all over the city and its surrounding suburbs.

Katrin Sigurdardottir mined clay in Iceland, formed it into tiles that she arranged in architectural stacks, and contributed several handsome and evocative photographs of those stacks to the Akron Art Museum's well-balanced show, organized by Ms. Grabner and Ellen Rudolph, the museum's chief curator. The tiles themselves Ms. Sigurdardottir buried around town, and one group, marked with a discreet sign in a grassy lot on an Akron back street, brings you right to the surprising doorstep of an ornate Lao temple.

Back in Cleveland, Yinka Shonibare MBE created a majestically proportioned installation, "The American Library." It's composed of a huge free-standing bookshelf, filled with volumes wrapped in African wax cloth and stamped in gold with the names of notable immigrants to the United States. The work highlights the glory of Brett Memorial Hall, at the Cleveland Public Library, with its Romanesque Revival ceiling and William Summer murals. And the Cleveland Curry Kojiwurst special sausage, designed for the festival by the artist John Riepenhoff and available from a number

Katrin Sigurdardottir buried tiles — made of clay she mined in Iceland — around Cleveland.
Jerry Birchfield

One downside of this diffuse approach is that it can make what purports to be an art festival feel a little too much like a Chamber of Commerce advertising campaign, which isn't pleasant even if, as I did, you find the pitch convincing.

The upside, though, is that each discrete group of art works has plenty of space to make its own discrete impact. And the most powerful may be in the Ohio City neighborhood, where you can find the 40-year-old alternative gallery Spaces; St. John's Episcopal Church; and Mr. Bidwell's Transformer Station gallery.

"A Color Removed," conceived by the artist Michael Rakowitz and installed at Spaces art gallery, is a response to the fatal police shooting of the 12-year-old Tamir Rice in 2014. The color in question is orange, because police blamed the shooting on a missing orange safety cap on the boy's toy gun; people in Cleveland and around the world have donated orange objects of all kinds — tarps, food wrappers, a set of plastic vampire teeth — that are now displayed around the gallery. It's an idea that could have been exploitative, manipulative or literal-minded. But because Mr. Rakowitz — along with the Spaces staff, and Tamir's family, who are involved in the project — lets these objects accumulate with minimal intervention, it's a pure precipitation of frustration and grief.

[Read Jill Steinhauer's piece about "A Color Removed"]

Dawoud Bey's "Night Coming Tenderly, Black" is installed just three blocks away in the beautifully peeling St. John's Episcopal Church, once the last stop before freedom in Canada for many fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad. Large photographs of rural Ohio printed so dark that it's hard to make them out are hung at eye level above the church's pews like so many portals to the still-living past. In combination with "A Color Removed," it's devastating.

Notable at the Cleveland Museum of Art are a series of huge woodcuts by Kerry James Marshall, Allen Ruppersberg's crisp lightbox photographs of Cleveland, and Marlon de Azambuja's paradoxically whimsical "Brutalismo-Cleveland," an airy little city of found bricks and cinder blocks held up with a menagerie of interesting clamps. At MoCA Cleveland, a pairing of Eugene von Bruenchenhein's uniquely odd paintings of undersea glass towers with the Georgia-born painter Walter Price's densely colored scatterings of fractured imagery walks the line between dream and nightmare.

But the most fully realized show is that one in Akron, where Ms. Grabner and Ms. Rudolph have mixed high-concept work by young artists well known in New York, like Walead Beshty's impaled office equipment, with less familiar jewels, like aluminum grids of blinking lights by the Croatian artist and computer scientist Vladimir Bonacic, who died in 1999. The highlight is a group of comic, delightful, implicitly heartbreaking drawings and wall-mounted models by the young artist Nicholas Buffon, who lives and works in New York.

Working from memory and found images, Mr. Buffon has offered the museum 20 or so vignettes of gay life and history in Akron and New York. A drawing set on the High Line in Manhattan, which features a poster of Zoe Leonard's furiously direct 1992 protest poem "I want a president," focuses less on the poem's political context than on four passers-by in autumn jackets who've stopped to read it. A meticulous wall-mounted model of the Stonewall Inn, site of the police raid and riot that kicked off the gay liberation movement, is notable for its details: 12 tiny pride flags and, in the window, a "B" from New York's Department of Health. The drawing "Pizza Liberation," 2017, in which the artist holds a drooping slice of pizza next to George Segal's statues of the Gay Liberation Monument in the West Village, is irreverent, honest, and self-deprecating. It's also a distinctly individual take on a well-known landmark, rendered in a style that seems to take inexhaustible joy in the process of drawing — which makes it the perfect way to wind up a scavenger hunt.

A version of this article appears in print on Aug. 17, 2018, on Page C11 of the New York edition with the headline: A Splash of Art Here and Civic Pride There

SFMoMA Open Space

May 11, 2017

Chance Transformations: Constance Lewallen Interviews Katrín Sigurdardóttir

Katrin Sigurdardottir, Metamorphic, 2017. Installation view, Walter and McBean Galleries, San Francisco Art Institute. Courtesy of the Artist and San Francisco Art Institute. Photo by Gregory Goode.

In recent years, the sculptures and installations of Icelandic artist Katrín Sigurdardóttir have been shown widely. Years before she achieved international acclaim, she was a student at the San Francisco Art Institute, earning her BFA in 1990 — and now she's returning with Metamorphic, on view May 11–September 16 at SFAI. Here, she discusses her work with the curator and writer Constance Lewallen, who has long followed her career.

Constance Lewallen: Katrin, I would like to ask you about your show that's opening at the San Francisco Art Institute. It's a kind of homecoming because you were a student at the Art Institute. What dates were you there?

Katrín Sigurdardóttir: I came originally as an exchange student from Iceland in 1988 and I ended up transferring to the Art Institute and graduating in 1990.

CL: It was a time when there were a lot of students from your country, as I recall. What drew you here?

KS: Like many students from Iceland, I went abroad to further my studies. It was kind of a coincidence or serendipity that I ended up in San Francisco and not in another place.

CL: Do you think that your studies at the Art Institute really informed the work that you've been doing ever since? Was it a fruitful experience for you?

KS: I remember feeling when I graduated, that everything that I knew had been taken apart. Maybe that partially had to do with coming from a different country and being in a new city, in a new environment. But perhaps this is one of the best things that can happen when you go to school. Often students come into art school with a certainty about what they know, and thinking of school only as a place to put into effect something that they are very sure of. I guess the older I get, the less secure I am of any knowledge that I have. And maybe that is exactly the sign of youth, to be very certain about what you know.

And so, going to school and ending up with one's system of values deconstructed might be a very good thing. I could almost say that upon leaving the Art Institute I was ready to begin to put myself together as an artist. My years there were almost like raking the soil so that you can actually start to make something grow. I was not an artist that came out of art school, particularly not out of my undergraduate studies, with a clear sense of who I was. In fact, I tend to be suspect of that type of certainty when I see it in new grads. I feel lucky that I had several years after finishing my graduate studies, before I entered an international stage as an artist.

CL: Which you have done. I'm fortunate to have been in New York to see your show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2010, before I knew you, and then Bill [Berkson] and I were at the opening of your show at the Venice Biennale in 2012, when you represented Iceland. I visited your studio in New York a couple of years ago, so I have some firsthand familiarity with your work. Let's start with the Met. The name of your installation was Boiseries. You used two of the museum's period rooms as the basis for the work, and in recreating them you eliminated the color and reduced the scale, right? As a result, the visitor experienced these rooms in an abstract way. Does that make sense?

KS: That's true. By formalizing — or in the traditional, the most pure meaning of the word, by abstracting elements in the design of these two rooms, I set the stage for a certain phenomenological occurrence between the body and the environment, the form that surrounds us. I think both of the works ask us to be conscious of an embodied physical experience within an architectural form.

Katrín Sigurdardóttir, Boiserie, 2010. Installation view: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Collection of The Reykjavik Museum of Art.

CL: Are you thinking of Merleau-Ponty?

KS: Yes, of course.

CL: His phenomenology that is experiencing the world through your body, which resonates with what I've been thinking about lately for something I am writing. It seems like a lot of your work relates to architecture, furnishings, to home, including your current work that you will be showing here.

KS: Yes.

CL: You did a show in New York in which you reproduced a royal palace guardhouse, shifting the scale and using other kind of perceptual tricks — playing with the shift between what you expect to see and what you see. This is a little bit of an aside, but as you know I'm working on a book about Bruce Nauman's architectural work; it's very different from yours in most ways, but something about it in that respect is not unlike your work.

KS: Absolutely, it's the relationship between expectation and surprise in space and what kind of dynamic — even psychodynamic — responses it brings about.

CL: I remember when we were in your studio you showed me this, I think it's called Green Grass of Home, a suitcase that unfolds like the Russian nesting dolls, except what is revealed are seventeen miniature landscapes and public parks in places where you lived, including here and also New York where you live now. The piece is a conflation between home and public spaces.

KS: Exactly.

CL: Do you regard that as a key work in your oeuvre?

KS: Yeah. Often when I lecture, I use this piece kind of like the gate to walk through to enter my work, enter the narratives that I work with again and again. They have to do with memory, they have to do with place and perception, with how we capture and depict space and also with a personal story or an account of a human life. When I'm representing something that has to do with a human life, for the sake of authenticity, what I mine is my own experience. And I think no one can really get very far from his or her own experience. But it's not for the sake of wanting to bring attention to myself.

CL: It's not autobiographical.

KS: It's not autobiographical in that sense. This might be strange to say, but I really believe in telling the truth. The truth that I know — my experience. So, there are often personal specifics in my work, not because I am trying to draw attention to them per se, but just because they are authentic information.

CL: There is no direct human presence in your work, but it's in everything you do. Architecture is certainly something that we all experience; furniture speaks to domesticity and home. You have an indirect way of talking about the human condition, let's put it that way. I would like to talk about the show that you created for the Venice Biennale, which was installed in a former laundry on the grounds of an eighteenth-century palace. You created a floor with tiles that had an ornamental design.

KS: The framework of this project was of course that I was asked to represent Iceland in the Biennale. The basic premise of the work has a lot to do with that, the fact that it was Venice, and I was representing a country. Originally I was thinking about a traditional eighteenth century pavilion in Venice, and because, like many countries, Iceland does not have its own pavilion in Venice.

CL: Did you select the site or was it suggested to you?

KS: I selected the site. It had been used by Iceland before but I looked at many different sites before selecting this one. I was working with the paradox of a fancy pavilion in a house of labor and service. The footprint of the large form I created in no way fit within the laundry, this small building. This displacement could then take on meaning in the context of Venice, national representations, etcetera.

Katrín Sigurdardóttir, Metamorphic, 2017. Installation view, Walter and McBean Galleries, San Francisco Art Institute. Courtesy of the Artist and San Francisco Art Institute. Photo by Gregory Goode.

The work is a direct continuation of the show I did at the Met, which was also dealing with architecture and design of the eighteenth century. In both works I am walking in the shoes of the artisan and this also has to do with my quandary about the role of the artist in a larger framework. The division between the artisan and the artist, in any time period, relates to economic and to societal structures, structures of power.

CL: Are you interested in the idea of elevating craft or at least recognizing craft as an art form? Or are you commenting on the fact that the lines between these different disciplines are not as distinct as they once were?

KS: I don't think I am really doing either. If anything I'm commenting on the relationship between the artist and the client. This is essentially examining economic models relating to the production of art, and doing so in these works within the dimension of history. It boils down to issues of authorship and power.

CL: Let's now move forward in time and consider the work you are exhibiting here in San Francisco. Chance seems to be a key concept in this work...

KS: Yes. Over the last twelve years I've made several works using a "method" where the work is subjected to chance transformations. Maybe this speaks of a certain attitude of recklessness, but if you think about it, this is actually a very controlled act. You can liken it to the throwing of a dice: You don't know what is going to happen, or what? Actually, you know that there are only six possible outcomes. So the chance is actually quite bracketed, and maybe this to me is a way to speak about artistic expression in general. To liken it to a game of controlled chance. But also, it begs a deeper question about what qualifies as an art object, and what constitutes value, economically and aesthetically.

In the studio, all kinds of events happen all the time, events that, after the work is supposedly "done," would be seen as destructive. This sequence of events is stunted when the work leaves the studio. But take this little stool as an example: It arrived in San Francisco in its crate, in twenty pieces. What you choose to call this occurrence is qualitative, it determines the work's value. You could say that is simply a transformation, a change of form. But before this was ever this stool it was a bag of plaster. By the same logic you could say that when I made the stool, I destroyed the bag of plaster.

CL: You are referring to the plaster stool that is one of the several "furniture" pieces that comprise your upcoming show — chairs, a table, a stool... there's something ghostly about them because they are white. I know that you shipped them knowing, intending that they would arrive broken and that you would "repair" them when you arrived. Now that you have, you can see cracks and patches in different colors depending on the material you used to adhere parts or fill in holes, so in fact they aren't pure white due to the various materials that you used subsequent to their original casting. This method relates to the Japanese concept of wabi sabi, which means finding beauty in imperfection, but also kintsugi which has to do with the way that the Japanese repair broken pottery. Rather than trying to hide the fact that an object was broken they enhance it by using gold, a precious material, to put the pieces back together to make them whole again, and maybe even more beautiful.

KS: Generally in Western culture there is a reverence for what's new and we think of things to be perfect when they're new and untouched, whereas in some other cultures, things become perfect as they are shaped through time.

CL: And time and life itself, interaction with the environment or with people. That's true, of course, of furniture.

KS: There are examples in Western culture, too, such as patinas, where a texture and color are built up through oxidation. Blue jeans — worn, patched, faded — are maybe another example. I still don't think this is quite the same as the reverence for chance, for example in Japanese ceramics. But for this particular show here in San Francisco, I have been thinking about marble, which I think is a good example of how we love time in a material. Marble is originally created by sediment, then vibration, seismic movement or other events cause breaks and then another sediment flows into it.

CL: Which accounts for the various...

KS: Which accounts for the striations and strata, etcetera. In geology, marble is termed "metamorphic rock" — hence the title of the show — a rock that changes when the minerals in the rock change, or the geological structure of the rock changes without the

rock melting. In other words, the shape remains but the ingredients transform. When you look at beautiful rocks you are looking at a lot of events, a lot of "destructive" events, which result in these beautiful, stripes, these striations. The original material in these sculptures is also a mineral; it's plaster, which of course is related to marble. So this is maybe an exercise in simulating geological processes and a probe into what might be suggested by that act. Reassigning value to destruction, taking an optimist attitude to cataclysm, presenting a destructive outcome as beautiful, valuable, something to revere.

CL: When these sculptures are installed at the San Francisco Art Institute are they going to be sitting on the floor or are they going to be elevated?

KS: They're going to be directly on the floor. I have made several other works that also deal with transit and things being moved from one place to the next. I like to bring them into the gallery and put them on the floor, just like you would a crate. The crate comes into the space and you just put it directly on the floor.

Katrín Sigurdardóttir, Metamorphic, 2017. Installation view, Walter and McBean Galleries, San Francisco Art Institute. Courtesy of the Artist and San Francisco Art Institute. Photo by Gregory Goode.

CL: This reminds me of Walead Beshty's glass sculptures that he purposefully shipped in cardboard crates without taping the glass to protect it. When they reach their exhibition venue, the crates are opened in the space, and the cracked glass objects remain on the cardboard.

KS: They are very beautiful.

CL: Very beautiful objects that also serve as physical documents of their journey. I don't know if that plays into this body of your work.

KS: Absolutely. I think several of my works over the years share this narrative with Beshty's work.

CL: Although they look completely different.

KS: Yes, different specifics and different identity. In the late '90s I was making these boxes and valises — you know, the suitcase that you talked about in the beginning, is an example of this body of work — they are basically transit objects.

CL: Yours (and Beshty's) relate to Duchamp's Large Glass, Beshty's specifically because his objects are glass, but the idea of the chance accident, which is embraced by the artist. In the case of The Large Glass, Duchamp thought it was improved by the damage caused when it was cracked in transit.

KS: I was talking about the game earlier — chance and chess and all of these sort of systems of allowing things to happen, and then how we...

CL: Relinquish control.

KS: The question of control is in certain ways left open. What might seem like relinquishing of control, might in fact be quite the opposite. That would be true for Duchamp's Large Glass, and for Beshty's work — and mine. The way the artist deals with the outcome of the chance event, you could say. Subverting the chance event, the accident. This is something that has so much potency for people. For artists and also for all of us. In essence this is something fundamental to all of our lives. Culture is controlled chance. Even war, and the destruction of war, is controlled chance.

Katrín Sigurdardóttir, Foundation, 2013. Installation view: Lavanderia, Palazzo Zenobio, Venice. Courtesy of the artist and the Icelandic Art Center. Photo by Orsenigo Chemollo.

CL: When you do display these in the exhibition are you going to provide information on how they came to be or do you want people to try to figure that out?

KS: I guess the older I get the more relaxed I am about not explaining everything. There is the philosophical question about whether the work has an inherent meaning in and of itself or if it

Katrí Sigurdardóttir, Unbuilt 7, 2014. Installation view: Katrín Sigurdardóttir: Drawing Apart, MIT List Visual Arts Center. Private Collection.

is always just what we bring to it through our perception, knowledge, experience. Maybe it's not either/or, but I tend to think that as an artist, it's hard to control the meaning of the work. In certain circumstances this can be problematic, because it leaves the intellectual rights of the artist in a gray area. But between the work itself and what people bring to it, there's not that much beyond a certain point that I can effect.

CL: You have your intention for the work and when you put it out in the world it has a life of its own.

KS: If you try to hold onto the being of the work, then maybe art, making art is going to be a very frustrating enterprise.

CL: I want to ask you one last question. I know that you are very attached to Iceland and you spend time there every year. I've found in my limited experience that that seems to be true with many Icelandic artists who may live elsewhere but who maintain a very strong connection with their culture and their country. Would you say that was true in your case?

KS: I would say that Iceland is always in my work. What is Iceland? —

CL: Iceland is a tiny country with a small population, and yet it seems to have a strong pull on people.

KS: You say so with certainty. Iceland might mean something different to me. And in a certain sense, Iceland is simply a word, and container of meaning, an idea, label, narrative, brand.

When I pose the question what is Iceland, I am asking, what is a nation? What is a national boundary, what is a national identity? And what is a home? To what point does a place belong to anyone? There is some kind of conflation of all of these thoughts in my work. What constitutes a membership to a nation? To some extent this has to do with my own personal life and in some ways not at all. In many ways it has much less to do with my personal life than with the time that we live in, with issues of migration, displacement, and homelessness. We see this in San Francisco, in America, and all over the world. So, I think that the best way I can answer your question is: Iceland is always in my work — but what is Iceland?

Uncovered Interiors: Katrin Sigurdardóttir Explores the Idea of Home

BY SEAN WEHLE, MODERN PAINTERS | APRIL 09, 2015

An installation view of "Katrin Sigurdardóttir:Drawing Apart" at MIT List VIsual Arts Center.
(Photo by Peter Harris)

Architects today tend to neglect physical models, once the fundamental tools of their trade. Digital technologies have rendered manual designs for construction inefficient, if not all but obsolete. In her exhibition “Drawing Apart,” on view at MIT through April 12, Katrin Sigurdardóttir shows herself to feel most at home in just this obsolescence. Here she salvages, by choice, the architect’s most anachronistic

techniques. MIT List curators Paul Ha and Jeffrey De Blois display the commissioned completion of two series of sculptures the artist has been producing over the past decade. The wooden works included in *Ellefu* ("eleven" in Icelandic), 2011-15 — model her childhood home in Reykjavík, cut into that exact number of interior segments. After conducting an on-site survey of the structure as a whole, Sigurdardóttir sketched architectural drawings for separate molds later cast, joined, and polished by hand. She has scattered the resulting units across the gallery floor, where their compacted scale conjures the dollhouse. To catch a closer glimpse of exposed hallways and bedrooms, viewers might move onto hands and knees, like children. But these sculptures will disappoint those looking for play: Sigurdardóttir has coated their walls with a forbidding institutional white. Without furniture or decoration, the uncovered interiors evoke cold anonymity. Life has no room in this home. For the present, memories appear absent. They are lost, scraped away, or have yet to be added.

If *Ellefu* models the past in order to abstract and distance it, the sculptures collected in *Unbuilt Residences* in Reyjkavik, 1925-1930, 2005-15, bring history closer by making it. This second set of works relates to plans for unrealized houses Sigurdardóttir discovered in her hometown's archives. Having redrawn the basic architectural designs for these structures, the artist created wooden, concrete, and papier-mâché models she subsequently dropped and burned. Sigurdardóttir has picked up the pieces, reassembling the ruined sculptures in various states of imperfection. A new piece produced for the gallery's exhibition, *Unbuilt 6 — Dentist Hallur Hallsson Residence*, 2015, has lost all exterior walls during the violent procedure, now possessing only an occasional gray-and-black scab over its gridded wooden framework. This artificial destruction miniaturizes history's progression. Time becomes tangible, as the dream or future associated with architectural design — unmoved, in the archive — shapes into a memory that haunts.

A version of this article appears in the June 2015 issue of Modern Painters.

View Slideshow (http://ende.blouinartinfo.com/photo-galleries/katrin-sigurdardottir-drawing-apart-at-mit-list-visual-center)

AN ARTIST WHO UNBUILDS TO BUILD — CHRISTIANNA BONIN

April 11, 2015 *by* archkioskguest *in Arts, Buildings, Events, Exhibitions* *Leave a comment*

As part of the guest post series, PhD student Christianna Bonin writes on the current exhibition at the MIT List Visual Arts center, “Katrín Sigurdardóttir: Drawing Apart”. See it before the exhibition closes on April 12! — AK

I employ architecture to describe places; I copy architecture to redraw and re-experience a moment. Whereas the work of the architect is traditionally prospective, my work with architecture is almost always retrospective.

—Katrín Sigurdardóttir

Ellefu series on view in Hayden Gallery, as part of the exhibition Katrín Sigurdardóttir:

Installation view: Unbuilt Residences in Reykjavik, 1925-1930, on view in Reference Gallery, as part of the exhibition Katrín Sigurdardóttir: Drawing Apart. Photo: Peter Harris Studios.

Instead of precious, fiercely preserved artworks, visitors to the exhibition “Katrín Sigurdardóttir: Drawing Apart” at the MIT List Visual Arts Center encounter precious, fiercely broken artworks. Neither poor climate control nor absentminded, backpack-wearing visitors are to blame. Instead it was Sigurdardóttir herself who sliced, smashed, or burnt the architectural models distributed through the show’s two expansive rooms. “Drawing Apart” begins in the Hayden Gallery, which contains floor-bound, rectilinear models from the series *Ellefu (*meaning “eleven” in Icelandic). Each model has been meticulously crafted in a rhythmic alternation of wood and pristine, all-white hydrocal. A wall label tells us that the models—each scaled slightly larger than a dollhouse—are fragmented sections based on drawings that the artist prepared of her childhood house in Reykjavik. The show’s second gallery also contains scale models of houses. But unlike *Ellefu,* which leaves unassembled the fragments of an unseen house, *Unbuilt Residences in Reykjavik, 1925-30* strives to reassemble into whole houses the tesserae of models built and destroyed by the artist, and now arranged across a wide, white horizontal platform. This difference—between immaculate, resolute fragments and sullied, precariously reassembled wholes—sharpens the juxtaposition of the two rooms. Both works expose the complexity of “fixing” and “building,” suggesting that “unbuilding” and “breaking” are also inherent to those processes.

On view through April 12, “Drawing Apart” addresses themes laden with historical and theoretical baggage: the nineteenth-century, romantic aesthetic of the fragment; nostalgia and the trope of the ruin; the tendentious relationship

whitewashed spaces that would ostensibly “cleanse” inhabitants of illness-inducing living habits and “primitive” traditions.” These themes are familiar fodder for Sigurdardóttir, a highly regarded artist who works in New York. Her installation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2010 replicated two of the museum’s French, neoclassical period rooms full scale in de-familiarizing and ethereal, snow-white surfaces. For the Icelandic Pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale, she constructed a baroque tile floor that intersected both the interior and exterior of the Old Laundry at Palazzo Zenobio. In both works, visitors could catch the *faux* in the histories Sigurdardóttir had staged, for she left exposed the raw particleboard beams that propped up her prosceniums. Crucial to any assessment of these installations is the ways in which architecture can craft and disrupt the writing of personal and larger social histories. How do you construe what is past? On what authority? These questions also pressed me while viewing “Drawing Apart.” What is different and captivating about the present exhibition is how Sigurdardóttir and curators Jeffrey De Blois and Paul K. Ha have employed narrative, spatial, and visual *absences* to make room for those persistent, historical questions.

Katrín Sigurdardóttir, Boiserie, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010, photograph by Bruce Schwarz, The Photograph Studio, © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Katrín Sigurdardóttir, Foundation (The Icelandic Pavilion at the Venice Beinnale), 2013, photograph by Contemporary Art Daily.

Ellefu’s most striking absence asserts itself when we learn of the work’s origins in the artist’s childhood house—a connection reinforced by the scale of each section. Because the open sections are too small for adults to view at eye-level, they encourage limber visitors to squat, bend over, and peer into each corner. This intimate engagement lends a kind of preciousness to the scaled-down, fragmented house, as if we are prying into the private and now exposed spaces of the artist’s childhood. *Ellefu,* however, exposes nothing of that sort. Instead,

acknowledgement of lived space as social space. The repetitive wood and gypsum cement seem to have abstracted lived experience into an empty arena. Was I, as viewer, supposed to be the activator of this unfamiliar, fragmented space? Should I *want* to fill in the empty walls with my own “memories”, of my interactions with parents, roommates, neighbors, or lovers?

Katrín Sigurdardóttir, Detail from Ellefu, 2012, photograph by author .

Rachel Whiteread, Untitled (House), 1993, photograph by Sue Ormerod.

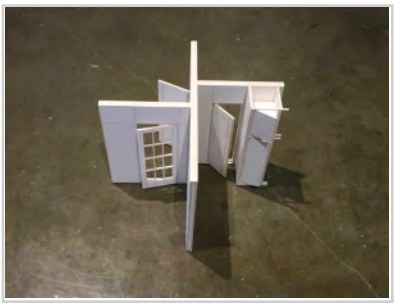
On the other hand, this resolute blankness was also relieving. Imagine being unburdened from the trauma of childhood or of nostalgia for a particular place and time! I thought of Friedrich Nietzsche’s comments in *The Use and Abuse of History for Life,* written long ago in 1874. Nietzsche envied what he perceived as the happily forgetful herd of cattle grazing around him. *“The man says, “I remember,” and envies the beast, which immediately forgets and sees each moment really perish, sink back in cloud and night, and vanish forever.”* For Nietzsche, some forgetting of history was crucial to happiness. The challenge was to determine *what* should be forgotten and when. How to find *“the borderline at which the past must be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present*”? On one level, *Ellefu* propounds a past compacted and neatly removed of personal and historical complexity. This “clean state” aesthetic is both comforting and disconcerting. For as feminist critique teaches us, “home” is also a place of confinement and dark secrets—an *unheimlich,* or unhomely place. Where, then, are the stranger, messier qualities among the model’s ever-so-smoothly-cut edges? How could one even presume to be able to clearly chart and execute the space of one’s past, particularly one’s childhood? In *Ellefu,* the cuts do fall at incomprehensible points—at times, through a stair, or in my favorite surprise, along a section’s lower edge such that just the lip of a window frame and door jam remain. Perhaps these illogical

moment, in one sudden motion there, in one sudden motion gone, before nothing, afterwards nothing, nevertheless comes back again as a ghost and disturbs the tranquility of each later moment."

Eric Rondepierre, Etreinte No. 15, Ilfochrome on aluminum, 1997-99.

