

# **Stony Brook University**



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**Between Motion and Stasis**

A Thesis Presented

by

**Hronn Axelsdottir**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts**

in

**Studio Art**

Stony Brook University

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Abstract of the Thesis

**Between Motion and Stasis**

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**2011**

This thesis is about my progress from photography to video installation. There is an exploration of my use of material, such as light, porcelain, photography and video and the importance of the screen with the pieces. While discussing the use of the screen, attention is paid to the process of using photography and how it evolved from photography to video. There is also a discussion of my progress from thinking two dimensionally within the space, one point perspective of the image, going towards the expansion of the work into the space. Although the work has evolved from photography to video there is a continued interaction between the still and the moving image in my work.

At last there is a comparison of my work with artists such as Roni Horn, Mona Hatoum and Kutlug Ataman. Roni Horn was chosen due to her use of photography, how she uses it within the space and her connection to Iceland. Roni Horn's piece *You Are the Weather* will be compared to my piece *Focus*. In examining Hatoum's work with beds and comparing it to my piece *Together*, I will look at the paradoxes in both pieces and also observe her view of the iconic image. Kutlug Ataman explores psychological space and issues of identity, and his thought process will be compared to mine.

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## Materials

“...projected images elicit fantasy: they invite us to see things that are not there. And they elicit specific forms of spectatorship, engendering a psychic mobility paradoxically dependent on physical immobility.” (Kotz, *Video Projection: The Space Between Screens in Art and the Moving Image*: 373)

The light and the weather influence people in Iceland, be it summer or winter. That is why light is one of the basic ingredients in my work. Growing up with summers without the darkness of night, I could wake up in the middle of the night and it would have the appearance of a day. At the same time being outside at night in the summer life is surreal. The day rhythm is different from the night. On the opposite end is the winter and its windy, rainy weather and intimacy. Without light there is no life, it is a part of the life cycle. Having light is a source of hope. Natural light constantly moves and, therefore it is a constant change and renewal. Light can also be glaringly annoying, at the opposite end is the darkness. In darkness one can barely distinguish what is what visually, but at the same time feel the intimacy and comfort of the dark. It almost becomes a cocoon. Growing up in these circumstances has created a headspace for me, and the need to reconstruct this memory. Perhaps it is because this experience is now amiss in my life. This act of the light almost becomes spiritual. Natural light has contributed to my thinking about the projected light, particularly in the context of the moving image.

I prefer to slow down time in my video installations so it almost becomes a still image. It is the slow movement of the projected light that I find fascinating. Having the projected image running at a slower than normal time is what makes the piece come together for me. It is the act of the slow movement that somehow makes it feel like it slows down time. This act of slowing down the time in the video either makes the viewer loose attention or keep him in the present. If



the viewer goes along with it, it has the effect that past time is present again. The slowing down of the movement along with the light from the video projector gives a sense of eternity.

Depending where the light hits, it creates another space for the viewer. The intensity of the light, whether it is soft or hard, creates a psychological space.

The still image is usually printed and therefore becomes a solid object. Sometimes it is backlit, then it emanates light; however the stillness of it makes it almost an archeological artifact. The photograph often has this sense of what happened, we almost always look at it as the past time. The still image also has this feeling of nostalgia. Many years later we imagine that this time was better than now. It carries the load of the past.

In the moving image the projected light constantly moves and changes because there is something moving in the image. The act of the moving image brings us psychologically to the present because of its movement. We often sit and watch and are caught in the moment of watching. Because things are moving in the image we are alert to what happens.

With *Together* I built a space both with the still and the moving image. The moving image was the video projection, and the still object was the porcelain tiles. I constructed them as images and they turned to an archeological artifact via firing of the porcelain and the bed sheet. An image was created within the porcelain.



Figure 1. © Hronn Axelsdottir. *Together*, 2008-2010.

### **Background**

*The Habitats of the Hidden People* is a series that came to be because of my longing to go back to my country of birth, Iceland; I had lived away from it all my adult life. The series was conceived while working on a project in Mexico. The supernatural tales I heard from the indigenous community were an inspiration, such as when a child is born it has an animal following it -- it protects the child. I aspired to do a project that dealt with the beliefs and the supernatural in Iceland.

This photographic series was created using a pinhole camera. The camera is a box like the camera obscura, but, unlike the camera obscura, it does not have a lens or a viewer. You can

predict what you are about to photograph. However, experience with the camera helps in the prediction. If you use a box, where the distance between the front-end and the back-end is shallow, the photograph has the appearance of a wide-angle lens. It also alters quite a bit what you see and the image is never quite in focus. I also cross-processed the film; it is a process where a transparency film is used with chemicals intended for negative film. Doing this exaggerates the colors and throws off the color curve. Part of this piece was the integration of interviews in video I conducted with those who had personal experience with folklore mythology.



Figure 2. ©Hronn Axelsdottir. *Reykholar*, 2006. From *The Habitats of The Hidden People*.

The hidden people are a part of folklore in Iceland. They are said to inhabit mounds or rocks. All these habitats are located close to where people lived, like on the farmland. There are a few in the cities but they are merely remnants of when the cities were farmlands. It was said that they had great power over humans and they liked to party, but they didn't like noise around their habitats. Many of the tales tell that the hidden people lived a better life than humans. They had more food and had things that the general public did not have. The hidden people were good to the person that helped them; there are many tales about midwives helping a hidden woman give birth. The reward was often a precious gift or good luck in life. However, if someone spoke badly of them or denied their existence, that person would be cursed forever.

