Postnational Identities, *Icelandicness* and *Icelandicity*.

Transnational and Environmental Strategies in Contemporary Art in Iceland

Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir

Dissertation towards the degree of Doctor of History

2023

UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, HISTORY AND ARCHEOLOGY

Faculty of Philosophy; History and Archeology
at the University of Iceland
has declared this dissertation eligible for a defence
leading to a Ph.D. degree in History

Deild heimspeki, sagnfræði og fornleifafræði Háskóla Íslands
hefur metið ritgerð þessa hæfa til varnar
við doktorspróf í sagnfræði

Reykjavík, 28. september 2023,
Sverrir Jakobsson, deildarforseti

Postnational Identities, Icelandicness and Icelandicity. Transnational and Environmental Strategies in Contemporary Art in Iceland

© Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir

Reykjavík 2023

Dissertation for a doctoral degree at the University of Iceland. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without written permission of the author.

ISBN ISBN 978-9935-9736-2-7

ORCID 0000-0003-1693-8004

Abstract

To travel north has always been a challenge for the explorer, the natural scientist, the poet, the cartographer, the photographer, and the artist. Long present in the European imaginary, Iceland's natural phenomena has functioned to affirm an idea of sublimity, an ahistorical notion that has far surpassed Iceland's geological and material realities as an island and a nation located in the far North. *Icelandicity* is not an entirely new cultural signifier. However, recently, *Icelandicity* has become an asset in the cultural production and advertising of Iceland as a global tourist destination. The importance of national ideologies, governmental nation-branding (including certain artists' resistance to these forces), has been largely absent from art and cultural historical accounts. In this study, I distinguish between *Icelandicness* and *Icelandicity*, demonstrating how a deeply-ingrained *Icelandicity*, has been embedded in and framed within Icelandic visual culture and contemporary art.

There is much to be revealed in such a multidisciplinary approach that integrates current debates around nationalism, postcolonialism and decoloniality, gender, race and ecology expressed in both art practices and in consumer culture. In this context, I will examine to what extent and in what ways the local and the global impacts shape artistic production in Iceland. What forces contribute to the creation of *Icelandicity*, its maintainence and expansion? How should one position contemporary art with regard to the national? How have artists either contributed to or contested the national branding of Iceland? I thus employ a structuralist distinction between *Icelandicness* and *Icelandicity*, that is, on one hand, the distinction between a specific and historically forged national identity and, on the other, *Icelandicity*, a mythological category now widely employed in discourses of tourism and advertising. In so doing, I demonstrate how national institutions both implement and interpret artistic and cultural expression, often functioning to challenge or neutralise diverse forms of cultural resistance.

Ágrip

Ferðalög norður á bógin hafa ætíð falið í sér áskorun fyrir landkönnuðinn, náttúrufræðinginn, skáldið, kortagerðarmanninn, ljósmyndarann eða listamanninn. Íslensk náttúrufyrirbæri hafa búið um sig í evrópskum hugmyndaheimi þar sem ægifegurð og aðrar andsögulegar hugmyndir hafa skákað þekkingu á menningu og listum norðurslóða. „*Íslenskið“* eða hið íslenskulega er ekki alveg ný táknmynd. Hins vegar hefur „*íslenskið“* orðið alþjóðlegt auðkenni, eign í menningarframleiðslu og auglýsingu Íslands sem ferðamannastaðar. Heimsvæðing listheimsins hefur haft lítil áhrif á listsögulegar rannsóknir á Íslandi. Með því að gera strúktúralískan greinarmun á því *íslenska* og *„íslenskinu“,* mun ég sýna fram á hversu mikil áhrif „*íslenskið*“ hefur haft á sjónmenningu og samtímalist. Það er margt sem kemur í ljós í slíkri þverfaglegri nálgun sem samþættir umræðu um þjóðernishyggju, eftirnýlendur, femínisma, kynþáttamismun og vistfræði. Í þessu samhengi mun ég skoða á hvaða hátt hugmyndir um hið staðbundna og hið hnattræna hafa mótað samtímalistir á Íslandi. Hvernig á að skilgreina samtímalist með tilliti til hins þjóðlega? Hvernig hafa listamenn andmælt auðkenningu og þjóðgervingu íslenskrar samtímalistar? Hvernig hafa þeir gert verndun umhverfisins að baráttumáli og viðfangi verka sinna? Hér verða rannsökuð sérkenni íslenskrar myndlistar sem byggja annars vegar á sögulegri þjóðernisvitund, hins vegar á ímyndinni um Ísland sem einkennir orðræðu og skrif um samtímalist. Með því að beita slíkri greiningu sýni ég fram á menningarleg áhrif auðkenningarinnar, en einnig hvernig innlendar liststofnanir sem í senn eru framleiðendur og túlkendur lista, hafa tilhneigingu til að óvirkja fjölbreytt form menningarlegs andófs.

Acknowledgements

The lead-up to this research is quite long. Following the 120th anniversary of the National Gallery of Iceland, a five-volume overview *Íslensk listasaga, frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar* (*History of Art in Iceland* from the late 19th century to the early 21st century) was published in 2011. I wrote a chapter focused on art and nationalism in the early 20th century under the editorship of Prof. Ólafur Kvaran. Working on this important publication with a group of Icelandic art historians launched a discussion about theoretical frameworks, perspectives, and various methods that could be employed in writing national art histories. At the same time, in collaboration with Reykjavík Art Museum, I started working with a number of contemporary artists for the preparation of the travelling exhibition *Dreams of the Sublime and Nowhere in Contemporary Icelandic Art* (2008).

I was one of the invited authors of the volume *Icelandic Art Today*. In the book 50 living Icelandic artists were presented and their work contextualized within contemporary art discourse. In the fall of 2008, I developed the course *Icelandic Art 1870–1970* at the University of Iceland, following this with several art historical courses and seminars, research projects, texts in exhibition catalogues, and academic papers in the field of photography and contemporary art. It was clear that there was a great need for a critical study and revision of the foundations of Icelandic contemporary art history, where the artist group SÚM is defined as a central subject. Participating in the conference *Transmettre l'art. Figures et méthodes – Quelle histoire?* held at HEAD (Haute école d'art et de design) in Geneva, opened new dimensions into my research of artists' transnational networks and the impact of Fluxus on art education in Iceland. I had the opportunity to delve deeper into different aspects of the topic of national versus global art histories. The AAH (Association of Art Historians) conferences in Reading 2013 and in London 2014 gave the promise of a wider academic interest in art historiography of the peripheries. The seminar *Networking National Art Histories, or, [insert nationality] specialist seeks relationships with like-minded persons*, led by Prof. Martha Langford, was important in this context and launched further discussions about contemporary art historiographies and I was invited to write a chapter in the book *Narratives Unfolding. National Histories in an Unfinished World*, 2017.

A sabbatical in the fall of 2016 allowed me to participate in the gallery festival *Curated by _Vienna*. My proposal for an exhibition of feminist art became *Feckless and*

Hotheaded, an exhibition at Galerie Raum mit Licht and led to further investigation into the life of Róska and feminist art in Iceland. It was also valuable to write about the work of Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique* and to participate in several seminars on the topic of racial anthropology and archival discourses in contemporary art. Finally, my participation in the interdisciplinary Rannís (The Icelandic Centre for Research) funded project *Visitations. Polar Bears Out of Place* (2019–21), under the direction of artists Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, permitted me a close collaboration with the artists and other scholars of animal-studies, focusing on a neglected subject, human-animal relations in art. A research semester in the spring 2021 enabled me to explore these findings in more detail and begin the writing of new chapters with focus on environmental debates and artists' resistance to the industrialisation of Iceland and neo-liberalization of the public space.

I am grateful to the institutions, libraries, museums, and galleries, that have assisted me and supported my research, and I am thankful to my colleagues, friends and family who have encouraged me in this endeavour. My gratitude goes to the artists I have worked with or corresponded with over the last decade: Ásta Ólafsdóttir, Borghildur Óskarsdótttir, Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, Brynhildur Þorgeirsdóttir, Daníel Þorkell Magnússon, Erla Þórarinsdóttir, Guðrún Erla Geirsdóttir, Goddur, Halldór Ásgeirsson, Hannes Lárusson, Haraldur Jónsson, Helgi Þorgils Friðjónsson, Hlynur Hallsson, Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Höskuldur Harri Gylfason, Icelandic Love Corporation, Kees Visser, Kristján Guðmundsson, Kristján Steingrímur Jónsson, Kristleifur Björnsson, Magnús Sigurðarson, Olga Bergmann & Anna Hallin, Ólöf Nordal, Ósk Vilhjálmsdóttir, Pétur Thomsen, Rúrí, Sigurður Guðmundsson, Sigurður Guðjónsson, Ragnar Kjartansson, Spessi, Svala Sigurleifsdóttir, Valdís Óskarsdóttir, and the Dieter Roth Estate.

Finally, I am indebted to the Doctoral Jury, Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, Ann-Sofie Nielsen Gremaud, and Anna Näslund Dahlgren. Thank you for your time, your accurate reading and your valuable comments.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

Ágrip

Acknowledgements

1. INTRODUCTION: *ICELANDICITY* 1

2. CHAPTER BY CHAPTER SYNOPSIS 11

3. THE LURE OF THE LOCAL AND THE GLAMOUR OF THE GLOBAL
3.1. The Difference of Icelandic Art 19
3.2. The North as a Cultural Brand 23
3.3. Writing Art Histories 32
3.4. Urban Regeneration and the Global Branding of the City of Reykjavík 38
3.5. New Global Art Events 43

4. NEW MAPS FOR NETWORKS–A CASE OF EXPANDING CONNECTIONS
4.1. The Artist as a *Passeur* or a Go-between 51
4.2. Making Connections 51
4.3. The FLUXUS Experiences 56
4.4. In and Out of Reykjavík 59
4.5. Early Networks 70
4.6. In and Out of Amsterdam 72
4.7. In and Out of SÚM 74
4.8. Probing Land and Language 80
4.9. The Vernacular as Paradigm 85
4.10. Inside and Outside the Gallery 91
4.11. Inside and Outside the Classroom 93
4.12. Writing Art History from the Inside and the Outside 96

5. THE GUERILLA PARADIGM OR “FEMINIST AVANT-GARDE” – TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE FEMINIST CANON
5.1. Women Artists, Feminist Artists, Feminist Art or Art by Women 99
5.2. Gender Equality, Feminist Difference or “Feminist Avant-Garde” 99
5.3. Anti-Patriarchy in Public Space 102
5.4. The De Appel Influence 107
5.5. Exhibiting Equality and Gender Politics 111
5.6. Institutional Politics 116
5.7. The Guerrilla Girls Effect 117
5.8. Conclusion 125

6. MEMORY AND IDENTITY. WHITENESS IN THE CULTURAL ARCHIVE
6.1. Whiteness in the Cultural Archive 127
6.2. The Toppling of Þorfinnur Karlsefni 131
6.3 The World Fair in New York 135
6.4. The Archival Turn in Art Production in Iceland 138
6.5 Unpacking Whiteness 141
6.6. The Uncanny Animal 147
6.7. Musée Islandique 150
6.8. With an Icelandic Accent 156
6.9. The Great White One 162