The longer I stared at the sections, the more I doubted that they could somehow be physically reassembled into a total house. The cuts seemed too erratic; their distribution across the space too wayward. My eye found formal echoes but no direct connections. Eventually, I stopped caring. The sections also stand their own ground as fragments and ask to be considered as such.

Johann Heinrich Füssli, The Artist Moved to Despair By the Grandeur of Antique Fragments, 1778-79, photograph Wikipedia/Public Domain.



Katrin Sigurdardottir, Detail from Ellefu, 2012, photograph by author.

interrupts itself in the same place. Hence, the fragment is always both a distinct monument and an evocation. I find that paradox intriguing, meaning that I may in fact be a bit of a romantic at heart. And Sigurdardóttir may be as well. I do not mean “romantic” in the sappy and eternally-hopeful-journey-is-the-destination sense. Instead, I am referring to a historical interest and use of the term, when the fragment became a favored symbol of artistic and architectural creation in early nineteenth-century Western Europe. Examples of artists programming with an aesthetic of the “unprogrammed” fragment abound in nineteenth century Europe, when empire-funded archeological research and emergent nationalisms combined to produce strong preservation cultures. Consider Henry Füssli’s early watercolor “The Artist Overwhelmed by the Grandeur of Antique Ruins” from 1779. It celebrates the greatness of the decaying classical ruin, just as it expresses a search for permanence fueled by the inextinguishable sense of one’s own temporality. Does treating each section of *Ellefu* as a fragment demonstrate a similar sense of impermanence? Sigurdardóttir’s fragments are certainly less melodramatic than Füssli’s, but they rely nonetheless on a similar creative process. The carefully crafted models hand us a part of her “history” (a childhood house) already fragmented. This move catches visitors in the netherworld between the available part and curiosity for a previous life that may never have been whole to begin with.

Bauhaus Building, Dessau, then East Germany, from Leonardo Benevolo’s textbook History of Modern Architecture, 1971.

Erich Mendelsohn’s Red Banner Factory, St. Petersburg (2014), photograph by author .

Treating each section in *Ellefu* individually also encourages viewers to attend to the object’s specific properties. For one, almost every fragment is cut such that it is impossible to distinguish between interior and exterior space. This aspect of the work plays on the paradigm of the modernist “blank box,” which emerged in the late nineteenth century in Western Europe and inspired many forms of design into the 1960s. “Blankness” and “transparency” were traits that coded for “honesty” in architecture. By exposing function and reducing rigid spatial divisions through the open plan, “honest” architecture was intended to incite

they also remain opaque. No ‘equality’ is performed here. Moreover, even the elements that read as structure in the models have been subverted. As MIT Professor Mark Jarzombek pointed out in a recent public conversation with the artist, the walls of each section skew a conventional contemporary building technique. It is common to first construct a wooden frame, add insulation, and then cover the frame with drywall. For *Ellefu,* however, the artist filled in the wooden frame with hydrocal, such that the plaster supports the work. Jarzombek argued that this decision reinforces the flatness of the walls, reminding viewers that the objects first came from two-dimensional drawings.

Katrín Sigurdardóttir, Unbuilt 6-Dentist Hallur Hallsson Residence, Bergstadastraeti 73 – Architect: Sigudur Gudmundssoon, 1929, 2015, photograph by author.

If *Ellefu* speaks of its artificial transcendence of the past, the series *Unbuilt Residences in Reykjavik, 1925-30,* seems mired in history. For the *Unbuilt Residences* bear not only the scars of destruction and reassembly. Their labels also include a precise address, the name of the client and architect, and the year of the design. These details locate the models in distinct places and moments in Reykjavik, as well as in the city’s archive (where De Blois told me that Sigurdardóttir did her research). The empirical details also conflict with another tidbit provided to the visitors: these designs were actually never realized at full scale. This besieged and battered model ‘neighborhood’ has

tabula rasa. Sigurdardóttir's work recalls that historical conceit but does not leave it unproblematized. To me, one of Sigurdardóttir's strongest statements occurs in *Unbuilt 6—Dentist Hallur Hallisson Residence, Bergstadastraeti 73 – Architect: Sigurdur Gudmundsson, 1929.* Crackled bits of wood dangle on a bright, new wooden frame. In unbuilding to build, the artist has created a modern model that bears the marks of movement and choice, of hazards and pet heavens, of a past still present but changed as we picked up the pieces. This is an artistic project that can't help but evoke an adage from George Eliot's novel *The Mill on the Floss*: "For the eyes that have dwelt on the past, there is no thorough repair."

Katrin Sigurdardottir - Ellefu

"Ellefu," an exhibition by Katrin Sigurdardottir, comprised of three structures representing cross-sectioned portions of the artist's childhood home at Langahlíð 11, Reykjavík, Iceland. Ellefu means "eleven" in Icelandic, and its consonance with the gallery's name, was entirely appropriate to the various keys of order and disorientation that the installation produced. The four-foot-tall structures are made of plaster poured into basswood frames, chalky white and adorned only with the natural lines of the wood. They resemble overgrown architectural maquettes, more ideal than real. Parts of each are missing- a floor here, a wall there- and the roofs are gone, doors open on to other doors, stairways mount to tiny platforms. The act of comprehending how these segments fit together, of mentally constructing a floor plan, is difficult, in part because our usual recourse to understanding space- moving through it is closed off to us, both physically and imaginatively. …. The viewer's physical relationship to these spaces mim-icked the way we reduce, diminish, idealize, things as they recede from us in time, and how those things, in turn, become closed off to us. The dimensions of the sculptures in "Ellefu," roughly those of a young child, give them a human presence, but their smooth white surfaces bear no evidence of actual life. This profound simplicity is also discomforting, showing how the mind's attempts to whitewash life's messiness (and our recall of it) are never quite complete. The result is a keenly felt rupture between present past as well as between viewer and artist. The sculptures are not unlike works that depict childhood spaces and sites of enchantment, such as Deborah Mesa-Pelly's photo-graphic works of girls discovering secret worlds in their closets, of Mike Kelly's replica of his childhood home, left unfinished at his death, but which was to be an exact copy except for tunnels burrowed underneath it, in which the artist would have worked on secret projects. The excavation of secret spaces in "Ellefu" is a private affair. For works representing home, they are remarkably unheimlich.

Emily Hall, ARTFORUM, pg 210-211, January 2013

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Art : Interview

Katrín Sigurdardóttir
by Eva Heisler

nstallation view of Boiserie, 2010, mixed media, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Courtesy of the artist and Eleven Rivington, New York City

Katrín Sigurdardóttir is a New York–based Icelandic artist whose sculptures and installations explore entanglements of body, perception, and memory. I first met Sigurdardóttir in January of 1998, shortly after I arrived in Iceland on a Fulbright grant. I remember sitting on the floor of the artist's Reykjavík flat as she opened a small wooden case and began removing shallow wood boxes, each containing a miniature landscape. Just when I thought she was finished, another landscape would emerge. The nested landscapes—17 in all—reproduced public parks in cities where she'd lived (including San Francisco, New York City, and Reykjavík). Sigurdardóttir's work—with its conflation

of home and public space—sparked a conversation, ongoing still, about sculpture and experiences of place.

Over the years, Sigurdardóttir's work has repeatedly explored the relationship between embodied experiences of place and imaginary or conceptual constructions of space. The artist often uses hobbyist miniatures or architectural models to set up contrasts in scale. High Plane V (2007), at MoMA PS1, was a large structure with steps leading to a platform through which the viewers poked their heads into a landscape of mountainous islands. The visitors' heads became part of the landscape and invaded the panorama of uninhabited nature. Home, as an elusive braiding of memory and fantasy, was evoked in the artist's 2012 exhibitions at Eleven Rivington in New York City and Meessen De Clerq in Brussels with works from the series based on scale models of sections (facades, halls, doorways) of the artist's childhood home on Langahlíð 11 in Reykjavík.

In 2010 to 2011, Sigurdardóttir's site-specific project for the Metropolitan Museum, Boiserie, reproduced two of the museum's 18th-century period rooms. The artist's meticulous rendering of decorative surfaces was bleached of color and reduced in scale, conceptualizing the museumgoer's encounter with historical objects. As Iceland's representative at this year's Venice Biennale, Sigurdardóttir's project (which will travel from Venice on to Reykjavík and New York's SculptureCenter) is an architectural intervention that furthers the artist's interest in scale, embodied experiences of place, and the staging of views.

Eva Heisler Green Grass of Home (1997) was one of your first works to use miniatures and model building materials. Since then, the use of both has become a signature practice. What prompted you to begin working with miniatures?

Katrín Sigurdardóttir The first miniature I made was my MFA graduate thesis work. Only in retrospect do I see this work as a miniature. It was a large installation, a topography made out of thrown-out rugs that I found on the streets of New York. Cartography is not usually thought of as "miniature" proper, although it represents landscape on a manipulated scale. When I look at this work now, I wonder if it is so indexical to my later practice because I made some discoveries in not only the installation but with the found materials and constructions I happened upon, or if this work was a manifestation of a preexisting narrative, albeit different in appearance in previous works.

EH I remember seeing images of Island Matrix—your topographical model of a mountain constructed of old carpets. I never would have considered this a miniature since it

is quite large—about three meters. Am I understanding you correctly: This work functions conceptually as a miniature? If a miniature is defined as bringing something large (such as a monument) down to a size that can be held in the hand, then this work brings landscape formation onto the scale of the body.

KS Yes, exactly. This work is a miniature in the sense that it depicts something large, in this case a landscape, dramatically reduced in scale. But it directly addresses the human body, and in this sense it functions very differently than traditional miniature. Since Island Matrix, I have made several of these large-scale miniatures, where the viewer is not granted the eye-of-God perspective, from outside the miniature world, but where the viewer's body is actually immersed in the work.

EH During my first year in Iceland, I wrote down a story you told me about Island Matrix. You'd been collecting carpets and mattresses off the street—"Things homeless people make their homes with," you said. At one time, in your studio, you fell asleep on a mattress and you woke in a fetal position. You then traced your sleeping position on the mattress and cut out the form, finding that it looked like a rocky hill. You kept tracing this shape, each time two inches wider, on bedding and carpet scraps, stacking them until you had what looked like a topographical map.

This early work marks the beginning of your preoccupation with conflating the body and landscape. The Birthmark Series is another example: You had moles on your own body photographed by a medical photographer and then fed the images into a computer program for the making of three-dimensional landscapes. These island topographies were displayed in the open drawers of a map cabinet at the Living Art Museum in Reykjavík.

KS Island Matrix and The Birthmark Series are related in that they both deal with locality, the place of the body and the body in nature, the placement of a person in landscape, and seeing the body as landscape, the locus that one's identity springs from.

EH Green Grass of Home reproduces public parks in cities where you have lived. The work is a wooden case, about the size of a large briefcase, with nestled compartments that expand into a set of 17 miniature landscapes made with hobby-modeling materials. Public and constructed nature—from Manhattan's Central and Washington Square Parks to San Francisco's Golden Gate Park and Reykjavík's Miklatún—is miniaturized, packaged, and rendered as a private object. Many of your works since then have played around with dichotomies of public/private and outside/inside.

KS Green Grass of Home has everything to do with growing up next to Klambratún, which now is renamed Miklatún, a public park outside my home. The public park becomes the monument of the home. In this work the polarity of inside/outside is confused and the outside is used to represent the inside.

EH What is your first memory of public art?

KS It would be the monuments in Klambratún. My memories of them are, as often with early memories, sensory: I remember the feel of the cold bronze under my hands. But another early memory is going with my mother—after visiting the thermal swimming pools in Laugardalur—to the sculpture garden of Ásmundur Sveinsson and climbing the sculptures. I also remember trying to climb the monument for Þorsteinn Erlingsson in Klambratún as well as the statue of Jónas Hallgrímsson in Hljómaskálagarðurinn. When I think of this I'm amazed how predictive this experience is to later works, like High Plane. Another memory, brought back when a radio interview with me at age five was rebroadcast: I recount my story of what was in fact a public sculpture in Klambratún by Jóhann Eyfells. In my interpretation, this was a large rock, brought from the bottom of the sea and then put on a very big truck and posited on Klambratún.

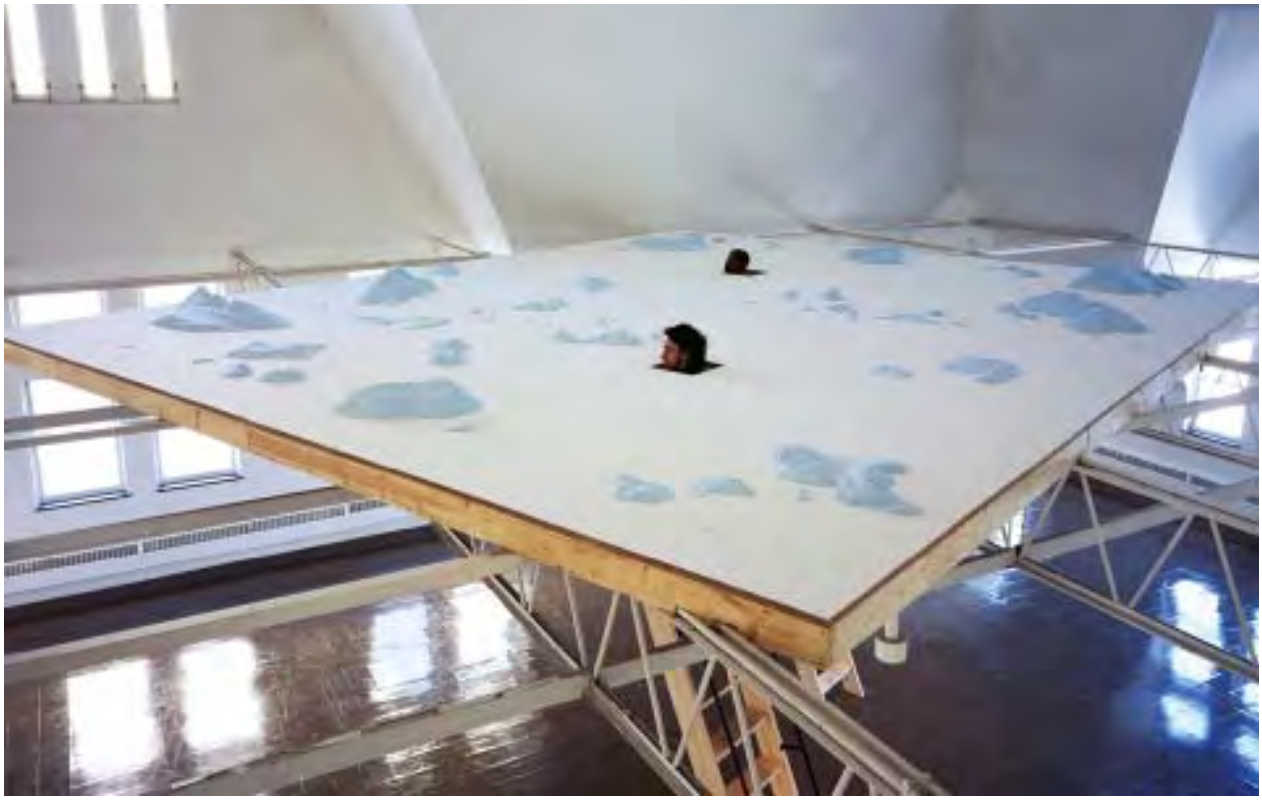
EH You moved to the States to study at the San Francisco Institute of Art, and then later settled in New York City. When you first came, did you experience any startling contrasts between the language used to discuss architecture (or space, in general) in Iceland, and architectural or spatial terms in English. (For example, when I was living in Iceland, I could never get used to the term hús that referred to all buildings, however large. When I heard hús, I saw house—there was a different experience or expectation of scale entangled in moving from one language to the other.) Any thoughts about this?

KS Generally, there is a gap in definitions between English and Icelandic. For me this has always been most prominent in abstract language. Structures and forms and even spatial utility, I think of primarily without language. The language that describes these is secondary to the spatial manifestation itself.

In my first years in the US, I wasn't particularly interested in space and architecture. I was much more interested in narrative and narrative analysis. But just as one cannot separate time and space, a narrative must also point to a locality. I think my first work where space was articulated I conceived of in my home in San Francisco, around 1990. The work never took on a concrete form, was never completely finished, but its premise was to fully superimpose one place on another, to bridge the unbridgeable gap between

distant locations, both in time and space. Back then, the only way I could think to manifest this was through language, text imposed on architecture. The remote place existed in language, but nevertheless was not on the page. This work still stays with me, surely because of the impossibility of its premise, the convergence of places across impossible expanses of time and space.

Installation view (below) and detail (above) of High Plane, 2005, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, polystyrene, wood, steel, 20 x 24 x 13 feet. Courtesy of the artist. Photos by Tom Van Eynde.



EH You told me about a student performance that involved being inside a cage of chicken wire coated in glue. You read aloud from an Icelandic pronunciation guide while a leaf blower blew away each paper after you read it. The sheets would then stick to the wire and, by the end of the reading, you were covered in a cage of Icelandic language.

KS This was a very primitive and unresolved performance that maybe I will remake one day. It's the only work of mine where sound plays a role. You couldn't really hear me speak because of the leaf blower. So it was sort of doubly incomprehensible, because as the paper started to clutter up the wire, it became impossible to read my lips.

Green Grass of Home, 1997, plywood, landscaping materials, hardware, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and the ReykjavÃk Art Museum.

EH The first piece of yours that I wrote about was Fyrirmynd/Model (1998–2000) in its early incarnation in the fall of 1998. In this work, a miniature road traverses and climbs the gallery space. The road is based on a neurological model of the electrical impulses

involved in perception and memory. The Icelandic term for model has different and more complex connotations than the English word. If I translate fyrirmynd literally, I might end up with “before-image” or “before-painting.”

KS The closest English equivalent of fyrirmynd is model. Yet the etymology and meaning of these two words are not the same. Fyrirmynd could be translated as “the image that comes before.” In painting for example, the apples on the table would be the fyrirmynd of what is painted. But fyrirmynd could also refer to a model citizen or to anything to be imitated or used as an example. But it doesn’t describe a hobby model. I liked the slippage between the two languages.

EH Fyrirmynd grew out of research into memory and perception. You were adamant in addressing memory in general and not a particular memory. Later, with a work such as Impasse II – Ísaksskóli (2003), a model of the facade of your elementary school, and the 2012 series of scale models of sections of your childhood home, you appear to be more willing to approach specific memories. What are your earliest memories of space?

KS My early memories of space were generally memories of surfaces: the coolness of cast bronze, the relief of the wallpaper in the bedroom, the buildup of paint layers on a windowsill. All this seems to have made its way directly into my work, which still deals much with the “skins” in a space, like the surfaces that divide structures and what they contain.

EH You grew up in a two-story Reykjavík rowhouse that was built by your family. There was a lot of construction and new building going on in the city during this time. Do you have memories of observing construction sites? I’m wondering if the ongoing development of Reykjavík wove itself into your imagination.

KS The construction sites from childhood that I remember are the church steeple of Hallgrímskirkja (of which we had an uninterrupted view from our west windows) and a senior citizens’ home in a lot next door. As the steeple of Hallgrímskirkja was finished, construction of the senior citizens’ home began. One of the differences between Iceland and, say, New York, is the level of public-site security and, in the 1970s, even more so. We would climb through the windows of the senior citizens’ home, claiming the half-built space as our own. Once the electricity was in place, we would go down into the control room and switch on the main breaker and light up the whole building. Nobody in the city seemed to mind if the building was lit up at midnight. It was thrilling to play lord of this large complex at age ten. Later, I had two dear friends live in these apartments, which

continued my experience with this building.

Installation view of Untitled, 2004, Reykjavík Art Museum, mixed media, 70 x 50 x 12 feet. Courtesy of the artist and the Reykjavík Art Museum.

EH Having lived in Reykjavík for many years, I had a different experience of public space compared to cities in the States and in Europe where there is more anonymity and often a sense of potential danger. In Iceland, the contrast between public and private is not as marked. Is an Icelander ever anonymous in Reykjavík?

KS So much of what's distinctive about Icelandic culture and social space can be traced back to one fact: the very small population—only 300,000 people—on the island. There is definitely a lack of anonymity in Iceland. In larger metropolitan places, people create community in many different ways, not only based on blood relations or traditional and local structures; instead they create their environment based on interests, preferences, beliefs—based on an identity that is chosen, not assigned.

I remember an observation of yours way back, about public parks and their role, for example, in gay subculture, as anonymous forums or forums for activities that do not have

"a place" within the socially accepted sphere. In the United States, you see public parks as the home for the homeless, not only those without means but also those for whom it is a chosen way of life outside social norms. It's unlikely you could ever have this type of freedom and anonymity in what we call "public space" in Iceland. Another important fact is the climate, which on most days turns people indoors, to private quarters. I asked a friend of mine recently, "Where is the free space in Iceland?" We agreed it was not in the allocated public lots but "out in nature"; then we both observed that there are no people there. So the free space in Iceland is a solitary space.

EH In your untitled 2004 installation at Harbor House, you play with the relationship between architecture and landscape. A wall spirals through the museum, bending this way and that with dramatic shifts in scale. The top of the wall has a jagged profile like a coastline or mountain range. Forgetting for a moment everything else that's going on in this piece, I want to focus on the work's allusion to early-20th-century Icelandic architecture that integrated native materials into its modernist practices. Do you have a particular interest in Icelandic architecture, or in modernist architecture?

KS I am less interested in architectural history than architecture in history, as a backdrop to histories, private and public. I employ architecture to describe places; I copy architecture to redraw and re-experience a moment. Whereas the work of the architect is traditionally prospective, my work with architecture is almost always retrospective—I replicate or describe already existing structures. While the architect sets out to solve spatial, functional, structural, and social problems, I use architecture as the passive container of experiences. For me architecture is receptive; it's the background, the stage—that which is performed, is oddly missing, or at least until the viewer steps into the work. In that respect my practice is much more related to that of a scenographer than of an architect.

For example my installation at the Reykjavík Art Museum in 2004, Untitled, had much to do with the museum itself, which, when I was growing up, had its primary location at Kjarvalsstaðir, in a beautiful modernist pavilion located at Klambratún. As this building was part of my daily landscape, it has the same significance as the outdoor sculptures at Ásmundarsafn, or the senior citizens' home mentioned earlier. The Reykjavík Art Museum is "home" in some way, and my work dealt with that very idea of home and memory. The reference to Icelandic 20th-century architecture in this work has much to do with the architecture of the museum itself. Both the ĺsaksskóli work and the one at the Harbor House propose a physio-spatial confrontation with a place in memory, a place that's distorted in scale and inaccessible in the present. The Unbuilt series— sculptures and photographs of proposed houses in Reykjavík from the early 20th century—are, in

Dining Room, Hallway, Bathroom, Coat Closet, 2012, Hydrocal and wood, 46 x 28 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Eleven Rivington.

a similar way, containers of history, sites, or rather non-sites, of proposed lives in Reykjavík in the 1920s.

EH How was it then for you to work with the 18th-century period rooms at the Metropolitan Museum, spaces you had no direct personal history with? Boiserie featured reproductions of two period rooms but, because they were installed in a different wing than the originals, the viewer's experience was complicated by the work's distortions of scale and detail in relation to the original. The reproduction of a polyhedral boudoir was executed at 85 percent of the original size and bleached of color, and its many mirrors were replaced with surveillance glass. Peering into the windows of the sealed room, a viewer was unable to see other viewers at opposing windows, and the boudoir reflected only itself. In your second installation, you duplicated the intricately carved wood paneling of a private residence's reception room, but the paneling stood free of any architectural structure and zigzagged through the space, descending in size from 8 feet to 12 inches. Boiserie, like earlier works, addresses memory, scale, surface, entanglements of interior and exterior space, and more. I'm curious, though, about your experience of working with neoclassical furniture as a sculptural object and with decorative surfaces and mirrors.

KS In a similar fashion as at the Harbor House in Reykjavík, I was using the 18th-century architecture in the Met as an emblem of the institution itself. It's less about an interest in the 18th century than about the preservation of a bygone time in the contemporary institution. My starting point was the museological experience—the arbitration of the displayed objects with the display structures that facilitate the experience. In the period rooms, this becomes very interesting, because the line between display and displayed is so seductively confused.

EH I want to ask you about your relationship to the floor, since it is central to your upcoming project in this year's Venice Biennale. Your work, even in miniature, has been floorbound. You call attention to the contrast between one's lumbering body and the tiny illusory world at one's feet, or at one's eyelevel in the case of the raised platform of High Plane. You are now constructing an actual floor as part of the Venice project.

KS Two important aspects of my floor-bound works have been: bringing the human body to the level of the artwork or vice versa, thus conflating the scales of the miniature object, the human body, and the architecture. The lumbering body poses a threat to the artwork. While my installation in Venice will be a full-scale floor construction, there will be a fragility to it; the tiles are each made by hand, and carry the mark of human labor. Also, I'm using a nonindustrial material, a material that is intended for sculpture, not for underfoot utility.

Boiserie came out of the institutional reality of the Metropolitan Museum itself, but in the process of making the works, as is usually the case, something new and unexpected started to reveal itself. I imagine it impossible to copy the artisan processes of any century, without seeing into the vast universe of techniques, and I cannot separate the technique from the outcome. I became fascinated with 18th-century patterns through my research at the Met, so perhaps one could say that the upcoming work for the Biennale, is a remnant of this research and my experience within the museum.

I saw a show at the Met last week of the furniture of the Roentgen brothers, who were active in 18th-century Prussia. These are simply the most wonderful constructions that I could think of in terms of function and ornament. They are so fanciful and extravagant in craftsmanship and design, intended for both leisure and utility. They strike me as completely pertinent to contemporary art. I have always been interested in the relationship between so-called fine art, ornament, and interior decor. In the contemporary environment, it often appears that the artist is posited in a tight space between commercial artist and craftsman. Issues of expression and authorship—essentially issues of power—all come up in the contemporary marketing of art. It is difficult not to look beyond the curtain drawn between artistic expression and the economy that feeds this expression. In this sense, my work employs parallel perceptions and existential trickery: As an artist I observe myself in the role of the craftsman, the worker, not as an author or a visionary, rather as a laboring provider of divertissement. That's why I chose as a location for my work in Venice the site of a former laundry and a boat shop. The viewers will be walking on a stilted floor, observing themselves in the role of a high-born audience, entertained and amused by the seductive form, which is created for the sole purpose of providing a magnificent "pedestal" for its patron. Anyone that marvels in this work will take part in the subversion, but it's intentionally left unclear who is the subverter and who and what is subverted.

EH In your initial proposal for Venice, you write, "I often present a two-sided world, on one hand an illusory, representational world, and on the other hand the structure that makes this illusion possible." This two-sidedness is central to theater.

KS I am less interested in the theater and its romance in contemporary art and more interested in scenography, in its widest definition, which includes, but is not limited to, theater. I'm not creating a space that will be used but a space that was used. I'm like a scenographer who "writes," describing a place, but my work is even more retrospective, because it is uninhabited—it's somewhere between forensics and the monument. And then there is the crucial aspect of the splitting of perception, between the front/back, in-

side/outside. In traditional theater, the objective is to give in to the illusionary space. But I endeavor to present this illusionary, symbolic space as a novelty construct that actually holds a much larger circumference, both in concrete space and conceptually.

EH I'm interested in hearing about your work Stage, a miniature theater stage that hangs from the ceiling, lit with a single spotlight. How important is it that the stage is hanging above the viewer and out of reach? Does it function as a kind of lantern in the space, casting shadows? (I'm imagining the effect of 19th-century magic lanterns.)

Installation view of Stage, 2005/2012, Art in General, New York City, mixed media, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

KS This work is a remake of an older work from 2005, one of a series of luminaries that I made during that period, contemplating the art object in regard to its function and ornament. Yes, it is important that Stage is placed out of reach, only to be viewed from below, perhaps suggesting the possibility of plunder and of destruction (as if this vision, this unattainable marvel of light, can come crashing on the viewer)—something that is sublime and dangerous at the same time. Aimed at the viewer's perception, it deflects attention from itself as an art object onto the viewer and the complexities of admiration and desire. The miniature theatrical lights, which light the stage but also project out into the surrounding space, spotlight the viewer below.

