



KATRIN FRIDRIKS

## Abstraction & meaning

Katrín Fridriks is one of those artists that just seems destined for good things. There is so much that is rare, original and genuine about her and her work, that it's very hard for other artists to compete with her energy and creative drive. Born and raised in Iceland, one of the remotest countries on the planet, she learned early on to work hard in order for her art to be seen and recognised. Moving her work and most of her life between Luxembourg and Paris helped this and it didn't slow down her production or artistic development. And much like her musical compatriots Björk, Mugison or Sigur Rós, Katrín is slowly but surely building a recognisable brand for herself and the Katrín Fridriks Workshop, through her conceptual paintings and artwork, which is shown and sold across the world.

*Words. Sasha Bogojev  
Images. Sasha Bogojev*

While Katrín is primarily a conceptual and abstract artist, her works carry much deeper meanings and messages, which she is very passionate about. Her Icelandic origins influence her work on many levels – from the obvious visual impact of reflecting the country's unique landscape and lava flows in her works, to the geopolitical and microbiological aspects of living in one of the most isolated places on Earth. Combined with her strong interest in the ways that modern science and technology are affecting our lives, and the moral issues connected with those, the stories behind her pieces are as complex and rich as the works themselves.

One of the common themes of her work is genetics and the fact that Iceland is a country with unique and clear genetic lineage.

Because of its geographic position and specific historic events, Iceland gives scientists a unique chance to research and examine these lines as an isolated sample, tracking down the periods during which new diseases or genetic anomalies first occurred. By putting this information into the context of historic events or connecting it with major lifestyle changes (food, climate changes, foreign influence), it is possible to better explain and understand these, or even find a cause for their development.

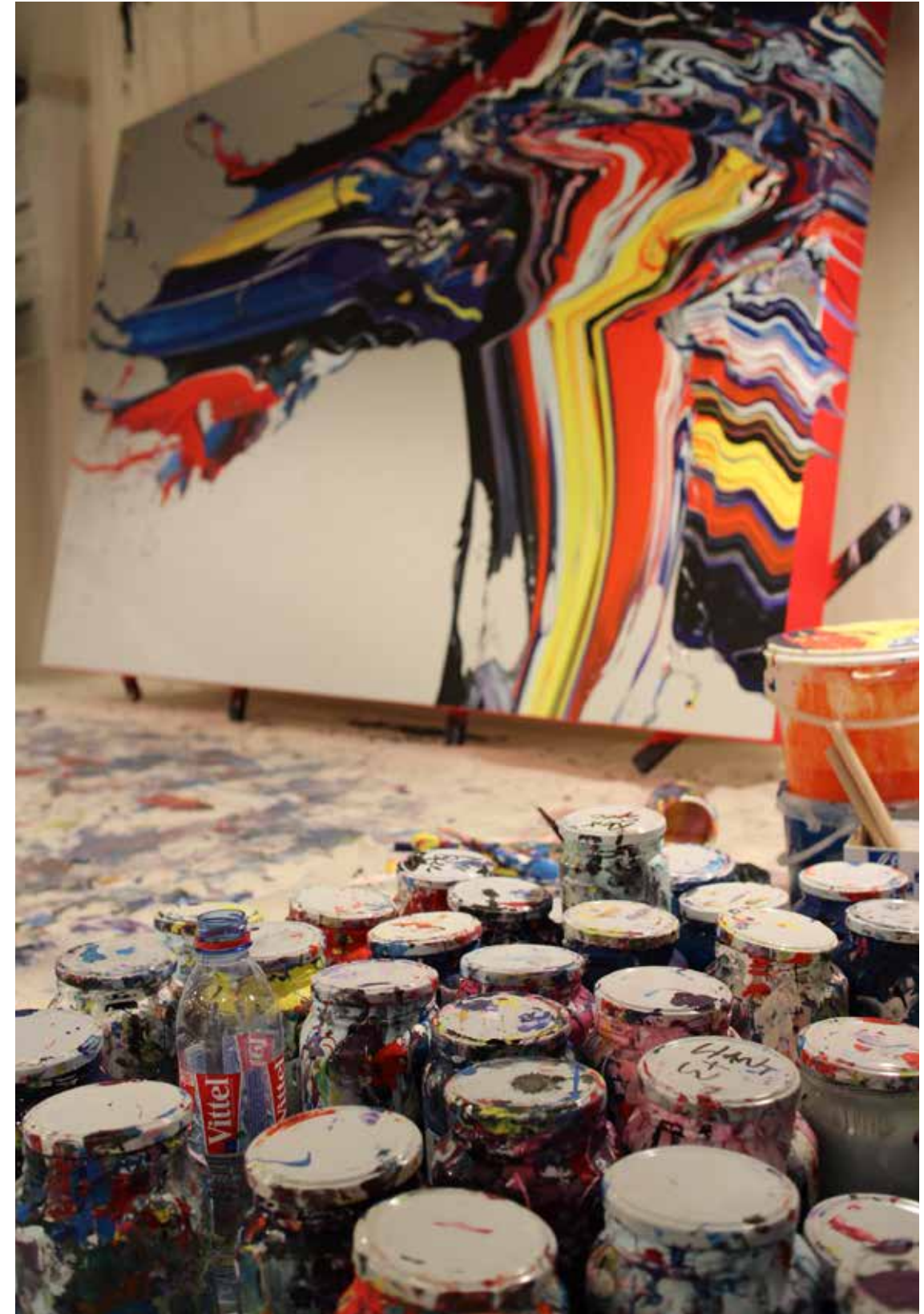
While this is a great opportunity for scientists, the question that Katrin focuses on is how this valuable information will be used. This is why she bastardises the term genetics into gene&ethics, which is the title of one of her better-known series of works. While the purpose of this research is to prevent and find cures for diseases, the opportunity to abuse this data for unethical purposes is something that needs highlighting.