7. FASHION THAT CAME IN FROM THE COLD WAR: TWO FACES OF COLONIALISM IN THE ARCTIC
7.1. The White Arctic 167
7.2. The Arctic in the Fashion Magazine 169
7.3. Fashion as Colonialism 171
7.4. Fashion as Landscape 175
7.5. Conclusion 178

8. THE NEW NORDIC COOL: BJÖRK, FASHION AND CONTEMPORARY ART IN ICELAND
8.1. The National Fabric 181
8.2. Constructing Icelandic Identity in Dress and Fashion 183
8.3. Woollen Dreams 184
8.4. Björk: A Global Hybrid 187
8.5. Nature as Pagan Mental Space 192
8.6. Conclusion 197

9. RESISTANCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM
9.1. Kárahnjúkar: An Identity Conflict 201
9.2. Towards an *Environmental Icelandicity* 210
9.3. Counterculture: Facing the Pristine 216
9.4. Archiving Disappearing Landscapes 223
9.5. The Postnational Image 227
9.6. Reality Check After the Economic Meltdown 231

10. DEAD OR ALIVE: POLAR BEARS ADRIFT 237

CONCLUSION 251
BIBLIOGRAPHY 259
FIGURES 311

INTRODUCTION

1. Icelandicity

Icelandicity has become an asset in the cultural production and global advertising of Iceland. Its discursive construction could be paralleled with that of Roland Barthes' analysis of *Italianicity* in his classic essay "The Rhetoric of the Image," first published in 1964.[1] Discussing the marketing of Panzani products to French consumers, among other examples, Barthes describes how a given society creates and secures meaning through a form of associative tropes. In an earlier essay of 1956, Barthes examined the workings of "myth" in modern capitalist cultures; "Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things."[2] Myth, for Barthes, is thus a form of language. And as he explained, "language needs special conditions in order to become myth".[3] Myth is therefore a particular kind of metalanguage that describes different realities through discourses that provide the illusion of transparency, common sense, "what everyone knows", in order to justify ideas that pretend to be natural and eternal, but are in fact, thoroughly ideological.

In his now-classic example of the working of myth, Barthes chose a 1955 cover of the magazine *Paris Match*, where a young Black soldier salutes the French flag, claiming that: "The whole of France is steeped in this anonymous ideology: our press, our films, our theatre, our […] literature, our rituals, our justice, our diplomacy, our conversations, our remarks about the weather, a murder trial, a touching wedding, the cooking we dream of, the garments we wear, everything, in everyday life, is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie has and makes us have of the relations between man and the world."[4]

These essays have inspired my own examination of *Icelandicity*, an entirely different, but related mythology. As Barthes demonstrated, the concept of myth mobilizes and

[1] Roland Barthes, "Rhétorique de l'image," *Communications* 4, no. 1 (1964): 40–51; Barthes, "*Rhetoric of the Image,"* in *Image, Music, Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (London/New York: Fontana Press /Hill and Wang, 1977), 32–51.
[2] Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies*, ed. and trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972), 107–64, p. 108. [Original ed.: *Mythologies* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1957)].
[3] Barthes, "Myth Today," 107.
[4] Barthes, "Myth Today," 139.

secures meanings, social imaginaries and cultural identifications, just as the concept of "Italianicity" is quite distinct from "Italianness" meaning the Italian character, quality or state of what belongs to Italy. In her gloss of Barthes' example, Eva L. Wyss notes that "[t]he nationalizing construction of Italianicity, for instance, endows the products with an identity, a sort of specific anthropomorphic ontology," which is seductive and affective.[5] In these cases, advertising connects the cultural and the commercial product or brand with a stereotyped cultural and national identity.[6]

Icelandic landscapes are now used as background in the advertising of luxury goods worldwide. Its landscapes are often characterized as *pure beauty*.[7] Like all successful branding operations, these landscapes no longer need a title or a caption – brands are autonomous and self-sufficient because, as Harsh V. Verma observes, "A brand's strength lies in the minds of customers."[8] The publicity campaign for the French luxury brand Louis Vuitton in 2020–2021, called *A la poursuite du rêve* (Towards a Dream), is a recent example of this strategy. Widely circulated in high-end newspapers and magazines e.g., *M magazine* in France, as well as in monumental hoardings in public spaces; it recently blanketed one of the most prestigious buildings facing the Place de la Concorde in Paris. The campaign consisted of numerous landscape photographs shot in Iceland by the Dutch photographer Viviane Sassen who works both in the fashion industry and in the fine arts. [Fig. 1].

The Icelandic sites selected are all recognizable as popular tourist destinations, renowned for their spectacular geography and geology. They include glaciers (signifying the essence of ice), black beaches (that of sand), and geothermal activity (that of rock and water). As the Louis Vuitton website enthuses, "At Louis Vuitton, the Spirit of Travel goes beyond discovering a physical destination, it also sparks curiosity for what lies within. For this year's brand campaign, photographer Viviane Sassen translates the core values of the Maison into a far-reaching journey towards a dream. Photographed in

[5] Eva L. Weiss, "Italianicity Goes Global. National and Transcultural Strategies in Advertising Discourse," in *Contrastive Media Analysis: Approaches to Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Mass Media Communication*, eds. Stefan Hauser and Martin Luginbühl (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012), 179–200, p. 180.
[6] Discussed in Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).
[7] Robert Kunzig (photographs: Orsolya and Erlend Haaberg), "Islande. La beauté à l'état pur," *National Geographic France* (May 2012): 28–47.
[8] Harsh V. Verma, *Brand Management. Text and Cases* (New Delhi: Excel Books, 2006), 235.

Iceland, the images are an evocative ode to the inner child, set free in a reverie of otherworldly beauty and infinitive possibility."[9]

Several tropes of *Icelandicity* are thus activated by the images, no less than the "mythic speech" (*cf.*, Barthes) of the press release. These include the notion of "freedom" (long associated with the North); similarly, implied or explicit attributes of purity, transparency, innocence, and happiness – all valuable assets in a world suffering from catastrophic climate change, endemic pollution, and a global pandemic.

Icelandicity is, to be sure, not an entirely new cultural signifier. To travel north has always been a heady challenge for the American and the European explorer, the natural scientist, the poet, the cartographer, the writer with a camera, the photographer, and the itinerant artist. Long present in the European imaginary, Iceland's natural phenomena, including its glaciers, geysers, waterfalls and volcanos have long functioned to secure an idea of sublimity, outside history or civilization, an ahistoricity that has far surpassed its geological and material existence as a particular country located in the far North.[10]

As a *topos* – a place – Iceland, and the North in general, has been consistently imagined as an unknown territory -- *terra incognita* -- in the eyes of the outside world; a "nowhere" where "anything can happen." The model of opposed terrestial locations, located between hot and cold geographical areas was introduced by Aristotle in the fourth century BCE. For Aristotle, there existed a frigid northern zone in which no human population could survive; *Ultima Thule* (the end of the world) was this unknown land mass.[11] This dichotomy of torrid south and freezing north was dramatically expressed by the French poet Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné (1552–1630) in his epic poem *Les Tragiques.*[12] In this work, d'Aubigné describes a journey from sweltering Africa to icy Thule ["De l'Afrique brulée en Thulé froiduleuse"] – an imaginary, conceptual non-place that, however, had an enduring legacy. Needless to say, ice, snow, light, darkness, emptiness, danger, purity, water, cold, white and blue are still attributes signifying the

[9] Retrieved from: https://en.louisvuitton.com/eng-nl/magazine/articles/brand-campaign#.
[10] Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, "Imaginations of National Identity and the North," in *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson with the collaboration of Daniel Chartier (Québec: Presses de l´Université du Québec, 2011), 3–22.
[11] Marie Sanderson, "The Classification of Climates from Pythagoras to Koeppen," *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 80, no. 4 (April 1999): 669–73.
[12] Agrippa d'Aubigne, *Les Tragiques*, ed. Jean-Raymond Fanlo (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1995/1616), verses 661–84.

North. Indeed, the North is still imagined and experienced in terms of the sublime, as theorized by the British philosopher Edmund Burke:"Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger […] or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."[13]

These ideas have been consistently reiterated in literature and the visual arts, and are strikingly close to those still forming the image of Iceland and the North in contemporary cultural discourse and media. Refigured, its terms can now be employed in our current "experience economy", so important to the tourist industry.[14] Consequently, the notion of Iceland as an undefined, mostly uninhabited territory at the end of the world has a venerable history in European thought.[15] Similarly, just as the term "Arctic" is an approximate designation within the Northern hemisphere rather than a geographic entity, it remains non-specific.[16] Hovering between reality and myth, Iceland's geographical location has also fluctuated, identified as the "Global Arctic" in a new economic and cultural geopolitical context.[17] The modern fascination with the Arctic in popular media that emerged in the1950s and 1960s maintained this non-specific historical and cultural rhetoric, but was also prompted by polar research, an other aspect of the colonial project. Much, if not all of this activity was orchestrated by the postwar militarization of the Northern nations and the subsequent expansion of earth sciences during the first decades

[13] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: J. Dodsley, 1757), 13.

[14] The use of the concept of purity in the branding of Iceland as an Arctic nation is discussed by Ann-Sofie Nielsen Gremaud, "Icelandic Futures: Arctic Dreams and Geographies of Crisis," in *Arctic Environmental Modernities: From the Age of Polar Exploration to the Era of the Anthropocene*, eds. Lill-Ann Körber, Scott MacKenzie, and Anna Westerståhl Stenport (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 197–213; Ann-Sofie Nielsen Gremaud, "Power and Purity: Nature as a Resource in a Troubled Society," *Environmental Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2014): 77–100.

[15] Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, "Islands on the Edge: Medieval and Early Modern National Images of Iceland and Greenland," in *Iceland and Images of the North* (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2011), 41–66.

[16] Discussed in Andrew Baldwin, Laura Cameron and Audrey Kobayashi, eds., "Introduction. Where is the Great White North? Spatializing History, Historicizing Whiteness," in *Rethinking the Great White North: Race, Nature, and the Historical Geographies of Whiteness in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 1–18; Heidi Hansson and Cathrine Norberg, *Cold Matters: Cultural Perceptions of Snow, Ice and Cold* (Umeå: Umeå University, 2009); Heidi Hansson and Anka Ryall, eds., *Arctic Modernities: The Environmental, the Exotic and the Everyday* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017).

