

ARTnews

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Turning Over a New Leaf

by rachel wolff

ICELANDIC ARTIST Katrin Sigurdardottir offers viewers a more approachable version of the wild, using scale to change the relationship between humans and land. In 2007, at the Landesgalerie Linz in Austria, she installed three untitled white cubes. People had to kneel like ducks diving for food, with their butts raised and their heads disappearing into a square cutout. Viewers found themselves encompassed by blue glaciers crafted out of resin, with the cube acting as the milky white waters upon which the glaciers float. It was a safe and private way to experience—at least in facsimile—the voracious arctic landscape.

Sigurdardottir's *Haul* (2005)—which will be included in "Beyond the Picturesque," opening at the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst in Ghent, Belgium, on the 4th of this month—makes landscape even more manageable. The work consists of eleven miniature models of picturesque parks and countrysides that fold up neatly into otherwise unremarkable crates and boxes. Each depicted terrain is an amalgamation of different places and memories, from Switzerland to San Francisco.

This work is often interpreted as a means of exposing people to a foreign landscape, but the artist holds that this is not her intent. It's rather "an idiosyncratic proposal of completely reversing your relationship to nature—playing on this idea that nature is something that we control," she says. "When you put nature in these boxes, it's very docile, desirable. But in fact nature is the complete opposite of that. Nature can kill us even if we're living in a protected urban place. In Iceland especially, we don't think of nature as our friend."

The intentional lack of specificity in Sigurdardottir's work speaks to a larger trend of globalization. "A lot more people get around to a lot more places," Bode notes, adding that on its own, "the idea of the 'wild' and the 'other' and the 'unexplored' is less seductive. We end up having to build a new relationship to landscape out of the portable frames of references that we all individually carry."