CELAND IS ABOUT AS CLOSE TO being the proverbial end of the earth as you could find, a titanic landscape composed of fire and ice. Almost two-thirds of the island's total area is a dramatic wasteland punctuated by glaciers, volcanoes, geysers and waterfalls — a backdrop for Ragnarök, the ancient Norse version of Armageddon. As a subject for art in our own resolutely unromantic time it is perhaps almost too violent or full of destructive potential. But for Icelandic-born artists it's an unavoidable, crucial fact, visually and psychically, like a parent. In the process of photographing Picasso's private collection of his own work, the photographer David Douglas Duncan ran across a little study of a faceless man in a flowing overcoat. Picasso explained that it was his father, and that once the painting that this fragment remembered had been huge.

“Their work is something like that,” he said.

Icelandic-born Hildur Ásgeirsdóttir Jónsson’s works are something like that. Her unblushingly lovely, low-key, nearly abstract visions of fault lines and cracks and mysterious openings are based on details of glaciers and other features of her native landscape. They seem to speak of the body as much as the eye, of the physical depth at which home is located, and the ineradicable impressions of early experience. At the same time, by focusing on small passages of earth, water or ice, they manage to evoke the tremendous scale of the places they quote.

Jónsson is a weaver with a painter's training and sensibility. She lives both in the Cleveland area and in her native Reykjavik, and in the years since she earned her 1995 Kent State University MFA, her unusual mingling of strategic patience and subtle visual response has produced a body of work surprising in its vast potential. But for Icelandic-born artists it's an unavoidable, crucial fact, visually and psychically, like a parent. In the process of photographing Picasso's private collection of his own work, the photographer David Douglas Duncan ran across a little study of a faceless man in a flowing overcoat. Picasso explained that it was his father, and that once the painting that this fragment remembered had been huge.

If you approach the two paintings on view at William Busta, Vatnajökull #1 and #2, you might think you’re facing an intimate conversation about the nature of light. And perhaps you are. But there is something else going on, too, a drawing/painting/weaving thing that has no certain visual ambition, but vast potential. More literal, panoramic landscape images and hints of autobiography, of the self, emerge slowly from Jónsson’s tranquil surfaces, like another world glimpsed in still waters. She seems to be feeling and touching her way to new vision as she treads over the frozen skin of a land that has known no thaw in countless millennia. The Swiss Dadaist poet Hans Arp once wrote, “Infinity comes into this world barefoot.” Certainly Jónsson’s barefoot works, at once intimate and remote, catch something of the infinite between their toes as they walk over the fissured ice of time and process.

During the years at Kent, Jónsson studied with two Northern Ohio masters, the textile artist Janice Lessman-Moss and the painter Craig Lucas. A legacy from the technical prowess of both of these artists has been evident in Jonsson’s work from the beginning. On the one hand her woven work, produced on a loom, is physically all about technique with opalescent grays, and the sense the artist conveys of fracture combine to evoke the uncanny pallor and ghost-like presence of a glacier. Fear and fascination are built deep into this world barefoot. The swiss dadaist poet Hans Arp once wrote, “Infinity comes into this world barefoot.” Certainly Jónsson’s barefoot works, at once intimate and remote, catch something of the infinite between their toes as they walk over the fissured ice of time and process.

Vatnajökull is the largest of Iceland’s four glaciers, and is the subject of all eight of Jónsson’s paintings on view at William Busta. None are particularly easy to interpret visually in terms of landscape. They could be a lot of things, but the Arctic green of certain bleeding lines, the deep blues contrasting with opalescent grays, and the sense the artist conveys of fracture combine to evoke the uncanny pallor and ghost-like presence of a glacier. Fear and fascination are built deep into Jónsson’s work from the beginning. On the one hand her woven work, produced on a loom, is physically all about technique with opalescent grays, and the sense the artist conveys of fracture combine to evoke the uncanny pallor and ghost-like presence of a glacier. Fear and fascination are built deep into this world barefoot. The swiss dadaist poet Hans Arp once wrote, “Infinity comes into this world barefoot.” Certainly Jónsson’s barefoot works, at once intimate and remote, catch something of the infinite between their toes as they walk over the fissured ice of time and process.

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