[17] Discussed in Lassi Heininen and Matthias Finger, "The 'Global Arctic' as a New Geopolitical Context and Method," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 33, no. 2 (2018): 199–202.

of the Cold War.[18] Scientific research outposts generated narratives describing polar expeditions and prompted other documentary reportage, underwritten both by colonial politics and military expansion. Polar research carried out by American, Canadian, Danish, French, Norwegian and Russian scientists also informed numbers of science fiction novels, influenced by the fear of nuclear war between the USA and the Soviet Union.[19] Moreover, geophysical disciplines like meteorology, geology, seismology and oceanography, profited greatly from both military and popular interest. This popularization of geoscience was equally manifested in cinema, where isolated polar stations, scientific labs and military outposts became ideal sites for staging espionage plots situated in Canada, Greenland and Iceland.[20] These cultural productions offered a synthetic, "instant" view of the world in general, and the North in particular, which, in turn, gave consumers the illusion of instantaneous apprehension of the entire world, mediated by television, disseminated in photography, cinema and in picture and fashion magazines.[21]

Icelandicness and *Icelandicity* may in some cases function as synonyms, but the important point to be made that they were, and are, still constructed internally and externally. In this respect, there are important differences among them that need be considered**.** As the historian Guðmundur Hálfdanarson has argued, "Sentiments about the distinctive nature of Icelandic culture were at the core of Icelandic claims to nationhood. The population of this remote North Atlantic island spoke a distinct language and possessed a large corpus of medieval literature of significant cultural value, in particular the so-called family sagas and Eddic poetry. The language and literary heritage became

[18] As the Cold War heated up in the 1950s, the Arctic became increasingly militarized. By 1957 the USA and Canada had strung together an elaborate, interlocking series of radar stations dubbed the DEW (Distant Early Warning) Line across the top of the continent, while bomber and fighter bases were built from Greenland to Alaska. Discussed in Matthias Heymann, Henrik Knudsen, Maiken L. Lolck, Henry Nielsen, Kristian H. Nielsen and Christopher J. Ries, "Exploring Greenland: Science and Technology in Cold War Settings," *Scientia Canadensis* 33, no. 2 (2010): 11–42.

[19] Examples include the James Bond films *Dr No* (1962), *From Russia with Love* (1963), *Dr Strangelove* by Stanley Kubrick (1964), *Fail Safe* by Sidney Lumet (1964), and *Ice Station Zebra* (1968), filmed after the thriller *Ice Station Zebra* (1963) written by bestselling author Alistair MacLean. The story marked a return to MacLean's classic Arctic settings such as *Night Without End* (1959), where the plot revolves around an airplane crash set on an ice cap in Greenland and an IGY scientific research team based near the crash site.

[20] Anka Ryall et al., *Arctic Discourses* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

[21] Hal Foster, *The First Pop Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 54.

the cornerstones for the political struggle for independence."[22] *Icelandicity*, on the other hand, is both a discourse and a rhetoric composed of tropes that historically and aesthetically, geographically and geologically, have, as we have seen, been long associated with Iceland. These cultural constructions have been described by a number of historians, literary scholars, and anthropologists who have traced them back to the identity politics of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1812) and the Grimm brothers– all of whom were profoundly interested in so-called folk culture and defined it as an element that characterized a nation.[23]

While *Icelandicness* was constructed as a building block of national identity, (including the establishment of a cultural canon during the late 19th and early 20th century), *Icelandicity*, is an ahistoric, fluctuating concept produced through an accretion of visual and textual signifiers in the visual arts, in literature, in poetry and, more recently, in advertising. Collectively, these become an archive or an encyclopaedia of images and tropes.[24] The linguistic renewal (and purification) of the Icelandic language was inspired by German philosophy when ideologies of nationhood required literary representations fostering a sense of collective identity. Scholars such as Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen have demonstrated how the organicist ideal of a spirit connected the material and immaterial world. In this context, geology, geography, poetry, visual art and history, became attributes of a "national spirit," connecting the people, their history and future, fostered by the invention of national icons.[25] These ideas, grounded in the aesthetics and natural philosophy of the late-18th and early-19th century featured, for example, in the writing of Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (1689–1755), celebrating the North for its freedom of spirit, based on his correlation of climate with the reactions

[22] Guðmundur Hálfdanarson and Ólafur Rastrick, "Culture and the Constitution of the Icelandic in the 19th and 20th Centuries," in *Culture, Empire and Nation*, eds. A. Cimdina and J. Osmond (Pisa: Edizioni Plus – Pisa University Press, 2006), 87–102, p. 88.

[23] Jacob Ludwig Karl (1785–1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859). Discussed in Simon Halink, *Asgard Revisited: Old Norse Mythology and Icelandic National Culture 1820–1918* (Groningen: The University of Groningen, 2017).

[24] Thus, in the case of nations, a *national canon* arises as a collection of authentic (cultural) objects, material and immaterial, in order to "negotiate authentic selves". Siân Jones, "Negotiating Authentic Objects and Authentic Selves. Beyond the Deconstruction of Authenticity," *Journal of Material Culture* 15, no. 2 (2010): 181–203.

[25] Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, "Nordic Nature: From Romantic Nationalism to the Anthropocene," in *Introduction to Nordic Cultures*, eds. Annika Lindskog and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen (London: University College, 2020), 165–180; Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, *Arfur og umbylting* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1999).

of the body to cold temperatures. He argued that cooler climates were more conducive to freedom because cold air would contract and strengthen the body, improving blood circulation, thereby making these Northern populations more vigorous.[26]

The concepts of purity and liberty of thought were similarly developed in Icelandic poetry, exemplified by Bjarni Thorarensen (1786-1841), who wrote about the mystery of waterfalls and the delights of the Nordic winter.[27] Egilsson observes how Thorarensen's "organicism of the Romantics" functioned to naturalize the concept of nation, elevating the idea of an innate *Icelandicness* to a spiritual plane. On this axis of *Icelandicity*, Egilsson explores the influence of the pastorale and sublime in the poetry of Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807-1845) who similarly espoused a "pantheistic experience of nature."[28] Here too, invocations of transparency, ice, water, light, vastness and transcendence are tributaries to the myth of *Icelandicity*, celebrating, for example, the waterfall as an essential manifestation of Icelandic nature.[29]

---

[26] Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Discussed in Pierre Bourdieu, "Le Nord et le Midi : Contribution à une analyse de l'effet Montesquieu," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. *L'identité* 35 (November 1980): 21–25; Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, "The Theory of Climate and the North in Anglophone Literatures," in *Images of the North: Histories– Identities– Ideas*, ed. Sverrir Jakobsson (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), 25–49; Kenneth R. Olwig, *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic. From Britain's Renaissance to America's New World* (Madison, Wisc.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 157.

[27] Winter is personified as a mighty ancient king in Thorarensen's poem of that title. He appears as a godlike Norse warrior, wearing a grey coat of mail, with a shield of ice hanging on his shoulders; he brandishes his sword, giving off a chilly wind, and on his helmet is a crest of Northern Lights. His true home is the Arctic. See: Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, "Ways of Addressing Nature in a Northern Context. Romantic Poet and Natural Scientist Jónas Hallgrímsson," in *Conversations with Landscape*, eds. Karl Benediktsson and Katrín A. Lund (Farnham, Surrey, & Burlington, Vermont: Routledge, 2010), 157–171; Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, "Iceland as an Imaginary Place in a European Context–Some Literary Representations," *Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek* 36, no. 2 (2018/19): 34–43; Gylfi Gunnlaugsson, "Old Norse Poetry and New Beginnings in Late 18th- and Early 19th-Century Literature," in *Iceland and Images of the North*, eds. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson and Daniel Chartier (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2011), 115–156.

[28] Jónas Hallgrímsson was a natural scientist and a poet, one of the founders of the cultural journal *Fjölnir*, published in Icelandic in Copenhagen with the aim to strengthen the Icelandic language and to introduce cultural nationalism amongst Icelanders. Dick Ringler, *Bard of Iceland: Jónas Hallgrímsson, Poet and Scientist* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002); Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, "Ways of Addressing Nature in a Northern Context: Romantic Poet and Natural Scientist Jónas Hallgrímsson," in *Conversations with Landscape*, eds. Karl Benediktsson and Katrín A. Lund (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 157–71.

[29] The waterfall is defined and visualized as semiotic *Icelandicity* in photographs by Carl Küchler (1869–1945) published in Carl Küchler, *Island* (Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, 1905), and Carl Küchler, *Unter der Mitternachtssonne durch die Vulkan- und Gletscherwelt Islands* (Leipzig: Abel & Müller, 1906). Including almost 100 photographs, showing waterfalls and other natural phenomena during his travels in Iceland. Also: Carl Küchler, "Við aðalfossana á sunnanverðu Íslandi," *Eimreiðin* 12, no. 3 (1906): 202–9.
A contemporary focus is seen in the work of the Korean artist Boomoon. Here each image is taken from the same frontal viewpoint, creating an immersive view, capturing distinct variations of light and form within the momentum of the huge waterfall Skógafoss. Boomoon, "Waterfall," *Foam. International Photography Magazine* 50 (2018). Special edition: Water, 51–58.

In a major traveling exhibition in 1927 *Ausstellung moderner Isländischer Malerei*, (*Exhibition of Modern Icelandic Painting*) curated by Danish-Swiss journalist and art critic Georg Gretor, Icelandic art is presented as a specific national category, even though Iceland was still not an independent state.[30] In his essay, *Islands Kultur und seine junge Malerei*, published in conjunction with the exhibition opening in Lübeck, Gretor characterized this young Icelandic art as a creative explosion related to its geography and yet again, the tropes of *Icelandicity* are reiterated in his text.[31]

It is outside the scope of my study to trace in greater detail the construction of Icelandic cultural nationalism in late 19th and the first half of the 20th century. There is already an important bibliography allocated to the subject of the political and cultural construction of Icelandic national identity and the complex economic and constitutional relationship with Denmark. Guðmundur Hálfdanarson and Ólafur Rastrick have studied the formation of political and cultural nationalism and have approached Iceland's national identity as a phenomenon constructed by national ideologies.[32] Iceland belonged legally to the Danish Crown and constitutionally Iceland was a part of Denmark, therefore Iceland was considered a Danish province rather than a colony.[33] However, as

[30] Gretor (1892-1943) selected, in collaboration with the Danish and the Icelandic commissions, 243 paintings and drawings by twelve artists: Ásgrímur Jónsson (1876–1958), Finnur Jónsson (1892–1993), Guðmundur Einarsson of Miðdalur (1895–1963), Guðmundur Thorsteinsson (Muggur 1891–1924), Gunnlaugur Blöndal (1893–1962), Jóhannes S. Kjarval (1885–1972), Jón Stefánsson (1881–1962), Jón Þorleifsson (1891–1961), Júlíana Sveinsdóttir (1889–1966), Kristín Jónsdóttir, Sigurður Guðmundsson (1833–1874) and Þórarinn B. Þorláksson (1867–1924). Women's national costumes, silver objects, woodcarvings and old bookbindings were included into the exhibition. The exhibition opened in Charlottenborg in Copenhagen in December 1927, then a smaller selection of works travelled to Germany, to Lübeck, Kiel, Hamburg and Berlin in collaboration with the Nordic Society in Lübeck. *Udstilling af islandsk kunst 10–23 december Charlottenborg 1927* (Copenhagen: Charlottenborg, 1927).

[31] "Der Kampf zwischen Vulkanen und Gletschern, zwischen Feuer und Wasser, hat auf der Erdoberfläche der halbpolaren Insel geologische Kuriositäten erzeugt, die seit Jahrhunderten Erdkundeforscher nach Island gezogen haben." Gretor, *Islands Kultur und seine junge Malerei*, 5.

[32] Guðmundur Hálfdanarson and Ólafur Rastrick, "Culture and the Constitution of the Icelandic in the 19th and 20th Centuries," in *Culture, Empire and Nation,* eds. A. Cimdina and J. Osmond (Pisa: Edizioni Plus – Pisa University Press, 2006), 87–102.

