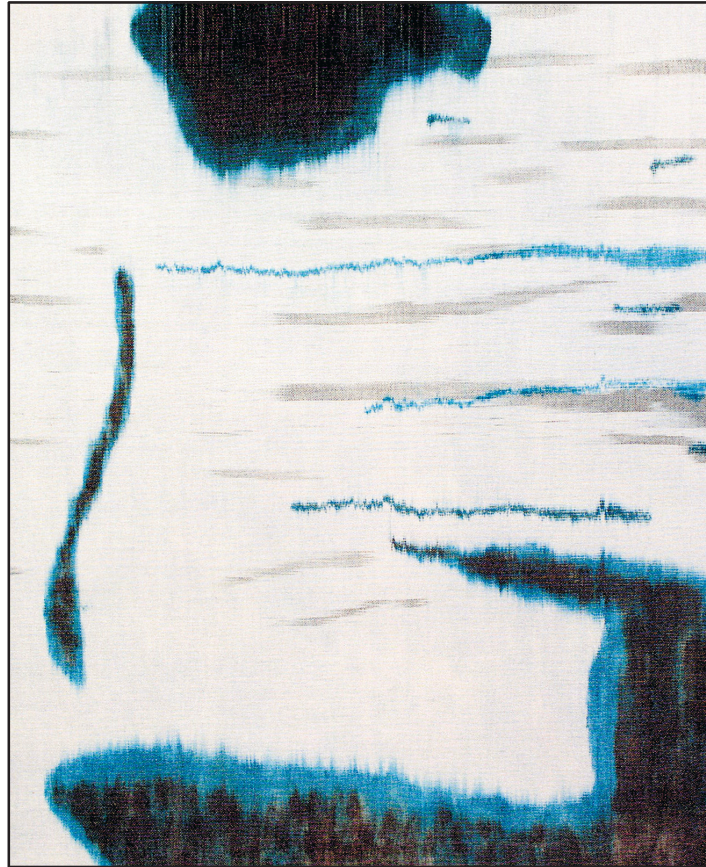
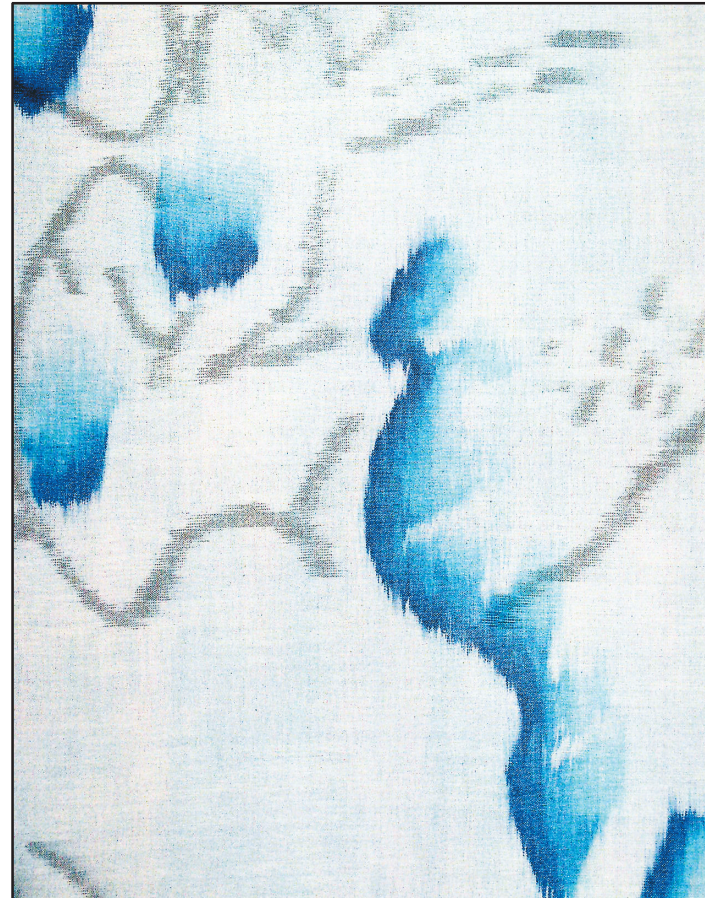


ART



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF HILDUR JONSSON

Hildur Jonsson's "Vatnajokull Series" at Cleveland's William Busta Gallery is based on photographs the artist took while exploring a glacier in Iceland, which she turned into works that function both as paintings and textile art.



