

Tinna Guðmundsdóttir: What was your initial approach or the topic that you were most interested in within this five-year research project?

Kati Gausmann: Well, one main thing was that the project enabled me to go back to fieldwork. I did some fieldwork with a project called *nordlicht / light from the north*, from 2007 to 2010, and after that I worked more in the studio. The Frontiers in Retreat project was quite a good chance to change that. It enabled me to go on with two main interests: One is how movements create shape. And the other one is looking for earth rhythms, or earth movements, or universal movements. The *nordlicht* project that happened in Northern Norway, and it was more or less working with earth’s rotation around itself during 24 hours. Here in Seyðisfjörður, when I came first in 2014, I started by doing research about the geological processes here, and I experimented with new techniques; Frottage and Moulding, to see if I could get some traces of movements here in this area.

Can you tell us about where does this interest come from?

That goes back to before I started to work in the art context, when I worked with fabrics and clothes. I studied men’s tailoring after school, then fashion design and then I realized that my main interest in fashion was not beauty or new styles but the relationship between the body and clothes and also the relationship between the body and the soul regarding identity and things like that. Therefore I was thinking and working a lot with the idea that the clothes that you wear and the movements the clothes allow the body somehow influence your personal processes, like forming identity, things like that, you can go very, very deep with those questions. Like how is identity influenced by what happens to your skin and, what kind of space you have for moving. I think it comes from my main question, which is how does movement create shape. The shape can be concrete, in a concrete material, but it’s also a picture for the shape that your personality has. And there is a very nice idea of Bourdieu that he called, the social sense. Most of the time, we are following this social sense. We don’t really decide, we just follow what we have learned, like, 95% of our behaviour, is more or less unconscious and influenced by what we have learned. Imagine what we have learned as something, that Bourdieu called *habitus*. This habitus is meant to be the space you can make your decisions in and also the space in which a person can act and handle things. So it’s not a fixed reaction, but it’s more or less a fixed area.

At that time in my work I researched a lot, I did many interviews with people about their way to wear clothes and what is important for them regarding their way to dress. I did participative works and so on. And then I realized that I could no longer discuss my work within the fashion

context. It didn't work, they talk totally differently about things and phenomena. People that work more with design, they often start with having a better idea how to do things, how things should be made. I wanted to be somewhere where I can start with describing what we have and what is there and what it may mean and what it opens. Where you don't have these judgements all the time.

This was why I made my way into art; I never wanted to be an artist. But this happened. Then I started taking the fabric away from the body and tried to think about how the two dimensional areas can become three dimensional without sewing them, because this is what you normally do when you create a piece of clothing. Therefore I did things like throwing them and looking at what shape they created when they fell on the ground. Folding them and making piles, a wide range of different kinds of piles and things like that. The main question that always stayed with me was; how is a shape created, what movement creates a shape, where does a shape come from.

Did the artistic process that you went through during your residency sessions in 2014 and then again in 2016, reveal any new findings within your practice?

Well, regarding the concrete work there were a lot of surprises with the moulding and with the frottage as well. When I did the first frottage, and I've never worked in this technique before, it was so nice to see how in such a little detail of the landscape on a little piece of paper, you get the impression of the whole landscape, you find the big in the little. That was one main thing. Then with the moulding, I started to mould parts of the surface of the mountains, I started with little pieces and then I put stamping ink on them and then I printed them on paper. There were two things, one was the printing and realizing that in the way I printed them there was some un-sharpness coming up. Because I didn't use the printing machine, so I didn't print them flat. I put ink on the little moulding and I like, rolled over it. Like when you bake a cake, like you deal with the dough. Doing so, the moulding was moving a little bit on the paper. The un-sharpness was so nice because it reminds me of these pictures that you get when you are pregnant. So this possibility we have nowadays to look inside the body, with image creating techniques. And there you always have a kind of un-sharpness and always some movement at the same time, and my printings reminds me of that. So it was a bit like looking inside the mountain and at the same time it became so fragile. There are these everlasting mountains in relation to our lifetime; they are 13 million years old in this area. Relative to our lifetime they are everlasting monuments. This trace that I took from them became fragile somehow, and also the moulding.

