

Art in America

DECEMBER 2005

CLEVELAND

Hildur Asgeirsdóttir Jónsson at the Museum of Contemporary Art

Born and raised in Iceland, Hildur Asgeirsdóttir Jónsson draws upon the awe-inspiring glacial landscape of her homeland, creating startlingly beautiful weavings that hover precariously between realism and abstraction. Based in Ohio, she has exhibited widely in the Midwest as well as in Iceland. To the viewer, stepping into her sprawling solo exhibition of 26 works, titled "Energy Forms," her medium wasn't immediately apparent. Eight large-scale, rectangular tapestries, woven from fine silk thread, tautly stretched and framed in wood, looked at first like paintings. Up close, her process of dyeing and then weaving the newly colored threads on a loom became more evident. In many cases, the muted hues of her warp and weft don't quite match up, lending each work a subtle textural richness.

Jónsson begins her process with photographs of the Icelandic landscape, which she shoots on frequent visits home. Some of her works suggest reflections in dark pools of rippled water or icebergs jutting up from the horizon of distant seascapes. At the same time,

many of her pieces carry the hallmarks of high modernist abstraction. The stained canvases of Helen Frankenthaler come to mind, as light and space are suggested. A sense of mystery is further evidenced in Jónsson's small, vividly colored embroideries, which eschew the typical landscape in favor of forms that can be seen alternately as aerial views of geological formations or microscopic studies of biological cells.

Jónsson originally intended to be a scientist. Switching first to architecture and finally to weaving, she clearly has displayed a talent for both perceiving and devising structural systems. Progressing from a photographic image to a finished tapestry involves a mind-boggling amount of planning.

Adding further depth to the exhibition was a series of modestly sized ink drawings on vellum, which closely resemble the embroideries. Made up of roughly circular lines that form tight clusters, they're somewhat like the system drawings of Tara Donovan or James Siena, often replicating the organic structure of fungi or barnacles. Jónsson has made a major leap forward with her new work, which possesses the confidence and clarity of purpose of a major talent.

—Dan Tranberg



Hildur Asgeirsdóttir Jónsson:
Glacier Tongue, 2004, silk weaving,
68 by 40 inches; at the Museum of
Contemporary Art.