[33] Guðmundur Hálfdanarson "Iceland Perceived: Nordic, European or a Colonial Other?" in *Postcolonial North Atlantic: Perspectives on Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands*. eds. Lill-Ann Körber og Ebbes Volquardsens (Berlin: Nordeuropa-Institut der Humboldt Universität, 2014), 39–66; Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "Var Ísland nýlenda? (Was Iceland a Colony?)," *Saga* 52, no. 1 (2014): 42–75. Hálfdanarson discusses how the complex constitutional status of Iceland was historically and legally debated amongst Icelandic and Danish scholars after the abolishion of the absolute monarchy in 1848. Finally, Iceland became an independent republic in 1944. Because of the ambiguity or confusion attached to the non-colonial status of Iceland, postcolonial theory in Icelandic historiography and in Icelandic cultural context has been considered controversial. Still, some scholars, such as Kristín Loftsdóttir, have argued for the critical and theoretical importance of such an approach. Anne-Sofie Nielsen Gremaud has employed Michael Herzfeld's theory of crypto-colonial relations as framework to analyse the cultural and social bounds between Iceland and Denmark in her doctoral thesis, *Kryptokoloniale landskaber: tid, sted*

Hálfdanarson argues: "In the colonial dichotomy, Iceland was therefore classified as a colony, whatever its actual political status was."[34]

The image of Iceland and the historical constitution of the *Icelandic* has also been described by Hálfdanarson, Rastrick, Ísleifsson, and several other scholars, but this complex dialectic between nature of the *Icelandic*, and the mythos of *Icelandicity* is still at stake.[35] These strategies operate in new situations, have new meanings, social imaginaries and cultural identifications, like the concept of *Icelandicity*, itself, now referring to democracy, freedom and quality of life, rather than a signifier of what belongs properly to Iceland, just as the former national characteristics related historically to *Icelandicness*.

The crucial difference here, through my research, is the distinction I make between Iceland and a mythological notion of *Icelandicity*. Suffice it to say its iconography in the visual arts and it's in textual forms, have been examined by historians of nationalism, visual culture, literature, ethnography and anthropology and displayed as an art historical concept in several exhibitions.[36] My own research in art history and histories of photography has been partly focused on these building blocks of nationalism.[37] Elsewhere, I have analysed how Icelanders used photography as a tool for constructing national identity through landscape photography, while articulating their modern self-image through portrait and family photographs.[38]

---

og rum i billeder af islandsk landskab 1874–2011, Copenhagen: Institut for Kunst- og Kulturvidenskab, Københavns Universitet, 2012. See also Gavin Lucas and Angelos Parigoris, "Icelandic Archaeology and the Ambiguities of Colonialism," in *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*, eds. Magdalena Naum and Jonas M. Nordin (New York, N.Y.: Springer, 2013), 89–104.

[34] Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "Var Ísland nýlenda?," 75.

[35] Guðmundur Hálfdanarson and Ólafur Rastrick, "Culture and the Constitution of the Icelandic in the 19th and 20th Centuries," 87–102; Karen Oslund, *Iceland Imagined: Nature, Culture, and Storytelling in the North Atlantic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011); Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, "Islands on the Edge: Medieval and Early Modern National Images of Iceland and Greenland," 41–66; Sverrir Jakobsson (ed.), *Images of the North*.

[36] Discussed in Joep Leerssen, "Nationalism and the Cultivation of Culture," in *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 4 (2006): 559–78;.

[37] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Nýr sjónarheimur," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*, vol. II, ed. Ólafur Kvaran (Reykjavík: Listasafn Íslands / Forlagið, 2011), 8–84.

[38] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "'Land mitt! Þú ert sem órættur draumur. Óráðin gáta. Fyrirheit!' Um ódauðleika ægifegurðarinnar í Íslandsmyndabókum," in *Fegurðin er ekki skraut. Íslensk samtímaljósmyndun*, eds. Sigrún Alba Sigurðardóttir and Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir (Reykjavík: Fagurskinna, 2020), 11–48; Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, *Til gagns og til fegurðar. Sjálfsmyndir í ljósmyndum og klæðnaði 1860–1960* (Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2008).

Similarly, an emerging artistic canon emphasized landscape, as well as the display of art in public space.[39]

However, there remains the need to examine how the processes of national identity – whether in the sense of *Icelandicness* or *Icelandicity* – in contemporary art – are, utilizing new approaches and new theoretical models. The focus in this study is therefore on postnational representations in contemporary visual art, and my choice of artists in its chapters is built on these thematic considerations.[40] Within this historical framework summarized in the first chapters, the dissertation intentionally adopts a case-study approach to explore questions all related to the construction of *Icelandicity* in contemporary art and visual culture.

The so-called global turn in cultural production, the effects of the economic meltdown in 2008, migration and the awareness of climate crises have indelibly marked this period. These have led many artists to consider and re-consider their relation to Icelandic culture, its legacies, and its collective memory. How they have reacted to and addressed these issues might suggest future paths in cultural production.

[39] Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir, "Listvakning á 19. öld," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*, vol. I, 14–43.

[40] The use of the concept postnational is based here on Eric J. Hobsbawm's discussion of "[…] the new supranational restructuring of the globe." Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalisms since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 182.

2. CHAPTER BY CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

This study includes an introduction, a conclusion and eight main chapters. The chapters are based on my research into modern and contemporary art in Iceland, visual culture, and history of photography. They have been written in the context of international academic conferences, my curatorial work and academic publications in the field of art histography and critical analyses of contemporary art and visual culture. All the previously published texts have been revised and adapted to this publication and new chapters have been added to develop different answers to the research questions by deploying my own examination of *Icelandicity*, discussed in the introduction.[41]

Writing a new, art historical narrative of contemporary art in Iceland became an urgent issue for cultural institutions and for the art market in the new cosmopolitan economy of the early 21st century.[42] Engaging in this critical and art historical writing process means reconsidering the artistic relationship with the national concept. By re-framing art historiographical narratives and chronologies through concepts such as postnationalism, postcolonialism, transnationalism, transculturation, feminism, gender, race, environmental issues, and nation branding, I contribute to a critique of former national narratives. In addition, I consider terms such as globalization, contemporaneity, and identity, and my choice of artworks is based on these considerations.

[41] A shorter version of the chapter "New Maps for Networks-A Case of Expanding Connections" was published in *Narratives Unfolding*: *National Art Histories in an Unfinished World*, ed. Martha Langford (Montreal & Kingston, London, Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 189–208. Chapter five "The Guerrilla Paradigm or "Feminist-Avant-Garde" – Towards an Alternative Feminist Canon," is a longer version of my chapter published in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries Since 1975*, Vol. 41, eds. Benedikt Hjartarson, Tania Ørum, Camilla Skovbjerg Paldam, and Laura Luise Schultz (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 447–74. Chapter seven is based on "Fashion That Came in from the Cold War: Faces of Colonialism in the Fashion Spread," was first published in *Fashioned in the North: Nordic Histories, Agents, and Images of Fashion Photography*, ed. Anna Dahlgren (Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 2020), 31–48. Chapter eight is based on an earlier version published in *Fashion Theory*. *The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 15, no. 2 (2011): 239–58. Chapter ten "Dead or Alive: Polar Bears Adrift" was first published in the volume *Debatable Lands. Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir/Mark Wilson*, ed. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir (Kópavogur: Gerðarsafn – Kópavogur Art Museum, 2021).

[42] Here, I am referring to cosmopolitanism as discussed by Homi K. Bhabha (and others): "There is a kind of global cosmopolitanism, widely influential now, that configures the planet as a concentric world of national societies extending to global villages. It is a cosmopolitanism of relative prosperity and privilege founded on ideas of progress that are complicit with neo-liberal forms of governance, and free-market forces of competition. Such a concept of global 'development' has faith in the virtually boundless powers of technological innovation and global communications." Homi K. Bhabha, "Looking Back, Moving Forward: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism," in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), ix–xxv, here p. xiv; See also: Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Cosmopolitanisms," *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 577–89.

Institutional nation branding is discussed in the chapter "The Lure of the Local and the Glamour of the Global" in the context of the globalization of art historiography and contemporary art. Considering the tension between the local and the global, I will demonstrate what role art plays in the dialectic between the national and the transnational and how *Icelandicness* and *Icelandicity* have played an important role in the diffusion of Icelandic art abroad. The essentialist narrative articulated in international writing about Icelandic art, such as the publication *Icelandic Art Today*, is still present.[43] The branding that took place through art festivals and exhibitions of Icelandic contemporary art in Iceland and abroad, was indeed focused on inscribing Icelandic contemporary art into a global narrative, rather than limiting it to the Nordic, even though Icelandic art was and still is inscribed into the Nordic brand.[44]

Cold war art movements such as Fluxus and Conceptual art might have contributed to a decentralization of the art world.[45] In the third chapter "New Maps for Networks – A Case of Expanding Connections," I trace the emergence of contemporary art in Iceland and describe the important historical role of the German-Swiss artist Dieter Roth (1930-1998), as a *passeur* or a go-between between Iceland, Europa, and the US. Roth was a singularly important figure in the restricted art world of postwar Europe, not only because of his multi-faceted and heterogeneous production but also because of his mobility and his influential networks connected to Fluxus and *The Eternal Network* of the French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou (1926–1987).

Moving freely between languages, media, genres, and locales, Roth constantly articulated his experimental initiatives, crossing borders and practices. He incarnated the role of the *passeur*, historically associated with an archetypal and implicitly masculine persona. In this chapter I discuss Roth's networks, his educational influences, and his direct impact on artists in Iceland. Although Roth established most of the connections and maintained various art networks, his relationship with Iceland as a place on the Western

[43] See for example Robert Hobbs, *Birgir Andrésson: In Icelandic Colours* (Berlin: Distanz Verlag GmbH, 2022).
[44] Charlotte Bydler, "Revisiting the Past: A Brief Introduction to Nordic Art," in *Nordic Contemporary: Art from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden*, ed. Hossein Amirsadeghi (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014), 10–19; Hossein Amirsadeghi, ''The Nordic Brand,'' in *Nordic Contemporary: Art from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden*, 6–9.
[45] Discussed in Sophie Cras, "Global Conceptualism? Cartographies of Conceptual Art in Pursuit of Decentring," in *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, eds. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux–Prunel (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 167–182.

cultural periphery might also be said to have profoundly marked his art. As such, he contributed to the construction of *Icelandicit*y in an avantgarde context by mythifying Iceland as a place of imagined freedom and otherness in postwar European culture. An important part of my discussion in this chapter is to trace some of the traffic that was generated by artist-run spaces in Iceland and in Holland, where Icelandic artists met and collaborated with artists from Eastern Europe and Latin America.[46]

Furthermore, I will argue that art spaces, such as the *In-Out Centre* in Amsterdam, might have functioned as *in-between space* for its Icelandic artists, operating to propel "postcolonial artists" from local into global institutions of art.[47] Focusing on experimental art education and relating the influences of the new art education to art practices as well as the new material and organic aesthetics introduced by Roth at the New Art department in Reykjavík, this chapter draws on interviews with some of the former students of the school. These interviews illuminate the tensions between female and male art students, thus indicating how historical Western avant-garde frameworks are problematic when writing about the development and the consolidation of contemporary art in local contexts.