The inspiration for this piece was a work by Roni Horn called *You Are the Weather*. I was taken with how she used the light and the space in the installation. At that time I was only able to connect her work with the photography and the light.

## Memory

The contemporary predicament of looking at photographs from different cultural perspectives necessarily raises questions about the contexts in which such photographs are viewed and the kinds of knowledge and experience viewers must have in order to comprehend fully the photographer's intentions for the images. Finally, one must consider the success of these images as interfaces for intercultural spectatorship and understanding. (Walsh, *Re-placing History in Locating Memory*: 26)

I use photography as a search through images; a collective memory. I search for how we are constructed, how we have used space, and in general, why we believe. By we, I am referring to

what is mostly connected to me, e.g. *The Habitats of the Hidden People* is directly related to my cultural background. I am looking into how this collective memory is constructed and trying to understand it in life as lived today. However, not just to understand it from the point of memory of people of Iceland, but also how we are constructed. These tales have a meaning, they protected the land for centuries, at the same time they constructed our identity.



Figure 3. ©Hronn Axelsdottir. *Nupur*, 2004. From *The Habitats of The Hidden People*.

E.g. the story attached to the photo above of *Nupur* is about a family who moved to the farm Nupur mid-19<sup>th</sup> century; there was a pond next to the farm and it was considered to be the hidden

people's fishpond. The family had two boys who entertained themselves with throwing stones in the pond. A hidden woman visited the mother in a dream where she told her to stop the boys from throwing stones in the pond, because they were ruining her livelihood from the fish. However, the mother did not pay attention to the dream. Soon thereafter the fish disappeared from the pond and inexplicable noise and rumble started to happen at the farm. It got to a point that the family had to flee the farm. Since they moved away there was peace and quiet at the farm.

Often the land had a feature, such as a rock, mound or a pond that was believed inhabited by the hidden people, the land was kept within the family and the tales were protected. Today many people have left the farmland, new people have moved in without this connection to the land. The meaning of this feature and the stories disappeared along with them; thus often there is no remnant, neither a story nor a mound (often people flatten the land to make it more accessible and profitable). These stories carried the spirit of honor and respect something you do not know. The land was equivalent of a human being. It had a presence. People had experiences with the land; today sometimes all that is left is the name of the place and a small remnant of a tale.

*The Shopping Cart* series is a similar search. It is of shopping carts as found objects; it is an attempt to reconsider our cultural history. These carts are discarded objects without an owner. Although they have wheels, they cannot move, because no one is pushing them; they seem to stand there and wait. They cannot do anything, we have to come over and use them for our consumption. They became images that are stuck in plain sight, however, everything else moves around them. To me, these carts become a living creature; a human being who has lost its way or is trying to escape. What is it escaping? We don't see these carts anymore, like we don't see the people that might not have a home or who do not belong to any particular community.

I exhibited *The Shopping Cart Series* in the thesis exhibition, however it did not work well with the two other pieces I had in the exhibition. They were hung on the wall in same size with equal distance between them and at same height. It would have been more successful had they been displayed in different sizes, so they would become a part of the space, and as well related more visually to the other two pieces.

The shopping carts are remnants of our consumption, but the habitats of the hidden people are often forgotten and mowed over; thus they are slowly disappearing. *The Shopping Cart Series* is different from *The Habitats of the Hidden People* because each one of us can reconstruct a tale around the images with *The Shopping Cart Series*. *The Habitats of the Hidden People*, the tale is already there I provide the story along with the images; it is for us to read what it is about. Thereafter we look at the image. *The Habitats of the Hidden People* derives from a collective desire to protect the land, but the *Shopping Cart Series* is about discarded objects. Through their abandonment, the carts become a part of our consumption and a part of the land; they reveal the problems we have with objects.



Figure 4. ©Hronn Axelsdottir. *Untitled*, 2010. From the *The Shopping Carts* series.

### **The Screen**

“The window was a membrane between inside and outside, and light was the material that modulated this relation.” (Friedberg, *The Virtual Window*: 111)

The screen is very important in my work. It acts as a window and a membrane. It catches the light. There is play between archeological artifact and light. I interpret an archeological artifact



as something that has been preserved from any civilization. It represents items people used and illustrates how they lived. These artifacts are often excavated from below the ground level. When the artifact has been excavated it comes in touch with light. The light changes the artifact due to chemical decay; there is an attempt to stabilize the artifact by keeping it away from light so we can preserve it forever. Nothing lasts forever. The item morphs and changes. It becomes something different from what it was before. There is a renewal, or the item completely decomposes. It becomes a part of the ground we walk on.

The whiteness and the delicacy of the porcelain has made it my favorite material to project onto. The white mimics the blankness of the screen; there is a possibility for something to be there and then to suddenly disappear. There is an attempt to connect with the past.

When porcelain is fired it changes permanently into a hard object. Traditionally porcelain slip is poured into a mold, and is left to harden. Once dry enough it is taken out of the mold and fired. I use the porcelain slip differently. First I dip a fabric or yarn into the slip, and slowly dry it. When it fires the yarn or fabric burns away but leaves a trace of their presence. A transformation takes place. It has evolved from soft into a hard object. Combining the fired porcelain with the projected stillness of the image magnifies the archeology of time.