EH Early on in the process of developing your project for the 2013 Venice Biennale, you mentioned that the work, while it does not explicitly engage Icelandic subject mat-

ter (such as folklore, the sagas, or Iceland's unique landscape), it does comment on the situation of Iceland at the Biennale.

KS The work I'm making in Venice represents an isolated territory, a territory that is marked by a clear border, beyond which is nothing. This could be read as a national boundary, a coastline, or as the architectural outline of an official national pavilion in the Biennale. This territory is not fixed, but a moving one—as the work will travel from Venice to Reykjavík to New York. Also, without giving too much away before the opening, the work will include a large bi-dimensional architectural element, which will be in stark symbolic contrast to its container. Possibly, one can meditate on this contrast as a metaphor for Iceland, for its history, and also for recent political and economic events. It's important for me to state that none of these potential narratives were there at the beginning. The conception of this work was completely instinctual, as I engaged in the formal, material, textural, and energetic aspects of my process. Language comes afterward as an analysis of what I see and of what has been manifested.

EH To exhibit at the Venice Biennale is to participate in a kind of theater, with the city as a spectacular backdrop. How do your ongoing interests in the embodiment of perception and the staging of "views" dovetail with your project in Venice?

KS My work in Venice is, in one sense, a flat surface, in another, much more than that. It is like a centerpiece in a very complex environment. I believe that, in the end, the whole of the installation—the structure, the site, and the surface—is more interesting than the surface alone. This is both similar to, and different from, theatrical scenography, and the same is true for so many surfaces in Venice. Traditional scenography relies on a frontal view, an illusion and a story told through a controlled perspective, whereas the world outside relies on a free perspective from any angle, and meaning is derived from weaving together impressions from many locations and dimensions. The difference between a theatrical impression and a historical impression is a passive perspective versus an active, empowered one—you look at a stage differently than at an architectural site, for example.

Through history, Venice has been the city of surfaces, aflame with color and full of precious stones and other materials from the Mediterranean and beyond. But these surfaces were symbols of the wealth, power, and rank of their commissioners and patrons. In this sense you could say they were scenography, or the stage for the people who paid for them. My work is not about Venice, or Venetian history, but it uses the past to address the present.

INTERVIEWS JUN. 04, 2013

New Foundations: An Interview with Katrin Sigurdardottir

by Faye Hirsch

To visit Katrín Sigurđardóttir's installation Foundation at the Venice Biennale, you must travel to the Palazzo Zenobio in the city's Dorsoduro quarter. There you traverse a courtyard garden, beyond which lies a spacious, grassy yard flanked by walls in diverse masonry. On the far side of the yard is a plain gray building that looks as though it has been sliced through horizontally by the black-and-white-tiled floor of a second, entirely unrelated structure. The plain building is an ex-laundry—a preexisting, if now disused, space—while the floor, which protrudes into the courtyard and on which visitors can walk, is Sigurđardóttir's contribution to this year's Icelandic pavilion, one of the many national pavilions situated within the fabric of the city.

For her ambitious piece, Sigurđardóttir cast thousands of tiles in concrete, inventing a pavement resembling worn marble or travertine in stylized 18th-century ornamental patterns. The floor plan, as well, draws upon elements of 18th-century architecture. In startling contrast, supporting the floor is a substructure of very contemporary-looking particleboard, created by the artist, which is also visible around the pavement's periphery.

Art in America

Such dislocations are typical of Sigurđardóttir, who toys in her sculpture with slippages of space and time, scale and medium. I met her at Palazzo Zenobio on May 30, just before the opening of the 55th Venice Biennale (through Nov. 24), and we conversed as we walked through and around her striking installation, the floor section of which (not the ex-laundry) will travel in 2014 to the Reykjavik Art Museum and New York's Sculpture Center.

KATRÍN SIGURĐARDÓTTIR It's easiest for me to take as a starting point the work I did at the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 2010. There I made a leap from working primarily with intimate, person-specific memory to collective or cultural memory, as I interacted with the holdings of the museum. Foundation is a continuation of this mining of cultural memory. It is a large surface that maps out an imaginary 18th-century pavilion. It is conceived very two-dimensionally, as a floor plan. I worked for nearly one year just drawing, mathematically composing the pattern.

FAYE HIRSCH There are essentially two facets to your piece—the shape of the floor in relation to the preexisting building, and the pattern in the floor.

SIGURĐARDÓTTIR And of course it's no accident that I chose to create something akin to a pavilion, nor that I chose to create it in an old laundry. The idea was to juxtapose the shell of the laundry with the idea of a pavilion—something made for luxury and leisure. The buildings near the Palazzo are something of a hodgepodge. The laundry also at some point became a boat workshop.

HIRSCH The setting is interesting: you have this big, empty yard and on the other side your installation, which makes the building look like it is in the process of being restored.

SIGURĐARDÓTTIR That wasn't necessarily intentional, though I can see it. Another important aspect of my work is its

play with scale—the confusion between what you take in visually and what you take in through a bodily experience.

HIRSCH From the yard, we see what looks like an ordinary door, but don't realize how terribly short it is until we bump our heads when entering the building.

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR Exactly. The door actually continues below the floor—you see only part of the door.

HIRSCH It's a simple device with a complicated effect.

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR Yes.

HIRSCH Did you scout this site?

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR Iceland had this space last time, too. I decided I wanted to use it again, though not until I had scouted a lot of other sites. But I had this idea early on, and it was such a strong idea. The way my work comes to me is very immediate—it just takes root, and I can't go back on it.

It was important to me to leave the site sort of vacant. I wanted nothing in this yard, so you come at the piece, and you take it in not only as a construction, but as part of the entirety of the site, which is such an interesting one. With all these surrounding buildings, there are all these different surfaces, and Foundation is very much about a surface.

HIRSCH Two different surfaces, right? You've consciously contrasted the rough particleboard surface and the concrete tile. And you created that concrete—it is not found material. Did you borrow the pattern from an existing floor, or did you make it up entirely?

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR I studied a lot of ornamental floors from all periods. I wanted to place this floor in the 18th

century because pavilions and folly architecture were prevalent in the 18th century.

HIRSCH The black-and-white pattern seems very off somehow. It's not symmetrical.

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR That's exactly right. In some parts of Europe in the 18th century, you often find this Rococo style in ornament that breaks away from the rules.

HIRSCH And you don't join the pattern neatly, which can be a bit dizzying.

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR Part of that has to do with the way the work is constructed. The entire floor is hand-made-we cast something like 9,000 tiles. And they are pigmented concrete—not glazed or fired.

HIRSCH In the black-and-white parts—most of the floor, really—we see a vine motif, a radiating pattern, and some stylized crowns, but at the center is an orange flower resembling a chrysanthemum.

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR Something that I noticed in my research is that the center of these floors is somewhat freehand. It's more like a painting, whereas the rest is a pattern. This was in many ways a very painterly project. I have a background in painting, and in a sense I have never left it completely. Foundation is a very large work, in many senses. I worked on it for a year and a half, and many strands of my work come into it.

HIRSCH The two buildings—the real and imaginary—don't easily mesh. It's not a very sympathetic relationship.

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR They don't fit—but somehow they do, in the sense that you are actually standing on the floor of the "pavilion," and you are looking at the ceiling of the laundry.

But they don't fit, in terms of the design.

HIRSCH You've given the edges of the floor a very intricate shape. One imagines that it would have been the floor of a very fancy room, which the laundry is not at all.

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR It's a meeting of the ornamental and the austere. I based the floor plan on designs of rooms mostly in Italy, but it's the type of space you would find all over Europe. Of course, the floor is made in a way that never existed, ever. It's a parquet pattern, yet it's made with tiles, and the tiles are not marble or travertine, but concrete.

HIRSCH Did you imagine the entire elevation of the room?

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR Yes. And I made about four site visits here when I was drawing the piece, and during that time I positioned and sized the sculpture to create an interesting space.

HIRSCH From upstairs looking down, you can really see that it's a sculpture and not architecture.

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR Exactly. This is just one of the things that I realized when I encountered this building. Here was the chance to make a very large drawing [in space] that could be experienced either as a drawing or a sculpture. You cannot take in the entirety of the work from one viewpoint, so in that sense it is huge. Only by moving through the site can you experience it as a whole.

HIRSCH It's interesting how you break the continuity of the radiating tile pattern. You feel that the floor was not one floor, but many, that you somehow excerpted.

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR There was one particular pattern I studied that had this peculiar combination of floral and geometric patterns. You see in 18th-century floor designs these

Op-ish patterns but also some Orientalizing motifs.

HIRSCH Could you speak a bit about the combination of the particleboard and the tiling?

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR In scenography, you have painted landscape, and on the backside you see something that looks like the underside of my sculpture. In a sense, this contrast between the two surfaces is very consistent in my work. My sculpture always has a two-sidedness. I'm often drawing out these illusionistic spaces, yet at the same time as I create them, I kill them.

Whenever I start a new work, I'm always answering a question that I raised in the previous work. At the Met, I chose to copy and work from boiseries that were in the collection. It's such an interesting process, to extract a decorative surface from its original place, install it somewhere else—say, in a private residence in another city and another country—where you can think of yourself as somehow being in the place where it was originally. The work migrates, and the visitor continues to have an experience of a place that is far away in space and time. So this floor is very much a continuation of that inquiry. Showing this very contemporary material—the particleboard—is a way to insert a footnote in the experience of the work. It tells us that we are in fact in the here-and-now. We're being fooled-in the way that painting both fools you and tells the truth.

HIRSCH You are Icelandic, and you have lived in the United States for quite a long time. So you are in a sense a displaced person. Is there any of that in the work?

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR Surely.

HIRSCH And here we are in the Icelandic pavilion, which is not in the Giardini.

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR Part of the intention of the work is to take the idea of the pavilion all the way. I mean, anything can be a pavilion!

HIRSCH The original idea of a pavilion was to create a structure that could be disassembled and, perhaps, moved.

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR It was a place of leisure or sport in proximity to a palace. There were all these themed pavilions in the 18th century.

HIRSCH How are you going to adapt this piece for the Reykjavik Art Museum and the Sculpture Center in New York, when it seems so specific to this site?

SIGURÐARDÓTTIR The ornamental floor is going to be removed. In Reykjavik you will have a void in the form of the building in Venice, and in New York you will have a void of the building in Venice and the building in Reykjavik. The floor is a suggestive remnant of another time. The true voids that remain are going to become more visible as the work travels. I think what is going to happen is that the experience of the work, and the work's meaning, are really going to transform. That's what I hope.

The Icelandic Pavilion was organized by Sculpture Center director Mary Ceruti along with Ilaria Bonacossa, curator of exhibitions at Genoa's Museum of Contemporary Art Villa Croce.

ARTFORUM

Katrín Sigurðardóttir

03.17.14

Katrín Sigurðardóttir, ***Foundation*** **(detail), 2013,** wood and concrete, dimensions variable. Installation view.

Katrín Sigurðardóttir's site-specific installations often address collective memory and architecture. For the Icelandic Pavilion at the Fifty-Fifth Venice Biennale, Sigurðardóttir debuted Foundation, 2013, a raised, decorative floor inserted into the former laundry of an eighteenth-century palazzo. The work is currently on view in her solo exhibition at the Reykjavik Art Museum until April 13, 2014, and will travel to New York's SculptureCenter. She discusses the piece below.

BY CONVENTIONAL LOGIC, you could say that floors don't move. We think of the ground underneath our feet as the parameter of movement rather than a moving entity in itself. When we travel, it

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is the fact that there is a different territory under our feet that bears evidence of our journey. Foundation takes this truth and turns it upside down. People still move to see the work, but it represents a static place that does the impossible: It moves from one place to the next.

The work is comprised of pieces that are designed to exist in modules that come apart and reassemble seamlessly. It is a megapuzzle of close to nine thousand handmade tiles preserved in about 150 sections. When I was preparing this work, I researched decorative floors, focusing mostly on the eighteenth century. I looked at every floor plan I could get my hands on and composed the outline based on pavilions and other types of nonresidential structures in central Europe. Once I had the footprint of the piece, it became a mathematical task to figure out a pattern that works within the shape—it's not a given. It was a sort of geometrical footnote to the process. Neither the outline nor the pattern is based on a specific place. I found the pattern that is most akin to what I came up with on a small, heavily retouched photograph of the interior of a building that had been destroyed. So you could say that the floor no longer exists; the building no longer exists; even the empire where the building was situated is gone. The floor derives itself completely from a constantly floating referent.

Working with a horizontal surface makes the implication of a moving locus even more dramatic because it is the floor that the viewer walks on; it is the very parameter that we use as evidence of our movement. As the work travels, I wanted the imprint of its past to be visible—not only its fictional eighteenth-century origins but also its recent history, the way it develops as it moves from place to place. In Reykjavik the work is positioned both indoors and outdoors, similar to Venice. However, the difference is that now the outline of the laundry of the Palazzo Zenobio in Venice—where it was first located—is apparent on the surface and starts drawing out a new pattern, in stark contrast with the original rococo-inspired design. Because I had already decided the piece would travel, I wanted to work with its peripatetic nature. The floor is inserted in three different buildings, and I didn't want to camouflage or ignore that.

What does it mean when a place moves? Can we imagine, while sitting in this room, that the room is now in a different country? No, we are in Paris, and Paris is in France. Or we are in New York, or we are in Reykjavik. Everywhere, we are bound to the laws of time and space. How can we break out of this truth?

— As told to Julian Elias Bronner

The New York Times

Art as Architecture and as Currency

Three Solo Shows at SculptureCenter in Queens

By KAREN ROSENBERG JUNE 26, 2014

For refreshingly un-Koonsian ideas about sculpture, look no further than the three solo exhibitions now at SculptureCenter. One is a large-scale installation by the midcareer Icelandic artist Katrin Sigurdardottir; the other two are smaller projects by the emerging American artists Liz Glynn and Jory Rabinovitz. Shiny objects and artisanal craftsmanship play a role here, as they do in Jeff Koons's survey at the Whitney, but so do imperfection, evanescence and parsimoniousness.

The biggest of the three projects, and the most commanding, is Ms. Sigurdardottir's "Foundation." An ornamental gray-and-white tile floor on a raised platform, "Foundation" was first exhibited last summer in the old laundry quarters of a Venetian palazzo at the 55th Venice Biennale, where it represented the Pavilion of Iceland. It was subsequently installed at the Reykjavik Art Museum, in a building that was once a customs house. Now it has come to yet another postindustrial setting, the former trolley repair shop of SculptureCenter.

Katrin Sigurdardottir's large-scale installation "Foundation." Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times

Conceived with all three of these locations in mind, "Foundation" might be seen as a challenge to the idea of site-specific, architectural installations. In a catalog interview with the project's curators, the SculptureCenter's executive director, Mary Ceruti, and Ilaria Bonacossa, the director of the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Villa Croce in Genoa, Ms. Sigurdardottir describes "a floating pavilion, a wandering pavilion. A pavilion that is here but yet not here."

The baroque-patterned tilework initially gives off a sense of permanence, but as you tread on it you notice strange gaps: areas where tile had to be cut out to accommodate walls and columns of the Venetian palazzo and, later, the Reykjavik museum. Only in New York is it totally free-standing, engulfed by SculptureCenter's cavernous interior, so that it appears as a room within a room.

With "Foundation," Ms. Sigurdardottir is also moving deeper into the decorative arts — abandoning the all-white set pieces exemplified by her 2010 set of installations in the Metropolitan Museum's period rooms. Instead of building ghostly models that riff on existing architecture, she is making something that looks historically authentic (at least to the casual observer) and is steeped in artisanal labor. Its thousands of concrete tiles, we are told, were all handmade by the artist and her assistants.

They add up to a stunning, 18th-century-style complement to SculptureCenter's exposed brick walls and metal fixtures.

artnet news

The Experience of Katrín Sigurdardóttir's Imaginary Palazzo

Benjamin Sutton, Wednesday, July 2, 2014

Installation view of Katrín Sigurdardóttir's *Foundation* (2013) at SculptureCenter. Photo: Benjamin Sutton.

The renowned Icelandic conceptual sculptor Katrín Sigurdardóttir has brought an 18th-century palazzo to a former trolley repair warehouse in Queens. Or, to be exact, she has filled SculptureCenter's soaring central gallery with an installation that manages to be both grand and understated: A fictional pavilion's ornately tiled floor. While the artist's stated intent is to explore issues arising from the international moving and removing of contemporary artworks, and the changing place of the artist in different cultures, what ends up being most powerful is the intensely strange experience of inhabiting two completely different and disparate spaces simultaneously.

The sculpture, *Foundation* (2013), was first installed in Iceland's pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale, housed in an old laundry, and then in a warehouse annex of the Reykjavik Art Museum. In both prior instances the piece was too big for the spaces it occupied, and as a result was partially truncated by walls, columns, and partitions. At SculptureCenter, the piece bears the marks of these prior architectural incongruities; blank spaces that register as cement scars cut across the elegant tile patterns, disrupting the historical fiction.

Sigurdardóttir makes suspending disbelief and indulging architectural time-travel impossible, as everything about her piece calls attention to its contemporary fakery. It is installed a few feet off the floor, requiring visitors to climb a few steps. Its edges have moldings that suggest the beginnings of walls, but nothing more. Where many of Sigurdardóttir's earlier works rope viewers in with intimations of narratives, fragments of historically loaded buildings, and allusions to charged events—indeed, many of them are rather rope-like in appearance—*Foundation* has an uncharacteristic bluntness to it. It conjures the imagery of pre-modern, aristocratic pavilions and austere churches, but makes its artificiality impossible to ignore. It feels most of all like a stage.

Installation view of Katrín Sigurdardóttir's *Foundation* (2013) at SculptureCenter. Photo: Benjamin Sutton.

The piece's greatest strength, in fact, may be the way it forces viewers to engage with it—to climb it, to walk on it, to look under it—and in so doing become more acutely aware of the work and its relation to the surrounding architecture. Walking on *Foundation* also adds to its wear and tear, providing scuffs and indentations from prolonged use that make the architectural fakery all the more convincing. Looking down while walking across this tile floor, with its indecipherable pattern of vines, flowers, and three-barred insignia, provokes a fleeting sense of geographic and temporal dislocation. Suddenly, you could be walking across the apse of a church in Venice or a small chapel in rural Spain. It makes you aware of how you might move in that type of space, as opposed to a contemporary art space, and, if you're willing to follow that track, about how each type of space elicits and implies different types of behavior, from college campuses to courthouses.

Installation view of Katrín Sigurdardóttir's *Foundation* (2013) at SculptureCenter. Photo: Benjamin Sutton.

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Katrín Sigurðardóttir

by Orit Gat

"In many ways, I'm profoundly uninterested in architecture," says Katrin Sigurdardottir — a surprising statement from an artist whose work would seem to be intimately linked to architectural traditions. For instance, "Boiseries," Sigurdardottir's project at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2010, included reproductions of two of the museum's French 18th-century period rooms: one from the Hôtel de Crillon and the other from the Hôtel de Cabris. Sigurdardottir constructed renditions of the two rooms on a scale that was 85 percent of the originals: a proportion almost the right size, only slightly off — making for an uncomfortable experience when walking into them. Her rooms were completely whitewashed. The elaborate embellishments in gold and paint became white patterns, the lush furniture turned ghosts of stuff past. Surprisingly enough, however, the result did not look like a stripped-down version of an original: It was some-?thing entirely new. Her rooms take their cue from the French interiors, but they also allude to history and the way we as a society build structures, use them, and then revel in conserving them. "It's not the questions of architecture that I am interested in," she clarifies. "I use architecture as a language to describe places, places with history, containers for experiences. Architecture programs experiences in the sense that it becomes a kind of script for how to live or how to exist, how to perform your daily life in?space — but it also just becomes the stage where things take place."

What does it mean to break down a building to its essence? There's something about Sigurdardottir's work that is very immediate — her pieces are visually gorgeous — but they are also suggestive in an elusive way. They evoke a play of associations, on what is and isn't palpable or what remains unsaid. And paradoxically, she creates immersive environments but then allows the audience limited access to them. For "Untitled," 2009, ?an installation at Eleven Rivington, her New York gallery, she created a box of medium-density fiberboard that housed a ?small replica of a watchtower visible through a window only by means of an assortment of two-way mirrors that offered myriad reflections, but never a direct view of the actual thing. Her ?most recent New York installation, "Stage," 2012, a miniature model of a theater, was displayed in Art in General's storefront window. Echoing the fact that a theater's stage is seen from ?the front, Sigurdardottir's sculpture was suspended from the?ceiling and could be viewed only from the street. And "High Plane," 2001–07, a large white platform with an imaginary landscape ?of a mountain range sculpted on it, is set on trusses 13 feet above ?its exhibition spaces, reachable by ladders leading to small holes in the platform through which the viewers can poke their heads.

MODERNPAINTERS

Usually made of cheap materials — plywood, plaster, resin, and so forth — Sigurdardottir's works are largely handmade. Her Long Island City studio has very little furniture in it: a number ?of desks and tables with works in progress scattered on them ?and a small sitting area by a large window, including a beautiful, simple bench made of wood with thick fabric stretched vertically and horizontally across it. When I comment on it, her eyes light up: "That is my divan. It's where I make my most important decisions. I built it out of leftover wood I had in the studio and fabric I bought in Berlin." Furniture may not be art, but building it is part of Sigurdardottir's experimentation with materials, which she defines as a crucial element of her work, especially because she did not study sculpture. "I was trained as a painter and a filmmaker, actually. So I have this obsession with doing ?as much as I can with my own hands," she says. "If a drawing were not made by the artist's hand, you would question its authenticity. There is something in that personally handmade quality that I often choose. Therefore I might opt to do something myself, even if I could hand it over to someone else to do it. I'm kind of an old-fashioned sculptor in that way."

The way into all of these works is paved with challenges, physical and visual. Recognizing these hurdles is a large part of the experience of Sigurdardottir's art. In an early piece, "Impasse," 2003, she constructed a wall between two columns. At the bottom of the wall was a miniature model of the elementary school she attended as a child in Iceland. "The wall is in full scale," she describes, "but the work itself is tiny. In some ways, this piece is indexical of my use of scale. I employ scale specifically to express an inability to enter. In the Met works, too, one is able to enter through a life-size door, but every step one takes into the work, it grows smaller. Yes, you can step in, but the farther you get into the room, the less possible it is to get out. That's

something to be interpreted by each person. I think that I've taken up this use of the distorted miniature and of scale precisely to present these as a metaphor for distance, to express something about a barrier in time or space."

This state of dislocation isn't surprising for an artist who splits her life between two continents. Sigurdardottir was born in Iceland, but has lived in the U.S. since her twenties. She wonders just how much a person who "lives between New York and Berlin" belongs in either. "I'm always interested in this overlap of places," she explains. "Maybe this is, in some very banal way, a central element to the narrative in my work: How do you unite two homelands? How do you take two soils in two different parts of the world and make them exist in one light? In some ways, that's the premise of my work, and that's the question of a lived life."

Sigurdardottir will be representing Iceland in the 2013 Venice Biennale. Even though she spent a large part of her life abroad, ?"in the most rudimentary terms, I am an Icelandic artist, no matter? what I do," she says. "If the pyramids in Egypt were to be my subject matter for the rest of my life, I would still be an Icelandic?artist." Iceland has not had a national pavilion in the Giardini since 2005, meaning that Sigurdardottir will be showing in ?a building that is not necessarily dedicated to exhibitions and does ?not carry the memories of other biennials. She points out that there is an interesting overlap in the contemporary idea of mobility — of transience and homelessness — and the national pavilions. "In the French pavilion, for example, are you on French soil? Within French jurisdiction? That's something that I find amusing to think about, this staking of territory, and the mapping of ?Venice. The cartography of this international city and its pavilions."

Sigurdardottir has another show scheduled before Venice, a solo exhibition opening in November at Eleven Rivington. "It will have something to do with architecture," she says, smiling. Even though she has a plan for the exhibition, she is hesitant to talk about it before it is complete. "It's like discussing names before the baby is born. Like parking a Volkswagen in your living room as a placeholder for the sofa."

ArtReview

The Venice Questionnaire #19: Katrín Sigurdardóttir

By ArtReview

Katrín Sigurdardóttir, Foundation, 2013, artisinal tile construction and mixed media installation.Photo: ORCH/orsenigochemollo. Courtes...

ArtReview sent a questionnaire to a selection of the artists exhibiting in various national pavilions of the Venice Biennale, the responses to which will be published over the coming days. Katrín Sigurdardóttir is representing Iceland. The pavilion is at Palazzo Zenobio Collegio Armeno Moorat, Raphael Dorsoduro, 2596, Fondamenta del Soccorso

What can you tell us about your plans for Venice?

Well, they are no longer plans, as the work is almost done. I am continuing to work with place and memory, but in this project, similar to the works I made for the Met in 2010, this is not an intimate memory or a personal place, rather a cultural memory. It's not exactly historical fiction, but still it's an unorthodox use of history, akin to how I mine the discipline of architecture in this work and many previous works.

Are you approaching the show in a different way to how you would with a 'normal' exhibition?

I approach every exhibition differently; there is always a new context, just as there is always a new floor plan. This work is borne out the possibilities that I saw in the location I selected. There is somehow not a way to separate the two.

What does it mean to 'represent' your country? Do you find it an honour or problematic?

Not problematic at all. The Pavilion of Iceland in Venice is an international project, but I'm very pleased to get to do a project on this scale with so many of my Icelandic colleagues and friends involved. And, it's nice to feel such unanimous support and joy from Iceland for my work.

What audience are you addressing with the work? The masses of artist peers, gallerists, curators and critics concentrated around the opening or the general public who come through over the following months?

I don't decide whom I am addressing, I never do. My work is intended equally for anyone who lays their eyes on it, and I believe people only reflect themselves and their own thoughts in the work. So the work is likely to provoke different readings to different people. In addition, the show in Venice will continue to develop, as the piece will travel to Reykjavík and New York, so I don't even see the work specifically for the audience in Venice.

What are your earliest or best memories of the biennale?

The first biennale I saw was shamefully late, but it was a good one. Francesco Bonami's show in 2003, which was an eye opener.

You'll no doubt be very busy, but what else are you looking forward to seeing?

I look forward to seeing the work of several friends who are also exhibiting – and celebrating with them. Then I most look forward to learning about artists and works that are new to me.

The REYKJAVÍK GRAPEVINE

The Emotion Of Cold, Hard Science

Katrín Sigurðardóttir employs a different alphabet for her poetry

4.7.2013

Words by Haukur S. Magnússon
Photos by Julia Staples

Artist Katrín Sigurðardóttir is in-between three cats, on a square, in Venice. All three cats stare at her intently. She beckons them over using the international language of kitty-beckoning. The Venetian cats continue looking at her, eternal feline mystery in their eyes, but make no motion to come closer. A church bell gongs a single gong, a flock of cackling seagulls takes flight, the cats stare on and we eventually continue conversing over the internet—me in the United States of America, and she in-between three cats, on a square, in Venice.

We are having a conversation about her art and her life and how these things came together to place her in Venice at that very moment. Katrín Sigurðardóttir's work exudes an aura of highly focused intelligence and years of study, and her published interviews usually reflect this—hers is a high art, one that can leave the amateur at a loss when it comes to engaging in discourse about it. Throughout our talk I often feel stunned and stupid, yet I am left with a sense of lingering satisfaction, like it's slowly making me smarter.