Within Iceland's cultural scene, we must acknowledge the omnipresence of masculine role models in and for the construction of contemporary artistic identity, an assumption that has determined the terms in which contemporary art history has been written. I thus argue how the personality of Roth, as well as his various networks contributed to a cosmopolitan (and masculine) view of art making and to an art historical narrative that is by no means specific to Roth or Iceland but is, in fact, part of the DNA of art history. This includes the assumption that the (male) artist is a singular and

[46] Roth's influence on Icelandic artists has been discussed by Anna Jóhannsdóttir, "Exile, Correspondence, Rebellion – Tracing the Interactive Relationship between Iceland and Dieter Roth," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950–1975*, 239–250; Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Bók um bók, frá bók ……Bókverk Diters Rot á Íslandi, 1957–1961," *Skírnir* 162 (Spring 1988): 51–82; Halldór B. Runólfsson, "Times of Continuous Transition," in *Icelandic Art Today*, eds. Christian Schoen and Halldór B. Runólfsson (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 10–26; Heiða Björk Árnadóttir, *The Conceptual, the Romantic, and the Nonhuman: The SÚM Group and the Emergence of Contemporary Art in Iceland, 1965–1978*. PhD dissertation (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2019).

[47] Homi K. Bhabha describes "in-between" spaces as "moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself." Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2. Furthermore, he noted: "It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance." Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 56.

exceptional being, and that cultural production springs from this individual, not from the collective or from the network. To extend the critique of the embedded, but often unacknowledged masculinities of avant-garde groups and their institutional function**,** I wrote the chapter "The Guerrilla Paradigm or 'Feminist-Avant-Garde' – Towards an Alternative Feminist Canon,"[48]

Woman artist, feminist artist, feminist art, or art by women are all different entities. With these distinctions in mind, I trace how these categories took form both through exhibitions and journalistic writing by investigating how Icelandic women artists and art students were exposed to feminism via institutions abroad –and how various networks were activated by women inside feminist organisations and artist-run entities. I discuss the development of feminist practices and interventions in Iceland since 1975, in conjunction with the often-conflictual collaboration with the male dominated avant-garde group SÚM which occupies a canonical place in contemporary art historiographies as pioneers of postmodern practices in Iceland.

Questions of national identity are closely associated with art reflecting on the culture of a nation. In chapter six "Memory and Identity. Whiteness in the Cultural Archive", I introduce the complex construction of "whiteness" in its various manifestations and as itself part of the signifiers of *Icelandicness* and *Icelandicity.* Like all racial categories, whiteness is capable of being created, inhabited, and transformed. Grounded in nationalism and its historical narratives including archaeology, anthropology, literature, vernacular and visual culture, these constructions are examined in the work of Magnús Sigurðarson, Ragnar Kjartansson, and Ólöf Nordal. I demonstrate how these artists explore the archive as a repository of ideologies, nationalism, and racism. In this respect, I am interested in their dismantling of national symbolism and its putative whiteness represented in national iconography.

Whiteness, as a racial construct in Icelandic culture has been discussed by scholars of anthropology and history such as Kristín Loftsdóttir and Sverrir Jakobsson. They have demonstrated how whiteness (constructed semantically through language) became one of the main signifiers of *Icelandicnes*s. In the late 20th century, scholars such as Michael

[48] This chapter is a longer version of my chapter: Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "The Guerrilla Paradigm or "Feminist-Avant-Garde" – Towards an Alternative Feminist Canon," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries Since 1975,* Vol. 41, eds. Benedikt Hjartarson, Tania Ørum, Camilla Skovbjerg Paldam, and Laura Luise Schultz (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 447–74.

Omi and Howard Winant, argued that "Simply stating that race is socially constructed, however, begs a number of important questions […] How and why do racial definitions and meanings change over time and place? And perhaps most important, what role does race play within the broader social system in which it is embedded."[49] They argue "that in the United States *race is a master category*—a fundamental concept that has profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the history, polity, economic structure and culture of the Unites States."[50] However, until quite recently, the multiple ways in which whiteness has been politically manipulated, culturally mediated, and historically constructed have, in large part, been ignored in cultural analyses in Iceland.[51] Here I will demonstrate how (in art) racialization is extended to cultural objects, emotions, bodies and organizations previously seen as non-racial.

The myth of the explorer, the landfarer, the Viking, is a thematic that runs through the cultural history of Iceland and is reinvigorated in contemporary contexts as an important part of Icelandic identity.[52] Articulations of masculinities in relation to fantasies of the North are discussed further through fashion photography in chapter seven, "Fashion that Came in from the Cold War. Two Faces of Colonialism in the Arctic." The absurdity of a fashion photographer representing himself as an explorer, braving the elements, while eliding of all social and material relations (which, of course, is what fashion photography is about) – articulating *Icelandicity* and *Arcticness* in the images presented to an upper and middleclass readership in Europe and America.

Icelandicity in contemporary pop culture and fashion, is also discussed in chapter eight "The New Nordic Cool: Björk, Fashion and Contemporary Art in Iceland." Already by 1981, in the documentary music film *Rock in Reykjavík*, by Friðrik Þór Friðriksson, her elf like presence was marketed as a signifier of Icelandic *otherness*. Björk nurtured the organic, the innocent identity, generally associated with Icelandic nature and its *purity*, an *Icelandicity* represented not only through her body, her voice, as Árni Heimir Ingólfsson and Nicola Dibben have argued, but also through colours, sounds of nature,

[49] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 2015 (1994), 106.
[50] Ibid., 106.
[51] Discussed in Kristín Loftsdóttir, "Racist Caricatures in Iceland in the Early 20th Century," in *Iceland and Images of the North* (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2011), 187–204.
[52] Discussed in, Katla Kjartansdóttir and Katrín Anna Lund, "Trapped in Clichés: Masculinity, Films and Tourism in Iceland," *Gender, Place & Culture. A Journal of Feminist Geography* 24, no. 9 (2017): 1125–1242.

material and sonic textures that are visually and musically mediated in her music and videos.[53] Yet again, the distinction between *Icelandicness* – being of or from Iceland, and *Icelandicity* is often blurred in Björk's multiple representations and interviews.

Since the 1990s there has been a new wave of interest in the social function of art, including collaborative (research) practices, and live encounters, most often taking place in museums or other public institutional contexts, with the aim of prompting environmental and social solutions to given problems. Artists were quite aware of the changing role of Iceland in the new global economic context and created works (including performances and actions) that countered the "truth" as articulated through nation branding and mediated through tropes of *Icelandicity*. In chapter nine "Resistance and Environmental Activism," I introduce the term *environmental Icelandicity*, defining the connection between *Icelandicity* and the environmental debate in Iceland. I discuss the conflicts and the dispute concerning the construction of the Kárahnjúkar power plant in East Iceland. How the idea of art as resistance was activated against the destruction of Iceland's highlands, and how artists reacted to cultural clichés manifested in art exhibitions and cultural festivals abroad that promoted "a distinction based on nationality."[54]

As cultural historian Ann-Sofie Nielsen Gremaud pointed out, "The crisis following the economic collapse in 2008 has intensified the debate about natural resources, the intertwined nature of the local, regional, global and planetary geographical levels and the political strategies associated with them."[55] Addressing these cultural and economic changes, before and after the 2008 meltdown, artists Ásmundur Ásmundsson, Hannes Lárusson and anthropologist Tinna Grétarsdóttir drew attention to the ways in which artists and artworks were turned into useful marketing tools. They concluded that "Icelandic artists find themselves tied down, and some might want to say haunted, by this

[53] Árni Heimir Ingólfsson, "'Follow My Voice': Structure and Improvisation in Björk's 'Mouth's Cradle'," in *European Journal of Musicology* 18, no. 1 (2019): 84–98; Nicola Dibben, *Björk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

[54] Discussed in Tinna Grétarsdóttir, Ásmundur Ásmundsson, and Hannes Lárusson, "Creativity and Crises," in *Gambling Debt. Iceland's Rise and Fall in the Global Economy,* eds. Paul Durrenberger and Gísli Pálsson (Iowa: University Press of Colorado, 2015), 93–105, p. 100.

[55] Ann-Sofie Nielsen Gremaud, "Power and Purity: Nature as Resource in a Troubled Society," *Environmental Humanities* 5 (2014): 77–100, p. 78.

dominant reduction of Icelandic art to a simplistic formula—the conflation of art with ethnicity and the land/nature."[56]

Over the last decades, the "animal question" has been addressed in contemporary art from several interdisciplinary perspectives. Scholars of anthropology, human geography, folklore and tourism have demonstrated how Icelandic souvenir production, distribution, and consumption has increasingly emphasised the country's association with Arctic landscapes, where animals like the seal, the polar bear, and the whale are fetishized in consumer culture.[57] The resulting and quite substantial bibliography dealing with human and non-human relations is predicated on ecological thought and the recognition that human and non- human lives have always been entwined. Moreover, the postmodern engagement with a variety of issues connected to the animal world has raised significant ethical questions, and requires different and more integrated knowledge, as theorist Cary Wolf and others have argued.[58]

These question of human-animal relations in the Icelandic context are raised in the last chapter "Dead or Alive. Polar Bears Adrift". This chapter was written in connection within the collaborative research and exhibition project *Visitations* led by artists Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson.[59] It was an interdisciplinary attempt to investigate how animals such as polar bears are "called into play in a political arena" as argued by Bradotti.[60] The project therefore counts as an important contribution to a more global social and political resistance against the fetishization of the animal and the environment currently practiced in Iceland. Finally, it will be discussed how artists are

[56] Economic and cultural branding of Iceland, including the promotion of visual arts, music and literature, took place in several art and cultural festivals in early 21st century: Paris (2004), Cologne (2005), Brussels (2008), New York (2008), Frankfurt (2011). Discussed in Tinna Grétarsdóttir, Ásmundur Ásmundsson and Hannes Lárusson, "The Cultural Worker," in *Þjóðarspegillinn*, eds. Ása B. Ásgeirsdóttir, Helga Björnsdóttir and Helga Ólafsdóttir (Reykjavík: The Social Science Research Institute, University of Iceland, 2011), 606–15, p. 612; Ann-Sofie Nielsen Gremaud and Salvör Aradóttir, "Ísland sem rými annarleikans: Myndir frá Bókasýningunni í Frankfurt árið 2011 í ljósi kenninga um dul-lendur og heterótópíur," *Ritið* 12, no. 1 (2012): 7–29.

[57] Katrín Anna Lund, Katla Kjartansdóttir and Kristín Loftsdóttir, "'Puffin Love': Performing and Creating Artic Landscapes in Iceland through Souvenirs," *Tourist Studies* 18, no. 2 (2018): 142–58.

[58] Cary Wolfe, "Human, All Too Human: "Animal Studies" and the Humanities," *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (March 2009): 564–75.

