In May and June 2005, I was an artist in residence at the Hafnarborg Cultural Center in Hafnarfjordur, Iceland. During that time, I had the opportunity to work on my art work as well as travel around the country, meet new people, and explore a fascinating culture. I visited different parts of the country and I encountered dramatic and seemingly impossible landscapes. This is a reflection of my experiences during that time.

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Iceland is an island located in the North Atlantic. It is situated about midway between the European continent and North America. The closest neighboring country is Greenland, followed by Scotland and Norway. Iceland belongs to the European nation and is considered to be part of Scandinavia.
View of Hafnarfjordur
The red roofed building was Hafnarborg, the cultural center where I lived and worked.
Hafnarfjordur was my home town for two months. It is one of the oldest towns in Iceland and has a large harbor where many fishing vessels arrive daily. The town is surrounded by rugged lava fields. In fact many of the houses are situated between lava formations. The houses had brightly colored tin roofs and neighborhood strolls were very pleasant.

Hafnarfjordur Landmarks
Sunset over the harbor at midnight, harbor in the day, and bright cheerful houses.
Hafnarfjordur
Felted wool, yarn, beads.
1”x6.5”x6.5”
Immediate Surroundings

This is one of the earliest pieces I created in my residency. Hafnarfjordur was the first town I explored and I immediately noticed the giant red and white aluminum tanks. At first, I didn’t even know what they were and made a beaded replica. I also had just purchased some Lopi yarn and started to knit an Icelandic motif. It reminded me a bit of a flag and I placed it on the felted harbor.

Details of Hafnarfjordur
Close ups of the beaded aluminum tank and the knitted flag.
The Blue Lagoon
The main swimming section. This was shot above from a lava cliff.
Blue Lagoon Visit

There is simply nothing like this place anywhere else. You drive through miles of tortured lava fields and suddenly, you encounter a huge geothermal plant and a spa. The color of the water is otherworldly... a milky, almost fluorescent baby blue. This is due to the algae in the water mixing with the calcite. Swimming in the 90 degree lagoon was a spiritual experience.

Details of the Blue Lagoon
With a silica face mask, close up of the calcite rocks, river at entrance to the lagoon.
Blue Lagoon
Felted wool, yarn, beads.
.5"x10"x10"
A Direct Inspiration

This piece was a literal interpretation of the Blue Lagoon in the Reykjanes Peninsula. The light blue knitting mimics the otherworldly water. The harsh wind is represented in the knitted "waves." The white beads become grains of calcite that surround the black lava formations that jut out of the water at uneven intervals.

Details of Blue Lagoon
Various details of Blue Lagoon showing calcite beads and black lava rock.
Reynisfjara Beach
The black sand beach with sea stacks near the village of Vik.
Vik and the Black Sand

One day I took an excursion to the Southernmost point in Iceland and visited the village of Vik and the black volcanic beach of Reynisfjara. This beach was voted as one of the world’s top 10 beaches by "Conde Nast Traveller." Unusual sea caves with mammoth basalt columns, relentless crashing waves and the remote location added to the ambiance.

Reynisfjara Beach Details
Looking out from a sea cave and at the various seastacks of Reynisdrangur.
Vik
Felted wool, beads.
4"x8.5"x7.5"
The South Coast

This piece drew on my trip to the South Coast of Iceland. It represents the seastacks off the coast of the village of Vik. The beaded black sand beach merges with the odd black cone-like formations of a nearby glacier that I climbed. The dirt formed black streaks on the glacial ice.

Vik Details
Beaded surfaces and black felt cones.
Hellnar Beach
The sea cliffs formed around the water, creating small lagoons.
Sea Cliffs of Arnarstapi

These sea cliffs are located on the Snæfellsness peninsula in West Iceland. I took a rugged 1.5 mile hike starting in the village of Arnarstapi. I hiked through lava beds next to the ocean and saw many bird cliffs and small lagoons. Birds were swarming and squawking. I ended up in the village of Hellnar, next to a coffee shop with this view outside its window.

Arnarstapi Sea Cliffs
Details of several bird cliffs near Arnarstapi and a close-up of beach stones.
Hellnar

Felted wool, clam shells.

.25”x10”x10”
Rocky Beaches

Many of the beaches in Iceland are rocky and rugged. One particular beach in the village of Hellnar was the inspiration behind this piece. This beach was filled with multicolored stones and surrounded by bird cliffs. I found interesting patterns in the random nature of the rocks and created a small shell "oasis."