When I am not embarrassing myself by asking flighty questions involving concepts I barely understand, I instead embarrass myself by asking naïve questions that must have the artist squirming. Questions like: "are you nervous and stressed for the big show?" This might be appropriate for a little sister before her dance recital, but to a successful and enduring artist whose career has progressed from one peak after the other—an artist educated in respected art establishments, one who recently displayed her work at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (viewed by some 180,000 people!) and one who has been chosen by Iceland's art establishment to represent the nation—they must sound utterly daft.

But Katrín takes it in stride, her patience with a terminally pretentious journalist perhaps reflecting the patience required by her creative process; her work is intricate, mapped, studied, thought-out, requiring vast amounts of historical and technical research and months upon months to execute.

And quite a few conversations to discuss.

"Two days and my entire life"

Six weeks ago, Katrín was with those cats, on that square, in Venice, engaging in conversation with The Grapevine over Skype (our mission to meet her at her Long Island City, NY, studio earlier this year failed because of traffic, although we did get some nice photos out of it). The idea was to discuss her art and her career and her exhibition at the 55th edition of the ultra prestigious Venice Biennale, which opened on Saturday, June 1. We start by discussing the installation process, then at its crux:

"We are not completely done," Katrín says, "but we are very close. Quantifying an installation like this can be difficult, especially when you are installing a work for the first time. You aren't done until you're done—you

can be finished with everything save for some minor detail that takes maybe three seconds to execute, but one might have to wait for a month to be ready for that three second moment of completion. It's the nature of the creative process..."

What has the preparation entailed?

The process of creating this piece has spanned more than eighteen months. The beginnings of its conception were in October of 2011, and the entirety of 2012 was dedicated to it. I spent the first year drawing, only drawing. Then some material tests were made, followed by some visits to the site in Venice to figure out this large shape that I am making. For the majority of the time leading up to the work's completion, I was drawing, on the computer and by hand. Having conceived the work that way, I commenced the fabrication of the actual surface those drawings denote. The 'proper' material production began in November of last year.

The undertaking of this project has been smooth, all things considered. Perhaps it is because it comes right on the heels of another large exhibit that I staged at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2010. I feel like I am well rehearsed. This time around I didn't have the problem that we artists sometimes struggle with, of having to wait a long time for the right idea of what to create—the gestation period for a work of art can be quite drawn out.

It reminds me of something my colleague and sometimes technical consultant Hjörtur Hjartarson—a great painter who was my right hand man in staging this project—likes to say about the making of his paintings: 'Well, it took me two days, and my entire life.' I think that kind of describes the process of creation, in the sense that any work of art you make builds on your whole life. Every preceding moment in your artistic development and production is part of the process and its end result."

Arctic expedition

Do you suffer stress or performance anxiety, of pulling it all together in time for such a large and seemingly pivotal event?

Not really, to be honest, for some reason I don't. I expected I would, but that's not how I feel. To reference my last project at the Metropolitan Museum again, I staged two installations that in many ways I had much less time to prepare for, so when I began the process for this show I felt ready and levelled in a way. I felt in good practice.

Long-term involvement in anything that demands such intense thought processes and labour seems like it must be daunting. How is it to sink yourself into the creative process, into a single project, for a year and half? Does it change your mode of thinking in a way?

At the start, you feel like you're going under, as if embarking on a year-long stint on a submarine?

I was thinking more like a polar expedition [laughs]. Undertaking a project like this is in some ways like venturing on a big journey with a small group of people. Your friends and family know you're going, but you're still very far away from everyone and everything—for the duration of the trip you are only really close to the people directly involved.

When you return, you are somehow changed because of what you experienced on the expedition. I think any big project is like this, especially one that spans such a long time and demands such energy to accomplish; it renders you a little bit different. At the end of the expedition, you come out a slightly different person than you went into it.

It's a journey creatively. You start with a certain premise, a question, a set destination. On your way to the answer, new questions arise that you try to address in the piece. Ultimately, there is a point where you think, "well, I suppose I'm going to have to address this question in my next work." And that sets the course for the future.

Problem solving

We have a tendency to envision thinking as a sort of problem solving activity. When you picture a person deep in thought you usually imagine them facing some sort of conundrum or dilemma—pondering the answer to a difficult question. Does this transfer to your creative thought? When you sit down with your sketchbook, do you conceive of a problem to address?

For me, the creative process is a dialogue between me, the artist, and a given material—a given idea, space or situation. Rather than preconceiving a problem or a question, my process is often that of resolving, articulating or examining further some phenomena, idea or dimension that I am drawn to. Sometimes this means that I identify a question to set the parameters I am working within and then commence the 'answering of the question' or 'solving of the problem.' It's a simple structure for thinking that sometimes is useful to work within. This method of working usually leads to more questions, to be further explored, and this cyclical process repeats itself.

I can imagine that my work sometimes seems very technical. For me, material and technique are not tools, they are part of the language itself. Say I am working with a certain material and gain a positive outcome. But I see that there is some aspect of the material that I could continue to perfect, some quality that I didn't know of when I started, something that is only revealed through the process of work. It's this same cyclical process.

In this way I pass through topics and materials. And then the passage usually brings me to new topics to explore, new materials. New questions.

The emotion and poetry of science

Based in this, it seems fair to say that you approach your work in a scientific or research based manner. If your work follows the model of scientific enquiry, and that you conduct your creative process discursively, as a scientist would, one must ask: is there a main, fundamental question or proposition that you are investigating?

When I give a quick introduction to my work, the 'Cliff's Notes,' I usually say that I deal with place and memory, and that place is often manifested through the language of architecture, through various forms of landscape visualisation and through cartography.

This means that I use a language that has a technical, a sort of anti-emotional alphabet, to describe something that is maybe the quite the opposite, that essentially was never meant to be described in such a language. It could be likened to the process of writing poetry using the Periodic Table of the Elements.

A contemporary predicament

In your own words, how would you describe what you're showing?

I'm showing a very large, bi-dimensional architectural element. In many ways, the whole of it deals with archaeology, with the memory of two buildings—one fictional, one pre-existing— and this memory is suggested and symbolised through the installation.

There are so many different ways of talking about this piece. Right now, I'm inclined to say that it's about different ways of accounting for architecture and this sort of double perception, where you have different strands of memory interweaving in the same place. I think a complex and sometimes conflicting spatial perception is something of a contemporary predicament, something we experience all the time, because even without ever setting foot on an archaeological site, we are still always happening upon ruins or evidence of one structure within another, one time or place within another. This can be externally evident, but just as often it's just a type of mnemonic overlay that gets projected in our mind's vision.

This piece relates to previous works of mine that deal with the idea of the ruin, The Unbuilt series that I've worked on since 2004, and then this more recent series that's based on Langahlíð 11, Reykjavík, my childhood home.

Does showing at the Venice Biennale have a special significance for you? Is it something an artist strives for? And does this reflect in the work you present?

Of course it has a significance. This is the first and probably only time I

am officially a representative of Iceland, and I am naturally very thankful for that, and very proud. It's not a goal you set out to attain, though—you don't make showing at the Biennale an objective to work towards. And there's no clear way to reach it... through time, you're perhaps found worthy... That's all.

If this project differs from others, it is simply because it marks the only time I will officially represent Iceland in such a forum. Of course, I always see myself as representing Iceland in a way, wherever I'm showing. It is the country where I was born and raised, a society which I am still part of; an artistic community that I continue to engage with.

Would you say that being officially decreed a Representative Of Iceland affects the context of the work presented? Being appointed by the administrative body of Icelandic arts, under the banner: "this is who we are now, this is who we'd like to speak for us..." That must entail some pressure...

I really don't think so. I've never seen it that I'm supposed to go about my work in a different way for this project than any other—and simply, I would never do that.

The context is slightly different, as I am in a different place in my development as an artist than I was one year ago or ten years ago; the floor plan is different, the budget is different, everything is different in the way that each new project is different from all the previous ones. But the mandate is my own, the work itself, not set by the commissioning body. And I believe I am commissioned exactly to do this: to make my work the way I always have, and not to illustrate some preconceived notion of what is Icelandic.

I don't believe that "national identity" constitutes an essential core in an artist, I think the national is a fiction or a script, one of many, that an artist can choose to take on, a role to be performed like in a play. But I am interested in writing my own script. And I honestly believe that those who commissioned me to go to Venice this year expected just that.

A problematic approach to art

Leaving aside the question of nationality, do you see your shows at popular forums like the Biennale or the Metropolitan as a chance to expand the reach of your dialogue, to present your ideas to a greater crowd?

That's how I think of every show. I don't discriminate an audience, whether they are one of ten who see a show or one of 100,000. Every viewer is equally important. In terms of the establishment, each venue offers specific opportunities, but I am primarily interested in the socio-political aspect of what these could be. I did two solo shows in 2010, one at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and then another at a gallery called The Suburban, which is basically a 20 square foot shed in a Chicago suburb.

Its a nice coincident to get to do these two shows in the same year. Of course the context and reach of the two is different, but I was as serious about the work I presented at both venues.

The opposite would be a problematic approach to art, to somehow theme and conceptualize your approach based on your audience. If you work in advertising you define and consider your target audience, but as an artist? As an artist, I am not in the business of manipulating experiences; I just want to make my work, as part of my own inquiry, not with a set outcome or effect. And people approach it and take from it what they want, but according to their own interests, experiences and perceptions. It is true that in each viewer there is the love for being manipulated, overpowered by a seductive experience. But I like to try to appeal to a different part of the viewer, where he or she is free. That's of course a much harder job for the viewer, but hopefully it's sometimes appreciated.

Your art is then something the viewer approaches on her own terms, it should be thought of as building blocks or seeds of thought rather than a planned, structured experience?

That to me is the creative process—it's what distinguishes the creative process from showmanship.

When I make my art, the viewers' reaction is not my premise or objective. It is always to continue my own enquiry, and to preserve my relationship with my work.

What happens once a project is complete is not something that I try to control. At that point, the relationship is between the work and viewer. Up until then, the work is mine and the relationship with the work is mine—after completion I let it go. I don't want this to come off as if I don't care about the viewer. I care about the viewer. I don't want to harm the viewer, and I don't set out to offend the viewer, but I also don't set out to please the viewer. Again, I am not in the business of creating experiences. At this point the work is its own being.

And you have no intention as to what it ultimately leaves people with?

I think it would be pretentious to say that I can't guess what people might take from the work. It's not an entirely blind procedure. But I don't try to control it.

Everyone has a different relationship with art and uses it in different ways and to different means. The question of purpose and intent is enduring and relevant. Art can serve so many different purposes, and the conversation about these possibilities continues. And our answers will continue to change, reflecting our world at each time in history, as it has until now.

ART

KATRÍN SIGURDARDÓTTIR'S SEQUENCE OF EXPERIENCE

By HANNAH MANDEL
Photography JEFF HENRIKSON

Katrín Sigurdardóttir's sculptures and installations redefine preconceptions surrounding architecture, history, and memory. Her work is defined by lack of presence: rooms without people or color, and interiors pared down to anonymous essentials that quietly exist as markers of the artist's specific memories. In 2003's Impasse II, for example, the artist recreated the façade of her childhood elementary school as a miniature. Without any specific reference to location, or details, the piece appears almost as an architectural study—its poetics only revealed upon the acquisition of background information.

Sigurdardóttir often employs exacting processes like cartography or architectural model making into her work, but the tension lies in the inexact nature of what she is rendering. In this way, Sigurdardóttir is less concerned with the language of architecture than with the architecture of language, with fluid nuances and room for reinterpretation and projection. In 2012's Stage, the artist displayed a miniature theater stage, suspended in an empty storefront and illuminated by a spotlight. It is this masterful control of information, which renders in viewers an empty hollowness, at once lovely and intriguing.

Currently based in New York, Sigurdardóttir will be representing Iceland at the 55th Venice Biennale, opening in June. It is a well-deserved honor for the artist, who has exhibited, lectured, and diligently and prolifically created at a diverse array of venues, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MoMA PS1, and Art in General.

We sat down with Sigurdardóttir to discuss her upcoming work in Venice, the role of the institution, and her thoughts on the Icelandic language of cultural production.

HANNAH MANDEL: What was it like finding out that you'd be representing Iceland in the Biennale? Was it a long process or was it more of a surprise?

KATRÍN SIGURDARDÓTTIR: It was both a surprise and not a surprise. That's something arrogant to say, but it was something I'd hoped for, for a long time, but nevertheless I was not prepared when I was told. Everything in my life has been sort of dedicated to this project from the moment I found out.

MANDEL: Are you excited about the other representatives this year, and the people that you'll be showing with?

SIGURDARDÓTTIR: Very much so, I believe I knew relatively early on. I was probably one of the early announcements, and it's been quite wonderful since then to find out little by little who the other representatives are. It's very joyful, because there are many other people that I know, that I've worked with.

MANDEL: Have you worked with either of the curators that you're working with before?

SIGURDARDÓTTIR: I've known both of them for a very long time. Mary [Ceruti] I have known since my days in San Francisco in the '90s—early '90s, late '80s. She was with Capp Street Projects, but I was not in the role of an artist then. I would often admire her work there. We sort of re-met in New York about maybe 10 years ago. We've never formally worked together, but we've always been in contact. She's followed my work and I've followed hers. Ilaria [Bonacossa] and I have worked together several times in Italy. Both of them are people who have been very much in my life over a long period of time. It's wonderful to have an opportunity to work with both of them. I'm Icelandic and I'm representing my country of birth, but Ilaria and Mary also represent my other origins, you could say.

MANDEL: I know that you had said that you had trained as a filmmaker. In a lot of work I see this reference to this kind of secondary or removed viewing process. I wonder if your background as a filmmaker and the idea that the camera can capture the set has influenced the way that you work, and view things.

SIGURDARDÓTTIR: I haven't thought of it this way, but I do think my two origins are from painting and filmmaking. In sculpture and sculptural installation, I think I'm very concerned with sequence of experience. In many works of art there is not a time element in how you take it in, but through navigation and interaction with the work, you are bound to experience things in sequence and over time. And it's very important what happens first and what happens next, in a similar way as it would be in film.

MANDEL: You mentioned your background as a painter. Can you tell me a little about your thoughts on using color and where that comes from?

SIGURDARDÓTTIR: When I was painting, and I still paint, I've always been very considered with the painting as an object. I think a lot about painting as a surface object. My sculpture always

deals a lot with surface. It usually has a very two-sided aspect to it, where you have one side, perhaps an illusionistic surface, and the other you have the structure that shows how this illusion is created. I don't think I use color in a very traditional or classical sense. I think I use color actually more as one could think that a sculptor uses color. I am more concerned with the living color of a material, usually. In this piece [for Venice], it's a little bit different because the surface that I've made is actually pigmented. I'm using natural pigments to make a color. When I use color, I'm very sparse. I use a lot of white and sometimes black, and when I use black I don't often think of it as black. I think of it as ink. I might use an inkwash that happens to be black, but the black isn't there to represent anything. Or the white is a reference to, say, a contemporary gallery space. The color is to represent not an emotion or a sensibility, but more a reference to something that exists. In this case I wanted to choose colors that would be kind of subdued but also on some level unexpected, in a way to abstract this surface that I am presenting.

MANDEL: What is very interesting about the way you work in relation to what I understand architecture to be is that architecture is based in fact, in math, in modeling, and a lot of the ideas that you're dealing with are based in something that's intangible, a memory. To create something exacting out of something that is abstract, is where this really interesting tension is. What do you think about the space between the replica and the reenactment? For example, in Impasse, was it important that the details were exactly right, or were you building from something you remembered?

SIGURDARDÓTTIR: I think maybe the premise of this whole reenactment of architectural drawing, or drafting, or cartography for that matter, has to do with choosing a language or form of representation that is concrete and unemotional. To try to present the opposite of what it is meant to handle, or contain. That's something that just kind of developed without me realizing it, but something I can't un-realize when I look at it. Let's say that the outcome of what I make often takes these quasi-scientific forms of representation. The way I produce them is also in certain opposition, because my methodology is not architectural or cartographical. It's very personal, and usually not like a workshop. Many artists who work with architecture, they work like architects in the sense that they have design, and then have a team of people that execute. I don't work like that in most instances. In this project, a little bit less so, but historically I don't work like that.

MANDEL: That was actually my next question—is the way you work similar to an architect, creating models and using software?

SIGURDARDÓTTIR: I've always been interested in the concrete, factual understanding of space and of function in space, but not necessarily to the same effect as an architect would. My drawing and my construction are never about solving functional problems. I'm interested in functionality, but I'm not interested in proposing functionality.

MANDEL: In looking at the places that you have shown work, it's so varied. Your work deals so much with space, with the architecture of the environment. It must be very different to show in a room at the Met, which is so infused with very specific history, versus showing in a "white cube" type space. In terms of Venice, is that something you're considering, with the history of the Biennale and Venice?

SIGURDARDÓTTIR: I think what I did at the Metropolitan Museum was very in the context of that environment, whereas the work that I'm doing in Venice is originally not in any sort of response to the Biennale, or to Venice, this incredible historical site. They're both museums, in a sense. This was really not the spark of the project, but this work inadvertently echoes the whole topography of Venice in some way. That's something I think is interesting and exciting, and I don't in any way try to control that experience of the work. As often is the case, when a work is started, there's a certain vision and intention, and when the work comes into being, when it comes into the world, it has brought with it aspects and qualities that one doesn't necessarily see in the beginning. In this way, I also don't work as a designer or architect often would, where there's this fully conceived model and it's executed. There's something that happens in the process, as when you paint a painting—you paint, and you look, and you paint, and you look—the creation is happening all along. I give the work a certain freedom to relate to its environment in this case.

MANDEL: You've lectured pretty extensively at different art schools and art institutions, and you went to the San Francisco Art Institute. As someone who is a working artist, what do you think the role of the art school right now is?

SIGURDARDÓTTIR: I think that the academic environment is extremely important. I think this is true in all professions. Most professions intersect with the market and the academy. People who are professional in any field often have a presence in the academic field through research and through sharing their excellence, or whatever, with students in an academic setting. I, as an artist and as a person, am a learner. When I'm an educator, I'm also a learner. It's hard to say what the role of an art school is, per se, but I don't

like to think of schools as a factory, where something goes in and something comes out. I like to think of it more as an open forum. It's a very important environment, no less so for artists that are not there to pursue a degree, but who are there to mediate or give back. During the time that I was making the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, I was also a professor at the Icelandic Academy of Arts. It's difficult to divide your time between a very large project like the show at the Met, and between my students, but I also know that being in that dialogue with my student was extremely giving and generous to me. It should never be underestimated, how generous an experience it is to work in that environment. So I didn't answer your question. [laughs]

MANDEL: I think that in expressing that you have faith in the role of the school, you did answer my question. I've read about people discussing how your work fits into the vernacular of Icelandic artists creating work. Can you tell me about what that vernacular is, or what you see it to be? I've read that you see Iceland as a very small country, and the idea that people have a very different idea of public and private space from the United States.

SIGURDARDÓTTIR: I think we who are part of this community of artists in Iceland, we are very much part of an international community. There are many particularities. One of them is the fact that we speak this language that about 300,000 people in the world speak. Visual art is wonderful because it's international. It's a language that's ours, but it's a language that we don't have to translate. I think there's a very strong literary tradition in Iceland, and a strong tradition of poetry. There's a very linguistic base to work that is made in Iceland, but it's linguistic without language itself, sometimes with the structure of the language, but it is depicted differently. I'm not very fond of trying to invent or pinpoint what Icelandic art is. I'm very proud to represent this community of artists, but I don't want that in any way to preclude us from being seen as part of a much larger community. We are all sort of dialoguing with each other through our eyes and through our experiences. There's not really a national boundary there. Most of us are showing internationally as well as in Iceland. I think what connects us is more the community itself than specific sensibilities.

MANDEL: For a country that's very small, there seems to be such a large creative community.

SIGURDARDÓTTIR: Thankfully, there's been an understanding that being very important. In order for us to define who we are as Icelandic, there are a lot of cultural productions needed. That's how we say who we are. I've been asked recently if my work is

really Icelandic, or that my particular work doesn't have a reference to Iceland, and I think that part of what artists do is that they help to define what it means to be a human being, what it means to be a human being in a particular place, what it means to be part of a certain community. We are the ones who give form to that. In literature, we are the ones who create this. I don't go to my work with the mission of telling people what it is to be Icelandic, or even what it means to be me, per se. That's not the motive of my work. But nevertheless, that's one of the results of an artist's work.

KATRÍN SIGURDARDÓTTIR WILL REPRESENT ICELAND IN THE VENICE BIENNALE STARTING JUNE 1, 2013.

TOP FLOOR

REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM, HAFNARHÚS.
January 24-April 13, 2014

BY **ÁSTA ANDRÉSDÓTTIR**

In her work, Icelandic artist Katrín Sigurðardóttir (b. 1967) often works with miniaturized versions of real or imaginary places, which take the viewer by surprise. From January to April, her artwork *Foundation*, Iceland's contribution to the 2013 Venice Biennale, will be on display at the Reykjavík Art Museum. This large-scale installation comprises a raised floor which extends beyond the walls of the exhibition space. Hand-made tiles form intricate patterns in the Baroque style on the surface of the platform; visitors can step up onto it and walk around on it. According to Katrín, this work is about drawing. "It's about labor, and it's about spatial immersion. I wanted to create a work that could be entered from different points, navigated in multiple ways, and viewed from several levels, so that the visitor is both in the work and at the same time able to observe him/herself in the work. This work is both new and familiar, familiar in that it will key into a twofold perception—to experience and concurrently observe oneself experiencing—a kind of existential trickery that I have played with in previous works. It is new in that it's my first full-scale architectural interpretation."

The New York Times

Art Review

Period Rooms Take on a Modern Gloss

Tina Fineberg for The New York Times

"Katrin Sigurdardottir at the Met": the artist has created a pair of fanciful, quasi-architectural constructions based on two of the museum's French period rooms. Above, her all-white Hôtel de Cabris room.

By KEN JOHNSON
Published: October 28, 2010

They have their charms, but the 18th-century period rooms at the Metropolitan Museum of Art are not the first place visitors are likely to go. Stocked with antiques that barriers prevent you from studying up close and dimly lighted in the interest of historical authenticity, they may be invaluable for decorative-arts wonks, but they can't compete for popularity with the Impressionist and Ancient Egyptian galleries.

The sculptor Katrin Sigurdardottir, an Icelander who lives and works in New York, evidently thinks otherwise. The latest in a series of midcareer contemporary artists to have solo shows at the Met, Ms. Sigurdardottir has created a pair of fanciful, quasi-architectural constructions — follies, you might say — inspired by two of the museum's French period rooms. Called "Boiseries," one is from the Hôtel de Crillon (1777-80) and the other from the Hôtel de Cabris (circa 1774). Both are Neo-Classical-style interiors with elaborately carved, painted and gilded walls and period-appropriate furniture.

Ms. Sigurdardottir's constructions are all-white abstractions of their models, made with exacting craft yet simplified details, like three-dimensional cartoons. They have a fine formal economy, but they are most interesting for their conceptual suggestiveness.

In the north mezzanine gallery of the Met's modern and contemporary wing stands a kind of elongated folding screen of 82 conjoined, snow-white panels with skewed top edges. They have moldings, floral reliefs, doors and window frames based on those of the Hôtel de Cabris's salon. The panels curve in a spiral arc ending in an S-shape, and they diminish in size in jagged increments from 8 feet to just 12 inches. Mirrors built into many of the panels further complicate the experience. It could be a set for a Modernist Alice in Wonderland ballet. Many of the panels have hinged doors, the smallest about right for a white rabbit.

The south mezzanine is occupied by an octagonal chamber. Inside are all-white replicas of the original room's furniture from the Hôtel de Crillon, including chairs, a love seat and a desk with a tilted mirror on top. As is often the case with period rooms, you cannot go into this one, but you can look in through windows; because everything is white inside, it has a dreamy, glowing appearance, as if it were the ghost of the room it copies.

What you may not notice at first is that you cannot see out through the windows built into other walls of the room. They are not ordinary windows but one-way mirrors, which, viewed from certain angles, reflect one another into infinity.

What, besides cleverly revising the old interior designs, might Ms. Sigurdardottir's constructions mean? First we should take into account that the rooms she selected belong to the era of the French Enlightenment, a time when science, philosophy and other intellectual disciplines cleansed themselves of superstition and religion and opened up to pure reason. Hence the uncontaminated whiteness of Ms. Sigurdardottir's rooms. (The designer of the Hôtel de Crillon boudoir, Pierre-Adrien Paris, was a well-known architect with connections both to the king and to some of the most radical Enlightenment luminaries.)

You might think of the enclosed boudoir as a model of Enlightenment-style consciousness in which the mind, turning in on itself, reflects on its own nature and its epistemological capabilities. That is what thinkers like Descartes and Kant did. Kant concluded that you cannot know reality as it is in and of itself — naked, as it were. We perceive what impinges on us with our senses, which transform incoming information into neurological signals. The brain somehow clothes these signals in visual impressions, sound, taste, feeling and smell, which the mind organizes into an apparently coherent world. We live in a vale of illusions produced by our own brains.

But not everyone believes that so-called mind-independent reality is so inscrutable. Ms. Sigurdardottir's spiral construction, with its multiple portals, calls to mind something that William Blake wrote in 1790: "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern."

The spiral, by the way, is a common symbol of spiritual progress — the soul's path as it travels in ever-widening circles, expanding its consciousness. But then, the doors in Ms. Sigurdardottir's spiral don't lead anywhere. If you pass through one, you find yourself on the other side of the facade, which turns out to be unpainted particle board. The outside of the enclosed boudoir is raw particle board, too.

Revealing the artifice in this way is a modern, pragmatic move; it is as if to say that the world is whatever we make of it. We are its constructors; there is no higher agency — divine, supernatural or otherwise — to be held accountable.

"Katrin Sigurdardottir at the Met" is on view through March 6 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; (212) 535-7710, met.org.

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

KATRIN SIGURDARDOTTIR AT THE MET

A pair of site-specific installations by the whip-smart Icelandic artist are based on two of the Met's period rooms—a French eighteenth-century salon and boudoir—and constructed from white-painted panels with exteriors of unadorned plywood. The salon has been recast as a decorative folding screen, whose sections grow smaller as it unfurls; viewers may feel as discombobulated as Alice after eating the cake. By contrast, the boudoir is seen in the round and hermetically sealed. One-way mirrors provide glimpses into the space; if there are people on the other side, they don't register, lending the experience a sense of ghostly isolation and underscoring the detached privilege of the Ancien Règime that led to the French Revolution—and the birth of the modern age. Through May 30.

October 19 – May 30
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St., New York, N.Y.
212-535-7710
metmuseum.org

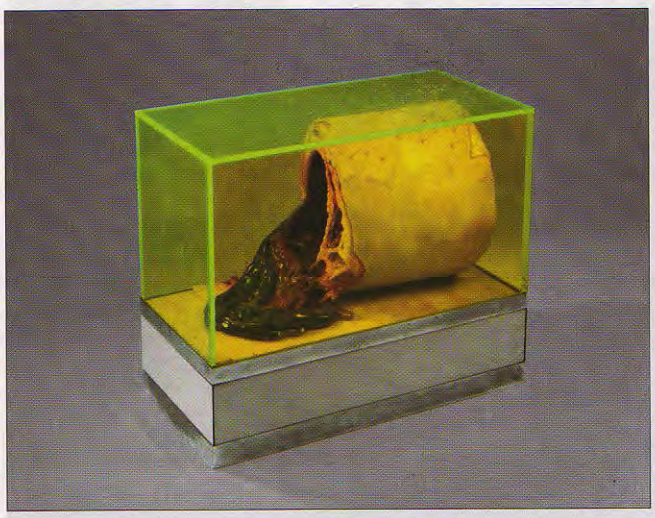
Paul Thek

Whitney Museum

"Diver" was Paul Thek's first major retrospective. Born in 1933, Thek was a painter, sculptor, and installation artist with a singular point of view. He wanted to inject a more visceral reality—"the ugly side of things"—into an art scene that to him was too Minimalist. Celebrated in the 1960s, he fled to Europe in 1967 for an itinerant life and was all but forgotten by the time he returned to New York in 1988, when he was dying of AIDS. He was never particularly sought after again, although in Europe his reputation remained high.

