

ECAL

Ecole cantonale d'art de Lausanne

The Iceland Whale Bone Project

Experimental research on whale bones
presented by the Product Design Master
students following a workshop in Iceland
led by designer Brynjar Sigurðarson

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Designer, Lausanne

Whales are remarkable gentle giants. Some are even so big that a human could easily swim in its veins. Sometimes, a whale can lose its sense of direction and swim onto dry land where it dies. This is called a whale stranding. Every year, 10–15 whales get stranded along the coasts of Iceland. When a whale strands close to populated areas it can be a big problem, mostly because the smell gets almost unbearable when the whale starts to rot. In that case the dead whale is towed to a more remote location. After a couple of years, the only trace of the whale is a handful of bones lying on the beach.

In recent times, whalebones haven't been used much in Iceland. They mainly serve decorative purposes, where people for example install them on their balcony next to or under a flower pot or in front of their house as 'natural sculptures'. Since whalebones have more or less been neglected as a material for making objects it felt ideal to give it a closer look and see what happens.

Iceland is a country of large contrasts and rapid changes which can be found in various contexts. For example the fire and the ice which you find in the volcanoes and the glaciers, not to forget the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull which got half of the design community stranded in Milan in 2010.

Another aspect that is rather specific to the culture in Iceland is the clash between the old and the new. Since recently, Iceland has become one of the most technologically advanced countries in the world, although at the beginning of last century Iceland was one of the poorest countries in Europe.

In January 2013, a group of 17 students from ECAL went to Iceland for a one-week workshop in collaboration with the Iceland Academy of the Arts. After landing on this remote island in the middle of the North Atlantic the group went to experience and get a glimpse of some of the remarkable things you can find there.

The topic was focused on whalebones and other materials originating from the sea. The group collected various types of whalebones, sharkskin and shark teeth and even scraps of plastic found on the beach. In addition, it was important to reflect on the atmosphere and the sense of the place; we couldn't forget the context, which was basically students from all over the world located in Iceland. It didn't make sense to do things in a very pragmatic way, simply because the environment didn't invite us to follow that path.

To bring this together, The Iceland Whale Bone Project shows a reflection on the culture and the history in Iceland and perhaps most importantly, the contrasts between the old and the new, or the primitive and the progressive.