Details of Hellnar
Close up views of the clam shells (which I found on a beach there) and stones.
Lava beds by Dritvik
Pointed lava spires next to Dritvik beach on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula.
Wild Lava Beds

Because Iceland is a volcanic island, the country is filled with lava fields. There is great diversity in the lava formations themselves. They range from brown and gray to jet black, and from scattered pumice rocks to 65’ tall arches. Additionally, many types of moss, lichens, and sometimes ferns, grow on top and all around these formations.

Types of Lava Beds
Arches of Dimmuborgir, needles near Dritvik, and moss covered lava fields.
Lavascapes
Felted wool.
2.5"x12.5"x11" (larger piece)
Land of Lava

The first things I noticed in Iceland were the fields of lava. Heading out of the airport, I passed great expanses of moss covered lava, some formations looking like giant twisted monsters. Hafnarfjordur was also surrounded by lava parks. I was so enchanted by the bizarre shapes, colors and textures of this common Icelandic site that I created my own islands of lava.

Lavascape Details
Various details of Lavascapes showing the diversity of color and texture.
Kerið Crater
Looking down into the lake from the top of the crater.
Kerið crater is located in the Golden Circle, an area about 1.5 hours southeast of Reykjavik. The guide told me that there are occasional rock concerts held here. He also said that there were fish living in the lake and every so often you can spot their air bubbles. I spotted another crater in the Snæfellsness peninsula that reminded me of Kerið, but with no lake.

Background of Kerið

Details of Craters

Close-ups of the lake in the bottom of Kerið and the crater in West Iceland.
Kerið Crater
Felted wool, beads.
2”x8.5”x8.5”
Colorful Craters

Iceland is filled with craters. One of the craters which really grabbed my attention was Kerið. It was one of the first craters that I visited on my trip. It had a large greenish-blue lake in the bottom and was surrounded by volcanic material red with iron.

Kerið Crater Details
Close-ups of the beaded lake and the iron ore material surrounding the lake.
Birds in Reykjavik
These are migrating birds flying over the Tjorn, the lake in the center of Reykjavik.
Experiencing Migration

Early in the trip, I was taken to a bird sanctuary in Bessastadir, a peninsula right outside Reykjavik known for migrating birds. There I got to see several types of birdnests, each with different color eggs that were surrounded by down feathers. In June, I saw many baby ducks in the Reykjavik Botanical Gardens and other parks.

Eggs and Ducklings
Details of some eggs I spotted and the baby ducks in a Reykjavik garden.
Migration
Felted wool, yarn, shibori silk, handmade paper.
1.5”x16.5”x12”
Bird Migration

I arrived in Iceland in early May, when the migration of birds begins. I created this piece as a result of being constantly surrounded by birds of many kinds, including their sounds. I made shibori on silk that reminded me of hundreds of birds flying in rows. Then I created felt eggs and tiny crocheted nests. I was also inspired by the colors of eggs I found lying around.

Eggs and Nests
Details of felted eggs and crocheted nests.
Jonsi Birgisson of Sigur Ros

A lucky encounter with the lead singer of Sigur Ros in the town of Mosfellsbaer.
Music and Architecture

I was fortunate enough to meet the lead singer of Sigur Ros, which intensified my idea of creating a headdress based on their music. Additionally, I gained inspiration from the angular, clean and stark architecture of churches and buildings that I visited. To me, white is the dominant color of Iceland, its architecture and music.

2 churches and a Museum
Hallgrimskirkja church, Hafnarfjordur church and sculpture museum interior.
Sigur Ros of Hats
Felted wool, beads.
Versatile Music

My cousin gave me the idea to create a visual interpretation of the music of Sigur Ros, one of my favorite groups from Iceland. The angular sides represent the intensity and harshness of the music, whereas the balls and small flowers portray the soft, whimsical and dreamlike quality of the music. It was a great challenge for me to represent their music through a hat!

Details of Contrast
Felt balls, beaded flowers and a close-up of cut layers of felt.
Skogafoss
In the village of Skogar, South Iceland.
Waterfalls and Geysers

I was able to visit the magnificent waterfalls of Gullfoss, Skogafoss, Seljalandsfoss and Godafoss. They were powerful and captivating and I knew they would be an influence in my art work. Additionally, I visited the tiny village of Geysir, which is the word for a spouting hot spring that originated in Iceland. I see a geysir like a waterfall in reverse, but more sporadic and hot!