I use the screen as a veil, to hide what is actually there. I want the viewer to look at the image and figure what it is on his own. The act of veiling the image brings the viewer into the present, it makes him attentive. He is attempting to see what it is that he is seeing and this action brings him into participation with the piece. This combination of the moving image with the screen brings on a play between the moving image and the still image. For me the screen is also a still

image. The viewer is watching a moving image on top of a still image. The moving image falls through the cracks between the objects while the screen is there silent but present.

My first installation was a group exhibition called *Systems*. In it I had a piece called *Together*, it is a video depicting my husband Memo and I -- touching and showing our relationship via the hands. This video shows our hands expressing themselves to each other. I wanted to depict the state of our relationship was in. At the same time I was working with psychological space -- with feelings of constraint. Not the constraint of feelings, but of separation -- separation of space between two individuals.



Figure 5. © Hronn Axelsdottir. *Untitled*, 2009. Detail, front view.



Figure 6. © Hronn Axelsdottir. *Untitled*, 2009. Detail, back view.

For the exhibition I constructed a wall with concrete bricks; there was little possibility of passing through it. It was rather high and felt like a basement wall with a window where you can see through between the bricks. The width of the wall was six feet, the depth 8 inches and the height five feet. In the front there was ample space, in the back there was very tight space. The wall had small openings in between the bricks that functioned as windows. It was placed deep in the gallery, six feet away from the wall and perpendicular to it. The outer side was smeared with adobe and connected the concrete bricks with the adobe as well. On the side closer to the wall I had dripped beeswax as a method of preservation. I put a screen on top, acting as a window and projected the video onto it. The base was tactile and the appeal to the olfactory senses was literally overwhelming --sweet and sour from the adobe and the beeswax.

I managed to break out of the two dimensional thinking that had dominated my work. Not only did I manage to work with the space, but also materials that appealed to other senses than the visual senses. I was pleased, but I knew I needed to work more on my process of creating

installations. I knew the video worked well, but the wall built with the bricks was still too flat, it acted as a pedestal. I loved the smell and the materiality of the beeswax and the adobe, however, my method of displaying it was too literal. This installation also broadened my thinking with exploring different senses, such as olfactory senses and the tactile senses.

I decided to rework this piece for the thesis exhibition; due to there was a disconnection between the materials and the video. My choice of material for the thesis exhibition was porcelain as a screen. The ambition was to incorporate the video, the screen and the space into the piece. In making the screen, I cut up bedsheets into 13 inch x 13 inch squares. The goal was to make it 12 inch x 12 inch squares after it was fired. I dipped the bedsheets into porcelain slip and then I fired it. The gallery has 12 inch x 12 inch floor tiles; I projected the video onto the porcelain tiles on the floor so the porcelain tiles would replace the actual tiles. I propped the tiles approximately one inch above the plexiglass and there was some space between each one of them. It looked like they were floating. The video showed our hands moving on top of a bedsheet, where our hands met, struggled to disconnect and then connect again. It appeared that porcelain bedsheet was moving as well. Having the porcelain tiles propped up formed the appearance that there was loose space, that there was ground but not really. The language spoken was a body language: four hands meeting and communicating with each other, while the ground was fractured and floating. There was no resting place, although it appeared to be a shared place. I slowed down the moving image which made the communication between the hands more noticeable. The video projection was a 5 minute loop. At the end it faded out and one could see the bare tiles on the ground for few seconds. When the projection started again, the screen and the wall lit up and it continued.

The remake of this piece made the video along with the screen and the surrounding come together. I was pleased how the porcelain sheets worked well with the bedsheet in the video. I felt I had more control over the light emanating from the video, although the light hitting the wall next to it was an addition that I had not visualized beforehand, however it worked well with the piece. The video and its support worked as one piece.

*Focus* is a reworked piece. Originally it was a projection upon a screen that I had woven with white plastic strips with an organic stretcher holding the screen together. I decided to redo the screen as I wanted it more translucent. I used clear plastic and dulled areas of the plastic so part of the image from the projection would retain on the actual screen. The stretcher that was holding the screen together served as a support instead of overpowering it as it did when I originally exhibited it. The screen was irregularly woven, so the projected light would project light back to the viewer. An image stayed on the screen, however, due to the translucency of it it also went through the screen and onto the wall. The screen was approximately six feet wide and four feet tall and was hanging approximately 5 feet from the wall. The video was projected frontally so the viewer could walk in front as well as behind the screen. The projected video depicted an image of me standing behind glass as water was pouring down onto it. However, the woven screen, almost obliterated my image, what the viewer saw was water moving. The combination of the water pouring and the tactility of the screen made it appear that it was a bright sunny day by the ocean. At the same time there were dark undercurrents in it. I was working with paradoxes of light, the rays we feel but cannot see and presence, someone is there but is barely visible.

