



Top: *RED*, from 2003–4, gives a vivid example of what Katrin means by her take on scale: "It's the way you experience your environment, like when, as a child, you lie in the grass and try to imagine what that world looks like for the worm."

Above: *In the Woods*, created in 2000, gives us some idea of the evolution of the worm's-eye view.

Right: The artwork at this installation by Michael Young, guest of honour at the *Interieur02*, Kortrijk, Belgium 2002, shows the now well-established pattern of collaboration between husband and wife.



Profile

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Katrin Petursdottir Young

"For me, my images are like a patchwork of different scale worlds," says Katrin. For us, they're a window to a different perspective...

Sometimes it's difficult to pin down exactly what it is about a person that you find so intriguing. Katrin Petursdottir Young is like that. It's not that you can't come up with reasons for loving her work; it's just that you can't come up with *the* reason.

A former industrial designer, committed to the digital, this Icelandic illustrator is

viewing because it reveals an attempt to decipher the world.

World whys

"Making things was always a big part of my life," says Katrin. That being the case, when it was time to think about further education, industrial design was a natural direction for the young Petursdottir. Unfortunately, this was the 1980s and Iceland had yet to develop the requisite

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currently in the process of organising shows in Tokyo and Milan. Her work — which is frequently very large and often has practical uses — rewards repeated and prolonged

infrastructure, so alternative arrangements were necessary: "I was very ready to see the world, so I went to Paris to study design." After graduating from Paris E.S.D.I, Katrin



stayed on to work for none other than Philip Starke before coming to London and the inimitable Ross Lovegrove. "I enjoyed working for Ross very much," muses Katrin. "In his studio it was like mixing science and sculpture in terms of approach." For it was here that Katrin discovered the allure of exotic substances: "The use of new materials and technology with shape was fascinating."

Soon it was time to move on, and this led Katrin to her husband, the product designer Michael Young. The pair promptly moved back to Iceland and set up shop. "When I met my husband he already had his own company in London, so it was natural to carry that on," explains Katrin. "The company was based around Michael and his designs. I started helping with projects and doing graphics."

Own development

"I think I always knew I would do my own thing," believes Katrin. The move to Iceland gave her the chance to make good on this. "We had a lot of fun with experimental projects, projects we would even invent, such as the Puffin soup. That was how I started developing my own graphics." A strange way to get involved with design, but none the less effective.

From early on, a pattern of collaboration emerged in the new Icelandic studio: "Michael would commission an artwork from me for a product, an installation or an interior," she explains. And as Katrin began to explore a two-dimensional world, the computer began to take on a new significance: "It became my tool and I used all my free time to draw and develop stuff that was in my head." >



Above: Green Stuff, from 2005. Katrin has a finely evolved ability to manage detail without losing composition.

Left: Dating from 1990 to 2004, this image depicts "a menagerie of early characters."

Left, bottom: One of Katrin's illustrations for Die Gestalten Verlag's reworking of the Grimm Fairy Tales.





Top: *Subplants 5*, a vast 10-metre-long digital image, was commissioned by the National Gallery of Norway for its show 'Kiss the Frog: The Art of Transformation'. It went on display this year.

Above: Giving some idea of the billboard-scale of Katrin's latest work.
Photo by Morten Thorkildsen/
Borre Hostland

Right: The sheer variety of media which Katrin works in is impressive in itself. This editorial commission for the cover of *Print* magazine shows her style to be truly scale-independent.



"I started building my own personal visual dictionary," she says. "Things I brought to memory and which just had to be drawn into the computer." Folders of plants, flowers, insects and so on began to accumulate. "Later I started to compose, bringing the different elements together to make pictures," she explains.

No oil painting

The computer has been an invaluable tool for Katrin: "I have always drawn by hand, but I never felt like doing an oil painting." This has led to a computer full of detail, ready to be pulled together into a new artwork. "It almost feels closer to making music than to making a painting," she says.

The beginnings of a new artwork are usually pretty considered, with lots of

different drawings and studies which I don't use," says a regretful Katrin. But it's not all bad: "Very often they give me an idea for the next thing, or perhaps I'll use them much later."

Big things

You have to speculate to accumulate and that's what Katrin is doing here. "They are part of my library," she says about the unused pieces of work — they are all part of a whole from which results are drawn. Demonstrating how this works, Katrin remarks with enthusiasm that "It's great, later on, to pull the work out of the screen, to see the results."

Scale is important to Katrin. Although her latest piece for the Norwegian National Gallery is the size of a swimming pool, it's

not just apparent scale that counts, it's scale within the piece. She explains: "It's the way you experience your environment, like when, as a child, you lie in the grass and try to imagine what that world

looks like for the worm in it, or when you take your dolls out by the river."

Odd though it undoubtedly is, this hits a note, as do recollections of films seen as a child involving giant crabs marauding the countryside and "people being reduced to a thumb size and attacked by their cats." You can understand when Katrin says, "Those sort of things had a big effect on me."

"It almost feels closer to making music than to making a painting"

online research: "It can be anything from a subject of nature, the elements, physics or philosophy to cartoons." The aim is to give the next stage a firm foundation because that is where the fun comes in: "I like the creative process most of all."

Things start out as simple sketches, pretty quickly emigrating to the digital. "I normally end up with so many files of



But Katrin has a firm grip on reality, and looks at these considerations of relativity without affected cuteness. "I think it's a childhood thing that I have unconsciously cultivated over the years," she says. "Life is all about that: big, medium, small. What's beyond a given limit, how big is the world, where does it end?"

Although that's probably not a question which has an answer, if there was one then Katrin has certainly gone about finding it in an honourably logical fashion. "There is a saying," she observes: "the world is for journeys, not for destinations". I like that." Katrin has seen a thing or two of the big wide world.

The journey continues

Iceland, Paris, London, Belgium, Taiwan, Hong Kong — this list of diverse places is just a representative sample of the destinations which have split up Katrin's numerous journeys. "Living with today's technology and open frontiers gives us enormous possibilities to see and experience the world," she says. "I don't want to miss that."

Acknowledging that it's a part of life but perhaps also realising that this is a privileged life, Katrin makes the link to her inner world explicit: "I travel mostly in my head anyway so quite possibly in the future I will settle down in the countryside somewhere and refuse to leave the house." What's left entirely open is the exact longitude and latitude. **ca-p**

Working with new materials

Michael Young, Katrin's husband, has been involved in working with high-tech material companies such as Dupont for some time. "Often this has involved two-dimensional work, so this is how we have collaborated over the past years."

In 2001 Michael was asked to introduce translucency to the use of the material Corian. This he did with CNC technology, developing a method of cutting and carving the surface of the material to create a translucent effect. This

provided Katrin with a perfect canvas. "Lit from behind it became beautifully translucent," she says. "It was like drawing with light." One of the resulting artworks was used to demonstrate this effect at London's 100% Design show in 2001.

The couple continues to pursue interesting uses of new materials: "We are currently exploring a new printing technology that will be demonstrated in a collaboration at the Milan Furniture Fair next year."



This display of translucent Corian was designed for the 100% Design show, London 2001.

Above: This is another collaborative effort for Michael and Katrin, produced in Corian and SGX laminated glass. It was produced for DR James Plastic Surgery in Taipei in 2004.

