



Open Doors

Katrín Sigurdardóttir's Boiseries

Artist Katrín Sigurdardóttir addresses the way we look at architecture and the history of interior design in her current exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. It's also an opportunity to reflect on the museum's impossible task of putting time on ice.

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Boiserie, the north (images top, above and previous spread) and the south mezzanine gallery installation (right image and both images facing page)

In Katrín Sigurdardóttir's double work entitled 'Boiserie', installations in separate galleries are based on period rooms that are on display elsewhere in the Metropolitan Museum. The original 18th-century French rooms are preserved down to the slightest detail as total works of art in neoclassical style with elegant and ornate walls, mirrors, textiles and furniture. Sigurdardóttir examined these rooms and creates meticulous imitations of them, replacing the original handcrafted wooden elements (the term boiserie stands for wood panelling) and the gilded décor with fibreboard, furniture and props – all in immaculate white. At the same time she complicates the notion of inside and outside that is evidently already at play in a museum display of historic rooms.

Disorted Dimensions

Approaching one of the works, you find yourself backstage, so to speak, facing the unpainted wooden structure behind an inaccessible facade that is on the other side. In there everything is white, a ghostly stage set that is sealed off from all sides. You can look inside through a few windows and realise that they are in fact surveillance mirrors, so you can only see the room and the reflections in other one-way mirrors. The space is small but dimensions get distorted in the endless mir-

roring effect. The notion of time is haunting in this work, where a precise historic style is made timeless by rendering it devoid of life and colour. The film set of Stanley Kubrick's '2001: A Space Odyssey' comes to mind, where towards the end the protagonist enters a time machine of sorts, set in a bright neoclassical space, where he sees himself in different ages of life. Here, Sigurdardóttir suggests a dialogue not only with time but also with place and memory.

The second work is similar in its painstaking attention to detail. Composed of numerous panels of different sizes and shapes that are all joined together on the sides, it spirals around the space so you can experience it from both sides. Again, only one side is made to resemble the period room but the other side is raw. The panels support each other in a zigzag installation, some have doors and others windows or mirrors. The size of the panels differs as they are systematically scaled anywhere from 1:1 proportion with the original boiserie, down to the miniature size of a dollhouse. As a viewer you wander from the side of the white, decorative facade to the unfinished backside and experience the work in different scale - either as your physical surroundings or as a model seen from above. Your sense of place is challenged and again time creeps in through

the symbolic play with scale, as the room appears to gradually diminish in the distance and the detailed décor becomes obscured.

The Flow of History

As often before in the work of Sigurdardóttir, she constructs a parallel to a reality that either exists in another place or did so in another time. She has examined the changes that occur as a viewer takes a geographic, temporal or physical distance from an architectural or landscape environment. Openly playing with reconstructions of real or imagined places, she shows us the structure 'behind' a work or deploys easily recognisable supplies from the hardware store or the world of arts and craft. She furthermore often refers to theatre and adds to her work the element of the fourth wall, where the reality of the audience and the fiction of the stage begin to blur. In her exhibition at the Met, Sigurdardóttir not only addresses the particular rooms in question but the whole institution around them. Her exhibition is the seventh in the Metropolitan's series of solo exhibitions of the work of contemporary artists at mid-career. She takes the opportunity to reflect on the museum's impossible task of freezing time and playfully turns the boiseries themselves to ice. By confronting the inherent dilemma of all museological practice



- that in order to preserve the flow of history one needs to halt it - Sigurdardóttir points to an ongoing debate within the arts as well as inwards, to the challenge of our own longing to remember and be remembered. #

Katrín Sigurdardóttir in her installation 'Boiserie', (top) in the south mezzanine gallery at the Met

Katrín Sigurdardóttir at the Met until 6 March 2011
www.metmuseum.org