Early sculptures here included the series "Technological Reliquaries"—unsavory hyperreal wax and resin casts of meat and of the artist's body parts displayed in vitrines. These were followed by *The Tomb—Death of a Hippie* (1967), Thek's most notorious piece. The work, of which little is left except photos by Peter Hujar, is a pink, full-size cast of the artist lying naked inside a pink wood pyramid.

The influential, extravagant, ephemeral, process-driven environments-cum-performances of his European years have not aged well, and the curators did not try to re-create them, showing remnants instead. One complete installation, *The Personal Effects of the Pied Piper* (1975–76), featured several lovely small bronze sculptures that included a campfire, a bowl, and a loaf of bread resting on a carpet.



Paul Thek, *Untitled*, 1966, wax, paint, polyester resin, nylon monofilament, wire, plaster, plywood, melamine laminate, rhodium-plated bronze, and Plexiglas, 14" x 15⅛" x 7½". Whitney Museum.

Another magical object here was a luminous painted glass globe—an alternative, miniaturized world. Many of the paintings were small and childlike, including lyrical blue seascapes and the affecting divers of the show's title. A late painting of a clock with hands almost at 12, as if time were nearly up, was prophetic. Inexpressively poignant, a poetics of death, the show itself seemed to be a fragile, immersive environment, part reliquary, part magical thinking. ***—Lilly Wei***

Katrín Sigurdardóttir, *Boiserie*, 2010, mixed media, installation view. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

UP NOW

Katrín Sigurdardóttir

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Through March 6

Icelandic artist Katrín Sigurdardóttir has always been preoccupied with scale and the way any variations in it set off a reverberating sequence of perceptual and cognitive shifts. Her latest project, *Boiseries*, part of the Met's notable exhibition series devoted to midcareer artists, is an elaborate, intensively worked (part handcrafted, part laser-cut), and extremely elegant take on two of the museum's famous period rooms. The south mezzanine gallery houses her almost-to-scale reprise in wood of a boudoir in the 18th-century Hôtel de Crillon, complete with detailed replications of the rich carvings, gilding, and furniture, including the chairs, cabinets, and chandelier.

It's an enclosed space that the viewer circumnavigates, peering in through a number of windows hung with one-way mirrors, suggesting voyeurism as a kind of surveillance. The presence of the viewer is never acknowledged; the interior mirrors reflect just the sealed room, ad infinitum, accessible to eyes only. To remind us of its fictive nature—which is its reality—everything inside is white, bleached. The raw particleboard exterior conjures packing crates and the back of stage sets.

The second room, in the north gallery, from the Hôtel de Cabris, is its opposite. An open construct, the piece, which consists of a series of unfolded panels, most resembles a theater set. However, it diminishes in size to dollhouse proportions as it spirals around, as if it were a perspectival drawing or something seen through a Lewis Carroll looking glass.

While Sigurdardóttir's installations force us to ponder the boundaries between reality and illusion, being and nothingness, they can also be appreciated for their obsessive formality, which is anything but cool, and, at their best, the works are visually irresistible.

—Lilly Wei

Luc Tuymans

David Zwirner

In his nondescript, subtly political canvases Belgian artist Luc Tuymans explores Europe's unsavory past—Belgium's colonial history in the Congo (King Leopold's exploitation, Lumumba's

ARTFORUM

Katrin Sigurdardottir

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
1000 Fifth Avenue at 82nd Street
October 19–March 6

Katrin Sigurdardottir, *Boiserie* (detail), 2010, mixed media, dimensions variable. Installation view.

There is something magical happening in Katrin Sigurdardottir's work, where architectural scale and space are re-presented as if Alice has returned from Wonderland, bringing evidence of a world full of alternative interiors. Sigurdardottir uses as source material the eighteenth-century French polyhedral boudoir from the Hôtel de Crillon, as well as another space from the Hôtel de Cabris—now period rooms installed and preserved in the Wrightsman Galleries at the Met. Location is key. Sigurdardottir plays with the relationship of the "original" rooms to their displaced versions.

The show consists of two sculptural installations that expand the idea of a room. The works, made in 2010, are both titled *Boiserie*—French for wood paneling, the material that serves as a primary building block for the sculptures. They occupy two separate galleries, at a distance from the period rooms they reference. Their placement investigates how we recall and connect things we see within the museum environment. In the first work, Sigurdardottir eliminates all color, pattern, and texture, producing a white-on-white space not unlike Rauschenberg's "White Paintings" of 1951, in that both are reduced to the most basic formal elements. The second sculpture takes on a different sensibility than the period room inspiring it by inducing a heightened sense of space and form. The varying shades of white are broken up by stark negative space and, more significant, are countered by the greenish one-way glass through which visitors peer to see the work. Here, the question of what is viewed—and indeed, the act of viewing itself—are surely under surveillance.

— Kathleen Madden

Open Doors

Katrín Sigurdardóttir's Boiseries

Artist Katrín Sigurdardóttir addresses the way we look at architecture and the history of interior design in her current exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. It's also an opportunity to reflect on the museum's impossible task of putting time on ice.

text MARKÚS THÓR ANDRÉSSON
photos BRUCE SCHWARZ, THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Boiserie, the north (images top, above and previous spread) **and the south mezzanine gallery installation** (right image and both images facing page)

In Katrín Sigurdardóttir's double work entitled 'Boiseries', installations in separate galleries are based on period rooms that are on display elsewhere in the Metropolitan Museum. The original 18th-century French rooms are preserved down to the slightest detail as total works of art in neoclassical style with elegant and ornate walls, mirrors, textiles and furniture. Sigurdardóttir examined these rooms and creates meticulous imitations of them, replacing the original handcrafted wooden elements (the term boiserie stands for wood panelling) and the gilded décor with fibreboard, furniture and props – all in immaculate white. At the same time she complicates the notion of inside and outside that is evidently already at play in a museum display of historic rooms.

Disorted Dimensions

Approaching one of the works, you find yourself backstage, so to speak, facing the unpainted wooden structure behind an inaccessible facade that is on the other side. In there everything is white, a ghostly stage set that is sealed off from all sides. You can look inside through a few windows and realise that they are in fact surveillance mirrors, so you can only see the room and the reflections in other one-way mirrors. The space is small but dimensions get distorted in the endless mirroring effect. The notion of time is haunting in this work, where a precise historic style is made timeless by rendering it devoid of life and colour. The film set of Stanley Kubrick's '2001: A Space Odyssey' comes to mind, where towards the end the protagonist enters a time machine of sorts, set in a bright neoclassical space, where he sees himself in different ages of life. Here, Sigurdardóttir suggests a dialogue not only with time but also with place and memory.

The second work is similar in its painstaking attention to detail. Composed of numerous panels of different sizes and shapes that are all joined together on the sides, it spirals around the space so you can experience it from both sides. Again, only one side is made to resemble the period room but the other side is raw. The panels support each other in a zigzag installation, some have doors and others windows or mirrors. The size of the panels differs as they are systematically scaled anywhere from 1:1 proportion with the original boiserie, down to the miniature size of a dollhouse. As a viewer you wander from the side of the white, decorative facade to the unfinished backside and experience the work in different scale - either as your physical surroundings or as a model seen from above. Your sense of place is challenged and again time creeps in through the symbolic play with scale, as the room appears to gradually diminish in the distance and the detailed décor becomes obscured.

The Flow of History

As often before in the work of Sigurdardóttir, she constructs a parallel to a reality that either exists in another place or did so in another time. She has examined the changes that occur as a viewer takes a geographic, temporal or physical distance from an architectural or landscape environment. Openly playing with reconstructions of real or imagined places, she shows us the structure 'behind' a work or deploys easily recognisable supplies from the hardware store or the world of arts and craft. She furthermore often refers to theatre and adds to her work the element of the fourth wall, where the reality of the audience and the fiction of the stage begin to blur. In her exhibition at the Met, Sigurdardóttir not only addresses the particular rooms in question but the whole institution around them. Her exhibition is the seventh in the Metropolitan's series of solo exhibitions of the work of contemporary artists at mid-career. She takes the opportunity to reflect on the museum's impossible task of freezing time and playfully turns the boiseries themselves to ice. By confronting the inherent dilemma of all museological practice - that in order to preserve the flow of history one needs to halt it - Sigurdardóttir points to an ongoing debate within the arts as well as inwards, to the challenge of our own longing to remember and be remembered. #

Katrín Sigurdardóttir
in her installation 'Boiserie', (top)
in the south mezzanine gallery
at the Met

Katrín Sigurdardóttir at the Met until 6 March 2011
www.metmuseum.org

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

ArtSeen Next Section » Next Article ›

KATRIN SIGURDARDOTTIR at the Met

by Michael Straus

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
OCTOBER 19, 2010 – MAY 30, 2011

Katrin Sigurdardottir. "Boiserie (detail)", 2010. Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Bruce Schwarz, The Photograph Studio, ©The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Katrin Sigurdardottir's current solo exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art is part of the museum's continuing series featuring the work of contemporary artists at mid-career—others in the series include Tara Donovan and Kara Walker. The exhibition, up through May 30, 2011, and curated by Anne Strauss, in fact consists of two installations, both riffs on 18th century wood-paneled rooms (known as "boiseries"), formerly part of private homes (well, palaces) in Paris, and now preserved as part of the Met's Wrightsman Galleries. Sigurdardottir is well-known for a signature series of hand-crafted wooden boxes that unlock and fully unfold to reveal miniature, railroad-style landscapes that are deliberately elusive as to their source or location. It remains unclear what about the landscapes is real and what is imagined. These boxes are generally shipped around the world by the artist and her galleries as traveling works, with the resulting postal labels forming part of the art and adding yet another element to these memory landscapes. In other works, such as her solo installation at P.S.1, where she built an elevated plane with cut-outs to which viewers ascended on ladders to gaze on what appeared to be a vista of icebergs (in fact, polystyrene forms), she toyed with our perception of space, location, materials, and memory, mixing things outside with things inside and natural forms with constructed ones.

In her current show, she goes further, creating works that find unexpected relationships within and among the varied historical periods and media embraced by the Met's vast holdings. The intent is to elaborate on our memories of the works we encounter as we journey through the museum.

Katrin Sigurdardottir. "Boiserie (detail)", 2010. Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Bruce Schwarz, The Photograph Studio, ©The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The first of the two *Boiseries* confronts us with a room within a room, a construction we walk around within a larger and otherwise empty gallery space, fenestrated on all sides with one-way mirrors that allow us to peer and spy on a smaller-than-scale paneled room based on one of the museum's period rooms. This replica of sorts differs from the original not only in scale but in its abstraction of form. Whereas the period room is gilt and otherwise elaborated with color and fabric, Sigurdardottir reworks its elements in an intense and pure white, creating a snowy interior landscape. Thus, the furniture, carefully replicated by the artist and a local craftsman, recalls, without duplicating, their 18th century models. Our status as outsiders peering in is enhanced by the one-way mirrors through which we look, our presences eradicated in the mirrors across the room. The emptiness of the room, removed from the present, allows us to move imaginatively from the past to the present and back again.

Now I have to admit that, before seeing this show, I had not visited the original period rooms in the Wrightsman Galleries, or, if I had, they made no impression on my memory. But one of the revelations one experiences through the *Boiseries* is in fact how elegant and dreamy the original rooms are. I suggest that they are best seen *after* viewing the contemporary interpretations, because the latter's purification of the period rooms ends up breathing new life into them. I then found it much more difficult to classify the one installation as "sculpture" and the other as "decorative design" or "architecture"; rather, Sigurdardottir has not only brought together viewer and viewed as we move in or around her conceptualization of the antique French spaces, but she has also imported an often overlooked unity between what is "contemporary" and what is "historical" and, in the end, between the real and the imaginary.

The second *Boiserie* elaborates still further on these relationships. Rather than place us outside the paneled room, as in the first installation, Sigurdardottir invites us to walk in and around a spiraling and folded screen-like construction in which the paneling from another of the 18th century rooms has been replicated as linked sections of continually decreasing size, all set at angles to one another, with the sections themselves angled to indicate perspective. One starts out at a life-size panel at the beginning and ends up at a tiny, *Alice in Wonderland* doorway. The best indication of this work's success is to see how visiting children immediately swirl around with its flow and quickly lie down on the floor, looking through the pint-sized windows and doors. The constructed spiral itself is, of course, a primal form, and while it is hard to avoid thinking of Smithson's "Spiral Jetty" as one among many art historical references, the essential form evokes galaxies and watch springs, as well—forms that themselves ebb and flow with visual energy. In short, *Boiseries* is simply one of those rare and magical sculptural installations that freely includes the viewer both in its space and its movement through time.

The Current / A Journal of Contemporary Politics, Cultural, & Jewish Affairs

Leaving the Door Open: Participation and Contemporary Art

in ESSAYS Tags: featured , Sophia Merkin — February 16, 2011 at 7:13 pm | 0 comments

This past August, Gary Tinterow, Chief Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, spoke to ARTINFO's magazine about his plans to widen the department's sphere of influence. Highlighting the importance of the museum's contemporary collection, Tinterow referred to a new initiative that " 'invites younger artists to engage with the collection.' " According to Tinterow, such artists " 'enliven our program by throwing a novel perspective on the collection of the museum and our public.' " This program has taken many forms, including an exhibition by artist Kara Walker in 2006 and, most recently, an installation by the little-known Icelandic artist Katrin Sigurdardottir.

Tinterow's goals may have overshot so small and ill-advertised an initiative, but in fact Ms. Sigurdardottir's installation, entitled *Boiseries*—French for "wood paneling"—is an incredibly deft and nimble interpretation of two classic pieces from the Met's collection. The first part of the installation is a reinterpretation of an eighteenth-century boudoir from the Hôtel de Crillon, which in its heyday stood in Paris's renowned Place de la Concorde. The original has been reassembled in the Met's famous Wrightsman Galleries of the Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts. Sigurdardottir's version of this highly frilled and flounced chamber, however, stands in stark contrast to the heavily ornamented original. The first of Sigurdardottir's two boiseries, located in the Lila Acheson Wallace south mezzanine gallery, looks from the outside like a massive, room-sized wooden box. As the visitor approaches, it becomes clear that this polyhedron contains within it an all-white, life-sized, and inherently untouchable recreation of a Crillon hotel room. Several windows allow viewers to peer into the room, yet the glass in the windowpanes is transparent on only one side. Within the boiserie they serve as mirrors, merely reflecting the ornate woodwork and furnishings within the room. This makes the room impossible to see in its entirety at once. It is an icy, distant room, literally and physically removed from the viewer by a wooden wall. The disorienting windows-cum-mirrors cast aspersions on what they reflect. Perhaps the interior is simply a case of trompe l'oeil, a visual trick played on the visitor by Sigurdardottir.

The second boiserie is a different story. Within the north mezzanine stands the recreated walls of an eighteenth-century saloon from the Hôtel de Cabris in Grasse, Provence (like the first boiserie, the second's original is also located in the Wrightsman Galleries). By reproducing the ornately chiseled walls and opening them up, Sigurdardottir creates a massive screen-like effect where the walls and

their angled ceilings become smaller and smaller as they curve around the periphery of the gallery. Like the first boiserie, the woodwork in this second half of the installation is beautiful and intricately carved, and doors to each wall are flung wide open on their hinges.

Ultimately, this second room provides a beautiful counterpart to the first room and makes *Boiseries* as a whole a meaningful and seamless work of art. To be sure, *Boiseries* is not for everyone; I saw several museum visitors peek their heads into the opened-up walls, cursorily glance around, and continue on toward another Warhol self-portrait. Frustrating though this may be, it is also understandable. Contemporary art is complex and often far from welcoming. Yet Sigurdardottir's installation serves as a corrective for precisely this difficulty. One can view contemporary art through the frustrating lens of the white cube: impossible to penetrate and forbidding, not unlike the first of the two boiseries. However, if you have patience, you will find with the second boiserie a wonderland quite literally opened up for you, ripe for exploration.

Sigurdardottir is hardly the first contemporary artist to extol the virtues and necessity of a more democratic, populist art form. Many other examples exist, yet perhaps none has been tested more recently than Chinese artist Ai Wei Wei's installation *Sunflower Seeds* at London's Tate Modern gallery. In this show, currently on display at the museum's renowned Turbine Hall, Wei Wei commissioned the creation of one hundred million individually hand-painted porcelain sunflower seeds from a small town in China called Jingdezhen. A stirring and stunning commentary on globalization and consumption, *Sunflower Seeds* opens itself to myriad interpretations. It originally envisioned a level of audience participation not often seen in traditional sculpture: Wei Wei wanted visitors to walk over the seeds, to play in them, to touch them, to interact with them. However, not long into its premier, workers at the Tate noticed a cloud of dust emitting from the seeds as visitors crunched through them. The installation has since been roped off, now merely a visual spectacle.

In this respect, *Sunflower Seeds* reflects the lingering tension within *Boiseries*: the former went from the open and inviting nature of *Boiseries*' second room to the removed and distant version of the first with none of the redemptive qualities of its welcoming foil. To be sure, many critics have been quick to say that *Sunflower Seeds* has lost none of its cultural and artistic resonance. *The Guardian*'s art critic Laura Cummings, for example, claims that it is just as important and skilled a work of art as its original incarnation. But Cummings is wrong. Yes, it is still beautiful, and it is still an "important" work of art—as opaque and loathsome a label it can be—yet *Sunflower Seeds* loses an inexpressible something when it relinquishes its direct interaction with its audience. The placement of an artwork that attempts to sever boundaries behind a velvet rope can hardly be anything but detrimental.

On my way out of the Met, I stopped at the Wrightsman Galleries to look at the original Hôtel de Crillon and Hôtel de Cabris rooms, the sumptuously decorated and richly hued ancestors of the boiseries. They are beautiful examples of eighteenth-century French design at its best. In their original manifestations, they were utilized as social halls, rooms for people to come together, yet as they stand now, they are vacuums of human interaction. I stood briefly and carefully behind the glass partition, snapped a few pictures, and left the museum.

SOPHIA MERKIN, CC '11, is the Literary and Arts Editor of The Current. She can be reached at sam2192@columbia.edu.

Tags: featured Sophia Merkin

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S · M · T · W · T · F · S

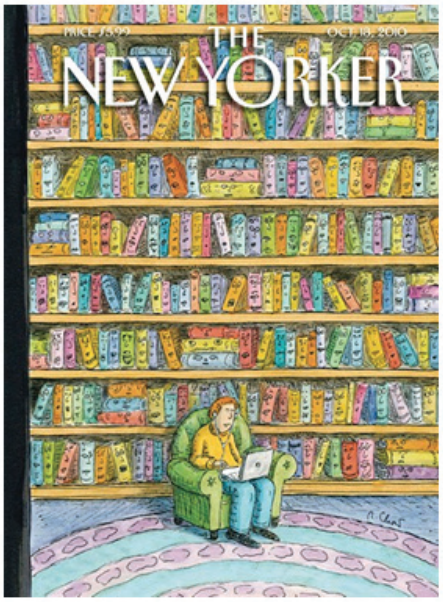
17 | 18 | 19 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16

ART

ROOM MATES

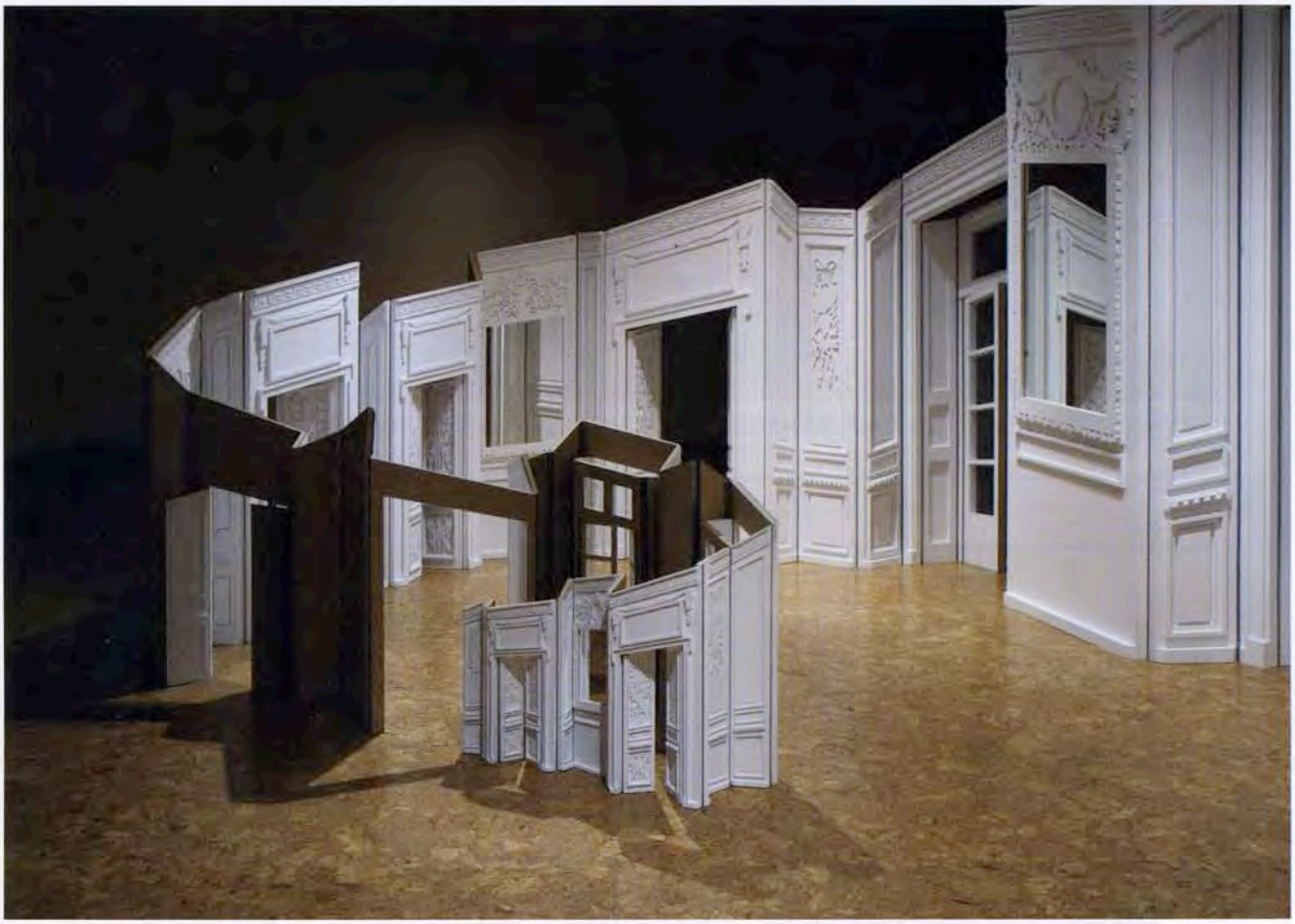
The Icelandic artist Katrin Sigurdardottir, inspired by two eighteenth-century French period rooms at the Met—one from the Hôtel de Crillon, in Paris, and one from the Hôtel de Cabris, in Provence—has created a pair of site-specific sculptural installations at the museum. (See page 11.)

October 16, 2010



Making It New

TWO OF THE MET'S PERIOD ROOMS GET A CONTEMPORARY REIMAGINING.



This page and opposite: Katrin Sigurdardottir, *Boiserie*, 2010 (in the north mezzanine gallery of the Metropolitan Museum of Art).

KATRIN SIGURDARDOTTIR, an artist born in Iceland in 1967, stands in one of her two installations in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, aptly titled *Boiserie*, meaning "decorative paneling." What seems like a Japanese-style screen stolen from the set of an *Alice in Wonderland* film adaptation wraps around her. This screen is really a reinterpretation of the Hôtel de Cabris period room in the museum's Wrightsman Galleries, a 1774 relic from Grasse, in Provence, with distinctive paneling carved, painted and gilded in Paris.

Sigurdardottir, who is the seventh artist to participate in the Met's series of solo exhibitions featuring the work of mid-career contemporary artists, is explaining the inspiration for her dazzling installations (on view through March 6). "This museum is so much about connecting with the past. Here, there are two convergent spaces, the one you are really in and the one you remember. This is a common thread running through my work, one that I identify with—I was born in another country than I live in." For the mix of tourists, day-trippers and transplants lucky enough to hear the artist (a New York City transplant herself) discuss her work, this statement is greeted with "oohs," "ahhs" and nods of

agreement—evidently they, too, have come to the Met to find both a window on the past and a new vision of the present.

This site-specific installation in the museum's northern mezzanine gallery is a chain of 82 stark white panels connected by hinges. Each panel is at a different scale—beginning with 100 percent at its opening gate (where the panel reaches to the eight-foot ceiling), and slowly decreasing to around 12.5 percent scale (just 12 inches) as it winds around the room. Sigurdardottir describes it as a "very mathematical work." The panels are adorned with the same intricate patterns as those in the room in Grasse—smoking incense burners, laurel sprays and torches. However, the artist has rendered the bronze-gilt filigree in pure white using a literally cutting-edge technology in which computer-guided blades incise the patterns in pieces of fiberboard that are then applied to the panels in three layers.

Sigurdardottir has added hinged doors and window frames to mimic those of the Hôtel de Cabris, but it is the mirrors implanted in some of the panels that elicit an immediate response from the museum group. Each visitor can see herself and her fellow observers clearly inside the space—something that the Met's roped-off, barely-lit period rooms could never permit. The installation sympathizes with the child-like urge to cross the velvet barricade, observe the furnishings in the round, tread on the

delicate textiles and generally party like it's 1774. The project is a meditation on "inclusion and immersion," Sigurdardottir says. "This room permits access, but with every step the scale changes and your spatial relationship changes and becomes problematic."

In the artist's other installation, situated in the middle of the Lila Acheson Wallace Wing's south mezzanine gallery, the viewer is conspicuously absent. Inspired by an angular compartment in the Hôtel de Crillon on the Place de la Concorde in Paris (1777–80), Sigurdardottir has constructed a completely enclosed white room that is accessible to the viewer only through windows. The windows are really one-way mirrors, infinitely regressing into a pristine oblivion.

The room is 85 percent scale to the Met's original. "This is the proportion of first-grade furniture," jokes Sigurdardottir,

Above: *Boiserie* (south mezzanine). Below: The Crillon Room, Paris, 1777–80, in the Met's Wrightsman Galleries for French Decorative Arts.