This is where a key word in Katrin's work comes up – awareness. Even in her early days, she wanted her work to raise questions and bring attention to these issues. Her work doesn't provide answers, direct facts or information that people can hold on to, but the idea is to keep raising awareness of these important issues. Her dynamic paintings, bursting with energy, can be seen both as warning signs pointing to these issues, as well as a representation of the chaos that can ensue when we let them get out of control. These organic shapes created with liquid paint are often juxtaposed with a silver, gold, black or white base, or straight dripping lines, which represent barcodes and technological progress. Together with a solid colour background, embodying the sterile laboratory environment, these elements are in strong opposition with the unpredictable nature of human life represented through her colourful strokes and paint flow. With extensive use of basic, earthy

colours – and a special accent on the warmer tones of yellow, red and orange – this striking contrast is one of the key elements of her work.

Her technique of handling and manipulating paint is unique – perfected over many years. Whether she is creating more expressive, splattered images, or more liquid, calming works in which she carefully controls the flow of the paint, the finished masterpieces are the result of years of experimenting with surfaces, paint thickness, and ways of applying it in order to reach the intended result. By combining her calligraphy skills with her love for the works of Pollock and Richter, she's created a distinctive style that sometimes balances between the captivating power of abstract fine art and the unpredictable spirit of graffiti and tagging. It is this connection that secured her a place at the Tag au Grand Palais show back in 2009, which later opened doors for a lot of exciting urban and contemporary art related projects.

While she is a contemporary artist, and her works can be seen as futuristic, especially when created on metallic backgrounds, Katrin has always toyed with two essential artistic tools of the Old Masters – paint and canvas. The softness of canvas and its texture work perfectly with the thick layers of paint she works with, and the challenge of controlling the paint is what she enjoys about her method. But this is where her connection with classic painting ends; many other parts of her production process are radically different. She only very rarely uses brushes when creating work, and she always paints with her canvases laid flat. This also influenced the way she developed her work methods with the Fridriks Workshop, which includes custom-made tools that help her apply litres of paint onto the large, thick canvases she works on. Combined with strict parameters of temperature, moisture, light





and other external elements, her techniques helped determine the way her new studio space is arranged.

