

## **Tamara Ferioli - HEIMAEY**

**di Björg Stefánsdóttir - Edda Halldórsdóttir**

I wonder if Ferioli's experience and encounter of Iceland was like déjà vu? That is how it seemed to me. Not like déjà from a dream but rather from another life. It is as if the extreme contrasts in Icelandic landscapes – the soft green grass and hard core volcanic rocks, black sands and glaciers, and the life of the inhabitants intertwined in it – had a great impact on her. As she described it, not in a surprising but a comforting way, a feeling of security of something that you know very well even though you are seeing it and experiencing it for the first time. Her obsession and attraction to Iceland seems almost like she is spellbound.

I met Ferioli in the West Fjords during her latest visit to Iceland. She seemed out of breath and as if she had no time to waste. We met in a little café a few days before her trip ended, she was researching, discovering, and finding inspiration for her exhibition. After a hot cappuccino and a Belgian waffle at the café, which was located in the middle of nowhere, she had to run. She was like a sponge, drinking in the surroundings, allowing them to seep into her system and circulate there while she captured what she sourced for. Ferioli has, in her own way, taken a part of Iceland with her and I'm certain it will stay with her for time to come. The forces she found and moved her in Iceland will haunt her and she will be back, no doubt.

Björg Stefánsdóttir

The title of Tamara Ferioli's exhibition, *Heimaey*, might not offer many clues to international visitors of Officine dell'Imagine in Milan, and might even leave them with questions concerning the origin of the name and its connection to Ferioli's artistic expression. Icelandic visitors, however, and others who know of Iceland and the Icelandic language, recognise it as the name of the largest island of the Vestmannaeyjar archipelago south off the Icelandic coast.

Ferioli's exhibition revolves around the theme of Iceland and deals with the artist's experience of the country and her travels around it. Ferioli first came to Iceland in 2013 after having dreamt of visiting the country since she was little. Literally, the name *Heimaey* translates into 'Home Island', and ever since her first visit, Ferioli has regarded Iceland as her home island – though she lives and works in Milan. The country affects her in

inexplicable ways, giving her power and filling her with feelings and emotions that she's never felt anywhere else in the world. The sparsely populated island in the North Atlantic Ocean feels like home to her and for some obscure reasons it seems as if she was always meant to go there.

During her extensive travels around the country, Ferioli visited the island Heimaey where, in 1973, there was a volcanic eruption that lay to waste almost half the town. Today, Heimaey has a population of 4500 people, you can still feel the warmth from the ground in the vicinity of the volcano that erupted 40 years ago, and that brings humans into an intimate connection to nature. To her, Icelandic nature is violent and comforting at the same time, and between the contrasts lays peaceful harmony. Everything is like it is supposed to be and the island feels like a big body where everything functions together to make a living whole. Travelling has become a part of Ferioli's artistic process, not unlike the British Land artist Richard Long, who travels to different countries, taking epic walks through rural landscapes where he performs in nature, and documents it or takes part of nature; rocks, mud or other natural substances and uses that to make works into exhibition spaces. Iceland has been one of Long's working fields and he has visited the country on several occasions since the 70's, travelling around it and making art. The use of natural elements is also intrinsic to Ferioli's art where she uses insects, herbs, flowers, bones, and other biological materials instead of synthetic ones. Ferioli experiences Icelandic landscapes as emotional and in that sense she fuses with it and relates to it. Nature has emotions, humans have emotions, and Ferioli combines the two in her works.

*Heimaey* is also the name of the installation Ferioli has created in the basement of the gallery in Milano. There, she has built a house, inspired by a house that she stumbled upon in her travels through Iceland; an abandoned house in the south of the country where a large cliff has invaded the space of the building and changed its image. The rock literally lies on the house and it is evident how nature has taken over the manmade space. Despite the force of the rock, the house is still standing strong and has become an ingrained part of the landscape.

The house that Ferioli has created stands like an island in the exhibition space and visitors can walk around it and view from all angles. The ceiling in the gallery basement lies over the house like a big mass and the visitor might get the feeling that the ceiling is invading the space of the installation. The house is covered with cuttlefish-bone spreading out onto the floor, connecting the house with the ground it is standing on. The look doesn't give away the nature of the bones that look strong and durable but are in fact delicately fragile.

Through an open door, stemming from the darkness of the house's interior comes a sound; the sound of various natural occurrences that the artist has recorded during her travels around Iceland. The visitors hear wind, waterfalls, and glacier cracking, and as they walk on the bones surrounding the house they crack, making a sound that blends with the others. The visitors have the power to affect the artwork and put their mark on the experience as well as the installation's appearance.

In a separate room, on the second floor of the gallery, are Ferioli's drawings and photographs. In the detailed and delicate drawings, Ferioli keeps her loyalty to natural elements using pencil on Japanese paper to depict plants, fish, flowers, leaves, and other things found in nature. In some of the drawings a naked and exposed human body is intertwined with the biological elements and the two share a dynamic relationship. Ferioli extends the use of nature by gluing her own red hair onto the drawings. With it she covers the faces of the humans and thus hides their identity. In that action lays a contradiction, as a person's DNA can be detected in the hair and the drawings become a game of hide-and-seek and a struggle between revealing and shielding.

In the photographs, the hair is used to form other objects that interfere with the landscape and change it. Ferioli blends herself into the nature displayed and thus becomes a part of it. The works in the exhibition all deal in one way or another with the relationship between man and nature, shedding light on how the two fit together, blend together, and what they have in common. In this sense, they reflect the writings of the French 20th century philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who wrote extensively on art, perception, and nature. In his phenomenology he sought to erase the borders between man and nature, body and soul, and other pairs that are usually regarded as separate, and instead, lead the pairs together to make a whole. Merleau-Ponty saw the body as the main site of experiencing the world and through it humans get to know and perceive their surroundings. Ferioli lets nature seep through her body and influence her art, and in her installation, drawings, and photographs the melding of man and nature becomes evident.

Although the doors to this exhibition will close, Iceland, as a source of inspiration and creation, is an on-going process for Ferioli.

Edda Halldórsdóttir