**Above and below the Horizon**

Our earth is not a stable entity; we live on itsʽ very mobile surface. The natural world is far from settled but ever changeable and inconstant.

This is essentially the point of view expressed by a show entitled *Við sjónarrönd,*  a joint project of artists Elva Hreiðarsdóttir, Phyllis Ewen and Soffía Sæmundsdóttir. The show includes individual pieces, as well as collaborative works. Their work deals with the natural landscape and land formation, the transformation of nature, earth tremors and the effects of climate changes; in effect subjecting an aspect of the natural sciences to artistic processes.

We are faced with microscopic as well as macroscopic views of nature, the methodology of cartography combined with the visual training of the artist and printing techniques that bring out the tactility of the subject matter. Hreiðarsdóttirʽs, Ewenʽs and Sæmundsdóttirʽs work exists in the gap between scientific inquiry and artistic perception, between logical thought and the emotions. Together they present us with a multifaceted vision of their subject.

Nature has long been the subject of artistic inquiries, which have brought out its many features. We have seen it presented as a *terra incognita,* teeming with fantastic aspects and untold dangers, or as the fount of terrifying beauty. With the spread of urban society, nature became a welcome refuge from the modern hustle and bustle. During the last few decades, the image of nature has undergone yet another transformation. Today nature conservation is at the top of our agenda. Climate change is an ever-increasing threat to the natural environment. Global warming affects the tides, which gradually erode the soil; the natural powers seem to have gone berserk.

Scientists strive to investigate and understand the complex processes of nature in their own way, using measurements, logical reasoning, the existing body of knowledge as well as their experience. During the 1950s, there was a revolution in the mapping of the ocean floor when the American scientist Marie Tharp discovered the existence of the North-Atlantic ridge, a discovery that underpinned the theory of continental drift.

Tharpʽs discovery, the surprising outcome of ocean floor mapping and Icelandʽs placement right between the European and American geological plates; all of this has inspired the artists under discussion. Artists and scientists often work in similar ways; both endeavour to think outside the box and thus bring forth unexpected solutions. But artists and scientists work from very different methodologies, arriving at their solutions through different premises.

The Reykjanes peninsula resembles an open geology primer, with remains of volcanic activity and geological shifts all around, a terrain in the making or constantly trembling, enclosed by the open sea, which to the west stretches all the way to the shores of the United States. This is a terrain which the three artist are all involved with, each in her own way.

Elva Hreiðarsdóttirʽs point of departure is the earthʽs crust, the surface. She engages directly with nature by focussing on the soil right under her feet, eventually creating imprints from it. The artist employs a special printing technique called collagraphy in order to transfer the lines, planes and textures of rocks, lava and sand to paper surfaces.

She makes casts from earthʽs surface, searching for images to print from and develop further. The texture of lava and rocks becomes close and intimate, evoking memories of rough lava or cold stones in our palms and fingertips. In Hreiðarsdóttirʽs works the spectator is positioned right in the middle of nature, his point of view is limited to what is close at hand, the microscopic, rather than the wide open spaces and vast distances. The earthʽs crust and itsʽ formation, the surface of the lava containing within it memories of white-hot magma. For the moment it presents us with an image of stability, but may easily turn on us, undergo another transformation.

The American artist Phyllis Ewan has long been interested in the connection between man and nature. Recently she has focussed more and more on the effects of climate change. Her works in the present show have a double focus, on the one hand she studies the movement of sand on a seashore in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, on the other she examines the manifestations of geothermal heat in the Reykjanes pensinsula.

In Ewanʽs works things seem to be about to fall apart, dissolve, crack up, wear out. The artist uses maps for a variety of reasons, f.i. to examine manʽs area of influence or domination, while casting doubts on the legitimacy of his claims. She uses maps to show us the extent of the erosion taking place on a given seashore due to global warming. Ewanʽs works featuring hot spring areas on Reykjanes peninsula capture the fluidity of nature and the transformations and uncertainties that it engenders.

Phyllis Ewan works on a large scale, which adds to the terrifying grandeur and the transitoriness suggested by her pieces. In the end nature calls the shots. If we donʽt heed her, she will change the maps and pull the „stable“ earth from under our feet.

In her works Soffía Sæmundsdóttir works with the idea of landscape. For a number of years she has put both her drawing and paper to the test, producing images of landscape both familiar and mythic. Her horizon is multiplied and fragmented, opening up visions of ever-changeable lava fields.

The artist applies her painting brush meticulously, closely observing the ebb and flow of her paint, gradually producing a sense of the changes that the natural elements constantly wreak upon the environment. The Reykjanes peninsulaʽs natural range of grey colours vibrates before our eyes, in places it is shot through with a green colour suggestive of moss, or we are presented with colours ranging from pristine white to deepest darkness.

Sæmundsdóttirʽs paintings are replete with ever-changing natural elements and a horizon defined by the movements of the lava. Over and above we have sky and ocean converging in a torrent of water, reminding us that nature is not just a place, but also a slice of time. The painter approaches his environment purposefully, but the result cannot be measured in scientifically tested units, but in „diagrams“ of jagged lines and soft strokes, a selection of impressions and light effects.

For centuries the arts and sciences, in their efforts to understand the world, have presented us with wildly different images of it. Artists are able to draw up visions of the world that are beyond the imagination of the scientist. The conclusion of an exhibition such as *At* *The Edge of the World* is contained within the works that it presents, their visual structure, linear arrangements and deployment of colours. It leaves us with insights and visions which enlighten us and enrichen our understanding of our environment, near and far away.

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Translation : AI