We met Katrin in her studio/home where our tour of the workshop began. Sharing this space with her five-year-old son, and her nine-year-old cat, it grants a direct view into the artist's life. Every corner of the house reflects her creative, energetic and experimental nature. She is the type of artist whose work is driven by the strong urge to constantly create and her immense energy is expressed through her work. Accordingly, the space is covered with colourful stains and splatters, and filled with personal memorabilia, old and new artistic tools, as well as a huge archive of her works.

Katrin tends to keep one piece from each of her series; and, being a very prolific artist, this means a lot of work from different stages of her career is stacked throughout the space. From the first ever piece she created using collage, early abstract and conceptual works, her Dust of Galaxy photo installation, through to her calligraphy canvases, round canvases from her Lollipop, IceCream or Peace Of Cake series, acrylic on reflective paper pieces, to big plexiglass tubes from her Code DNAnd Munition series, Crayons canvas Sticks, and large canvases from her current Gene&Ethics, Stendhal Syndrome or Riding Awareness series. The original canvas for her Blue and Gold Awareness print edition released through Pictures On Walls, Golden Awareness No9, takes a special place in her home/studio, along with couple of earlier calligraphy pieces that she is strongly attached to.

She is currently focused on creating works on large canvases and large installations, after seeing huge demand for this sort of work. It was this demand that motivated her to move to the new studio space. In September 2013, after months of rebuilding

an old warehouse and emptying tonnes of sand and gravel, Fridriks Workshop was able to start producing work in the new studio. With her passion for architecture and very precise ideas on how the space should work and look, she was involved in every step of the process, putting her art on hold until the space was complete. The result is a spacious two-level studio, in which she can produce massive works, prepare entire installations that often work both as sculptural works and canvas pieces, as well as store materials, pack and ship her work, and host friends and clients. Along with a lot of clean floor space, which is necessary for her production, she has all the custom tools needed for her art, as well as a specially built room for drying and varnishing her works.

What is immediately noticeable about this new space is that it has no windows; instead a large glass roof provides the natural light for her to work. The layout and design of the new studio space was critical as she needs to have some distance from the rest of the world when creating new work. Her painting sessions can last up to 10 days, during which her performance reaches its peak during the third or fourth days.

When asked about her ultimate artistic goals, Katrin reaches back to her love for architecture that eventually brought her into the world of art. It's her admiration and appreciation for the works of Anish Kapoor that is fuelling this dream of having her work incorporated within an architectural concept. Not just in the way of making a large mural like the Red Sea, which she created back in 2007 for the Olympic Stadium of Nîmes, or Emotional Landscape, a 150-square-metre installation created in Ireland in 2005, but more in the functional and dimensional integration of her work within the structure of the building.

With many plans for the rest of the year, ideas of further



reinventing her familiar concepts and producing new works for her ongoing series, Katrin is busy supplying new works to galleries and fairs worldwide. She is a perfectionist in every aspect of her work, so she is not making exceptions or compromises about any part of it. From talking directly to the paint producers about supplying the workshop with a certain paint they have pulled out of production, choosing the works of other artists alongside whom she wants to show, deciding on the framing of her works on paper, all the way through to making sure her work ends up in major institutions worldwide, Katrin is fully in charge of every aspect of her art.

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With her small but well

organised team of assistants and a new studio space, she is 100% dedicated to achieving her goals. It's the new studio and crew that helped her develop new ideas and ways of combining her painting styles and techniques. This is how the new paintings that combine the flowing, leaking effect and splatter Stendhal syndrome techniques were created, as well as her first landscape-oriented canvas and new series of works that are combining different backgrounds on the side of thick canvases. These exciting works were already introduced earlier this year at art fairs in New Delhi, Singapore, Brussels and London, with new works currently being prepared for her upcoming solo shows and fairs later in the year in London, Berlin and Seoul, to name just a few.

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