



Reach for the Impossible

In Iceland, art is not an upper-class phenomenon. It's for everybody, and people work very hard to be able to purchase works of art. People in Iceland are much more interested than they are in the US. The visitors who came to my Reykjavik exhibition were very sincere and I was surprised at the number of questions that they asked. People often have difficulties understanding the works of young artists. The visual arts are the mirror of time and at the same time a conversation with the past. Young people are a part of a long tradition, but they also want to express themselves in an original way."

Does Iceland influence her work? "I am influenced by a lot of different things from different places," she says. "At the moment I am interested in Latin American art, Mexican in particular. I am certain that my Icelandic heritage influences me more than I realize myself. In Iceland, the world of nature is a tremendously powerful influence. It is often said that Icelandic paintings are characterized by mysticism. Icelandic art is very strong, in my opinion, perhaps because the people are so strong."

Gylfadóttir has often changed her style and artistic approach. At the moment, she is abandoning conventional canvas and paints onto plywood. She uses an old Egyptian technique which involves melting wax and covering the surface of the wood with it, then painting on it with oils. This method enables her to create different textures and she sticks other objects, such as flowers, hairs, leaves or pieces of glass onto the wax. "These pictures

are really reliefs," she explains. "I want to be free to experiment. It happens too often that an artist creates a particular style and then follows it for life. Working that way is perhaps an easier road to recognition and selling one's pictures. But I am always more impressed with artists who allow themselves complete freedom and are not afraid to do something different. I think that my work will always be changing, at least that is my attitude at the moment."

Gylfadóttir will be leaving the US for Amsterdam this winter, accompanied by her American husband who is a video artist. Asked about a possible return to Iceland, she says: "I always find it difficult to plan far ahead. Artists who come back from living abroad have always found out that it is far from easy, financially, to be an artist in Iceland. I hope to be able to come back and exhibit from time to time. I might stay in Amsterdam for two years, depending on how I like living there. It is a luxury to be able to work every day without having to think about how to cope moneywise."