[59] *Visitations. Polar Bears Out of Place* was a three-year collaborative research project (2019–2022), funded by the Icelandic Research Fund (Rannís) and run by the Iceland Art Academy, University of Iceland, University of Cumbria, Akureyri Art Museum and Anchorage Museum, Alaska. Retrieved from: http://visitations.lhi.is/

[60] Rosi Braidotti, "The Contested Posthumanities," in *Conflicting Humanities*, eds. R. Braidotti and P. Gilroy (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 20.

organizing resistance through critical actions, calling for a reevalution of the public sphere.[61]

[61] I have discussed the nationalisation and the neoliberalisation of the public sphere in Reykjavík in Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Óræð inngrip og pólitísk orðræða í borginni: Listaverkið í almannarými og áhrif útisýninga í Reykjavík," (Agonistic Interventions and Political Discourse in the City*) Ritið* 18/2 (2018): 78–103.

3. THE LURE OF THE LOCAL AND THE GLAMOUR OF THE GLOBAL[62]

3.1 The difference of Icelandic Art

> "Just what is it that makes Iceland's art of today so different, so appealing? Be it from a conceptual, experimental, or poetic angle, today's art in Iceland is what artists in other nations struggle to achieve: it is direct and genuine. It playfully oversteps the boundaries of other art forms. Interesting collaborations between artists, musicians, actors, designers, or authors are the norm. The art is fed by a strong, creative energy that practically makes each of the island's roughly 300.000 inhabitants into two things: culture recipients and culture creators."[63]

The year is 2008, and Schoen's effusive description, with its clever pun on the title of Richard Hamilton's parodic work, with its multiple references to the wonders of postwar technology and consumer capitalism, might be interpreted from several viewpoints.[64] Schoen, then director of the Centre for Icelandic Art,[65] seems to evoke a naïve or primitive explanation, a cultural cliché, when he specifies that "Icelandic art has kept a bit of its creative virginity, which most other European societies had already lost centuries ago. That is my explanation of what makes Icelandic art so special."[66] At first glance, his enthusiasm might be seen as a *clin d'oeil* to the hype that characterized the global

---

[62] The title of this chapter refers to Lucy R. Lippard´s book, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997).

[63] Christian Schoen, "Preface," in *Icelandic Art Today*, eds. Christian Schoen and Hallḍór Björn Runólfsson (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 7.

[64] *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing*? is a collage by Richard Hamilton, often considered to be the first work of Pop Art. The work was created for the poster and the catalogue of the 1956 exhibition *This is Tomorrow* in the Whitechapel Gallery, London. It includes images from Hollywood cinema, advertising and a reproduction of a Van Gogh painting. As described by Hamilton, "The objective here was to throw into the cramped space of a living room some representation of all the objects and ideas crowding into our post-war consciousness […]. The collage had a didactic role in the context of a didactic exhibition, *This is Tomorrow*, in that it attempted to summarize the various influences that were beginning to shape post-war Britain. We seemed to be taking a course towards a rosy future and our changing, Hi-Tech, world was embraced with a starry-eyed confidence; a surge of optimism which took us into the 1960s. Though clearly an 'interior' there are complications that cause us to doubt the categorisation. The ceiling of the room is a space-age view of Earth. The carpet is a distant view of people on a beach. It is an allegory rather than a representation of a room." Richard Hamilton, *Exteriors, Interiors, Objects, People*, ed. Dieter Schwartz (Kunstumuseum Winterthur, Kestner-Gesellschaft Hannover, IVAM, Centre Julio Gonzalez, Valencia, Stuttgart: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1990), 44.

[65] Centre for Icelandic Art (Now Icelandic Art Centre – Kynningarmiðstöð íslenskrar myndlistar) was established in 2005. It promotes Icelandic art by connecting the local visual art community with international art networks.

[66] Rita Canarezza, "Interview with Christian Schoen, Director of CIA – Centre for Icelandic Art, Reykjavík, Iceland," in *Little Constellation,* ed. Chiara Leoni (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2010), 178–82, p. 182.

contemporary art scene in the early 21st century. However, Schoen not only affirms the dubious idea of self-generated creativity among Icelandic artists, but he also asserts that the specificity of this effervescent art scene is due to the fact that "There is no gulf separating art and life but instead a thriving relationship. Creativity penetrates society. This in itself reveals one essential characteristic of Icelandic art and explains how such a small country can produce such a large number of interesting artists."[67]

The concept of national creativity is here posited by Schoen as some kind of organic entity, when such notions are discursive constructions, reframed and developed by neoliberal discourses through cultural and educational policies and celebrated through governmental nation branding.[68] Schoen could also be alluding to the fact that contemporary art in Iceland developed in a tense political landscape dominated by the Cold War and capitalist transformation and under the auspices of the US military presence in Iceland.[69] Or, read differently, this may be described as the act of branding, itself a marketing stratagem that accompanies most of what is meant to be sold, exemplified by such ambitious governmental programs as *Iceland Naturally, Reykjavík Pure Energy* and *Inspired by Iceland*.

Schoen equally activates a globalized discourse when he describes Icelanders as mobile and "intrinsically hybrid" in the sense that artistic production bears witness to the crossover of media and art genres. The intermediality discussed by Schoen has, in fact, been described as one of the main characteristics of artmaking within the global art scene.[70] Similarly insisting on the "powerful artistic influence of the international music export" he notes, that the musician and composer, Björk Guðmundsdóttir played a key role and "[…] this energy marks a new euphoric mood in Iceland's art scene."[71]

By acknowledging forms of intermediality in contemporary Icelandic art, but also by identifying and contextualizing these characteristics with essentialist notions of nature,

---

[67] Schoen, "Preface," 7.
[68] Kevin Gormley, "Neoliberalism and the Discursive Construction of 'Creativity'," *Critical Studies in Education* 61, no. 3 (2020), 313–328. Also discussed in D. Hesmondhalgh and S. Baker, *Creative Labour. Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (London: Routledge, 2011).
[69] The 1951 U.S.–Icelandic Defence Agreement paved the way for a permanent U.S. military presence at the Keflavik base in Iceland, an outpost that played a crucial role in U.S. strategy during the Cold War. The Naval Air Station Keflavík was closed on 8 September 2006.
[70] On intermediality see Lars Elleström, "The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations," in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström (London, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020 (2010), 11–48.
[71] Schoen, "Observation from Inside and Out," *List – Icelandic Art News* (Summer 2007): 4–7, p. 6.

Schoen infuses contemporary art with *Icelandicity*. This infusion reflects the neoliberalization of Icelandic society in the late 1990s onwards, where creativity was defined as essence in public relations discourse and nation branding as one of the important elements of *Icelandicnes*s.[72]

In a governmental report, *Image of Iceland. Strength, Position, and Policy* published in spring 2008, creativity was framed as an essentialist concept and described as natural sustainable resource.[73] A notable example of Icelandic artists directly performing their "native creativity" in a global art context, occurred during the reconstruction of the alternative Reykjavík downtown bar Sirkus for the London Frieze Art Fair in September 2008. The export of the bar to London was described as "A zany nomadic act reflecting the drive of Icelandic art, producing a situation of one circus within another for artists to respond to".[74]

Here, the local fuelled the global, art and capital fused together in a lauded international event. Produced by the Frieze Foundation for Frieze Projects, a program of concerts and performances organised by Kling & Bang (an artist collective founded in Reykjavík in 2003), took place inside the bar during the art fair, transplanting the atmosphere of the well-known art bar from the periphery (Reykjavík) to the centre (London): "A place of celebration and creation will move town for a few short days, like the travelling circus invoked by the bar's name."[75]

This participatory installation constructed within the Fair's precincts recalls a project first conceived by Dieter Roth in the early 1980s. Roth considered his personal version of the mobile bar to be the perfect example of a participatory and nomadic installation that could travel from one exhibition venue to another. In retrospect, the bar

[72] Barbara A. Kerr, Maxwell Birdnow, Jenelle Hallaert, Keely Alexander, Robyn Malmsten, Olivia Stull, J. D. Wright, Brittany Lucas, Rachel Swanson and Grace J. Claiborn, "Creativity and Innovation in Iceland: Individual, Environmental, and Cultural Variables," *Gifted and Talented International* 32, no. 1 (2017): 27–43.

[73] Svafa Grönfeldt et al., *Ímynd Íslands. Styrkur, stefna og staða* (Reykjavík: Forsætisráðuneytið, 2008). Retrived from: https://rafhladan.is/handle/10802/4328. Discussed in Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir, "Ímynd Íslands, sagan, menningararfurinn og hin ýmsu sjálf Íslendingsins," *Saga – Tímarit Sögufélagsins* 46, no. 2 (2008): 56–85.

[74] "KlingBang export the Reykjavík Sirkús-bar at Frieze Art Fair, London," Stjórnarráð Íslands, 30 September 2008. Retrived from: https://www.stjornarradid.is/efst-a-baugi/frettir/stok-frett/?NewsId=6da8d17b-e3e1-11e6-9c23-e4a47104df25

[75] Retrived from: "Kling & Bang at Sirkus Bar at Frieze Art Fair, London 16th October to 19th October 2008," Kling & Bang. http://this.is/klingogbang/archive_view.php?id=168

could be interpreted as a metaphor of his cross-generational and interdisciplinary practice.[76]

This international marketing of Icelandic contemporary art in the London Frieze Art Fair echoes in many aspects the branding of *Cool Britannia* and the cultural, national (and economic) identification of Brit-Art also named YBa (Young British art), in the 1990s, whose success was linked to London's changing status as new business capital.[77]

Branding as a technique of governance or a paradigm for culture reflects the ideological element in art that was activated in Iceland at the turn of the century.[78] As artists Ásmundur Ásmundsson and Hannes Lárusson have argued: "The synchronized, consistent, and coherent "Iceland" brand—projected internationally—provides the nation with a symbolic system of national paradigms, peculiarities, aesthetic distinctions, and taste. The brand thus becomes a kind of disciplinary institution, dictating the development, management, and streaming of the Icelandic image as it is directed both outwardly at the larger world and inwardly at Icelanders themselves."[79]

During the political turmoil that followed 2008 the massive economic meltdown the potential of art and design continued to be identified as an important creative element of survival and recovery, and the creativity paradigm was reinjected into the new institutional discourse. In 2009, Katrín Júlíusdóttir, then Minister of Industry, Energy, and Tourism, observed: "The creative power of our people is attracting attention and making Iceland a place people want to come and visit. We must get the message across

[76] Additionally, "the bar" was consistent with Roth's negation of boundaries between his artistic creation and real life, as the bar was also an important space – even a tool – in his idiosyncratic teaching methods; sessions were often organized around drinking with the students inside or outside the classroom. In 1997, Roth announced that a bar would also form part of his one-man show at the Hauser & Wirth Gallery in Zurich where "Every beer bottle consumed became a part of the bar installation and visitors' conversations were recorded and archived." Discussed in Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Magnús Pálsson et le département New Art à Reykjavík 1975–1984. 'Teaching: The Maddest Artform'," in *Transmettre l'art – Figures et méthodes – Quelle histoire*, eds. Christophe Kihm and Valérie Mavridorakis (Dijon, Les presses du réel, 2014), 129–51; Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Avons-nous encore besoin de héros nordiques ? Une analyse des généalogies artistiques et des filiations masculines entre Dieter Roth et Ragnar Kjartansson," *Perspective*: *actualité en histoire de l'art*, 2019–1, 227–38.