## **Framed Psychological Space**

In her book *Installation Art* Claire Bishop examines space in installation art. She first talks about space on general terms, the viewer enters a space or situation physically and he is addressed directly to experience the exhibition via physical immediacy or via the senses. The viewer then becomes a part of the work and is also aware of how other visitors are a part of the piece. She also addresses the idea of the ‘decentered subject’ from the time of the renaissance and one point perspective to installation art and its multiple perspective, where the viewer is allowed various positions to view or experience the work. She goes on to say that sometimes installations can trigger fantasies, memories and cultural associations. Installation art has the ambiguity of two types of subject: the viewer, who walks into the work, and:

an abstract, philosophical model of the subject that is postulated by the way in which the work structures this encounter... Installation art and its literature elides the two subjects of its address –the literal viewing subject (who enters the work as a ‘veiled object’) and an abstract model of the subject (of which the viewer ideally made aware through being in the work)... Installation art is both centered and decentered, the viewer needs to be present so he can be subjected to the process of fragmentation. It is successful when the philosophical model and the physical viewer intertwine.” (Bishop, *Installation Art: 130-131*)

Space becomes important when I start to do installations. I originally became aware of space when observing how other artists displayed photographs; how they took the room and the photography and made it one piece. Yet, I did not connect it with my photography. This longing for exploring the space and trying to connect it with my work had stayed with me for a long

while, but I was unable to go forward with it. Before coming to Stony Brook my work had been purely visual with one point perspective. I went from two dimensionality and one point perspective, to many perspectives existing at the same time.

In the installation *Time*, my intention was to explore interior and exterior space. There were two video projections inside with one of them projecting a slowed down looped video onto fifty porcelain balls. The viewer had to stand in one spot to be able to see what it was, due to the tactility of the screen. The tactility of the screen made people want to touch it to find out what it was and to interact with it. That was not an option though due to the fragility of the porcelain balls as they were hanging loosely from the ceiling. The porcelain balls were made of yarn covered paper castings that were dipped into porcelain slip and fired. I used the balls as a screen that I projected frontally onto a video I did of me knitting and unknitting. The viewer needed to stay at one end of the gallery and in a central location to be able to distinguish what the image was. Part of the video poured through and between the porcelain balls, the backwall was bathed in reddish aura. The space between the screen to the wall blurred the boundaries of the gallery space and the moving image, and the viewer could walk between the wall and the screen. This liminal space made the viewer a part of the piece.



Figure 7. © Hronn Axelsdottir. Screen for *Time* made of porcelain dipped yarn.

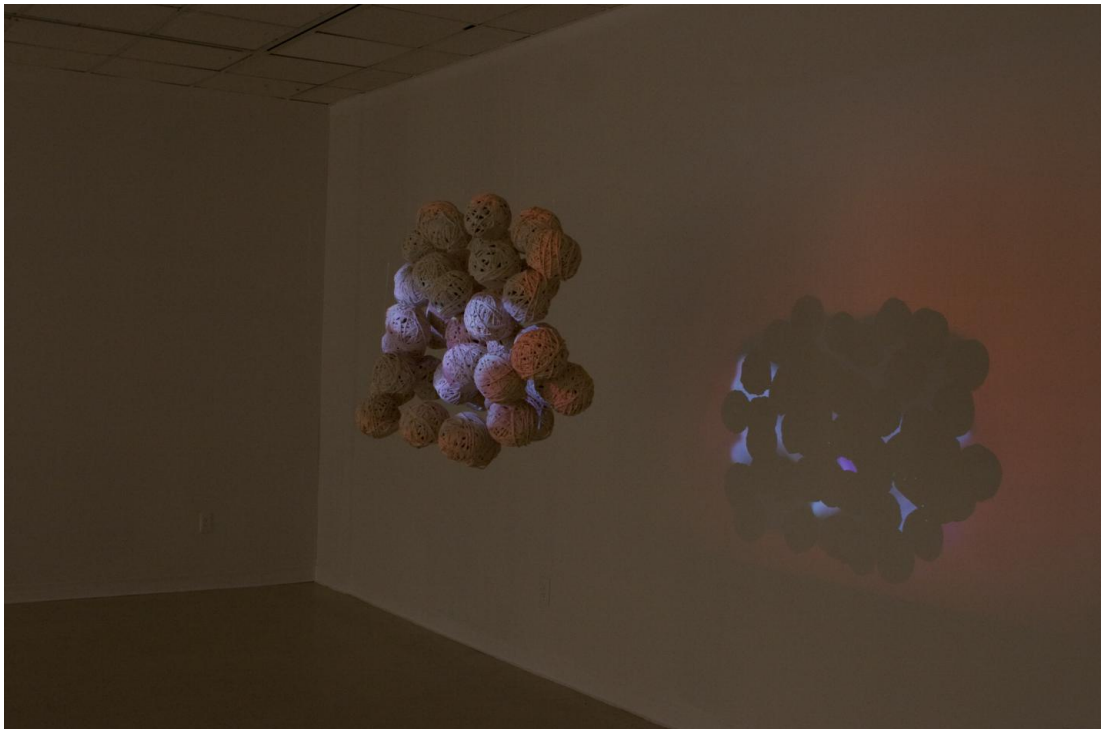


Figure 8. © Hronn Axelsdottir. *Time I*, 2010.



The other video installation was on the far side of the gallery. It was projected onto silk paper that formed a convex screen that mimicked the shape of a face. My face projected onto the paper, the rest of the image was a landscape transmitted onto the wall. The fan from the projector caused the silkpaper to move and also to distort the image. The video looped and was placed six feet away from the wall. It showed a video of me standing with my face made up while I was waiting in the rain. I was waiting and smiling. Slowly the make up on my face begins to deteriorate, and as time goes on, it becomes more difficult to smile. I stand there for 34 minutes, until my eyes burned exceedingly. The silk paper was a little crimped and one could view the piece from the outside and from the inside.



