

On The Verge Of A Breakdown: The Delicate, Unsettling Works Of Guðný Rósa Ingimarsdóttir

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Layers of translucent white paper, cut into vaguely cloud-like shapes, lend different shades of cream to light grey due to the layers themselves. In impossibly tiny, handwritten letters, the word "PANIC" is written in several places. Different coloured paper cards, with mysterious rectangular holes cut in them, are lined up in rows within a simple white frame. On these cards are typed phrases from what looks like a manual typewriter, conveying such messages as "take the blame if ever possible" and "alltaf þæg, góð og stillt" ("always nice, good and still"). Brown wrapping paper is sewn over top of swirly burgundy and cream wallpaper, revealed to us only because the words "WAKING UP WITH AN OVERDOSE OF SELFPIITY" have been cut into the brown paper.

These are just some of the many unsettling, delicate works of Guðný Rósa Ingimarsdóttir, being shown now at Kjarvalsstaðir at an exhibition called "opus – oups", referring to the Latin word for "work" and the French word for "whoops", respectively.

Two decades in the making

Guðný Rósa has been making art for over two decades, and this retrospective reflects her growth as an artist. Many of these works make use of simple paper and ink, which in her hands are transformed into a fragile beauty. On one white space, measuring about one square metre, first glance only shows a series of curiously bent black horizontal lines. On closer inspection, these lines are actually handwritten numbers, leaving the viewer to wonder if this is some encryption code or pure randomness. Another work features long, thin strips of different kinds of paper, some of them cut from books, arranged in a row and sewn into place along the top in tiny stitches.



Gudny Rosa
Ingimarsdottir,
exhibition view
of opus - oups
at Kjarvalsstaðir,
Reykjavik (IS), 2021

But as with any artist interested in exploration and whose career stretches back this far, there are other media at work here, too. There are, for example, abstract sculptures made from knitted wool, a nod to her Icelandic heritage (Guðný lives and works in Belgium), and a series of thin glass pipettes suspended from thin coloured strings, held in place by equally thin pins.

No matter the medium, Guðný Rósa deftly conveys feelings of anxiety, fragility; a person on the verge of breaking down completely in the most beautiful way.

Multiple media

One of the more intriguing works in this exhibition isn't even visual media. There are two purely audio works. In one, the attendant is invited to put on a pair of headphones and listen to a woman's voice review a series of numbered, anonymous letters. The letters are not recited; rather, the narrator summarises their contents. There is an intimacy to this piece, as what is left unsaid in the details of these letters that invites the imagination to consider their writers. In another audio work, 'Time and Water', a child reads texts in languages that are clearly not their own. It is at times difficult to understand what is being said beyond supposing that we are probably hearing Icelandic or French. The effect is such that even if you happen to understand these languages, they are rendered near incomprehensible to the listener.

There are also two video works—one of a pair of hands cutting apart wool with a pair of scissors, and another showing an infant's hands grasping at a nipple—convey the same delicateness that can be found throughout this exhibition.

Anyone attending 'opus - ous' is likely to come away from the experience with the same unsettling feeling of a friend sharing an intimate secret, but also with the same sense of honour of being made privy to that secret.

Opus - ous will be shown at Kjarvalsstaðir until January 16th