Forceful Water
Details of Gullfoss, Seljalandsfoss and the Strokkur hot spring in Geysir.
Foss
Felted wool, yarn, white pearls.
Water Everywhere

Water is ubiquitous in Iceland. Waterfalls, lakes, rivers, ocean, geysers and glaciers abound. For this headdress, I was most inspired by waterfalls, or foss. Vertical rivulets of water spout from the head scattered with giant bubbles. The sheer force of these waterfalls are astounding, an idea I worked with in this piece.

Bubbles and Rivulets
Details of pearl and felt bubbles, and aqua yarn streams.
The Viking Festival, Hafnarfjordur
Ending rituals at the annual Viking Festival, June 2005.
A Memorable Festival

Perhaps the most interesting thing was the intensity of these "Vikings" and how seriously they took this festival. Many of these folks looked like they’re straight out of "Lord of the Rings," complete with dreadlocks, long beards, chained armor, belts, fox skins, swords, knives, shields, helmets, stuffed minks, tights and lots of beer. At the end, they all drank beer out of a single ram’s horn.

Viking Festival Details
Man jumping over a fire, portrait with the owner of Viking Hotel and the hotel itself.
Viking Cap
Wool yarn, horsehair, reindeer horn.
Tribute to Vikings

While at the Viking Festival in Hafnarfjordur, I bought some yarn, and slices of reindeer horn. I wanted to create a hat to pay tribute to the festival and this important part of Icelandic history. My Viking cap is horned, as is most of the Viking headwear. I also added texture with Icelandic horse hair and fiber dyed with native moss to take advantage of the surrounding resources.

Details of Viking Cap
Close up views of horsehair, moss dyed yarn and sliced reindeer horn.
Pseudo Craters in Lake Myvatn
Some of the diverse scenery of Lake Myvatn, North Iceland.
Lake Myvatn

Myvatn means "Midge Lake" in Icelandic and indeed, there are swarms of these pesky black flies in certain parts of the park. However, it was so unseasonably cold that there weren’t as many bugs as there could have been. The lake has a district called Dimmuborgir or "the black castles" and a geothermal area of boiling mudpots called Hverarond.

Pseudo Craters of Lake Myvatn
Various views of pseudo craters from the lake and a petrol station.
Myvatn
Felted wool, yarn.
1"x12"x12"
Pseudo Craters

The green rings on this piece represent the dozens of pseudo craters that I saw in Lake Myvatn. Some of these craters were up to 300 feet in diameter and I was able to walk around and explore them, even climb up some of them. The alien landscape influenced this simple, yet dynamic pattern.

Pseudo Crater Details
Close-ups of the various pseudo craters.
Icelandic Beachscape
Felted wool, fish skin and beads.
.25”x10.5”x11”
Many Icelandic artists use marine themes and so do I. Here I discovered a unique material that is common in Icelandic art but not elsewhere... fish skin. It has a similar feel to leather, but with a different look. Along the shorelines, I was also enthralled by the changing nature of beach rocks. The last time I visited the beach, many rocks were covered with a fluorescent green moss.

Icelandic Beachscape Details
Close-ups of fish skin portions, beaded moss and multicolored stones.
Is
Felted wool, beads, fur.
2"x8"x8"
Unusual Ice Cream

The food in Iceland was very interesting. There were distinctive local dishes, as well as many global influences. One of these global foods was ice cream, or is. It wasn’t the ice cream that was unusual, rather what was put on it and mixed in. All kinds of strange sweet candies were added and it was covered in brightly colored syrups. Here is my own is concoction.

Is Details
Close-ups of felted ice cream balls, sprinkles and fur cherry.
Snæfellsness Glacier
One of the most recognized glaciers in Iceland, on the Snæfellsness Peninsula.
Icy Landscapes

I was able to visit two glaciers while in Iceland. I climbed Solheimajokull, which was a tongue-like projection off of the main glacier of Myrdalsjokull and drove around Snæfellsjokull, a popular site for new-age gatherings. Not all these icescapes were in Iceland, either. As I was flying over Greenland on the way home, I saw an unexplored world of snow, ice and glaciers.