Various images in the Busta Gallery show evoke the cuplike hollows filled with icy pools of meltwater that form on glaciers when exposed to the sun.



Jonsson's weavings include tendrils that might depict the stain left by volcanic rock ground by the glacier into fine powder and distributed on the ice in patterns that record the passage of seasons.

Iceland is calling in weavings

and drawings

Hildur Jonsson presents artwork at Busta Gallery

REVIEW
Steven Litt
Plain Dealer Art Critic

Hildur Jonsson made artistic news two years ago with a stunning exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland of weavings in dyed silk inspired by the austere glacial landscapes of her native Iceland.

She's back for an encore at the recently reopened William Busta Gallery in Cleveland, with a powerful collection of weavings that

expand on her previous exhibit. She's also showing a portfolio of drawings that hint at new directions to come.

The outstanding textile works in the current show—eight in all — are loosely based on photographs the artist took while exploring the Vatnajokull glacier in southeast Iceland.

Working from details in the photographs, Jonsson developed large-scale drawings, which she used to stain separately the warp and weft threads in her weavings. She then wove the threads together, creating works that function both as paintings and textile art.

The completed works retain a sense of their photographic origins, while functioning also as highly evocative abstractions. Various images

in the show evoke the cuplike hollows that form on glaciers when exposed to the sun; icy pools of meltwater; and deep, blue-black crevasses. Other images are filled with enigmatic branches and tendrils traced in shades of brownishblack, which may depict the stain left by volcanic rock that is ground by the glacier into fine powder and distributed by wind and rain on the ice in patterns that record the passage of seasons.

An essay in a brochure accompanying the exhibition, written by Saul Ostrow, chairman of the Visual Arts & Technologies Environment at the Cleveland Institute of Art, compares Jonsson's weavings to the 1960s Color Field abstractions of Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler, who poured pigments directly

onto canvases. Jonsson's work also bears comparison to the lyrical and intuitive abstractions of Arthur Dove from the 1920s and '30s.

More than anything, however, Jonsson's textiles bring to mind the evolution of a slow-changing, primordial landscape affected by processes that unfold over millennia.

Jonsson's work doesn't convey anything specific about melting ice and global warming, but, undeniably, these pieces function like telegrams from a remote, cold, northern place where big climatic changes are under way. They also convey the sense that the artist is deeply in touch with the rhythms and moods of that place.

At the same time, Jonsson's images remain tantalizingly out of reach, like the blurry opening sequence of a film before the narrative begins. They communicate an air of unresolved tension and expectation, while seducing the viewer with their soft edges and indistinct imagery.

"Vatnajokull #15," for example, resembles a Chinese landscape with a mountain reflected in a languid pool. Or it could be a view looking

straight down into the mouth of a crevasse. It's hard to tell, and it really doesn't matter. Open-endedness is a big part of the attraction.

Given the soft-focus nature of Jonsson's weavings, it comes as a surprise to see a series of 10 recent drawings, made in oil pastel and gouache on handmade paper, in which the artist has sketched barren, rocky landscapes that look like moraines left behind by melting glaciers.

These images also have a faintly expectant air, as if they recorded the moment before a momentous event. This mood of anticipation is underscored by arcs and rays of light that traverse the drawings, perhaps indicating pulses of energy that will bring to life Jonsson's broken stones.

The quality of this fine exhibition makes you eager to see what comes next — both for the artist and for the gallery.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter: slitt@plained.com, 216-999-4136