COURTESY KATRÍN SIGURDARDÓTTIR. PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRUCE SCHWARTZ. COPYRIGHT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

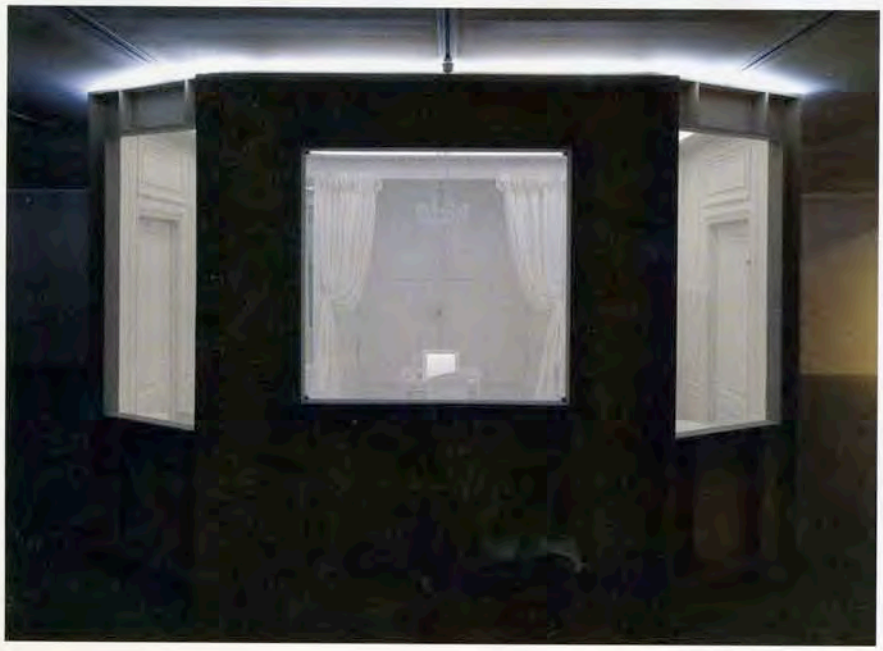
"but my intention was not for a child-like world." The ornate details of the room's Neoclassical furniture are rendered perfectly in snowflake white. Sigurdardottir explains that her decision to replace the Hôtel de Crillon's powdery pastels and vibrantly fecund chains of decorative flowers with white was based on her need to establish the work's sense of modernity. "Everything in the room is so ornate. But even if this work references a historical period, it's still a contemporary work and environment," she says. "A contemporary art space is bare and white, and I wanted to relate this to a contemporary area for art."

The installation is as tall as the ceiling, and fluorescent lights line the tops of its walls. The light tumbles faintly into the otherwise dim exhibition space, creating the illusion of a glowing mosquito-lamp at dusk off a summerhouse's deck. Sigurdardottir elucidates the effect: "You can notice

Boiserie (south mezzanine). Below: The Cabris Room, Paris, 1774, with later additions, in the Wrightsman Galleries.

COURTESY KATRIN SIGURDARDOTTIR. PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRUCE SCHWARTZ. COPYRIGHT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Above: *Boiserie* (north mezzanine). Below: *Boiserie* (south mezzanine).



how we are directed by the lighting in a museum—we look towards the light. But these fluorescent lights are very flat and dead. There's nothing natural about them, and looking in the room, we really have no sense of day or night."

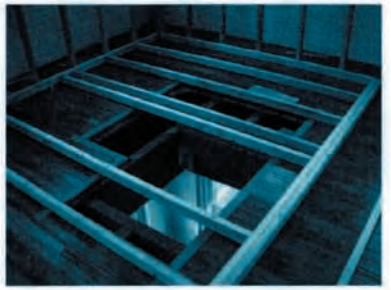
As the group prepares to scatter, the artist imparts a final thought: "There's a longing to want to go into this beautiful space. We think it's real and want to go in, but then we realize that we can't—it's a singular world, and there is nothing before or after it." While we know or can at least imagine the sparkling pasts of the Met's period rooms, their present fate, beautiful as they are, is to collect dust and be seen from far away. With her installations, Sigurdardottir has breathed new life into at least two of them. And until March 6, everything old is new—and white, and mathematically manipulated to an enlarged or shrunken scale—again. —SARAH E. FENSOM

P.S.1 MoMA

P.S.1 ARCHIVES: GORDON MATTA-CLARK

Katrín Sigurdardóttir's site-specific installation *High Plane V* required architectural and structural modification not unknown to P.S.1's corner galleries. For P.S.1's 1976 inaugural exhibition *Rooms*, Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-78) modified the corner galleries in a similar manner by cutting into the floor and ceiling of the third, second, and first floors, creating *Doors, Floors, Doors*. Gordon Matta-Clark was known for site-specific works involving dramatic physical changes to architectural spaces. For example, an earlier work, *Splitting* (1974), literally cut through the middle of a house, splitting it in two.

Caitlin Kerker Mennen



Installation of *High Plane V* in progress. Photos: Jenny Louise Hamblett., Beatrice Johnson and Caitlin Kerker-Mennen.

Katrín Sigurdardóttir: Small Wonder

BY ELNA SVENLE

Contemporary artists such as Tom Friedman, Jeffrey Vallance, and Charles LeDray have all embraced the miniature—yet few allow it to dominate their practice as fully as Katrín Sigurdardóttir. In sculptural presentations inspired by visited or imagined places, she employs this minute form to address notions of memory, time, travel, and place. The *Green Grass of Home* (1998) consists of a small crate containing representations of public parks in San Francisco, Reykjavik, New York, and Berkeley; in *Model* (1998-2000) a toy-sized highway crisscrosses the wall and floor of the gallery; in *High Plane* (2001-06), presented in its fifth iteration at P.S.1, mountains the size of sugar loaves generate an icescape akin to Arctic topography.

Small-scale art has a long history. In 16th-century Europe, miniature portraits emerged as a popular practice, often commissioned by noblemen wanting to introduce their daughters to long distance suitors, or sailors and soldiers craving a souvenir of their loved ones while far away. Miniature portraits remained prevalent until the mid-19th century when they were gradually replaced by the faster and more economical daguerreotypes and later by photographs.

In the history of Modern art, small expressions have often been overshadowed by the grandiose, such as the huge canvases of Jackson Pollock and fellow Abstract Expressionists or the gargantuan land art projects by Robert Smithson or Walter De Maria. Alongside there have been a number of prominent explorations of the minute: the Russian Constructivists' maquette-like objects; Alexander Calder's traveling *Circus* (1926-31), which frequently crossed the Atlantic in his suitcase; Alberto Giacometti's delicate wood stage *The Palace at 4 AM* (1932); Marcel Duchamp's various *Box in a Valise* (1941/66), containing miniature reproductions of his most significant works; and Joel Shapiro's dollhouse-size sculptures from the 1970s exhibited strategically on the floor of the gallery space.

The small artwork evokes memories, echoing the many miniatures of childhood: the Barbie palace, the Lego fortress, or the Marklin railway. The fantasies animated by toys—as well as by scaled-down artworks—create isolated and more detailed environments, enabling the mind to wander effortlessly. Engaging in a small painting or installation cuts one off from the normal experience of time, the reduction in scale skewing one's perception of duration. In a study carried out by the School of Architecture at the University of Tennessee, the subjects were asked to spend time with scale-models of human habitats in three different sizes: 1/6, 1/12, and 1/24. They were asked to move around the figures and come up with activities for the specific spaces. The subjects were then to report when they believed they had taken part of the exercise for 30 minutes. Their answers showed remarkable results: the experience of time shrunk in accordance to the diminished scale of the model.[1]

The miniature begs to be scrutinized, and with close investigation the vast difference in scale between the real world and the world of the miniature gradually shrinks. The miniature also changes one's perception of the context in which it is presented. In the case of Katrín Sigurdardóttir's *High Plane V* (2006), the viewer's head is turned into that of a giant. The reduced scale of the ice landscape automatically imposes a reevaluation of the size of the surroundings, making one believe that the room-sized icescape stretches into infinity. The perception of time spent in the work might also be influenced by its size, and, as with many of Sigurdardóttir's miniatures, one feels as if they awaken memories of places visited or seen, even though they might primarily echo the games played as a child.

[1] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham and London: Duke University Press (1993), p 66.

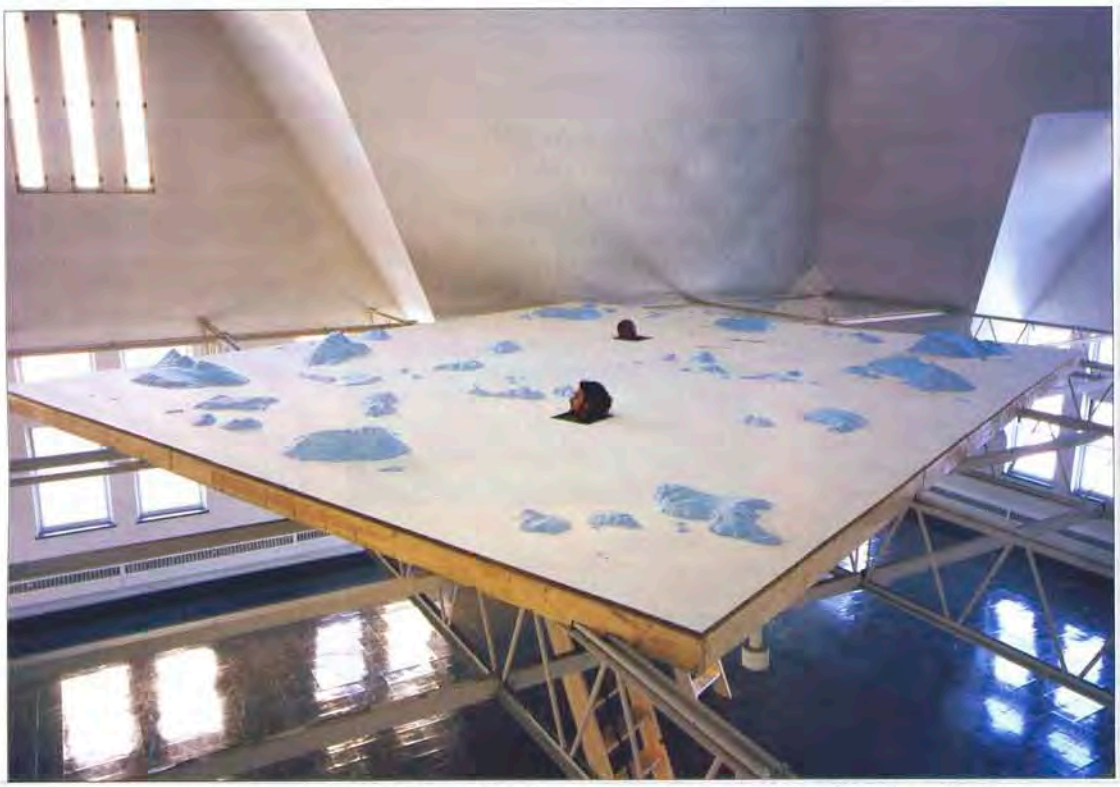
THE NEW YORKER
GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

Published December 4, 2006

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—Entering **"High Plane V"** by Katrín Sigurdardóttir, one encounters a pair of ladders in an empty, sunlit room. Windows on two walls of the former public-school classroom survey a Long Island City panorama, but the viewer is invited to turn away, climb the narrow steps, and stick his or her head into a hole in the ceiling. Like Alice or Gulliver, the voyager emerges in another world—a cool, totally enclosed, patently false and yet oddly convincing landscape of ice and snow. Radically out of scale but strangely familiar, the model vista feels expansive and remote—until another head pops up through the second hole. Through May 7. ♦

CRITIC'S PICK KATRIN SIGURDARDÓTTIR



Katrin Sigurdardóttir's *High Plane*, 2002, a 450-square-foot model of an imaginary fjord.

For her installation in the September group exhibition "Odd Lots," a tribute to conceptual artist Gordon Matta-Clark at New York's nonprofit White Columns gallery, Icelandic sculptor Katrin Sigurdardóttir started by studying maps of Queens. The documents showed many of the "odd lots" (small, misshapen property parcels) that Matta-Clark bought for his 1973–74 piece *Fake Estates*. Sigurdardóttir chose to model her diorama-like polystyrene cityscape on Sunnyside, a neighborhood containing three of Matta-Clark's 15 lots. Her partly fictional, soot-colored replica covers the inside walls of seven handmade shipping crates—some shoebox-small, others the size of a microwave oven—that unfold along hinged edges and interlock to create a floor piece.

In June, Sigurdardóttir shipped the boxes to Basel to serve as the spotlight piece for Galleria Maze's booth at the LISTE fair. "I wanted to take *Odd Lots* into the New York show as property with multiple owners," she explains. Her plan worked: the Turin-based gallery sold all the pieces at prices ranging from €1,500 to €3,500 (about $1,850 to $4,350).

Deploying everyday supplies such as polystyrene, drywall, and lumber, plus hobbyists' "landscaping" materials, Sigurdardóttir's exquisitely crafted works sometimes replicate real places, sometimes imagined ones, sometimes both—she once merged the hallway architecture of her Manhattan apartment building with the topography of a glacial river in Iceland. Though the individual elements are often minuscule, the works themselves can stretch across entire gallery floors.

Sigurdardóttir, 37, moved to the United States in 1988 to attend the San Francisco Art Institute before getting an M.F.A. at Rutgers University. Amiable and quick to laugh, with a New Yorker's radar for irony, she nevertheless veers away from American-style small talk, preferring to discuss the metaphysics of perception. Sigurdardóttir describes her work as a continuous experiment aimed at triggering pseudo–dream states in the viewer, saying, "I like to contrast the purely visual and cerebral perceptions of the work with the actual physical encounter of an object."

Katrin Sigurdardóttir.

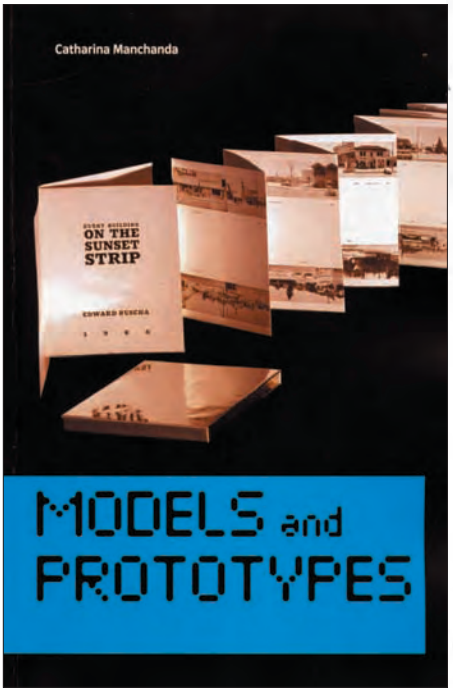
Curator Hamza Walker of the University of Chicago's Renaissance Society is among the convinced. He selected Sigurdardóttir for the institution's "Here and Now" sculpture show last January, where she reprised *High Plane* (originally done in 2002 at GAle GAtes et al gallery in Brooklyn). To view the piece, visitors climbed ladders and poked their heads up through the 450-square-foot model of an imaginary fjord hung high in the rafters. "The work was the hit of the show," Walker recalls. "Your eyes are at the level of the water, and your body is below the model, so it messes with your imagination and sense of scale. That's what makes her work successful."

—Marc Spiegler

Marc Spiegler is a contributing editor of ARTnews.

TOP: COURTESY RENAISSANCE SOCIETY, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO; BOTTOM: BJÖRG MAGNEA

Catharina Manchanda, Models and Prototypes, Midlred Lane Kemper Art Museum , St. Louis, USA Oct 2006



If Ruscha's urban topographies complicate a reading of the documentary model, in part by pointing to its inherently fragmentary nature, Katrin Sigurdardôttir ruptures the seamlessness of the landscape through the realignment of the model's topography. At once container and display, her foldable structures rely on both analog and conceptual uses of the model in order to create a compelling new vision. The landscape sections in her suitcase containers are compartmentalized and fold out into irregular patchworks that emphasize the fragmentary nature of her arrangements. In *Green Grass of Home* (1997–98), parks and nature preserves from her native Reykjavik are juxtaposed to others from San Francisco, Berkeley, and New York City, places where she has lived or visited. "Home" is an emotionally charged term that can apply to one's abode, neighborhood, country, or place of personal significance. Sigurdardôttir multiplies and fractures the meaning of the term, reflecting at once on a personal journey and the growing social and economic reality of people moving from place to place. With every new destination, past homes become history and as such part of personal memory. If maps are commonly used as analog tools meant for navigation, Sigurdardôttir's three-dimensional topographies are constructed from memory and chart a course of emotional affinities. Space here is not conceived as one continuous, logical expanse but as a series of significant sites to which the artist's topographic model confers a kind of proximity and mobility that parallels the structure of memory. It is appropriate then, that the artist uses incongruous scales in different topographic compartments—lengthens or shortens a stretch of land, or bestows a different scale upon a feature within it. There is a circular logic to this work where the static display of the model acts as the stage for an exercise in mobility, referencing the art object, which travels from one exhibition venue to another, a person's physical journey from place to place, and the ability of human memory to connect places that are geographically remote. All of these braid here into one coherent yet fragmentary tapestry.

Art in Review

Exceeding Paint/Expanding Painting

Pratt Manhattan Gallery
144 West 14th Street
Greenwich Village
Through July 16

"Exceeding Paint/Expanding Painting" does not introduce any exciting new painters. Rather, it is an exhibition about artists who construe painting as a symbol of cultural or political conservatism and who make variously rebellious gestures on that basis. Organized by a guest curator, Karen E. Jones, the show would be most usefully viewed by undergraduate theory students.

Some of these gestures against tradition are less than inflammatory: for example, Arturo Herrera's elegant fusion of Abstract Expressionism and Disneyesque cartooning painted on the wall; Nils Erik Gjerdevik's mural with meandering black lines and round canvases bearing intricate geometric compositions; and Kimberley Hart's small compositions made of nonpainterly domestic materials like fabric, beads and sequins.

Other reactions are more visceral, like the "painting" Andy Warhol made by having an assistant urinate on canvases prepared with metallic pigment and Philippe Meste's large, square mirror splattered with something white that is identified by the wall label as sperm.

And some works are more conceptually complex. Katrin Sigurdardottir's miniature sculptural landscapes in neatly made wooden boxes that unfold in clever ways allude to connections between landscape painting and travel. Yinka Shonibare's life-size, three-dimensional tableau of beagles chasing a fox and headless mannequins in 18th-century European costumes made of African-patterned cloth is a post-colonialist send-up of English hunt paintings. And Louise Lawler's glass paperweights, through which you see small photographs of famous paintings in situations of economic privilege, reiterate the old Marxist critique of paintings as capitalist luxury goods.

KEN JOHNSON

Jen Osborne

Katrin Sigurdardottir's "Untitled (Four Boxes)" (2005)

Exceeding Paint/Expanding Painting
Pratt Manhattan Gallery
144 West 14th Street
Greenwich Village

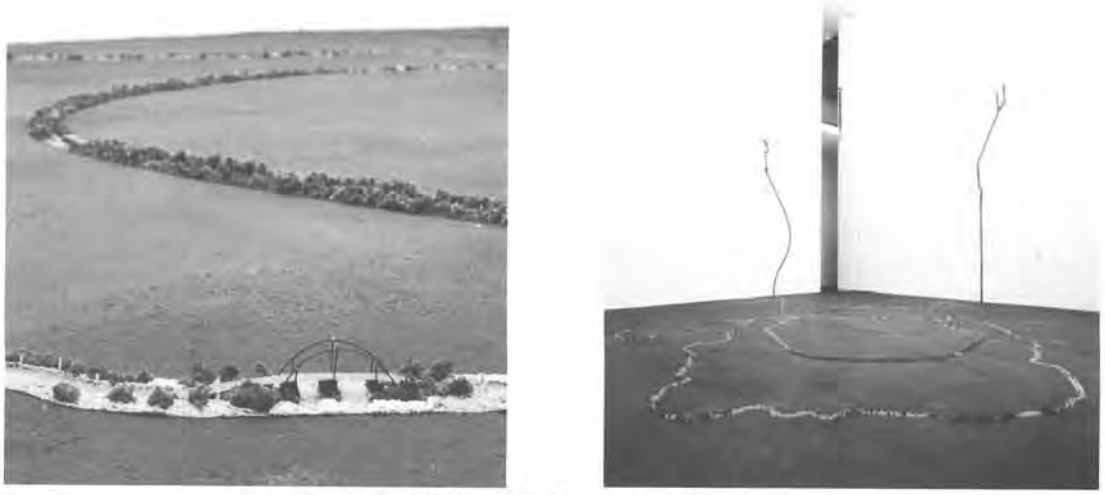
Of Landmarks and Birthmarks: the work of Katrín Sigurdardóttir

Eva Heisler

Katrín Sigurdardóttir's work repeatedly returns to and circles around the experience of place: experiences which are variously presented as elusive, nostalgic, deceptive, simultaneously desired and suspect. As the New York-based Icelandic artist states, '**My work testifies to a nomadic predicament: the center of one's existence as the transit itself rather than a location arrived at or departed from.**' This is a revision of the traditional understanding of place as pause; as Yi-Fu Tuan puts it, '**If we think of space as that which allows movement, the place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place**'.[1] The nomadic experience is not one of being unmoored or homeless, but is one in which one '**dwells by moving**'.[2] A discussion of three key works, emphasizing their negotiations of the contradictory notions of place and site, will be followed by an examination of the ways in which Sigurdardóttir's *Birthmark Series* (1998) engages issues of gender and national identity in its cartographic re-imagining of moles on the artist's body. A comparison of the *Birthmark Series* with several other island-related works will argue that the artist's straddling of utopic and dystopic notions of "***home***" also engages what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick refers to as an epistemology of the closet.[3]

The Green Grass of Home (1997-8) marks the beginning of what has become a signature practice for the artist, namely, building in miniature. *The Green Grass of Home* consists of a wood case, about the size of a large brief case, that expands into a set of seventeen tableaux, all of which reproduce public parks in cities lived in by the artist. The artist's experience of a public and constructed nature – from Manhattan's Central Park and San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge to Reykjavik's Miklatún – is miniaturized and packaged such that it remains within the reach of the body and is transferable to yet other spaces. In this, the work displays the nostalgia of the souvenir as described by Susan Stewart: '**The souvenir reduces the public, the monumental, and the three-dimensional into the miniature, that which can be enveloped by the body**'.[4] Public space is rendered as private object.

The Green Grass of Home suggests the portability of place, its experience as one that is embodied. As Edward S. Casey puts it, '**Just as we may say of the lived body that it "is not where it is, nor what it is", so we may allow that place is neither *just where it is* nor *just what it is*: only concerning the simple location of a site can we say these things**'.[5] But Sigurdardóttir's work also evokes the rub of public and private that is an important aspect of the history of the public park. The public park – initially promoted in



Katrin Sigurdardóttir *Fyrirmynd/Model* (1998-2000) Installation shots from Centre d'Art Contemporaine a Sete, France. Courtesy of the artist.

the nineteenth century as a means of subduing the boisterous energies of the urban working class – also provided shelter for illicit intimacies, in particular the intimacies of homosexuals who were denied the public visibility of a private home. The work's inversion of public and private, of what is visible and what remains hidden in the suitcase, of the external view and the internal look, underscores the pressure of the public eye on the shaping and very experience of a so-called private life. This is a pressure that no one escapes but is perhaps most keenly experienced by those who find themselves outside the heteronormative social structure.[6] The work's title may be read as ironic, because the green grass of the park is not the green grass of home even as it has provided space for what is rendered illegitimate by the home.

In a subsequent work, the artist is interested less in specific places and more in the perception of place. In *Model* (1999), a miniature road traverses and climbs the gallery space. The configuration of the road is based on a neurological model of the electrical impulses involved in perception. The diagram is an attempt to explain how, for example, the sight of an orange might remind one of Christmas, or how it is that the experience of one place summons the memories and feelings associated with another place. This road maps the movement of visual information in the brain as it passes through those places associated with imagination, memory, and feeling. As the poet Erin Mouré remarks, memories '**are not fixed data or inscriptions, but are active, moving brain states**'.[7]

Sigurdardóttir's work *Model* addresses memory but not a particular memory; it addresses the experience of place but not a place. On the one hand, the absence of identifying features along the road suggests the appeal of anonymity for the wanderer – to be on the move is to be suspended in the present, to unfasten the claims of location. On the other hand, the very shape of the road echoes the configuration of a diagram that seeks to explain how the past surfaces in the present.

Although *Model* addresses the circulation of "***place***" through a body, neither place nor body is represented; the work is resolutely anti-autobiographical. Place and body, however, do become specific in and through the viewer of the work. There is a tension experienced between the viewer's body, located as a "***here***", and the road that, because of its scale, remains "***there***". The viewer's body feels large and encumbered; the path and size of one's feet are at odds with the road underfoot. The work generates a tension between the body which hovers and lumbers and an image of transit which is inaccessible. The road, however, is an exteriorization of an internal process. As viewers, our attention is snagged by the map – the projection of an internal process that laminates memory onto place. The viewer is teased by the prospect of narrative but ultimately denied it by the work's transversal of the viewer's space; in this sense, the artist's miniature road transgresses the law of the miniature, which is '**to discredit the present**'.[8]

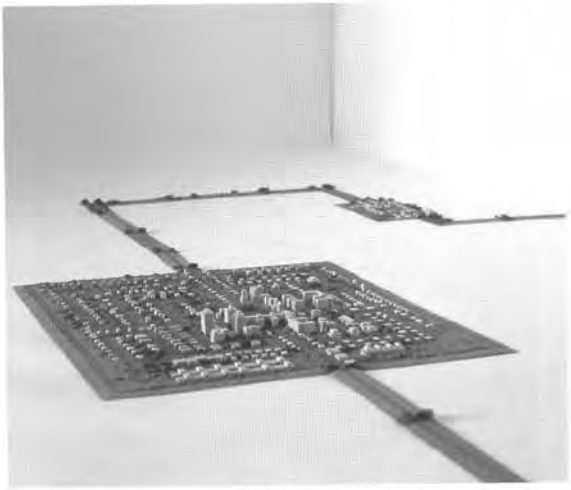
Like *Model*, Sigurdardóttir's work *Circuit* (2000) features a miniature road that traverses both wall and floor. In *Circuit*, the flow of the miniature path is interrupted by cityscapes,

the geometries of which are based on electronic circuit boards. Each city is also a labyrinth and there is only one entrance and one exit. A circuit board is designed to maximize energy flow; while a labyrinth is designed to bewilder one's movement. Thus, by constructing cityscapes that resemble circuit boards but contain labyrinthine paths, Sigurdardóttir evokes an experience of transit but one which remains caught by a place transforming our experience of this into a moment of bewilderment. The physical appearance of the road itself, a closed geometric form made of hobby-modeling materials, suggests the predicament of the wanderer whose restless movement is both standardized and circular.

The view into these imaginary cities is always an aerial one. Michel de Certeau describes how an aerial view transforms the city into a text, when he looked at the "***urban island***" of Manhattan from the 110th floor of the former World Trade Center: '**The 1370 foot high tower that serves as prow for Manhattan continues to construct the fiction that creates readers, makes the complexity of the city readable, and immobilizes its opaque mobility in a transparent text**'.[9] This is in contrast to an experience of walking through the city in which one is aware of one's body as it interacts with other bodies, vehicles, lights, and noises. The aerial view is primarily an optical experience; what is laid out in front of one is there to be "***read***". Those walking through a city '**follow the thicks and thins of an urban "*text*" they write without being able to read it**,' writes de Certeau. '**These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms**'.[10] Sigurdardóttir's work choreographs the dual experience of space as embodied and space as experienced through a disembodied eye.

Model operates within the logic of site-specificity: it engages the viewer as a body in a specific location. This is an understanding of site that originated with minimalism.[11] "***Site***" is understood as a situation which engages the lived body of a viewer. *Circuit* does this as well but it also pairs an art world concept of site with the Foucauldian understanding of site as disembodied and anti-place. In this view, as Casey puts it: '**Site is the very undoing of place, its dismantling into punctiform positions**'.[12] Consider the following contrast of place and site:

'**Yet site does not situate. Space on the modernist conception ends by failing to locate things or events in any sense other than that of pinpointing positions on a planiform geometric or cartographic grid. Place, on the other hand, situates, and it does so richly and diversely. It locates things in regions whose most complete expression is neither geometric nor cartographic**.'[13]

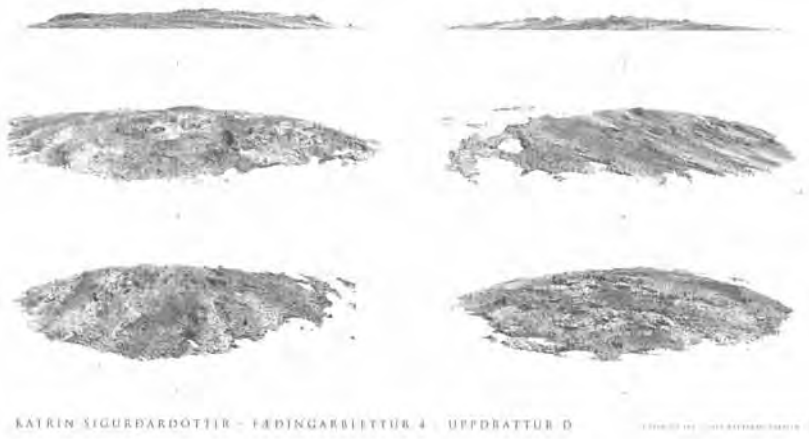


Katrin Sigurdardóttir *Circuit* (1999-2001)
Collection of the National Gallery of Iceland.