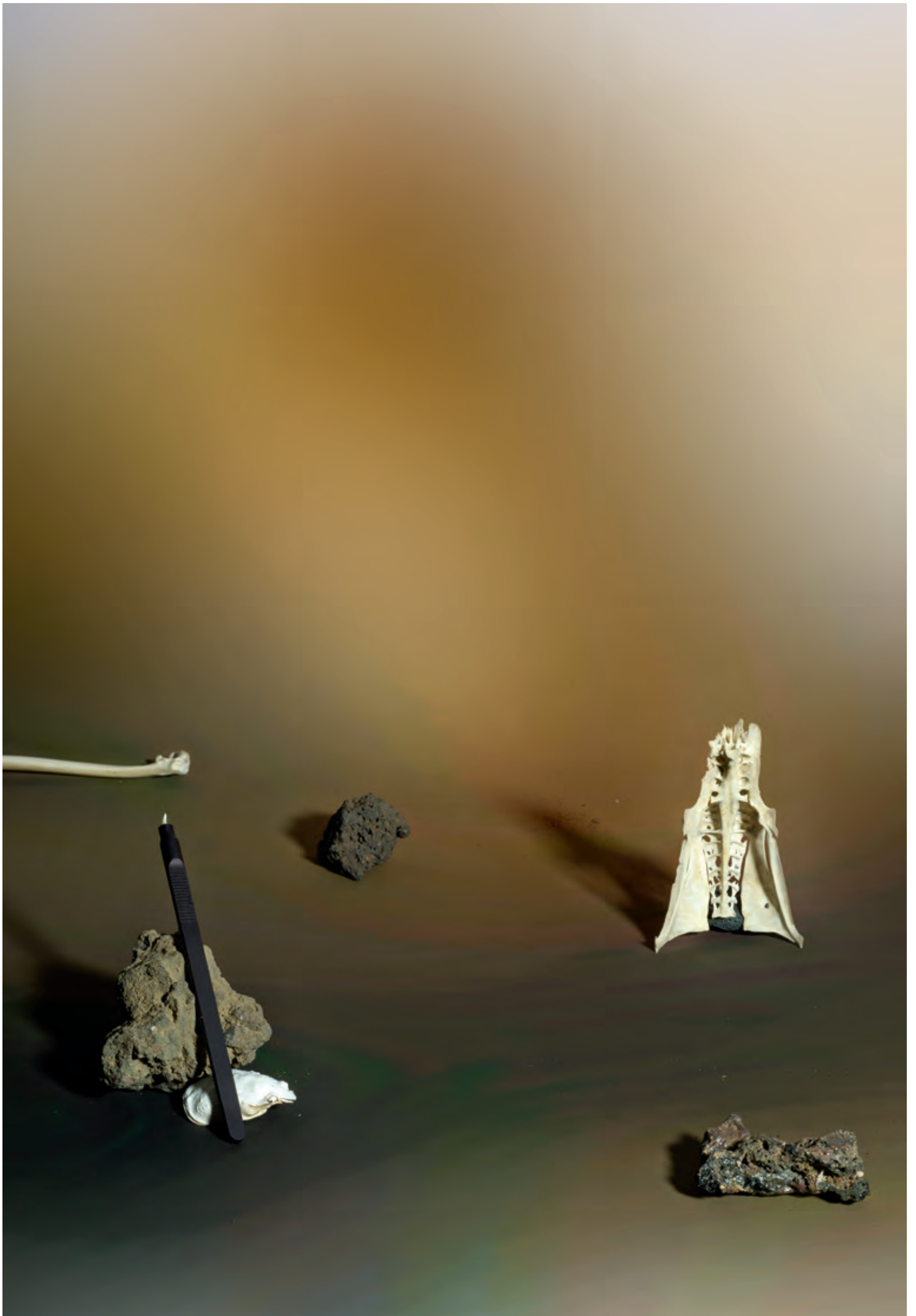
















Thibault Penven

Skipið (Boat in Icelandic)

Curved, fluid, salient and sharp. The whale bones, especially the vertebra laminae, make me think of forms of shark fins or fins of fish. *Skipið* is a collection of boats built with and around bones of whales. Each shell, made in hard foam, is an extension of the bone, which follows and develops these curves to form a caricature of a style of boat. An Icelandic legend says that every boat is alive – *Skipið* is the proof.



Dominic Schlögel

Hákarl (Shark in Icelandic)

The cutters result from an observation on the razor-sharp teeth from the legendary North Atlantic Greenland shark. The contrast between the raw teeth and the precisely done alloy hilts, create curiosity for testing. The tools suggest a precise function for various tasks, while maintaining the mystery of their application.



Luc Beaussart

Stallur (Pedestal in Icelandic)

This project proposes a new way of presenting whalebones. Geometric wooden pedestals transformed into the shape of each whalebone being presented. With this system of connecting the two materials, the beauty of the bone is highlighted and the bones become a domestic decorative object.



Charlotte Baverel

Gríma (Mask in Icelandic)

Composed and assembled with raw and primitive Icelandic materials, the masks play with contrast and similarities. The strength and energy of each marine animal frees itself in a new form, a new body. Seal, shark and whale meet through contemporary elements.



Milos Ristin

Hrefna (Minke whale in Icelandic, also a woman's name)

This project simply compares the visual language of manmade objects, such as high end motorbikes and sports cars, with natural elements like the skull of a minke whale. Using the incredibly fascinating formal languages of nature is a common practice in the process of designing 'artificial' objects. We let nature inspire us and take our capabilities of creating formal languages to a new level. At the same time our intention of interpreting those shapes is being restricted by the tools we use to get there. In this work I try to highlight the possibilities and limitations of the man-made interpretation of such a mesmerizing piece of nature. The parallel between the inspiration and the outcome results in the same piece.



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