Figure 9. © Hronn Axelsdottir. *Time II*, 2010.

There are two double glass doors to the gallery I covered them with white paper to prevent light coming in and interfering with the exhibition. I cut a rectangle out at each side of the glass doors. I wanted to give a similar feeling when you look through a boarded construction place in New York City. There was a predetermined viewing angle. Viewing through these peep holes compressed the space inside.

I wanted the viewer to be aware that he was looking into the space; and I wanted him to think about what he was seeing and experiencing outside and again when he was inside. On the inside

he was traveling through the space and experiencing what was going on. On the outside he was looking at it remotely with a single point perspective. I managed to make a space with both one point perspective and multiple perspectives. I was addressing the endlessness and visibility of time in this piece, and as well the act of inactivity.



Figure 10. © Hronn Axelsdottir. Detail, peephole viewed from outside the gallery.

In my third year solo show I made two self portraits -- one where I was overwhelmed by mud and the other where I stand behind a glass with water pouring down on it. There were two portraits of me facing each other. In between these two pieces I projected video on top of sand,

the projection showed a swamp moving slowly. The idea was to work with a paradox; the comfort of the sand and the sense of the sliminess from the swamp. I put seaweed in the space; they did not emit any odor. This was my first exhibition where I incorporated sound; it was the sound of a heartbeat. I had wanted to project the video straight down onto the sand, however, that was not possible because the image would be too small. The alternative was projecting the video askew; the result was the projected video was not in the center of the room, and it was still too small. I was working with interior space in this piece. However, this piece didn't come together; I wanted it to have more tactile sensibility where there would be an experience through the feet. I also believe adding light in there would have given the people more sense of play with walking in the sand so the idea of comfort and discomfort would have been more pronounced. I conclude adding selective sound could have augmented the sense of disorientation.



Figure 11. © Hronn Axelsdottir. *Pulse*, 2010.

## Influences

I would like to situate myself with Mona Hatoum, Roni Horn and Kutlug Ataman. Mona Hatoum I chose due her work with paradoxes and her repeated motifs. Roni Horn I chose due to her connection to Iceland and how the country itself influenced her work. Kutlug Ataman was chosen in how he relates the subject matter and the way he works with liminal space.



Figure 12. © Mona Hatoum. *Lili (stay) put*, 1996.

## **Mona Hatoum**

Mona Hatoum is of particular interest to me because of her repeated choice of objects and how her choices reflect her background, and how she directs our gaze. She is originally from Beirut, she was visiting London in 1975 when civil war broke out in Beirut. This forced her exile and she finally decided to study art. She was separated from her family for many years. The bed is a repeated motif in Hatoum's work. The bed is considered a resting place but not, however, in Hatoum's work. It is not a place of comfort. The beds are collapsed, and feel like a prison. The bottom of the bed has sharp wire so if you sit on it or lay down you will definitely hurt yourself.

### *Lili (stay) put*

It is a piece she did while she was in Jerusalem. She found a simple iron bed and put casters on it. She attached nylon strings to it on one end and attached it to the floor on the other end. These strings are all around the bed. The bed frame is simple and not inviting. It is very narrow and one would need a mattress in order to sleep on it. However, it feels like it is not a luxurious sleep one will have-- there is very little room for tossing and turning. The nylon strings give us the feeling that the person who the bed belongs to cannot easily leave it without getting hurt. Because the nylon strings are not easily seen, one has to be cautious (as there is always the danger of getting hurt either leaving the bed or approaching it.) When we sleep we might have our hand hanging off the bed but that is not an option with this bed since you can get seriously hurt if you do so. So it is obvious that when you sleep you sleep with caution. You never get a good night's sleep. Be aware. If you leave, or drop your guard that will surely have consequences. For the person looking at the bed one gets the sense of helplessness. I cannot get

close to it without hurting myself. It feels like a stuck situation, the bed should be able to move and looks like it can move but it has almost invisible strings that keep it in place.

There seems to be always some conflict in Hatoum's pieces; that is where she draws her energy. My work is much less confrontational. For example, when I compare my piece, *Together* to *Lili (stay) put* my piece feels much softer, however mine has conflict as well. My conflict is more veiled. Both of us use simple visual language explain more..

*Together*, looks like two people exploring each other on a bed sheet. However, when the viewer looks at the screen it is projected upon, it is tiled and appears floating and separated, so there is no solid ground to rest on. Life goes on and the hands keep moving on this fractured ground. We see the space between the tiles as the projection of the hands falls in between the tiles. At the same time the porcelain tiles look like fabric and it seems that the hands are moving on top of the porcelain tiles. The reason I chose porcelain is due to the fragility of it, but I combined it with cotton bed sheets, which is a rather soft and flexible material, and it holds well together. The juxtaposition of these two materials works well together. Although these hands know each other, there is this sense of loss between these individuals. They get together and they separate. They are at the opposite ends of the bed; only a part of their body is together, there is never the whole. The viewer feels he is seeing an intimate interaction yet there is loneliness and longing in these gestures. He feels an attraction and in a way he wants to see the outcome, but there is an unending continuation. There is never closure between these hands upon this fractured ground.

Hatoum's piece *Impenetrable*, could be an example of her gaze internalized and directing our gaze towards her thusly.