[77] Discussed in Aidan While, "Locating Art Worlds: London and the Making of Young British Art," *Area* 35, no. 3 (September 2003): 251–63; John Michael Lee, "Interpreting the 'Rebranding of Britain'," *The Round Table* 90, no. 362 (2001): 679–89; Guillaume Clément, "De Britpop à Cool Britannia: une identité britannique revue et corrigée par le New Labour," *Observatoire de la société britannique* 2008, no. 5, 195–209.

[78] Discussed in Bjarki Valtýsson, *Íslensk menningarpólitík* (Reykjavík: Nýhil, 2011), 112–13.

[79] Tinna Grétarsdóttir, Ásmundur Ásmundsson, and Hannes Lárusson, "Creativity and Crises," 97.

that we are more than geysers, volcanoes, waterfalls— and now fallen banks. Here you will also find creative people, culture and modern industries."[80]

3.2. The North as a Cultural Brand

This new institutional (and market) promotion of Icelandic art had certain geopolitical precedents. From the 1980s on, the North, conceived as an aesthetic category had been manifest in several art exhibitions in important museums and art institutions in Europe and in the US. Curators, such as art historian Kirk Varnedoe framed Nordic art as a specific geographic and historical artistic category, infused with certain essentialist qualities attributed to all Scandinavian nations. Varnedoe's 1982 exhibition, *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880-1910*, at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington and subsequently at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, is often presented as being the first exhibition since 1912 of Scandinavian art in this category in the US.[81] The exhibition was highly influential and opened new markets for Nordic, or Scandinavian art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, succeeded by a number of exhibitions.[82] As Øystein Sjåstad and Elizabeth Doe Stone have remarked, Varnedoe's exhibition was succeeded by a number of exhibitions and publications, in Europe and in the US. These exhibitions were historical and aimed at traditional museum publics, many of Scandinavian descendance. However, they also note that a more inclusive framework for Nordic art and visual culture has reconstituted the field, placing a greater emphasis on global exchange versus national or regional exceptionalism.

American art historian Robert Rosenblum, who is often claimed to have "invented" the connection between the sublime in abstract painting and German romanticism in his 1975 study *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko*, might have contributed to this aesthetic connection between the

[80] Katrín Júlíusdóttir, "You Are in Control" [speech]. September 23, 2009. No longer accessible online.
[81] The first Nordic exhibition in America titled *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art*, was organized under the auspices of the American Scandinavian Society in the American Art Galleries, New York. Christian Brinton, Karl Madsen, Jens Thiis and Carl G. Laurin, *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art* (New York: Redfield Brothers, Inc., 1912). Discussed in Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen and Kristen Ørjasæter, eds., *Globalizing Art: Negotiating Place, Identity and Nation in Contemporary Nordic Art* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2011); Øystein Sjåstad and Elizabeth Doe Stone, "Le modernisme nordique: nouvelles orientations d'étude," *Perspective*: actualité en histoire de l'art (2019/1): 199–210.
[82] The main Nordic exhibitions are listed in Sjåstad and Stone, "Le modernisme nordique."

Nordic and the German romantic painting by setting "up a whole system of affinities between artists who are not normally associated with one another."[83]

This idea of the North as a collective aesthetic category – notwithstanding its essentialist elements – served a purpose for contemporary Icelandic artists. Originally conceived as a regional identity related to German concepts such as *Stimmung*, a transdisciplinary concept modelled in late 18th century touching upon philosophy, psychology, and aesthetics, is privileged as a Nordic category in these exhibitions. They were curated for both a national and international public, projecting and mirroring a phantasmatic concepts as national and Nordic. It permitted artists' works to be situated into this cultural and geopolitical framework when displayed in international settings in exhibitions, and in art historical catalogues, an "identity" shared with other Scandinavian and North European artists.[84] Romantic, however, in either its upper- or lower-case meanings is a highly elastic category. Doubtless, this has contributed to its emergence as a dominant category in Nordic art. However, this identification with Icelandic conceptual art being poetic and romantic was already dominant in mid 1970s, when Icelandic art was described as such both by Icelandic artists and art critics.[85]

---

[83] Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975); John Russell, "Did Pollock Derive from Blake?; Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition," *The New York Times*, October 19, 1975, 269.

[84] Discussed by a number of art historians in connexion with exhibitions forging a common Nordic identity: Katharina Alsen and Annika Landmann, *Nordische Malerei: im Licht der Moderne* (München: Prestel, 2016); Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir, "Visions of Nature in Icelandic Art," in *Confronting nature: Icelandic Art of the 20th Century*, eds. Ólafur Kvaran and Karla Kristjánsdóttir (Reykjavík: National Gallery of Iceland, 2001), 23–38; Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir, "Hið upphafna norður," *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, 13 October 2001, 4–5; Laurence Bossé and Hans Ulrich Obrist (eds.), *Nuit Blånche: Scènes Nørdiques: les années 90* (Paris: Musée de l'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1998); Halldór B. Runólfsson, "Symbolische Landschaft: Die verschiedenen Ausdrucksweisen in der islandischen Malerei von 1900 bis 1910," in *Landschaft als Kosmos der Seele: Malerei des nordischen Symbolismus bis Munch 1880–1910*, ed. Götz Czymmek (Köln: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, 1998), 47–50; Halldór B. Runólfsson, "Reflections on Icelandic Art," in *Landscapes from a High Latitude*, ed. Julian Freeman (London: Lund Humphries, 1989), 21–92; John Russell Taylor, "Symbolism: The Constant Strain in Icelandic Art," in *Landscapes from a High Latitude*, ed. Julian Freeman (London: Lund Humphries, 1989), 93–105; Svein Christiansen (ed.), *Borealis 2: Posisjon: Nord* (Helsinki and Hovikodden: Nordic Arts Centre and Henie-Onstad Art Centre, 1985); Kirk Varnedoe, "Nationalism, Internationalism, and the Progress of Scandinavian Art," in *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting 1880–1910*, ed. Kirk Varnedoe (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1983), 12–33.

[85] Tryggvi Ólafsson qualifies the work by Hreinn Friðfinnsson and Sigurður Guðmundsson exhibited in SÚM IV in Amsterdam 1971, as being romantic and poetic. Tryggvi Ólafsson, "Frásögn af SÚM IV í Amsterdam (ekki algildur gæðadómur)," *Þjóðviljinn*, April 28, 1971, 6–7, 9, here p. 7; Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Through SÚM to Suðurgata 7. Some Recent Trends in Icelandic Art," in *Iceland*, exhibition in Zona, Via San Nicoló, Florence, Desember 1979–January 1980 (Reykjavík: Gallerí Suðurgata 7, 1979); Eva Heisler, "Soulful Mathematics: Poetry and Icelandic Conceptualism," *Mosaic* 49, no. 2 (June 2016): 51–73.

The displacement from the more sophisticated South towards the creative (contemporary) North can be identified in this context by Pontus Hultén (1924–2006), the influential curator and former director of the Stockholm Moderna Museet and Centre Pompidou in Paris.[86] Hultén, in his 1983 exhibition *Sleeping Beauty – Art Now: Scandinavia Today*, held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, selected "emerging artists from Northern Europe," including Hreinn Friðfinnsson and Sigurður Guðmundsson.[87] Needless to say, no women were included in the show. The exhibition was a part of the series *Northern Visions*, displaying Scandinavian art chronologically from the mid-20th century until 1982. This regional approach to contemporary art was unusual for Hultén who in his catalogue text was apologetic about the geographical grouping he was co-curating. "The reason why the Scandinavian countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – are grouped together is that they are all situated at the corner of Europe, and they are all small in terms of population."[88] After having discussed their differences and likeness, he adds "There is no overall pattern common to the situation of the pictorial arts in the five Scandinavian countries today."[89] He explains that the reason for this regrouping was political consequences of the Cold War: "Scandinavia: a kind of northern Balkan; little -known, neglected, misunderstood, often simplified in modern journalistic presentations into the silly, suffering since 1918 from its dead-end geographical situation that has come as a result of the Soviet Union's reluctance to open its boarders or rather, its will for isolation."[90]

Then Hultén falls into a form of romanticising, into the rhetoric of geographic branding: "A wonderful part of the world; rich, modest, mysterious, difficult, partly untouched by modern international culture, still maintaining its own cultures, thousands

[86] Hultén established a strong connection with American Pop artists already in the 1950s (called his New York Connection). One of his most innovative historical and contemporary exhibitions was *Rörelse i konsten*, a 1961 travelling exhibition between Moderna Museet, Stedjelik Museum and Louisiana. In 1974 he became engaged in the creation of Centre Pompidou in Paris His large transnational exhibitions Paris-New York (1977), Paris-Berlin (1978), and Paris-Moscow (1979) all in Centre Pompidou, have become legendary. Annika Öhrner (ed.), *Art in Transfer in the Era of Pop. Curatorial Practices and Transnational Strategies* (Södertörn: Södertörn Academic Studies, 2017).
[87] The selected artists were: Bård Breivik, Lars Englund, Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Sigurður Guðmundsson, Per Kirkeby, Olle Kåks, Olli Lyytikäinen, Bjørn Nørgaard, Paul Osipow, and Arvid Pettersen, with monographic participation of Asger Jorn and Öyvind Fahlström. Björn Springfeldt (ed.), *Sleeping Beauty – Art Now / Scandinavia Today* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1982).
[88] Pontus Hultén, "Little History & Explanation," in *Sleeping Beauty – Art Now*, 11–16, p. 11.
[89] Ibid, 13.
[90] Hultén, "Little History & Explanation," 16.

of years old. Full of lakes, forests, lonely islands all of polished granite, winds, silence, darkness of the winters, the white nights of the summers, far between the farms, unpretentious, timid. A demonstration of the possible."[91] The selection of the artists and the artworks in the exhibition speaks to this mystified image of the North as silent, dark, but also white – transparent, and (it goes without saying), "authentic".