Glaciers and Greenland
Solheimajokull, Snæfellsjokull and the stark white landscape of Greenland.
Icescape
Felted wool, fabric, metallic yarn.
Land of Ice

Iceland conjures up images of ice. Although misnamed (there are many green, fertile areas), 11% of the country is still covered by glaciers. I was inspired by the constant use of white in the artwork there. I am interested in how metallics work with white to create arctic, icy landscapes. I wanted to capture the fresh, sparkling look of an icescape in this headdress.

Icescape Details
Close-ups of silver yarn and metallic fabric.
Town Hall, Reykjavik
This is a significant building in central Reykjavik designed by Finnish architect Alvaar Aalto.
Architectural Influences

It was refreshing for me to encounter such distinct styles of architecture and design while in Iceland. There was an aesthetic that I was exposed to that was different than anything else I had ever seen. The styles were direct, simple and uncluttered, yet elegant. This challenged me to look at design in new ways and to consider applying these principles to my art work.

Architectural Details
Inside Asmundursafn museum, a clever plant design, and the moss wall of City Hall.
Untitled
Felted wool, mica, feathers, stones, paper, shells, horsehair, fish skin, buffalo fur, yarn. 2" x 11" x 11"
Elements of Iceland

I was intrigued by the various materials that Icelanders use in their artwork. I created a nine element piece with some native and non native materials to Iceland, representing many diverse textures and environments. Additionally, I was inspired by the grid like architecture and the geometric nature of Icelandic artwork.

Yarn and Mica Details
Close-ups of knitting and mica disks.
Farm outside Reykjavik
Farm about 10 miles outside of Reykjavik with wildflowers in full bloom.
Rural Iceland

It was a real treat just to travel the long distance through the amazing landscapes. I saw thousands of sheep, lambs, horses, ponies, rugged snow capped mountain passes with hundreds of unnamed waterfalls, lonesome farms, fjords, glacial backwaters and forests. One thing for certain is that as a human, you feel dwarfed and insignificant to the overpowering land here.

Farm Scenes
Icelandic horses, atmospheric wasteland, and the lumpy ground.
Icelandic Farm
Felted wool, cotton thread.
.75”x8.5”x9”
Farm Features

As I was taking my tours around Iceland, I passed through miles of farmland. The ground was often very lumpy with straight irrigation trenches at even intervals. There were small patches of grass and rivers. When passing a tiny village, a road sign would appear with a simplified representation of all the buildings and roads mapped out. The isolation here haunted me.
Icelandic Ski Cap
Yarn, wool fabric, fish skin.
Icelandic Fashion

I saw many interesting fashion styles, particularly in the hats and accessories. Icelandic artists are known for their resourcefulness, and make use of fish skin and other natural materials in their wearables. I also noticed that many of the hats had tassels and a ski cap shape. Knitwear is a major tourist item and I wanted to create my own styles with a twist.

Details of Icelandic Ski Cap
Close-ups of fish skin tassels and knitting.
Kringlan
Felted wool, yarn, plastic beads.
.5”x9”x9”
Popular Culture

One day I visited the largest shopping mall in Reykjavik called Kringlan. Here I learned more about Icelandic popular culture. I purchased some striped beads at a discount store called Tiger Island. I studied the types of colors and imagery that commonly appear in the local fashion and design. As I noticed many modern styles in the shops, I came up with this interpretation.

Kringlan Details
Close-ups of plastic striped beads, knitted squares and felted stripes.
Nordic Horsehair Tapestry
Felted wool, horsehair fabric, mica, fur, yarn.
1"x28"x18"
Inuit/Icelandic Influences

The art here often incorporates neutral colors and natural materials. For this piece, I used a horsehair fabric for my canvas and muted felt circles for my composition. I was experimenting with the repetition of a form, but constantly changing the color, size and material. I was also inspired by Inuit art from Greenland, which I saw in various shops and galleries in Iceland.

Horsehair Tapestry Details
Close-ups of felted circles, mica, fur and horsehair fabric.
Icelandic Beach Hat
Felted wool, mica, sea sponge, egg sack, shell, buffalo fur, horsehair, yak hair, driftwood.
Landscape Versus Design

One day I took a walk on the beach in Hafnarfjordur and collected some interesting materials. While the top of the hat has a rather chaotic collection and presentation of materials, the sides have more organized rows of circles. This is based on my observation of the complex and overwhelming Icelandic landscapes versus the simple artwork and design by the artists.

Icelandic Beach Hat Details
Close ups of an egg sack, felted circle and an overall top shot.
Reynisfjara Beach
Sea caves with stacks of basalt columns, an inspiration for future art work.

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