Figure 13. © Mona Hatoum. *Impenetrable* 2009.

Is she then the subject turned object and sees herself as the other sees her? Has she internalized the gaze as per Lacan's mirror stage theory? Or, has she finally come to terms with what she is made of? Is she showing us the negativity of the gaze, the struggle? How is this happening and we watching it happen?

Hatoum's work is about longing. Her bed series derives from the feeling of longing but is confrontational at the same time. That is the paradox in her work. There is both rage and vulnerability in her work. She doesn't allow us to look away. She is in our face. My work does

not have this screaming rage, but there is anger and separation below the surface. I admire the way she works with the gaze as well. I worked with the gaze with the piece *Focus*. Using the woven plastic screen to create a light show out of it, it reminded me of looking at the ocean on a sunny day with the water reflecting light -- that was the view from the front of the screen. From the area between the screen and the wall you can see the water hitting the surface. In the video I am looking at the viewer behind the glass, although people wouldn't know unless they had seen the video before in previous work. There is this paradox of tranquility with the light hitting the screen and water hitting a surface with me standing behind a surface and staring at it or you.

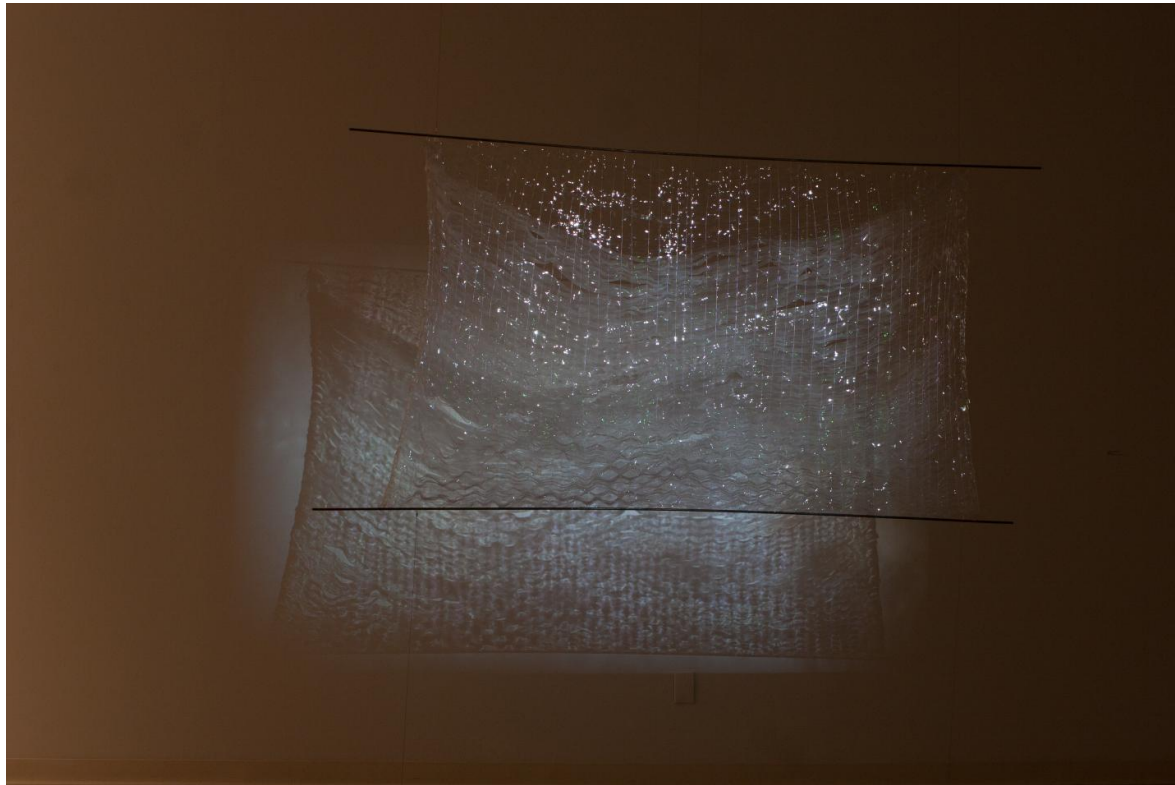


Figure 14. © Hronn Axelsdottir. *Focus*, 2011.





Figure 15. © Hronn Axelsdottir. *Focus*, 2011. Detail.

### **Roni Horn**

I chose Roni Horn because of her connection to Iceland and the influences it had on her and her work. Roni Horn is an American, New York based artist. She went to Iceland after graduating from Yale University and fell in love with the country. *You are the Weather* is a photographic piece she made with a fellow artist Margret Blondal. She photographed Margret in different outdoor pools throughout Iceland. The photographs were close ups of Margret's face with very little expression in the face as she stares at the camera. In each photo the light is different. She used Margret's face as a screen. The change in this series was the weather and the light. All the photos she selected were from the same distance, she printed them the same size and put them up in one room on the gallery walls. They seem somewhat conventionally hung, but here we have one person staring at us multiple times in one room. Although the sitter is staring at the camera and us, she starts to disappear and you see the combination of light and

weather coming through into the space.

