

MARGRÉT H BLÖNDAL

Simple Enigmas: The Art of Margrét H. Blöndal

This year, Margrét Blöndal is nominated for the Icelandic Visual Arts Award for the second time and her selection for Manifesta 7 confirms the success of her international exhibitions. For Icelandic audiences, the opportunity finally came to see Margrét's work in a large private exhibition as her work was installed in the Reykjavík Art Museum in Hafnarhús last autumn. Using only simple materials for her assemblages, she nonetheless managed to engage the somewhat overwhelming architecture of the building and create a show that was surprising and beautiful. At first glance the large hall with its brutal concrete columns seemed to contain nothing at all, but as one explored the exhibition, new parts came to light, sometimes half-hidden, one work leading on to others. It was one of the most delicate yet enjoyable exhibitions of the season.

With her fragile but oddly attractive sculptural installations, using the humblest of found materials, Margrét Blöndal has been exhibiting widely in the last few years. Since 2005 she has had private shows in Dublin, Rome, Basel, New York, Reykjavík and elsewhere. Her group exhibitions in the same period range from Chile to Poland, via Canada, Germany and other stops. Gradually and entirely without fanfare, Margrét has built up a body of work that is substantial, although her installations are always assembled on the site and her list of materials is as innocuous as can be: "snippets, foam, plastic, colours, string, rubber, tubes, paper".

Margrét's works sometimes manage to look almost like nothing at all, just a few unspectacular objects strewn about the space. There is nothing that draws attention to itself, no clever puns to understand and no sly references to catch.

About her work, Margrét herself says: "The works are stepping stones around the space inside the head; hummocks on which you can sit to catch your breath ..." The works are not mementoes of a particular story, but pointers towards nonverbal space – and they flutter around the concept of being alive. The process of making them is intensely personal: "Everything I do is based on my experience and feeling." But Margrét Blöndal is not a storyteller and her installations don't offer any easy clues for audiences to grab onto; they are not about her or her story and even the text she sometimes includes is too general to allow us to formulate any interpretations based on her character or history. She leaves us only with the objects she has assembled and we are forced to trace only the tentative connections between them, certain angles formed across the space of the gallery, a certain tension between irregularly formed groups of balloons, or rubber balls, or bits of foam. It is a very minimal aesthetic, built up almost entirely of nuances, but instead of paring down the materials or reducing them to abstractions, Margrét relies on their insignificance to help us look beyond them to the quiet poetry of the arrangement.

Jón Proppé