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THE ART OF FEAR

BANKS VIOLETTE, DAVID NOONAN AND GABRIELA FRIDRIKSDOTTIR ARE THREE OF THE KEY NAMES IN A NEW WAVE OF VISUAL ART THAT PLAYS ON OUR FEELINGS OF FEAR. **FRANCESCA GAVIN** INVESTIGATES THE ART THAT GOES BUMP IN THE NIGHT. PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY BY **BENJAMIN ALEXANDER HUSEBY**



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di-fr 12–18 uhr
sa 11–17 uhr
oder nach vereinbarung

Gabriela Fríðriksdóttir
Ouroboros

29 March to 10 May 2008

The Icelandic artist Gabriela Fríðriksdóttir (*1971) lives and works in Reykjavik. Since her participation in the Venice Biennale (Icelandic Pavilion 2005) with her installation “Versations/Tetralógica” as well as her spacious exhibition at the Migros Museum of Contemporary Art in Zurich (2006), her work has attracted international attention. For the first time in Switzerland, Galerie Bob van Orsouw is showing her newest film “Ouroboros” within the framework of a solo exhibition. The presentation is a followup to the group exhibition “Through the Looking Glass”, in which Fríðriksdóttir’s enigmatic ink drawings were introduced.

Her drawings not only represent the starting point for exploring other media (painting, sculpture and film), it combines with these to a pictorial vocabulary that uses narrative material while simultaneously disallowing any kind of linear storyline. The basic emotions of fear and isolation that constitute the human psyche, as well as the question of the origin and meaning of existence, are set in the context of Nordic sagas and creation myths. The film title “Ouroboros” takes up the cross-cultural symbol of the primal snake swallowing his tail. This infinite return of death and rebirth embodied by the snake is what Fríðriksdóttir has called: “the eternal cycle of renewal, the creation out of destruction”.

In analogy to her earlier work cycle “Inside the Core”, in which the number eight was the dominant feature in content and form, “Ouroboros” is also furnished with numerological references. The seven vertebrae of the primal snake make up the film’s numerical framework and its leitmotif. In seven scenes against the backdrop of Iceland’s natural beauty, actions take place that run from mystical to surreal and often to grotesque extremes. Thus at the climax of the film, Sybille—who via her mouth gives birth to black stones—meets the majestic figure of death. In another scene, the memories of an old couple are laid over their bodies in the form of fine white flour, as though it were the concrete emanation of their souls. In another episode, two cannibalistic creatures are seated in a cave, indulging in their cravings. As in a B horror movie, their heads are shaped out of raw flesh. This scene, driven by animal instincts and violence, stands out against the subtle poetic plot in another section of the film. A woman sprinkles drops of ink onto a loaf of bread that she then shoves into the oven. Bread also appears as a leitmotif in earlier works and, as in other materials (e.g., dried whole fish), points to symbolic and metaphorical associations.

In “Ouroboros”, what is crudely archaic encounters technical perfection and an impeccable film aesthetic. Paradox seems to be the policy. It is not only the chaos of human feelings that contrasts with the undisturbed breadth of the Icelandic landscape. Also the protagonist’s existential angst stands in unresolvable contradiction to the cosmic state of affairs. In contrast to the film, the exhibited drawings and paintings in their reduction have an almost abstractly graphic look. It is the sculpture—a table on which objects from the movie have been arranged—with its haptic quality that first arouses associations of single film sequences. Fríðriksdóttir resembles a magician. With her codified pictorial vocabulary that invokes traditional genesis myths, she constructs a reality in which dream and ratio, the occult and the factual, are fused into a fantastical amalgam.

Birgid Uccia

Vernissage: Friday, 28 March 2008 from 6 to 8 pm. The artist will be present.

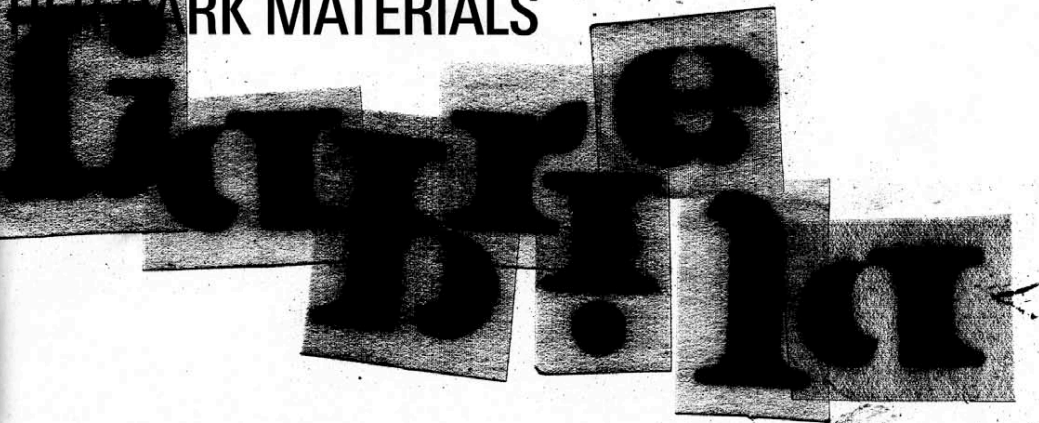
Growing up in Iceland, artist Gabriela Fridriksdottir found creative touchstones thin on the ground. Which wasn't a bad thing. Cut off from European art history, and with a modern art scene up for grabs she could do pretty much anything she wanted. Alongside a fledgling generation of Icelandic musicians like Björk and Sigur Ros, Gabriela has pioneered her own spooky vision. From traditional painting and sculpture through to experiments in architecture, performance, musical happenings and video, nothing is off limits, nothing is sacred. In a recent book project with this issue's guest creative collaborators M/M, trippy little line-drawn creatures part amoeba, part Pingu-Gremlin bounce along to squiggly Clanger noises. The drawings are as likely to appear on album sleeves like Bjork's Greatest Hits or Family Tree compilations as in galleries. She probes the fantastical while the substance of her work is often stickily hands-on. Recently she's been making ghoulish headgear from dough and experimenting with other gooey substances and is currently collaborating on video art for Iceland's pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennale. Here Gabriela and international curator Hans Ulrich Obrist talk Vikings and volcanoes

INTERVIEW BY HANS ULRICH OBRIST

PHOTOGRAPHY AND ART BY GABRIELA FRIDRIKSDOTTIR

PORTRAIT BY KRISTINN INGVARSSON

HER DARK MATERIALS



HANS ULRICH OBRIST: Could you tell me about the relationship between your drawings and the more performative films and videos? I had the impression that it all started with drawings.

GABRIELA FRIDRIKSDOTTIR: It did. At first I didn't think of them as drawings because they were more like sketches, like a collection of what I was thinking of at the time. I never thought of them as something I could use for an exhibition. Then I started to look at them and I found out that they were maybe like a part of me, like inside out, you know what I mean?

Yeah.

I thought OK, I'll try to gather a group of drawings that will contain all the forms, dots, lines and symbols that I've been developing since I was a teenager. That's fifteen years ago.

The book is the first thing I had seen of your work. Could you tell me a little bit about it? It was designed by M/M and Bjork contributed.

To work with M/M was great, we didn't have to talk much - it was more telepathic. There is also a CD inside the book, which I call drawings as well. Both are in black and white: drawings with a pen on white paper and the melodies with a finger on a black and white

Julia Wirxel

Spittle, Dough and Hay —
Excess and Measure
in the Work of *Gabríela Fríðriksdóttir*

ATHENA