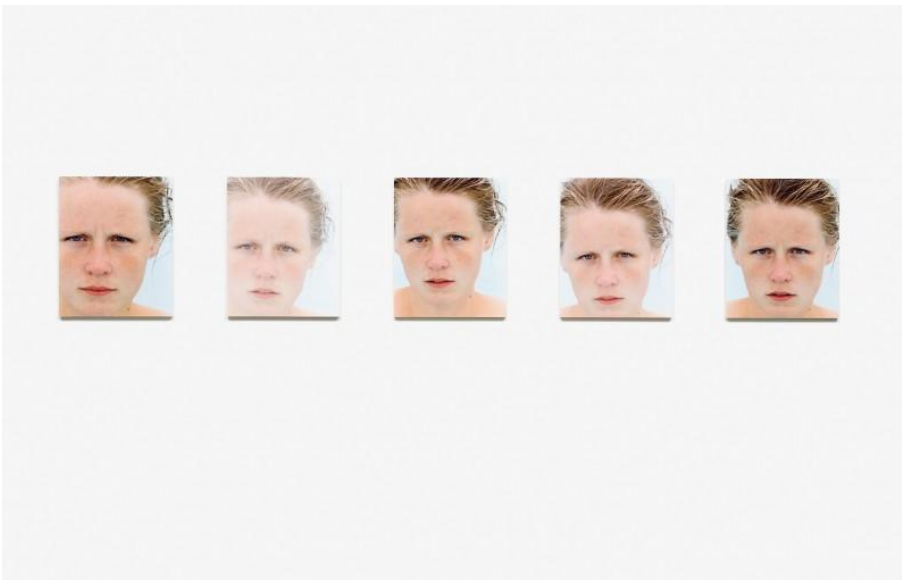


Figure 16 and 17 ©Roni Horn. *You Are the Weather*, 1994-1995. Installation view and detail.

The climate and the weather has a big influence on people in Iceland. I find quite bit of my work derives from the weather cycle and the seasons. My work *Focus*, for example, calls attention to the interplay of light and water. In the video I am standing and staring at the viewer, however, veiled behind glass and water pouring down on the glass. The screen with its translucency creates a double layer -- the screen itself and the projection on top of it. It brings us into another space. It distances us from watching what is behind the glass. A different world is created, people enjoy the light and ignore the back story.

The series *You Are the Weather* has also influenced my thinking about what is a screen and how it can be utilized. It has as well contributed to my ideas about how the artist can direct the viewer's gaze. In this series the subject Margret is looking at the viewer from every angle of the space, at the same time she starts to disappear due to her face is used as a screen. The rays of light along with the weather pattern become the main subject in this series.

Our work is very different, but the light is the common denominator. The opposite of light is darkness. I find it appropriate to my work with light when Claire Bishop refers to Eugene Minkowski in his writing about light:

Minkowski describes how daylight is characterized by 'distance, extension and fullness', while the dark night has something more 'personal' about it since it invades the body rather than keeping its distance: 'I no longer have the black night, complete obscurity, before me; instead, it covers me completely, it penetrates my whole being, it touches me in a much more intimate way than the clarity of visual space.' "(Bishop, *Installation Art*: 84, Minkowski, *Lived Time*)

When using light and darkness as material they often exhibit emotion, with the darkness if it is inside there is this sensibility one can more be oneself, and there is a sense of comfort. Although intimacy can be achieved in daylight, it has this sense of being watched and one cannot truly be oneself. Although the subject is the light, the weather influences how the light falls upon the subject.

### **Kutlug Ataman**

Kutlug Ataman is a Turkish artist, and a filmmaker. The people in his pieces are storytellers, which makes his videos more verbal than visual. He is interested in allowing people to actively constructing themselves in front of the camera. He believes that we are all artists and we are all creating and recreating our lives. The people in his pieces have rather extreme tendencies; one of them, for example, collects tropical moths. He has classified over 30.000 moths in his apartment in Berlin. His way of being is so extreme that we notice it. What the subjects are saying is not interesting to Ataman which is why he believes he is not making documentaries. It appears to me that he is exploring psychological and liminal space. However, Ataman is not making a piece to make fun of his subject matters. He says that we don't communicate by talking, but, instead by body language. Talking is done to reveal or construct a certain reality. He is interested in revealing the machinery of constructed identities. He is interested in depicting people acting out, and showing how we fictionalize ourselves to the world. People are creating their mythologies, whether by individual or collective means. The people in his work border on being on the outside.

The series *Twelve*, I find is comparable to my series *The Habitat of the Hidden People*.