In the art world, site-specificity refers to the placement of work, the place created by the work in relationship to the body. In this sense, site and place are intertwined. This is in contrast to site as mobile, as simply a nodal point in a network, as mapped, as disembodied and anonymous.

In *Circuit*, the bewilderment of the labyrinth is paired to the standardization of the circuit board. What in *Model* is the psychological experience of place as schematized becomes in *Circuit* the experience of a place as standardized yet even this standardization remains labyrinth-like. The contradiction at the center of the work appears to be that of grid as labyrinth. Casey poses an interesting question in relation to this: '**Site may be bodiless – it entails a disembodied overview, a survey – but there can be no being-in-place except by being in a densely qualified place in concrete embodiment. Indeed, how can one be in a place except through one's own body?**' My reading of *Circuit* is that it choreographs the disembodied overview (site) but as a place for an embodied viewer.

Unlike the other works discussed in this essay, the *Birthmark Series* (1998) doesn't use the materials of the miniature. Rather, the work toys with the rhetoric of magnification. The work consists of seven computer-generated maps of islands. For example, *Map B* looks as if it might be documenting the temperature zones of a land mass; *Map D* presents what appears to be six aerial

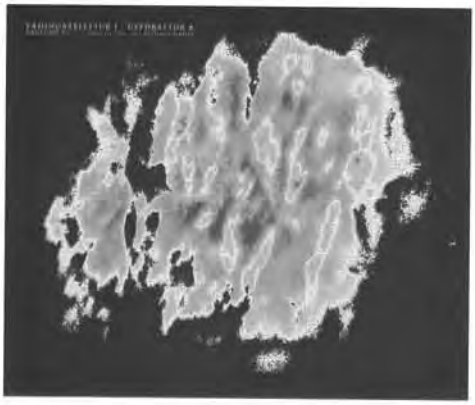


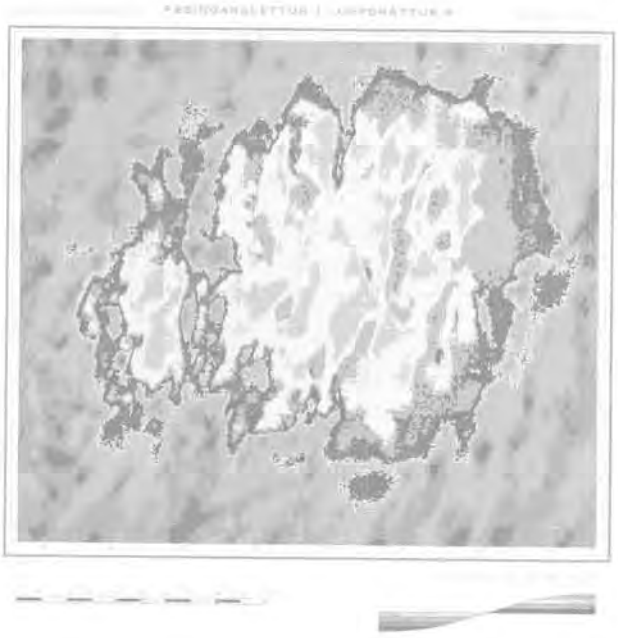
Katrin Sigurdardóttir, from *Birthmark series* (1999) Collection of the ASI Art Museum, Reykjavik, Iceland.

perspectives of one island. The work's 1998 installation at Reykjavik's Living Arts Museum consisted of a map cabinet; with its one drawer open and the laminated maps it contained available for the viewers to pick up and examine. A chart accompanying the maps indicated that each of the islands corresponded to a mole on the artist's body. On the chart, the contrast between each paired medical image and cartographic image is striking: the close-ups of discolored, roughed imperfections of skin call to mind Julia Kristeva's characterization of the abject: this is skin that does not respect borders; it is out of place; it is ambiguous.[14] In contrast to the unappealing images of flesh, the images in the cartographic translations are rather attractive – they are haloed in green and suspended in a deep blue: a series of bounded, closed forms.

To make these images, the artist had moles on her own body photographed by the clinical photographer in residence at Iceland's National Hospital; the results were then fed into a computer program for the making of three-dimensional landscapes. One might consider the *Birthmark Series* as a performance in which the artist is both cartographer and landscape, both the mapper and the mapped. The cartographer's mission is both to describe and to stake territory. Metaphors used to described the landscape often evoke the female body as not only maternal but also sexual. **'Implicit in the metaphor of land-as-woman'**, argues Annette Kolodny, is **'both the regressive pull of maternal containment and the seductive invitation to sexual assertion'**.[15] In the *Birthmark Series*, Sigurdardóttir assumes a gaze traditionally associated with the heterosexual male. As Gillian Rose puts it, **'This masculine gaze sees a feminine body which requires interpreting by the cultured knowledgeable look: something to own, and something to give pleasure'**.[16]

The artist states that she initially viewed the maps in the Birthmark Series as **'declarations of autonomy and strength'**. In considering the effect of this series on viewers, however, Sigurdardóttir has subsequently revised her own understanding of the work to include an implicit **'threat of the grotesque'**. The contrast between miniaturization and magnification is noted by Stewart: **'while the miniature represents a mental world of proportion, control, and balance, the gigantic represents a physical world of disorder and disproportion'**.[17] The mole mapped as island might remind one of a passage in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* when Gulliver, having entered the land of giants, is exposed to a woman nursing a child. The breast is monstrous and disgusts him: **'The Nipple was about half the Bigness of my Head, and...so verified with Spots, Pimples and Freckles, that nothing could appear so nauseous'**.[18] Later, he observes **'a Woman with Cancer in her Breast, swelled to a monstrous Size, full of Holes, in two or three of which I could have easily crept, and covered my whole Body'**.[19] Swift's evocation of the monstrosity of a female body is a variation on a theme which has been traced to Aristotle. As Rosi Braidotti summarizes it: **'If we define the monster as a bodily entity that is anomalous and deviant vis-à-vis the [male] norm, then we can argue that the female body shares with the monster the privilege of bringing out a unique blend of fascination and horror'**.[20] In





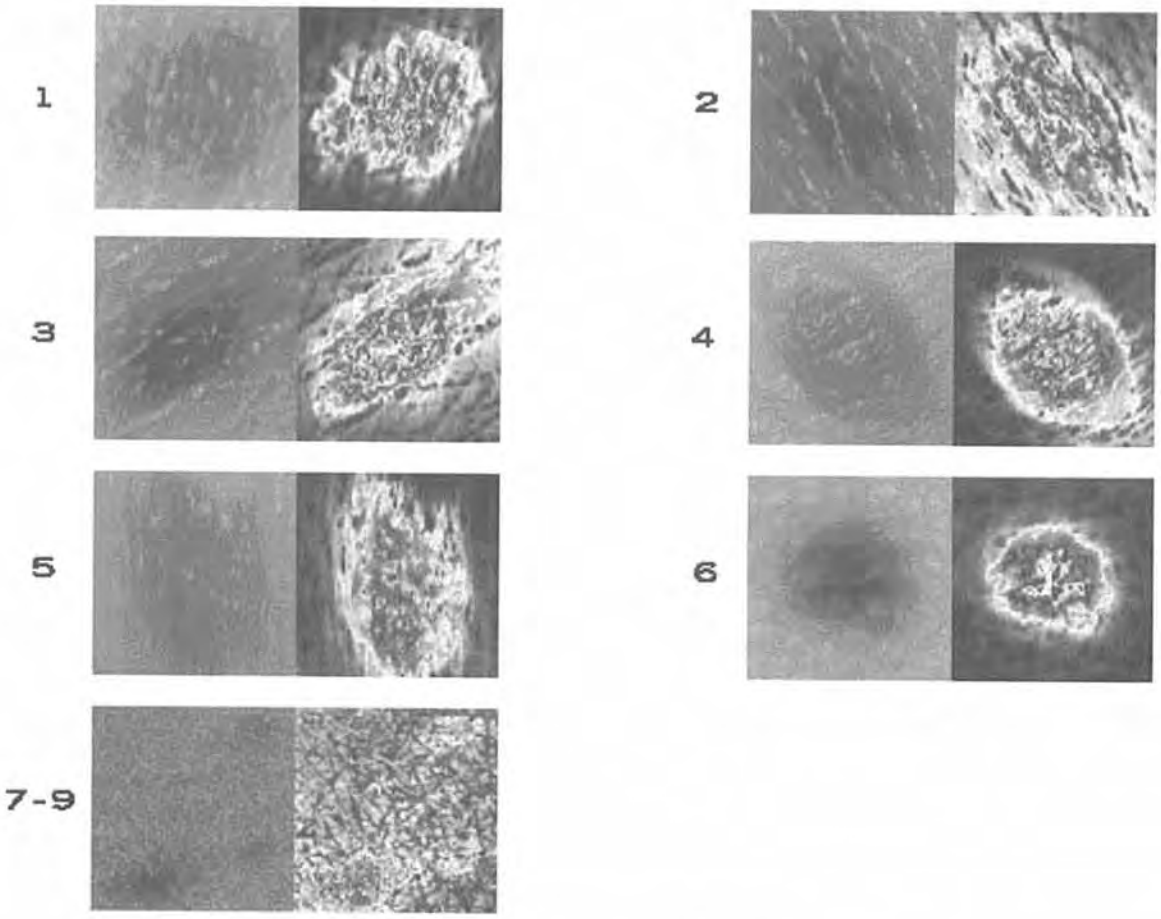
Katrin Sigurdardóttir, from *Birthmark series* (1999)
Collection of the ASI Art Museum, Reykjavik, Iceland.

Sigurdardóttir's *Birthmark Series*, there is something monstrous about the translation of mole into a land mass. Stewart reminds us that '**our words for the landscape are often projections of an enormous body upon it: the mouth of the river, the foot-hills, the fingers of the lake, the heartlands, the elbow of the stream**'[21]; but Sigurdardóttir's magnification of the mole suggests less creation than a malign growth.

In the medical images, one can make out the ridges of the skin, highlighting its sensitivity. The images as cartographic translations, however, imply an extension of reach far greater than that associated with the skin which does not, like the eyes, perceive distance. A cartographic image provides, one assumes, visibility of distance not available to the embodied viewer. The "***birthmark***" is a localized tactile image paired to the image of a mapped expanse.

Because the artist's homeland is an island, and the birthmarks are rendered as islands, one can argue that the artist is using the trope of land as a symbol for maternal containment. The body is, after all, the first place a child knows. As Yi-Fu Tuan puts it, 'If we define place broadly as a focus of value, of nurture and support, then the mother is the child's primary place'.[22] The birthmark, however, is not only an identifying mark; it is also a flaw. Thus, the birth place is not only that which identifies one but it is that which disfigures – identity and disfigurement here are paired.

In 1998, the year the *Birthmark Series* was begun, there was a heated public debate in Iceland about the construction of a National Health Sector Database that would store the medical records of the entire Icelandic population. Approved by Iceland's Parliament in December 1998, this database is part of a larger project that makes available medical records, genetic information, and family histories for the purposes of genetic research. Iceland's appeal to genetic researchers is due in large part to its geographic isolation and that, coupled with its small population that even today numbers less than 300,000, has kept the gene pool relatively homogenous. In addition, Icelanders have maintained genealogical records since the country's settlement in the ninth century. In their examination of the discourse on bioinformation within the Icelandic context, Gísli Pálsson and Kristín E. Hardardóttir point to the risk of linking national identity and biology: '**The reference in current Icelandic rhetoric to the continuity with the Viking past may indirectly suggest a genetic notion of bounded citizenship**'.[23] Because a eugenics movement played an active role in Iceland's struggle for independence from Denmark, the Icelandic community may be vulnerable to what Bob Simpson refers to as "**genetic essentialism**".[24] Pálsson and Hardardóttir state, 'The



Katrin Sigurdardóttir *Birthmark series* **(1999)**

mapping and rhetoric associated with the Icelandic Biogenetic Project may implicitly reinforce a rather narrow notion of "***Icelandicness***" a notion underlined in the nationalist discourse of the last century.'[25] While Sigurdardóttir's series does not explicitly address the biogenetics debate, Pálsson points out that its representation of '**prenatal signatures**' resembles the imagery that circulates in the public debate.[26] In the Birthmark Series, one's birthplace is carried on the body – as disfigurement and as imaginary kingdom.

The skin anomaly, as genetic inheritance, is projected as distant territory to be mapped. The map "***civilizes***" the imperfection of the birthmark. The work alludes to the biotechnological gaze that renders the body as a site – in particular the female body that is, as Braidotti puts it, '**morphologically dubious**'.[27] The body's small "***monstrosities***" are charted and magnified; the body is visible as a "***field of inscription***". The artist's use of cartographic imaging might be compared to the biologist's use of stains to render tissues visible in the microscope. As Michael Lynch discusses in his examination of the forms of scientific visibility, '**the stain, like a name, defined, pointed to and consolidated the visibility of its object**'.[28] On the other hand, the stain, like language itself, '**could obscure the object or create fictional resemblances**'.[29] Sigurdardóttir's use of cartographic techniques magnifies the identifying mark but nonetheless obscures identity.

The image of the island is a central feature in many of Sigurdardóttir's works. Her 1996 *Island Matrix*, for example, resembles an enormous topographical map. Three metres high, its hollow interior is accessible to the viewer. The work is both map *and* shelter. The shape of the island is based on the contours of the artist's body lying in a fetal position. The island's topography is constructed with carpet

Katrin Sigurdardóttir Top: *Untitled* (2004) Site specific installation for the Reykjavik Art Museum, Iceland. Collection of the Reykjavik Art Museum. Above: (front) *Island /Isola* and (back) *Impasse* (2003) Installation shot from Galleria Maze, Turin, Italy, Private Collections.

scraps found on the streets of New York. In this work, "***home***" is made from her body and the scraps which are discarded by others.

In her installation *High Plane* (2002), the viewer climbs steps leading to a platform through which they must poke their head. What they see at the top are twenty-nine mountainous islands; the mountains are generic but they are loosely based on the geology of Iceland. Simultaneously, the viewer's head becomes part of the landscape. While the perspective is panoramic, the viewer is denied the god-like power of the disembodied eye, because the eye, in the head, becomes a body in the landscape and ruins the representation of uninhabited nature. The viewer's head is a blot in the landscape, and a blind spot. The head, cut off from the body, becomes itself an island.

In another work, *Island* (2003), a miniature crooked wall

Katrin Sigurdardóttir *High Plane* (2001-2002) Installation shot from Gale Gates et al. New York, NY, USA. Courtesy of the Artist.

forms an irregular circle. The ground plan is based on one of the many small unnamed islands off the coast of Iceland. The wall is smooth white on one side and left unfinished on the other. There are no doors or windows in the "***room***" but there are electric lights and air vents at regular intervals. Like a map superimposed onto an architectural draft, the work resembles a jagged coastline, or the outline of an oversized birthmark. The wall marks off an arbitrary space in the gallery that creates an inside/ outside. It alludes to the interior / exterior dynamics of the home which, on one hand, shelters the body and, on the other hand, must be protected from the impurities of the body.[30] Sigurdardóttir conflates wall and coastline and so evokes both home and homeland as both closed and confining. At the same time, however, *Island* suggests that the private is not only a matter of content (given that the inside of the island is empty) but also one of inherited structures.

The image of the island as both bounded and embodied was further explored in the artist's 2004 installation at Reykjavik Art Museum's Harbor House. In this work, a wall which spiraled from the column of one room, zigzagged across an indoor bridge that overlooked the cavernous space of this former packing house, and folded itself into a second room. Because of the wall's jigsaw movement through space, the viewer, from any position, was faced with both the inside and the outside of the same wall. The doubling of inside / outside and the dramatic shifts in scale splintered the experience of space from that of passage and enclosure to miniature stage or puzzle as the wall towered above the viewer or just as dramatically stretched out by their feet like toy building materials. The constant shift in scale rendered the viewer's movements precarious. Like a maze,

Sigurdardóttir's wall propelled the viewer into the space and bewildered their sense of space. Considered within the context of the artist's earlier works, I would argue that the viewer's alternating experience of intimacy and distance not only parallels the psychological experience of being simultaneously engulfed and abandoned by the home, but that its pleating of inside and outside also participates in spatial and temporal dynamics that are similar to those that structure what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick refers to as an epistemology of the closet. The paradox of stepping out of the closet is that "***out***" as a form of visibility renders one in other ways invisible. '**The preposition "out" always supports the double sense of invisibility (to put out) and visibility (to bring out)**'[31] writes Diana Fuss. She describes the dilemma implicit in the term "***out***": '**to be out is really to be in – inside the realm of the visible, the speakable, the culturally intelligible [although] to come out can also work not to situate one on the inside but to jettison one from it.**'[32] Fuss points to the degree to which the very compulsion to identify oneself, to actively claim a subjectivity related to one's sexuality, is, on the one hand, an act of agency, but, on the other hand, participates in a homophobic discourse, that very discourse one hoped to circumvent by claiming space "***out there***". Thus, the very demand or compulsion to be "***out***" – as is the very construction of a place to be "***in***" – is determined by the social structure of compulsive heterosexuality. [33] The dilemma of the closet throws into relief the artificiality and contingencies of identity itself. Rather than an experience of being in or out, the closet might better be described as an experience of being simultaneously in and out. To be "***out***" is an experience that is shaped by the experience of being "***in***", as being "***in***" is often motivated by projections of "***out***".

Sigurdardóttir's artistic practice could also be described as a form of conceptual nomadism; the artist moves among disciplines and media in an attempt to evoke *útthrá*, an Icelandic term meaning '**to wander**' that translates literally as '**out desire**'. Conceptual nomadism is described by Braidotti as '**passing in between different discursive fields, and through diverse spheres of intellectual discourse.**'[34] Sigurdardóttir toys with the visual languages of the road map, the neurological diagram, medical photography, cartography, and the miniature model in order to articulate the experience of place that always seems to exceed the specificities of location. While Sigurdardóttir makes reference to a nomadic predicament, she is nonetheless preoccupied with place. The artist has stated in conversation that a work such as the *Birthmark Series* is about place as an experience of the body, place as carried within the body. One might be reminded of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the lived body: '**The thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh**'.[35] Much of Sigurdardóttir work is an attempt to articulate the experience of a simultaneous homesickness and restlessness – of homesickness as restlessness. For Sigurdardóttir, the desire to wander is entangled in the desire to remember – it is as if wandering is necessary to the process of remembering where one has been. The work is not autobiographical, but the process of memory – and its affect on an experience of place – is a recurrent investigation. *Model*, for example, is based on a model of brain activity associated with memory and *Circuit* evokes an architecture of electronic memory. *Green Grass of Home* toys with the portability of souvenir as a memory-trace manufactured for the hand; and the *Birthmark Series* asserts the paradox of the moving body: '**The body moves, [yet] without "getting farther away**."'[36]

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This paper builds on earlier writings on Sigurdardóttir's work published in conjunction with the following exhibitions: *Fyrirmynd*, Listasafn ASÍ, Reykjavik (October 31-November 15, 1998) and *Confronting Nature: Icelandic Art of the Twentieth Century*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (October 13-November 26, 2001). In addition, this paper benefited from conversations with Gísli Pálsson and Katrín Sigurdardóttir; many thanks to both of them.

Notes

1. Yi-Fu Tuan *Space and Place; The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold,Ltd., 1977) p. 6

2. Edward S. Casey *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) p.307

3. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990)

4. Susan Stewart *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993) p. 137

5. Edward S. Casey *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (1997) p. 231.

6. For a discussion of the role of public space in the formation of queer subjectivity, see Aaron Betsky *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1997).

7. Erin Mouré interviewed by Dawn McCance 'Crossings; An Interview with Erin Mouré' *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 36.4 (December 2003) p.10

8. Susan Stewart *On Longing*(1993) p.139

9. Michel De Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) p.92

10. ibid p.93

11. A useful discussion of the history and development of the notion of site-specificity can be found in James Meyer 'The Functional Site; or, The Transformation of Site Specificity' in *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, ed. Erika Suderberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) pp.23-37.

12. Edward S. Casey *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (1997) p.186

13. ibid p.201

14. Kristeva's discussion of the abject occurs in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

15. Annette Kolodny *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975) p.67

16. Gillian Rose *Feminism and Geography; The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) p.97

17. Susan Stewart *On Longing* (1993) p.74

18. Jonathan Swift *Gulliver's Travels: Based on the 1726 Text: Contexts, Criticism* Albert J. Rivero (ed.) (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002) p.77

19. ibid p.93-4

20. Rosi Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) p. 79. Quote p.81. See also Donna Haraway *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) and Elizabeth Spelman 'Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views' *Feminist Studies* 8.1 (Spring 1982)pp. 109-31.

21. Susan Stewart *On Longing* (1993) p.71

22. Yi-Fu Tuan *Space and Place; The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold,Ltd, 1977) p.29

23. Pálsson, Gísli and Kristín E. Hardardóttir 'For Whom the Cell Tolls; Debates about Biomedicine' *Current Anthropology* 43.2 (April 2002) pp.271-301. Quote, p. 276

24. Bob Simpson 'Imagined Genetic Communities; Ethnicity and Essentialism in the Twenty-First Century' *Anthropology Today* 16.3 (June 2000) pp.3-6

25. Pálsson, Gísli and Kristín E. Hardardóttir 'For Whom the Cell Tolls; Debates about Biomedicine' *Current Anthropology* 43.2 (April 2002) p. 286

26. Pálsson, Gísli 'Decoding Relations and Disease: The Icelandic Biogenetic Project' in Hans-Jörg Rheinberger and Jean-Paul Gaudillére (eds) *From Molecular Genetics to Genomics: The Mapping Cultures of Twentieth-Century Genetics* (London: Routledge, 2004).

27. Rosi Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) p.80

28. Lynch, Michael 'Discipline and the Material Form of Images: An Analysis of Scientific Visibility' *Social Studies of Science* 15.1 (February 1985) p.51

29. ibid

30. For a discussion of the history of the private house and its role in the production of 'sexuality as that-which-is-private' see Mark Wigley 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender' in Beatriz Colomina (ed.) *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton: Princeton Papers on Architecture, 1992) pp.327-389.

31. Diana Fuss *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991) p.4

32. ibid

33. ibid p.14

34. Rosi Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) p.94

35. Maurice Merleau-Ponty The *Visible and the Invisible* trans. Alphonso Lingis. Claude Lefort (ed.) (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) p.135

36. Edmund Husserl, quoted in Edward S. Casey *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (1997) p. 218.

Katrin Sigurdardottir

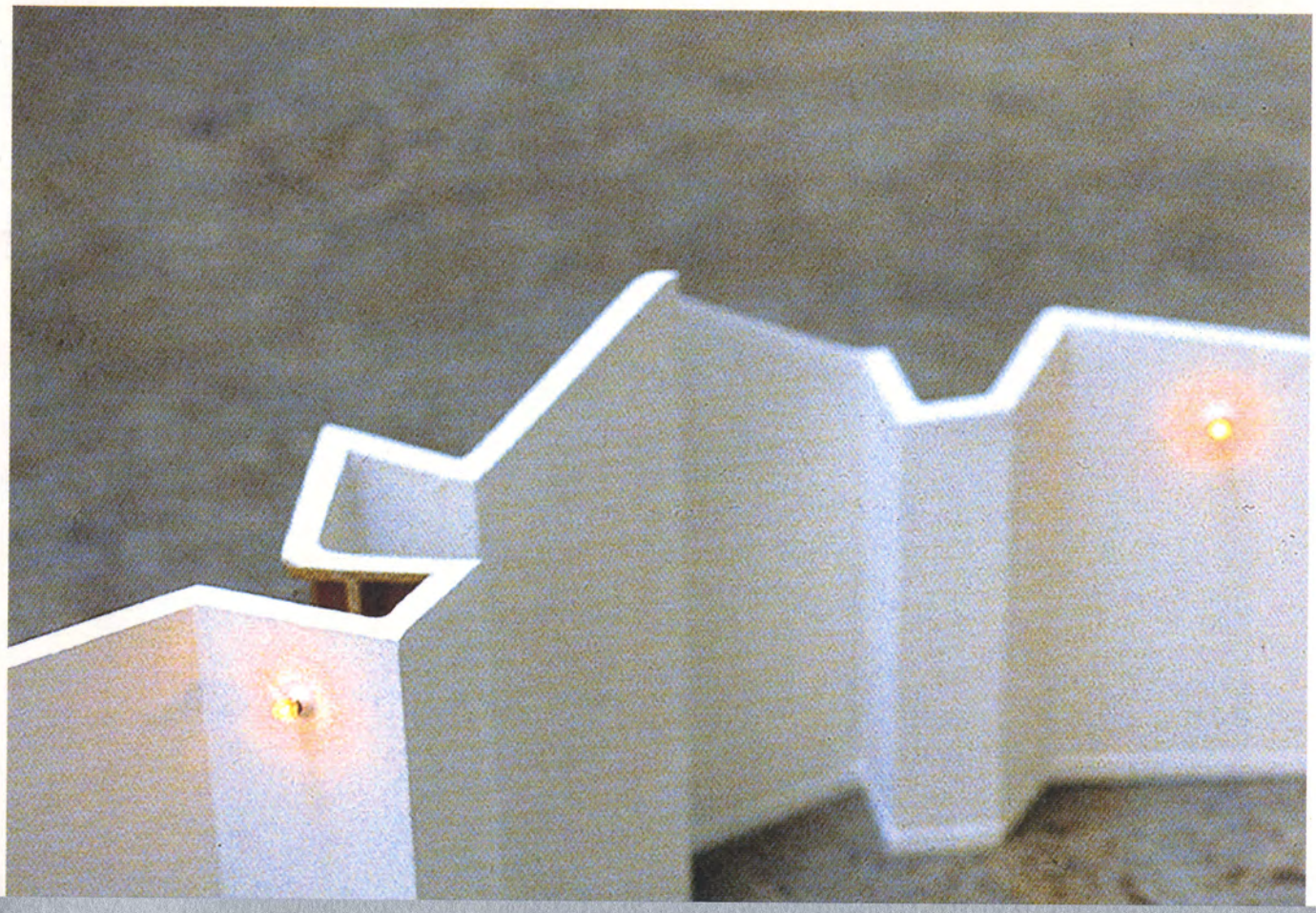
NÉE EN 1967 – REYKJAVIK, ISLANDE

Dans son essai sur les sculptures de Katrin Sigurdardottir, Gregory Volk constate avec une certaine fascination que la plupart des artistes islandais ont ceci en commun, qu'exilés, leurs travaux ne cessent de revenir sur les particularités de leur pays. Volcans, glaciers, déserts de lave, plages de sable noir, kilomètres de côte découpée sont autant d'éléments qui composent le paysage de ce singulier pays. Le travail de Katrin Sigurdardottir dialogue ainsi avec l'Islande. En 1999, l'artiste réalise une pièce intitulée *Your Land with You* qui se résume à une petite sculpture s'apparentant à une île. Mais l'étonnant est que cette sculpture se déplace. Elle possède en effet un moteur qui se commande à distance. Cette miniaturisation de l'Islande, fidèle, peut alors suivre l'artiste dans ses déplacements. Emporter son pays avec soi, ou plus exactement le transporter sous un mode ludique et réflexif, voilà ce qui semble constamment revenir dans le travail de Katrin Sigurdardottir. Il en va ainsi de *The Green Grass of Home* (1997), une valise qui n'est pas sans rappeler celle de Duchamp et qui, déployée, présente, dans chacun de ses compartiments, des modèles miniaturisés de parcs ou de réserves naturelles que l'artiste côtoya lors de ses divers séjours en Islande ou à l'étranger. Ici, comme pour la pièce précédente, c'est bien de nature dont il s'agit, mais d'une nature très architecturée, cultivée par l'homme. Un simulacre de nature. Récemment, l'artiste a réalisé une exposition à la Renaissance Society de Chicago. Prenant en considération l'architecture du musée, elle a placé à proximité du plafond une large planche de bois peinte en blanc, à la surface de laquelle reposent, éparses, ce qui pourrait bien s'apparenter à de petites îles d'Islande. Mais l'altitude à laquelle ces formes sont placées ainsi que leur couleur bleue les renvoient également aux nuages. Pour y accéder, on doit monter à l'échelle. Deux trous dans la planche permettent de passer la tête. La tête dans les nuages, le spectateur s'intègre à l'œuvre et participe à sa signification. Il prend alors conscience de son isolement, séparé qu'il est du reste de son environnement.

