

MAGIC CARPET RIDE

*FROM HER STUDIO IN REYKJAVÍK, SIGRUN LARA SHANKO
MAKES HANDMADE, HAND-TUFTED RUGS THAT LOOK AS GOOD
ON THE WALL AS THEY DO ON THE FLOOR*



Sigrun Lara Shanko's rugs are designed to be walked on. But their arresting beauty means that they are, more often than not, to be found hanging on walls and enjoyed as works of art. For Sigrun, there's a certain irony in this.

"I used to have a studio in Reykjavík that made huge silk wall hangings, inspired by Icelandic sagas," she says. "When the economic crash hit Iceland, it was not the time for expensive works of art, so I had to rethink everything."

She is now gaining a reputation for her hand-made Icelandic rugs, using wool from a unique breed of Icelandic sheep. "I have seen rugs in this wool made in the 1950s," says Sigrun, "and they are still going strong. Mine are a centimetre thick, and I expect them to last a very long time."

Sigrun began to learn about textiles from her grandmother at the age of six, then honed her skills in dyeing and painting silk while living in Britain during the 1990s. At first she worked with another designer and, after they were featured on the website of the trend forecaster WGSN, the commissions began to come in.

She has now taken over as the sole trader and makes all the works herself. The allure of her art has attracted clients from as far away as China and Canada, and she has begun to train students to assist her with the upcoming workload.

AN INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION

Sigrun's work has been displayed at the Icelandic embassies in both London and Helsinki, and she was also invited to exhibit at the 2015 Florence Design Week. For the latter she created an eye-catching pair of wall-mounted works that epitomise the drama of her country's landscape. One, representing a vertical lava flow, perfectly complements the other, a glacier. Her rugs have also been recommended by the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Inspiration for the designs comes from extended rambles through Iceland's wild countryside with a sketchbook and a camera, capturing the endless lava fields, the constantly changing glacial rivers and dramatic waterfalls. Once home, Sigrun brings the sketches to life with watercolours, to give an idea of how the rugs will look.

"My background is in painting," she says. "I just need to do it. I absolutely love making these rugs, and I use the needle of the tufting handgun like a paintbrush."

Due to the rarity and individuality of her works, many in the design world are watching Sigrun with keen interest, certain that her rugs will soon be collectable works of art.

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