



HILDUR ÁSGEIRSDÓTTIR JÓNSSON

ESSAY FOR TURPENTINE GALLERY

Ever since Kandinsky painted, in 1912, what he claimed was the first abstract picture, a spectrum has existed defining what such a work could and could not be. At the negative extremes of this range were mere imitation, whereby art lapsed into representational figuration, and mere ornament, whereby it collapsed into the decorative. In Hildur Asgeirsdóttir Jónsson's incomparable fiber paintings, these antitheses provide the push-pull for a marvelously unfamiliar practice, one that begins in photographs of the peculiar, barren Icelandic landscape — here the Bláskógabeiði of the country's highlands and Hekla, a volcanic mountain in the south — and moves toward the irregular patterning of hazy, color-washed textiles, thankfully resting in neither.

This refusal to settle down and compose a focused, identifiable image emerges from the very stuff of Jónsson's technique. Her paintings comprise not stiff paint on canvas but dyed thread woven together to simultaneously form field and ground, creating an inextricably fused unit that, in its oneness, can withstand the vibrating, dispersed blurriness of the resulting picture. That visual breakdown stems from the fact that Jónsson dyes her yarn first and weaves it second, allowing for the randomness of human imperfection to enter the composition naturally, through process. Paradoxically, however, the textured abstraction of her exhaustively handmade work resembles nothing so much as digital pixilation, with colors and shapes built up by and reducible to squares of intersecting thread. Likewise, the shimmering indistinctness of her effervescent landscapes suggests not subjective artistic interpretation but rather the magic of mechanical error: the strange sunspots and streaks of an unfocussed camera lens, the eerie coloration and shapes of an out-of-register print.

Woven both literally and figuratively into the decorative irregularities of Jónsson's framed tapestries, these incongruities embody distinctly contemporary tensions. Their amalgam of old and new, representational and abstract, craft and fine art, analog and digital intertwines conceptually and materially to form the most significant of textiles: one whose marvelous, unplaceable pattern enmeshes indivisibly with meaning.

Lori Waxman, 8 April 2008

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