The question is if the moulds are three dimensional, how can you print them. The smaller ones were printed in a way that I used toy balls for kids

and I moved my hands in circles and that was the way I printed the three dimensional moulds. In the beginning the mouldings are ugly, they don't smell nice, like if you have to take the skin from somebody its not really nice or beautiful. But after I did the one day presentation in the Bookshop-projectspace in 2016, I got to know why it was so important, to really deal with this moulding and to find a way to present it. To see it, hanging from the ceiling, it was very impressive. Its like you are doing something but you don't know what it will be in the end. This is what artistic process always is. Its funny, I mean I knew it was about three-dimensional but I started to fix it on two points and when I did I realised "no this is not working, Kati, you have to change it" Then I fixed it on three points and it was ok, it was good, as it was.

Can you tell us a little bit more about the fieldwork in the fjord.

First I did some research. In 2014 we started with the seminar in the geological centre Breiðdalssetur. That was a really good start and I found a very important book there for my whole work in this project, its called "Living Earth" and they had it in German so yeah! Huh! I was lucky. I knew a little bit about Iceland and because I worked with the continental drift before I knew about the system of Mid-Atlantic ridges and that Iceland is part of it and more or less the only part above sea level and things like that.

In the beginning I was a little bit disappointed that in this area we don't have the Atlantic ridge but then I thought ok, what created the uprising of these mountains here and how is the erosion going on? These seem to me the two sculptural ways you have in order to create, you put away, from working with the stone, you put material away, or you take material and create something. Something comes up: rising of the mountain. Or it's been taken away: erosion. I wanted to see if I could find some traces of these processes in the surface of the mountains. So I walked around a lot looking at the mountains here. Then I chose one or two sites where I wanted to start. I took mouldings of the surface of the mountains, I did a lot of frottage, I collected stones that I took with me to the studio and I moulded stones and then I worked with the flat printing and the uncoiled printing and with big scale frottage also. I experimented with latex to do the mouldings.

Did you often have to go to the same location?

Yes. That was also a very nice thing in the „Frontiers in Retreat“-project, that I had the possibility to come back. It allowed me to be free the first time I was here. I didn't had to finish. The second time I came was for two months, first was for one month. And the second two months was a super good period of time: in the beginning I reflected on the first works from 2014, experimented a bit, made some decisions how to go on,

experimented with those decisions and then in the end, reflected again and very concretely finished some works. And finally the one-day presentation in the projectspace „bookshop“, which was such an important and good ending of the second residency.

In your view what is the most critical connection between your practice and ecology?

What is ecology? This was one important question in the whole project. Very basic answer can be that ecology is all the relations humans have to every living non-human. But this doesn't really bring me forward so... In my work it's important to have a human presence. Not to create things with a computer but to really do it myself. On the one hand it is important because I like to have the experience, on the other hand because I am looking for the expression that the piece is done by a human. For example in my shadow drawings you can see where the lines are not really straight sometimes... Its really a hard question. Maybe the question is what concept of nature we have in our times. What nature has to do for us, how it serves us. I mean ok, capitalism.... it serves us for everything, we exploit it and we don't really care about it. But in a more theoretical way... I found this one book from Hartmut Rosa that was published last year, I brought it with me when I came for the second residency, it's called *Resonanz*. It's a term that comes from music, I think it's the same in English; *Resonance*. It's about trying to develop a sociology of world relations. It goes back in time and it's very scientific and interesting. It helps me, or it makes me think about what I am looking for in this whole process. An important thing is that my approach to nature happens within the limits of human perception. There in I try to understand the contemporary relations and responses to earth or nature and how they relate to our beliefs or philosophies. What makes us feel that we are in a responsive relation to nature or in a dumb relation. With my work I try to find a way to be in a responsive relation. Then the question is what art can do or what kind of relation people can create with these artworks, another important question. This is maybe the main thing in my artistic process regarding ecology. We may say that in this response to nature there is a very big crisis that has probably to do with capitalism, another big theme. Its something we have to think about. This is my contribution to the whole debate.

What do you think we can learn from your artwork?

There is not a "one message" or "the one thing" I like that people are touched. When you are touched, it brings you closer to yourself. I think this is what art can do somehow. Ok, it can have some theoretical background or it can deal with important questions. It is not my way to show the work with the theoretical background it may have to me.