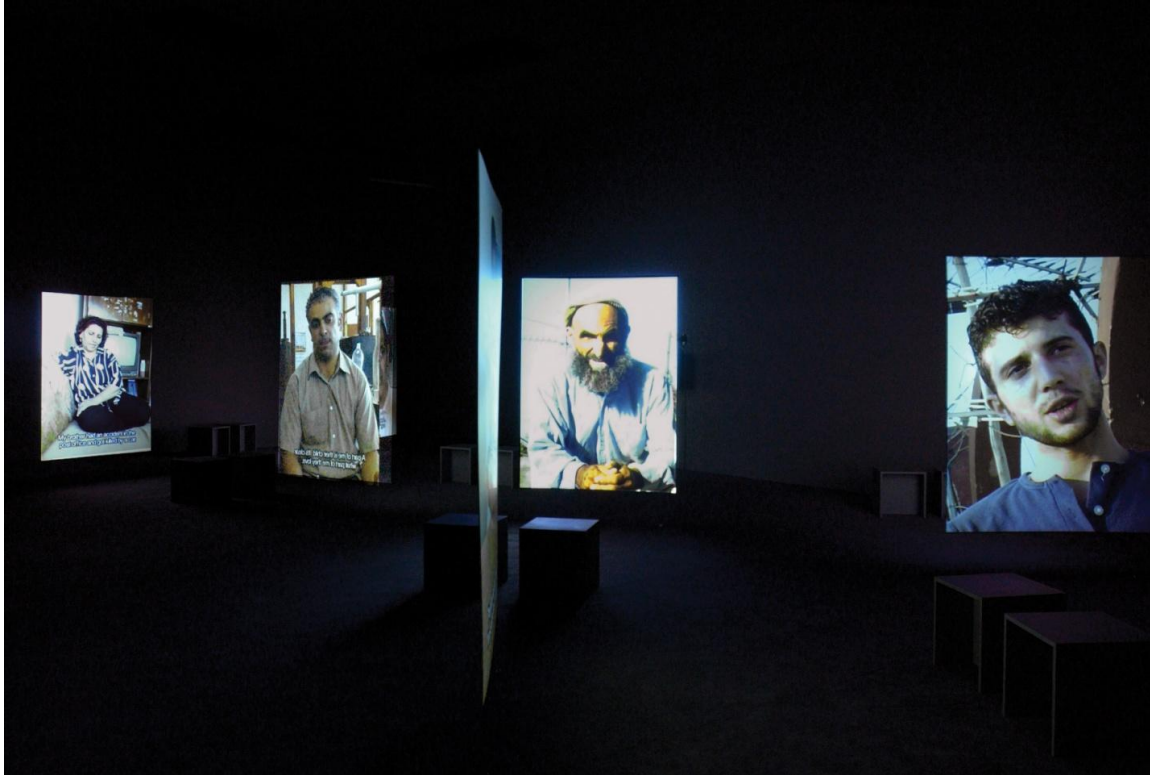


Figure 18. © Kutlug Ataman. *Twelve*, 2004.

Both of these pieces are about supernatural phenomena, or this liminal space which most people don't have an understanding of. Ataman's point of view is that their reconstructed identities are more extreme than other identities because of the area where they come from (South East Turkey) is saturated by conflict. Many people might think that the subjects are insane. However, it seems rather unlikely that a whole population is insane. When I relate this to Iceland, I think of the stories about the hidden people. Living in mounds and rocks they have a good life at a time when Icelanders hardly had food and lived in cold and damp turf houses. It could relate to Ataman's reconstructed identity theory. Ataman interviewed and filmed people. I photographed the places. The auditory has a big role in Ataman's pieces; we get to know their stories and make

our conclusions with what the individual is sharing with the camera. In *Twelve* he uses the people to tell their story they are framed almost like police shots, straight on, a very basic framing. The stories in my work were very important as well, however, I chose to do it silently. When I exhibited this body of work I had the text with the pieces so people could read the stories that went with each place. The stories have an interest to me. Because of these stories, these places have been protected. Being aware of his artwork, has made me want to include sound in my work.



Figure 19. © Kutlug Ataman. *99 Names*, 2002.

Ataman's *99 Names* is a piece about a man citing 99 names of Allah. This man becomes increasingly elevated during the process of citing Allah's 99 names. In the end he is almost screaming. It is showing the process of altered states of consciousness. Ataman showed the piece on several screens and elevated them so they have the appearance of being closer to Heaven. It expresses the frenzy one can get into when one is focused on a singular thing and uses the emotion to get into altered states. Ataman's *99 Names* and my piece *Together* both show emotion. *Together* is a single channel projection, projected onto approximately 30 tiles elevated slightly from the floor. It is a quiet piece expressing emotions through hand gestures. There is nothing quiet about *99 Names* with its dramatic gestures. The image in both of these pieces is simple. *99 Names* shows a medium close up of an ever increasingly agitated man; the image in *Together* is of four hands meeting over a bed sheet. We both use the screen to emphasize what is going on in the projection. The screens in his case have a sense of movement and appear to move upward. My screen is a series of porcelain tiles that look like fabric. They are separated from each other by few inches and float slightly above the floor. This positioning creates liminal and emotional space that reads similar to that found in Ataman's work.

### **Conclusion**

My work is about the veiling of the still image within the moving image. It oscillates between motion and stasis. I attempt to bring the viewer into the presence of the space with the process of veiling and unveiling the image; along with other perceptual factors such as olfactory, tactile and auditory senses. The formation and the cohesiveness of the screen is very important to me, it expresses the fractured reality we live in. As well it creates another space for the participant. The

play of the projected image with the screen brings us on a treasure hunt and hopefully into another space. Space for me is a combination or meshing of interior and exterior space and an interaction between materiality and senses. The work carries the load of the past, and brings us to the present. I therefore find it important to play the still image against the moving image. It has brought me to think about the coexistence of light and dark and its forces. Darkness can be comfort where one is in a cozily lit warm place with the sound of screaming exterior forces seeping through. There is this sense of protection, a house that limits the attack of the exterior forces. Darkness can also be dark outside and there is a stark fluorescent light inside that penetrates every pore of the body. It is so bright, that there is nothing left for the imagination. Whether it is dark or bright there is a need for a cocoon, an alcove that makes us capable to continue on. I desire to create a cocoon where images and light coexist in harmony, with the coexistence of exterior forces.



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