La pièce *Island* réunit les diverses problématiques de cette démarche : elle joue sur des rapports de proportion et d'échelle, sur le très petit et le très grand, le très près et le très loin. Il s'agit d'une sculpture faite de contreplaqué et d'ampoules qui retrace les contours accidentés d'une île au large de l'Islande. Posée au sol, cette pièce symbolise à elle seule un territoire, et l'on observe avec la curiosité d'un géant ces parois chaotiques et découpées dont les formes anguleuses oscillent entre fiction et réalité.

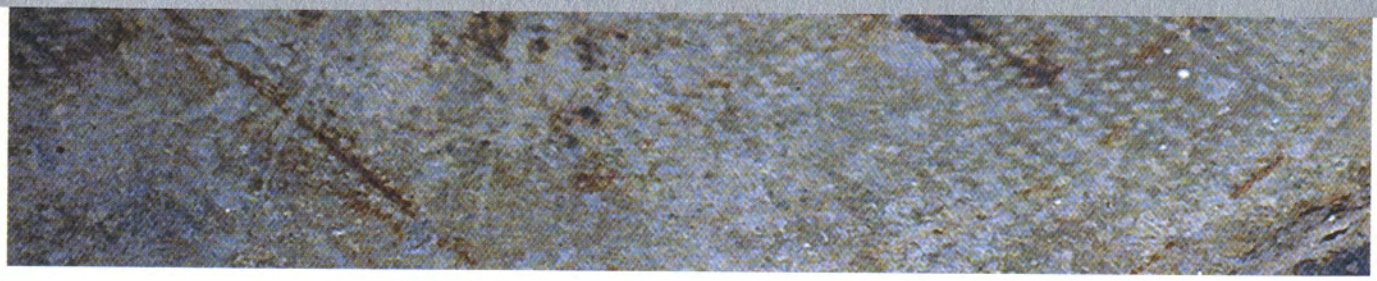
N.S.

Reykjavik Art Museum, Iceland · August 2004
Catalog Essay by Gregory Volk · Foreword by Eirkur Thorlaksson, director



Katrín Sigurðardóttir

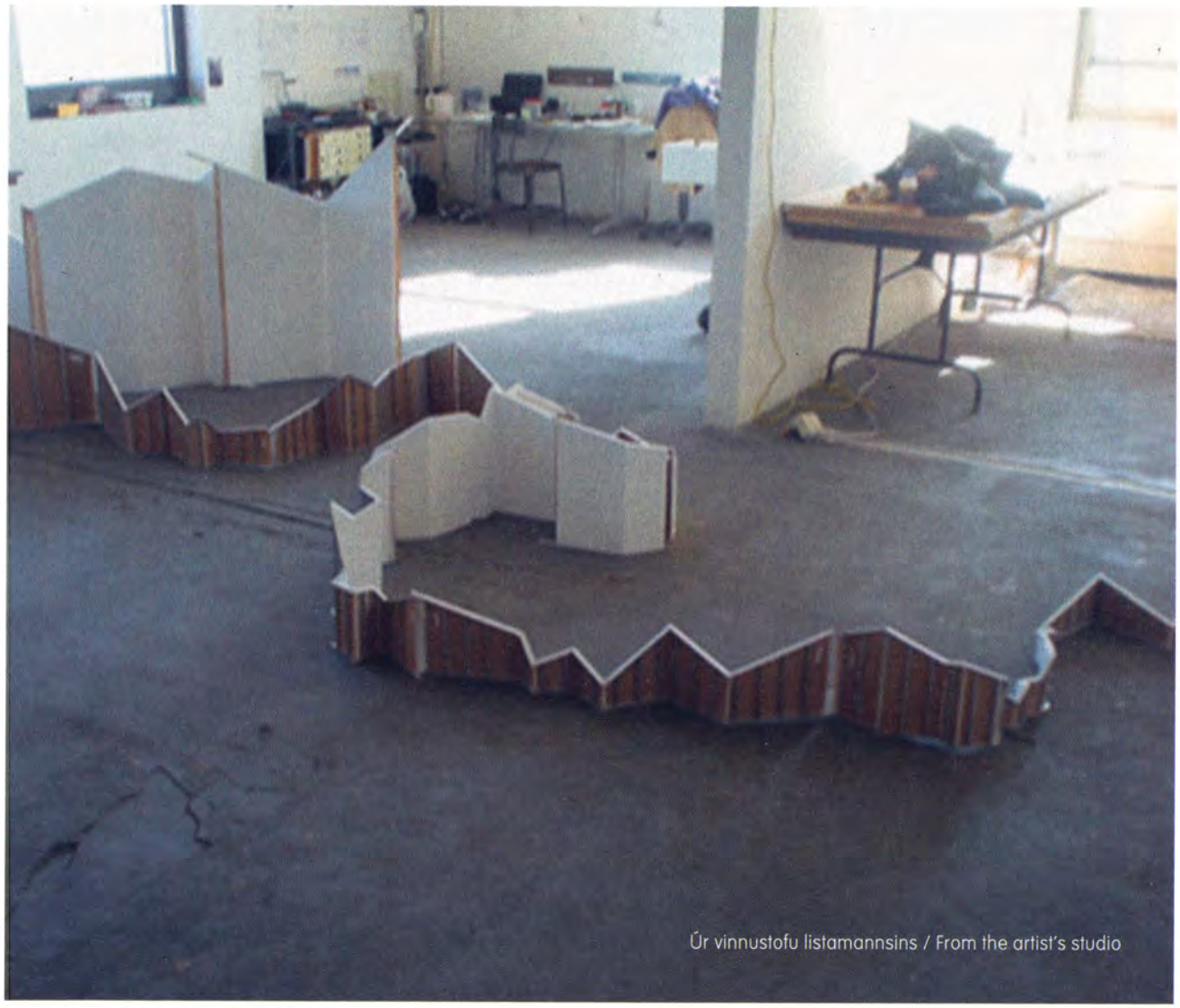
20. ágúst - 3. október 2004



Near and Far: On Katrin Sigurdardottir's Sculptures

In 2000, when I first wrote an article about contemporary Icelandic art for Art in America, I was fascinated to discover how much artists there continue to be engaged with Iceland itself, with its culture and history, and especially its profound and varied landscape—to a far greater degree, in fact, than anything I have encountered anywhere else. Here is what I wrote about this point: "...one thing you do notice with many (Icelandic) artists, no matter how internationally-minded they are (almost all have studied and lived abroad for some time) is that eventually Iceland itself figures into their work as subject matter, as a physical locus, a trove of images and materials or—more mysteriously for outsiders—as a comprehensive force with which one is constantly in dialogue. It's not that the compelling work being produced now is about Iceland—far from it. But Iceland is there, in the deep grain of the inquiry; this homeland on the mind which can be approached with a profound sense of connection or with a sharp sense of irony, with wonder and humor, with poetic engagement and tough-minded criticism."

When I wrote this, I did not yet know the work of Katrin Sigurdardottir, which I would encounter a short while later in New York. When I did discover her work, I immediately recognized what had originally fascinated me in Iceland: a savvy and



Úr vinnustofu listamannsins / From the artist's studio

idiosyncratic artist whose work was uncommonly energized by her complex relationship to her homeland, including its spectacular landscape and geology, but also her own rhythms of departure and return, memory, fantasy, and at times alienation and conflict. At the time, Sigurdardottir was making a series of sculptures-as-furniture out of cut foam. The resulting structures were like miniature renditions of vast, and presumably Icelandic, topographical landscapes seen from an airplane, for instance, or better yet from a satellite. These fabricated versions of "nature" had some of the splendor and wonderment of the real thing, but also conjured model-making kits, museum dioramas, and movie props. When nature appears in Sigurdardottir's work, it is always in a highly mediated, "impure" way, subjected to all sorts of cultural and personal transformation and manipulation.

Still, one had the desire to lie down on these peculiar mini-worlds, to close one eyes and dream on them, and to be mentally transported; fused with elements of architecture and design, Sigurdardottir's nature simulacra oftentimes have such a transportive, even mind-bending, power. For her work High Plane (2002), Sigurdardottir constructed a high wooden plane as a platform atop upright wooden planks. Two stairways let viewers climb up and poke their heads through square openings to see another of Sigurdardottir's splendid, artificial vistas, in this case 29 miniature mountains (based on Icelandic mountains) all made out of blue insulation material. One had the feeling one was looking for miles and miles at a breathtaking landscape, and not up close at small piles of synthetic stuff from the hardware store. In an unusual twist, when two viewers gazed simultaneously through opposite openings they also eyed one another across a seemingly vast expanse. Sigurdardottir's fabricated landscape thus doubled as a potentially cathartic interpersonal encounter. Elsewhere, Sigurdardottir has installed miniaturized synthetic landscapes made out of polystyrene and model-making materials in shipping crates and suitcase compartments. When the box or the suitcase is opened, one discovers landscapes which are sometimes based on actual places, but also fictional, and often a combination of both; moreover these hybrid landscapes have a way of seeming at once plausible and altogether otherworldly. Throughout her work, Sigurdardottir typically scrambles the distinctions between near and far, architecture and nature, immediate experience and layers of memory, while concentrating attention on (and thoroughly manipulating) exactly how we perceive.

When it comes to her combination of architecture, design, and landscape, Sigurdardottir points to her years in New York as an abiding influence, more the city itself than the kind of art being produced there. In New York it oftentimes seems that the whole city is in a state of permanent physical flux, with buildings going up and coming down, and with whole neighborhoods constantly morphing into new conditions and new identities. If you leave even for a few months it is guaranteed that some familiar things will look decidedly unfamiliar when you return, that new buildings will be looming where you never expected them, and that old buildings will be gutted or in the process of renovation. The actual experience of being an artist in New York also oftentimes involves scrambling for studio space and both putting up and tearing down walls over and over. Other factors enter into to Sigurdardottir's work, notably her extensive study of deconstructivist architecture, and her personal experience of making a home in a fractious, foreign city. Sigurdardottir's frequent use of architectural fragments, and the way that her works evoke disruption, dislocation, relocation, and constant reinvention, suggest repetitive efforts to domesticate a city that is at once close and remote, familiar and enduringly alien.

Recent works by Sigurdardottir both use and transform some of the most basic architectural components such as walls, shelves, rooms, storage compartments, and floor plans. In Sigurdardottir's case, however, her architecturally inflected works, which seem beholden to interiors, are suffused with wild news of the outside, and

the outside, in her case, usually (but not exclusively) means Iceland, with its glaciers, coursing rivers, rugged mountains, rocky outcroppings, and jagged lava fields—in short this "homeland on the mind" that enters her work in startling and compelling ways.

One of Sigurdardottir's twisting, low-to-the-ground sculptures made from architectural scale lumber and wire mesh conflates the floor plan of the hallway in her New York apartment building with a section of the glacial river Jökulsá á Fjöllum in Iceland; other works in this series refer to the outlines of Icelandic islands. These sculptures, incidentally, are wonderful. Decidedly fragile and non-monumental sculptures, which are made of nothing more than tiny walls and even tinier lights, and which are distinctly playful, deftly allude to the kind of world-shaping geologic forces prevalent in Iceland. For another recent work, Sigurdardottir constructed what she calls a "false" wall in a gallery in New York, which easily looked as if it had been there forever except for its base, which was transformed into a miniature, yet exact, backlit replica of the façade of the artist's elementary school in Reykjavik. The effect was magical. Iceland and New York, childhood and adulthood, grade school and art gallery all fused together, and this is one of numerous times when Sigurdardottir's architectural transformations seem frankly poetic and deeply touching.

It is interesting that Sigurdardottir has increasingly gravitated to working with walls, which are, of course, consummate barriers; they are what separates us from the outside, and also from one another. In Sigurdardottir's art, however, it is this barrier aspect of walls that gets completely subverted. You see over them, as if you were a giant, around them, at them, and sometimes through them, and they also misbehave: they are not rectilinear but instead curvaceous, organic, at times choppy and ragged, and always surprising. Rather than closing off or defining space, they open space up to a host of new connotations, associations, and psychological possibilities, and that's precisely what happens with Sigurdardottir's striking new project for the Reykjavik Art Museum.

Here, two upright, near-identical structures (both a cross between sculpture and architecture) mirror one another in the space. Like many of Sigurdardottir's works, these structures are meticulously arranged, but also rough and seemingly casual, and while you recognize them as quirky architectural structures you also get a feeling of rocky escarpments, mountainous peaks, glacial debris, and ice floes, as if nature were mysteriously infiltrating piles of raw construction materials. A tiny, curving wall connects the two structures. While it is indeed delicate, it also looms large in the work, suggesting distant horizon lines and a meandering path through the mountains, but also, more implicitly, fragile tries for connection between people, disparate places, and present and past. The whole installation involves constant shifts of scale, ranging from quite big to really small, which are masterful, as is the exchange that happens between interiors and exteriors. You can walk around the work, appreciate it from a distance, and also quite literally walk into it, where it becomes an intimate enclosure. Moreover, this static work implies motion within the space, but also between states of being, ranging from one's public identity to intimacy with others and solitude. Combining raw architectural materials with raw aspects of nature, Sigurdardottir has devised a work that bridges architecture, landscape, and complex psychological nuances.

Gregory Volk

Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy · April 2004
Conversation between Katrin Sigurdardottir and Ilaria Bonacossa (excerpts)
Foreword by Francesco Bonami, director

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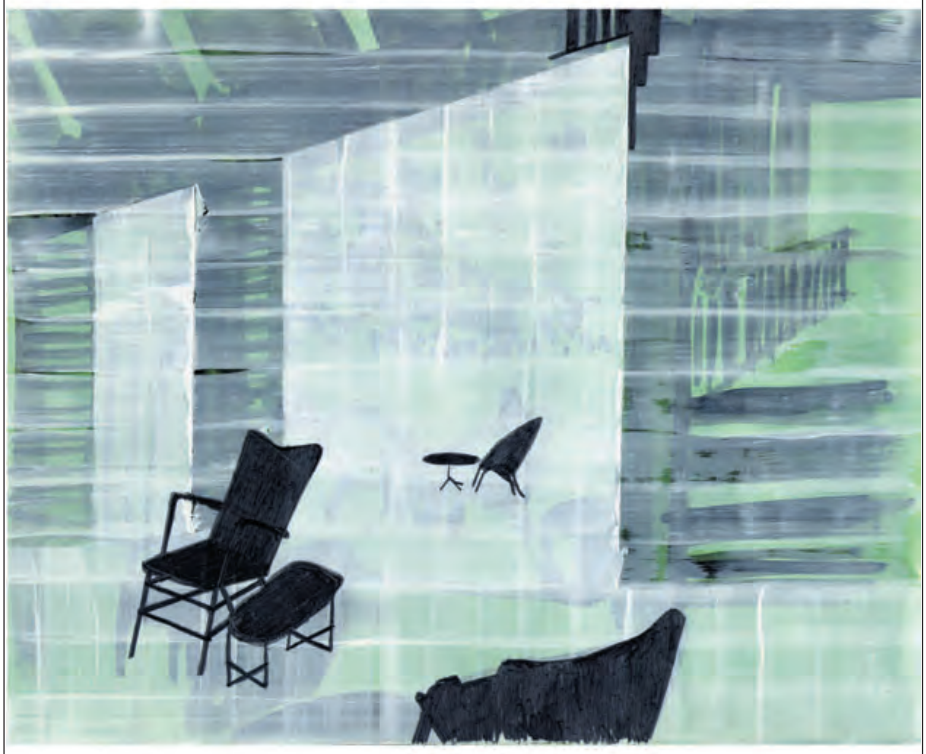


katrin sigurdardottir (islanda) 22 aprile - 16 maggio

KATRIN SIGURDARDOTTIR

Born in Iceland in 1967.

Katrin Sigurdardottir's work creates meticulous models of reality. Her work talks about the way in which we perceive space. Because of the drawings and the architectural models built by the artist, the spectator has an aerial view of the whole that is transformed into metaphors evoking memories and dreams. The fact that Iceland is a deserted island informs the artist's spatial perception and indicates the obsession for travel and distance as the central themes in her work. Her drawings and installations evoke the longing for home united with the irrefutable desire to escape. In Katrin Sigurdardottir's work there are spaces and architectural structures that look like islands suspended in space, microcosms that reflect the abstract character of remembrance. Like memories, the artist's drawings do not create rational spaces, but evocative ones, in which the lines and the outlines are all that is left of reality. The ordered and scientific aspect of the drawings shows how the artist is reordering her memories through the representations of these spaces.

IB: There is a narrative aspect in the work, even if your 'landscapes' are always empty and deserted by human beings. The public becomes the presence that should inhabit the space, feeling a certain physical inadequacy.

KS: I often think the work has this kind of scenographic quality, where you expect some acts to be played out... Primarily, my interest lies in the conflation of scales, of the perceptual scale of the miniature object on one hand and the physical scale of the body and architecture on the other. In trying to erase the line between these two worlds, the world of cerebral perception and physical presence, I am going for the effect of awkwardness and inadequacy, lack and longing, where the body feels large and cumbersome, almost threatening to the vision presented in the sculpture. The body can never quite catch up with the fantasy of these perceptual worlds. I like to make something that conveys beauty, intricacy and perfection, but simultaneously the scenario doesn't quite add up, when the scale relationship is so ambiguous.

The logistics of this effect are often in not using platforms or pedestals, but to place the work directly on the same surface as the body; or if platforms and pedestals are used, the viewer is not left outside of them, but these augmentary devices become the architecture that contains the body. The drawings that I show here don't really take on this effect, since they are traditionally resolved within a square border. I believe that the frame, neutralizes the scale of the work, relating to the body and architecture. Spatial memory is a key concept in both the drawings and the sculptures, but the alienating effect between the body and the miniature is not at work here. Maybe this alienation is substituted in the blocking out of recognizable phenomena in the drawings.

IB: What is the relation between your drawings and your sculptural production? Do you draw all the time?

KS: I draw concepts all the time. Those drawings are illustrations of ideas, sculptures, I see them more as writings than drawings, a codified language to describe an idea...

They are visually just as barebones as text. I don't make 'pictorial' drawings all the time, mostly because I have been busy with my sculpture... Sometimes I've been almost at a standstill, sometimes I made as few as 5 or 10 drawings a year. I think that all my drawings inform my sculptures.

The pictorial drawings have a less direct relationship to the sculptures, but the basic notions are the same.

IB: Do you feel there is something more personal in your drawings than in the rest of your work?

KS: Not necessarily. Only the visible trace of my hand, I guess, and maybe not even that, since almost all of my sculpture is fabricated with my own hands... To me, to spend hours impregnating an area the size of my palm with graphite, to the point where it looks metallic, seems no more personal than to spend the same number of hours improvisationally cutting angles on hundreds of 3mm thick basswood trips. I, being on the artist's side of the work, experience all of my work as personal rituals...

IB: Looking at your work made me think of Jonathan Swift's novel *Gulliver's Travels*...

KS: Yes, my work in the past has dealt a lot with travel and transience, and yes, certainly with surreal scale proportions. I haven't read that book since I was a kid, but I recently picked up *Alice in Wonderland* again after about 30 years... There are many interesting connections, that I guess have found their way into my work unconsciously and that's probably true with most of everything in my work.

IB: There is a strong melancholic feeling in the work contrasted by a sense of transformation. It always makes me think of how we perceive space in our dreams, the space seems to be more evocative than rational.

KS: Exactly, and how impossible it is to pin the vision of a faraway place – faraway in time or space – down to the space and rations of the present. This discrepancy, disconnectedness, is elemental in the work. The dualism in the work makes it impossible to forget that the vision presented is fully illusory, when the construction, the backside of this vision is fully exposed – here I am speaking primarily of the sculptures.

This also relates the work to scenography. The workings of the miniature can be quite elusive. On one hand it seems so detailed and accurate, but if most miniature objects were blown up to real scale, one would notice how gestural and fussy their presentation of their subjects really is.

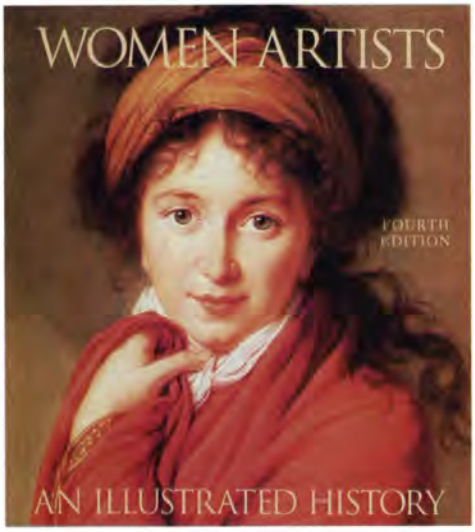
So the miniature simultaneously conveys a sense of control and precision, but really, all the details that cannot be presented in the infinitesimal scale, have to be narrated by the viewers imagination, and empirical knowledge.

This deception fascinates me. I think the drawings might speak to an evocative space in a different way from the sculpture. I don't know if the duality that I describe about the sculpture is as prominent in the drawings. What I see as at once attractive and frightening in the drawings, is the anonymity of the spaces conveyed and that repeatedly information is presented and then either crossed out or painted over, as to keep it embedded in the work, yet inaccessible, at best only hinted at on the surface.

IB: What do you feel is the relation of your work to many issues of contemporary social and political life? How does your split life between New York and Reykjavik influence your production?

KS: I imagine that the emphasis on place in my work, has a lot to do with the fact that my life is divided between two places on the globe; and similarly, the sense of duality in my work, between the 'here' of the body and the 'there' of the miniature vision, also responds to this predicament.

History and geography kind of morph into each other in this duality. I see my practice and my life in general in a socio-political context, and I wouldn't be surprised if my work reflected that, although only in a very indirect, internal way.



"The last 20 years of scholarship have brought many forgotten women artists to attention, but too often their presentation has been marred by anachronistic feminist rhetoric. Nancy G. Heller's lucid, evenhanded *Women Artists* is a noteworthy exception."

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Women Artists

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Meanwhile, over the last half-dozen years Sigurdardóttir has created a visually arresting, emotionally rich, and politically ambiguous group of objects and installations. Most of these are miniature versions of actual or imagined landscapes, constructed with the materials and techniques normally used by model makers. They are simultaneously mysterious yet accessible, humorous and disturbing. One of the earliest examples of these signature pieces, *The Green Grass of Home* (1997) is a plywood "suitcase," carefully designed and built by the artist so that it opens out into seventeen separate compartments or tableaux. Each section contains a miniature scene of a park located in one of the many places where Sigurdardóttir has lived, complete with Lilliputian grass, shrubs, ponds, roads, and buildings. The artist has said that this work came from her feelings of being out of place back in Iceland, where she had moved after spending nine years in the United States. She explains, "Since this upheaval seemed to stem from my geographical dislocation, I started making models of locations that I somehow could identify with."[45] She adds that these models were made from memory and were, therefore, inaccurate in many respects. Sigurdardóttir also describes the making of these scenes as "nostalgic" and as seeming "almost like a religious practice, where the recall of distant experiences served as an affirmation of who I am and where I am from."

These things—the combination of memory and imagination and the feeling of being lost but finding oneself again via remembered spaces—recur in many of Sigurdardóttir's other works. *Farmur/Haul* (1999; plate 219) is related to *Green Grass* in that it, too, involves plywood containers that first conceal, and then reveal, tiny land- and cityscapes. Yet these scenes are entirely invented by the artist; Sigurdardóttir has built for them a series of small shipping crates, of the type generally used to transport traditional artworks. In this example, however, the interiors and exteriors of the crates themselves are the "art."

Sigurdardóttir is interested in each crate's journey from one geographical point to another. Like Marcel Duchamp, who regarded the accumulated dust and cracks that developed in his work *The Large Glass* as part of the piece itself, Sigurdardóttir considers the various stains, labels, and bar-codes that the crates collect while being shipped from her studio to the destination gallery or museum as integral parts of the work. Likewise, she sees the entire process of the trip—every stop on the way, as the boxes are moved on conveyor belts or stored in cargo bays of airplanes and boats—as additional exhibition spaces.

In a museum environment, Sigurdardóttir has these crates placed directly on the floor—not on pedestals—to emphasize their relationship with actual packing crates and to put them within the viewer's physical space. She is also interested in the additional sense of dislocation that comes from the contrast of scales—since the viewers are so much larger than the "landscapes" through which they wander.

A strong sense of humor, which the artist calls "obsessive playfulness," is apparent in many of Sigurdardóttir's works. The most obvious

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example is *Your Land with You* (1999), a miniature sculpture of a mountain/island made of Styrofoam, painted green, and fitted with a set of wheels and the remote-control mechanism from a toy car. This kinetic piece was created for a performance parade in Brooklyn, New York. Many of her other works also evoke the feelings of pleasure and control that people feel when admiring or manipulating model railroads or dollhouses.

Some works by Sigurdardóttir emphasize the physical awkwardness and psychological tension that can occur when the visitor's relationship to the scale of the gallery space and the artworks on display seems unclear or keeps changing.[46] For example, *Untitled* (2001) requires the viewer to squeeze into a narrow hallway between one permanent and one temporary gallery wall, and then stand on a small platform, in order to see the miniature landscape displayed near the ceiling. Based on computer circuitry and the complex information-processing systems within the human brain, both *Circuit* (2000) and *Untitled* (1999) encourage visitors to mentally trace a series of miniature "roads" that take circuitous routes around the gallery floor and walls.

Sigurdardóttir's emphasis on landscapes and broad, unarticulated expanses of space seem to echo the often-repeated comment by critics and scholars that Icelandic artists tend to make art about Iceland. For an American viewer this is a particularly tempting assumption, since it is difficult to imagine how a place that seems so extraordinary in a purely physical sense (an island with thirty-two active volcanoes, where geothermal water heats people's homes, the drinking water comes from glaciers, trees are difficult to find, and winter daylight lasts only four hours) could fail to influence the art produced by people who were born and raised there. Clearly, geography has some influence on artists, but there is nothing identifiably "Icelandic" about Sigurdardóttir's work. While much Icelandic painting from the late nineteenth century until the 1970s does emphasize landscapes, Sigurdardóttir dismisses the idea that Icelandic art deals "in a special way with nature as a subject" as a cliché, with unfortunate political and theoretical overtones. Instead, Sigurdardóttir maintains that her art "depicts places and movement through them . . . as metaphors." At the same time, she does admit: "on one level my work . . . describes a predicament that can be seen as particularly Icelandic"—namely, the experience of the late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century "Icelandic diaspora." By this, Sigurdardóttir means the large group of Icelandic artists who have felt compelled because of practical considerations to stay away from their homeland, living in large foreign cities where they never truly feel they belong.