Sometimes I use the title to create a theoretical link. But mostly I want people to be touched by what they experience with the work. Maybe it unfolds inside them some memory, some feeling. It can also be that they don't like it. Sometimes artworks that I don't like, in the end are more important to me than the ones that I like. They make me think, they make me ask myself, why am I reacting this way.

The main thing is that when you want to get something from art, you have to be open to putting some effort into it. You can only learn from things you pay attention to. This doesn't just happen through beauty or how the artwork is, it's more the way the viewer deals with the artwork. A lot of my work is somehow very fragile. I know people are often interested in how it's made and so on, then they have the feeling they understand it better. But from my point of view as the artist, it's more or less not necessary to know about that. It's necessary to trust yourself, to open yourself up to the work. The thing is about the relationship between the human and everything else. It's basic, so not one message.

What will you take with you from the project? Has your ecological position altered or changed? Has your viewpoint transformed in any way?

Because I read a lot and learned a lot it has for sure somehow changed, but not basically. The view on my own work and my own approach has deepened; more red lines have been pumped up. Because it's such a concentrated process doing these residencies, it's also hard to be away from home but at the same time you can really concentrate on your work and more aspects of it unfold. I feel really enriched by the whole thing. I also like that the main thing of the project revolved around residencies and like we said before, that I could come back here. Now I'm here for the third time and now we do the show. In the end it seems to be something that meets itself, like a circle and from that I can go on with all the experience that I have now. I said before that we have a big crisis and that we have to change the way we behave but that's more a political thing than art. Whatever you do is somehow political but I don't think art needs to be... we do not need to put the demand on art to be political.

Are you positive towards ecological concerns in the future? Are you negative? How do you see the future?

I'm not optimistic at all and that's a pity. It's not only ecological issues. Think about poverty. We have enough food in the world for everybody but there are people who starve. Why is that? We have enough technology so we only have to work 20 hours a week worldwide. But there are people working their asses off. It's super unbalanced and I think it's not about convincing people and opening their eyes and making them see that there can be a better way. They know there can be better ways. But they don't

judge these ways as being better for themselves. In the end I can only say that we need a revolution and that may change things and make the world a better place. I don't think it will change without revolutions and for sure wars, and we already have wars in many places in the world – well, like it is now I don't think it will find a good ending. We are bringing our species to an end and it might be better for the world and all other creatures. But not for our children for sure.

Do you think nature will rebel or do something towards humankind?

Well, what idea of nature do we have? Its not a person, it's not something that decides. It's a system and maybe the system is looking for balance but for sure the system is working with whatever happens. I mean, the Great Barrier Reef is dead, you can take it as an answer, which I don't think it is, but we can take it like that or we can just say these are the consequences. Nature will not fight back and also, we cannot heal nature. I think, it is a ridiculous idea to heal nature. Nature doesn't need us, we need it, we are part of it and we need it. Earth has existed for four and half billion years and our species, or the beginning of our species was maybe three to one million years ago. That's nothing. There were a lot of other living creatures before us and there will be others after us. In the end this planet will come to an end like planets do.

It is a very important point, that we have no control. That's why I don't like this idea of "healing a river" and things like that, it means that we can somehow control what's going on. But at the same time it's super important how we behave. It's maybe not that important to nature but it's important to our society and to ourselves and how we feel about ourselves and our relationships. If you take care of your relationship you take care for nature, too. It's like an attitude you have. You have no control, you can be dead in the next minute, by whatever force, something in your brain. Life is so fragile and this is maybe one important experience that I had when I was younger. When I was in my early twenties my father died and the doctors reanimated him, they brought him back to life but his brain was without oxygen for some minutes. Humans are so fragile, our whole system, and after some minutes without oxygen your personality is completely gone. He still had his main functions, like breathing, he was breathing on his own. But he was lying in a coma, awake-coma, for more than three and a half years. This was maybe the beginning of my research of what is human life and what kind of ideas of death do we have. I did a huge research with old Egyptian ideas of Life and Death.

From that on I never forgot and will never forget this feeling of how fragile life is. Just a little something and everything has changed. It doesn't have to make you sad; it's just how it is. I think it's a good thing to face things and knowing what basis we are living on and then go on with that.