This geographical, nationalist and mythical approach was addressed by the American art critic Donald Kuspit, in a review published in *Artforum*, asking "why must artists be seen in nationalist context before any other?"[92] Kuspit does not question the categories of *North* or *Nordic* affirmed in the exhibition. Rhetorically, however, he comments on the title of the exhibition and he wonders "Does the restoration of this context imply that stylistic and content considerations don't really matter anymore-- that all that matters is that art personify the nation and that the nation buoy up the art with a new depth of meaning? Have we stopped believing in art's inherent value? Is the only thing that makes art meaningful today the fact that it is national? […] art may be just another aid to tourism […] art may be the barker before the carny tent of the nation."[93] "[But] all this Nordicness," he continues, "is forced and finally absurd, the art stands or falls on its international credentials not on its nationalistic posturing. And from the international point of view this art is quite credible."[94]

The political move of representing Nordic art as a cultural and aesthetic unity was similarly criticised by some Nordic art historians. Sune Nordgren would make a similar remark some years later when he dismissed the so-called "Nordic fellowship" as a "fabrication" only given credence by "New World" curators such as Kirk Varnedoe. Writing in 1990, Nordgren, considered the construction "Nordic art" to be "no longer something worth pursuing". It was, and has always been, "a case of romantic self-deception […] that has never functioned… [and that] is kept alive today by means of artificial respiration."[95]

Later, Stuart Burch argued that "[…] 'the north' is […] a noetic phenomenon: an abstract or intellectual concept made powerfully real by being objectified in museums,

[91] Ibid.
[92] Donald Kuspit, "Northern Visions," *Artforum* 21 no.4 (December 1982): 77.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Sunne Nordgren, "'Ten Nordic Artists'–But What is The North?," *Terskel/Threshold* 2 (1990): 6–7, p. 7.

depicted in galleries and named in catalogues, many of which carry the logos of such funders as the Nordic Council."[96] Despite this criticism, Burch argues that the Nordic metaframe has been functioning a useful cultural tool.[97] It has not only been employed as a curatorial concept and a cultural and diplomatic policy platform, but also been debated as a concept of common cultural policy in the creation of the Nordic welfare state, an argument also made by Øystein Hjort, in the *Sleeping Beauty* catalogue.[98] Consequently the Nordic Arts Centre (NKC), established in 1978 by the Nordic Council of Ministers, located in the military fortress Suomenlinna outside Helsinki, organised important didactic pan-Nordic art historical exhibitions such as *Konkret i Norden* (*Nordic Concrete Art 1907-1960*, 1988), and *Nordiskt 60-tal* (*The Nordic '60s*. *Upheaval a Confrontation 1960–1972*, 1990), in order to build a collective Nordic art history, through art historical research projects sponsored by the Nordic Council of Ministers.[99]

When the exhibition, *Nuit Blånche: Scènes Nørdiques:les années 90*, organized in 1998 at the Musée de l'art moderne de la ville de Paris (MAM Ville de Paris), the Nordic contemporary art scene was introduced through a slightly different prism even though the category Nordic was maintained as its framework. The exhibition, co-curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist (HUO), was a part of the festival *Visions du Nord*, an important multidisciplinary cultural festival sponsored by the Nordic Council. Obrist, then a young upcoming curator, described the Nordic art scene as "a veritable Nordic miracle" and "an explosion of creativity."[100] The New Nordic Cool was born.[101]

---

[96] Discussed in Stuart Burch, "Noetic Norden: assembling and dissembling the art of 'the north,'" in *Linköping Electronic Conference Proceedings: Kultur–Natur: Konferens för kulturstudier i Sverige* (Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2009), 333–38, p. 333.

[97] Stuart Burch, "Norden Reframed," in *Culture Unbound. Journal of Current Cultural Research* 2, no. 5 (2010); Peter Aronsson, "Uses of the Past – Nordic Historic Cultures in a Comparative Perspective," *Culture Unbound. Journal of Current Cultural Research* 2, no. 5 (2010); Julia Kristensen, "Do We Have Contemporary Nordic Art?," *Kiasma magazine*, 10, no. 36, (2007): 9–10.

[98] "There is an extended view of culture: as many people as possible should have access to art, and artists should be supported as well as possible under (given) economic conditions." Øystein Hjort, "Making Art. Making a Living. The Artist's Role in Scandinavia," in *Sleeping Beauty*, 118.

[99] The Nordic Arts Centre NKC, created in 1978, became Nifca (Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art) in 1997. SIKSI – *The Nordic Art Review*, was established in 1986, and disseminated information on the Nordic art scene in English to Nordic and international readership. The institutional and cultural impact of the Nordic collaboration through representative art institutions is discussed in Jonas Ekeberg, *Postnordisk. Den nordiske kunstscenens vekst og fall 1976-2016* (Oslo: Torpedo Press, 2019).

[100] Laurence Bossé and Hans Ulrich Obrist (eds.), *Nuit Blånche: Scènes Nørdiques*. The Icelandic artists selected for the show were Anna Guðjónsdóttir, Björk Guðmundsdóttir, Hannes Lárusson, Inga Svala Þórsdóttir, Kristinn G. Harðarson, Ólafur Elíasson, Valborg Salóme Ingólfsdóttir, and Þorvaldur Þorsteinsson.

[101] This marketing of Nordic contemporary art echoes in many aspects the branding of *Cool Britannia* and the cultural, national (and economic) identification of Britart also named YBas (Young British artists), in

French feminist art critic, Elisabeth Lebovici, immediately recognised the branding element in the *Nuit Blånche.* She identified it with a certain marketing hype and describes "l'ambiance" in the exhibition with a certain irony in the daily *Libération*: "And the artists? They make contemporary art. It has the taste, the aspect, the mix of sorts, etc. Journals, like English *Vogue*, have fuelled the hope of a hip Nordic planet. The collaboration in the Parisian show between Björk (the singer), Jeremy Deller, the English graphic-artist (who video clipped her), the Japanese Araki (who photographed her), and the Finnish experimental techno guru Mikia Vainio, from the Panasonic duo -- enough to maintain the hype."[102] However, she appreciated the large wooden installation by Hannes Lárusson (even though she wrongly attributes the work to Anna Guðjónsdóttir), but his work indeed was a critical reflection on the fusion between national cultures and branding that was uncritically articulated in the festival.

By the early 2000's, Icelandic contemporary art was becoming an asset in the global art world and a new process of canon formation was established through a revigorated museum and gallery scene.[103] Urban branding in connection with the celebration of Reykjavík as a European Capital of Culture, was the motivation for an external analysis of the contemporary art scene in Iceland, written by the American art critic Gregory Volk. His "Report from Reykjavik: Art on Ice," published in *Art in America* in September 2000, was, in fact, the first internationally distributed account of contemporary art in Iceland.[104] In the text, Volk remarks on how:

---

the 1990s, whose success was linked to London's changing status as new business capital. See Aidan While, "Locating Art Worlds: London and the Making of Young British Art," in *Area* 35, no. 3 (September 2003): 251–63; John Michael Lee, "Interpreting the 'Rebranding of Britain'," *The Round Table* 90, no. 362(2001): 679–89. Cool Britannia is also discussed in Guillaume Clément, "De Britpop à Cool Britannia une identité britannique revue et corrigée par le New Labour".

[102] "Et les plasticiens? Ils font de l'art contemporain. Ça en a le goût, l'air, le mélange des genres, etc. Des magazines, genre *Vogue anglais*, ont alimenté l'espoir d'une planet hip nordique. La collaboration, dans l'exposition parisienne, entre Björk (la chanteuse), Jeremy Deller graphiste-artiste anglaise (qui l'a vidéoclipée), le Japonais Araki (qui l'a photographiée) et le technoïde expérimental finlandais Mikia Vainio du duo Panasonic, a de quoi entretenir la hype." Elisabeth Lebovici, "Dans l'envers du nord. La jeune scène nordique de l'art contemporain est au musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris," *Libération*, February 16, 1998.

[103] A new governmental cultural policy, focusing on neo-liberal methods, was put in place by the Icelandic government in 1996. See *Menning og menntun: Forsenda framtíðar* (Reykjavík: Menntamálaráðuneytið, 1996). Discussed in Heiða Björk Árnadóttir, "Listasafn Íslands (1884)," in *Saga listasafna á Íslandi*, ed. Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson (Reykjavík: Rannsóknasetur í safnafræðum við Háskóla Íslands, 2019), 12–61, p. 30; Bjarki Valtýsson, *Íslensk menningarpólitík* (Reykjavík: Nýhil, 2011), 112–113.

[104] Gregory Volk, "Report from Reykjavik: Art on Ice," *Art in America* 88, no. 9 (September 2000): 40–45.

> "In a 'remote' country growing rapidly more urban and cosmopolitan, Icelandic artists readily adopt – and meet – global art world standards."[105] While discussing the antinomy between the local and the global, the aim of Volk's review seems to be to identify some kind of essential *Icelandicness* among Icelandic artists, who are imagined as a manifestation of some kind of "otherness", determined by historical narrative, traditions, and a shared love of nature. As he elaborates, "One thing you do notice […] is that no matter how internationally minded Icelandic artists are […] eventually the country itself comes to figure in their work: as a physical locus, as a trove of images and materials or – more mysteriously for outsiders – as a comprehensive force with which one is perpetually in dialogue. It's not that the compelling work now being produced is *about* Iceland in any literal sense. Far from it. But Iceland is nevertheless there, in the deep grain of the inquiry, a constant presence that can be approached with a sense of wonder, humour or irony, via poetic engagement or tough-minded criticism."[106]

The art scene, as described by Volk, is seemingly a reflection of postcolonial attitudes adopted by artists in the 1990s. Their practices were seen as articulating a deep concern with identity construction and through a search for difference characteristic of artistic thought globally at the end of the century. Volk's interpretation is, however, both romantic and essentialising. He emphasises the state of insularity so often evoked when foreign commentators write about the "otherness" of Icelandic culture, thereby contributing to what is both a mystification and mythification, imputing a shared mentality and characteristics to these "others". In this manner, discourse produces an imaginary knowledge, thereafter, taken as real, a phenomenon famously described by Edward W. Saïd.[107]

This "otherworldliness" and *placeness* of Icelandic art is an important feature, even a characteristic of Icelandic contemporary art, but also the music scene at the turn of the millennium. The French art critic Richard Leydier, discovered Icelandic

[105] Volk, 41.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Edward W. Saïd, *Orientalism* (London: Henley, 1978), 41–42. Also see Saïd's claim that it should be every historian's task to deconstruct any dominating system of in- and exclusion, both nationalism as well as stereotypical images of "the other", p. 28.

contemporary art in 2004, and described its *placeness* in an article in *Art Press*: "Iceland, a lost island on the top of the world" (l'Islande, une île perdue sur le toit du monde).[108]

The art historian Martica Sawin, in the catalogue of the exhibition *Confronting Nature: Icelandic Art of the 20th Century* (held at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., October 13–November 26, 2001), also stresses this placeness as an important characteristic: "The bi-polar anchorage of Icelandic art in an international artistic language on the one hand and on the other in a deep rooted connection to a particular volatile and often hostile environment has given rise to a body of diverse work, linked by its mediating role in this dialogue of opposites."[109] Sawin describes the "revival of the "Nordic Sublime"" a characteristic she notices in Georg Guðni's metaphysical landscape paintings, she views as, grounded "in a collective heritage within the confines of their natal island."[110] In general, she addresses artists', "confrontation with nature […] as a sub–text in the Icelandic art […] there is no dominant style, but rather just the kind of diversity that one finds internationally."[111] Further she remarks: "More uniquely Icelandic is the use of indigenous material, principally lava, which Ragna Róbertsdóttir attaches to the wall in small chips or pumice, creating austere reliefs, or which Halldór Ásgeirsson melts and throws at the canvas to produce a Pollock-like splattering."[112]

Sawin identifies lava and moss as typically Icelandic materials and describes Ólafur Elíasson's use of moss in an installation in Berlin, where "a hanging curtain of moss which referred to the covering that eventually forms on the lava fields."[113] This material existence, identified by Sawin, also features in Steina Vasulka's (Steinunn Briem Bjarnadóttir b. 1940), video work *Orka* (Power) created for the Venice Biennale in 1999. The work was introduced as an archive of recordings the artist had collected on her fieldtrips in Iceland over the past twenty years. Standing with her video camera on top of cliffs or overlooking a waterfall, the lens pointing into the swirling waters. Three years later, Vasulka created a performative music and video work, "a projected video

[108] Richard Leydier, "Un autre monde. Découverte de l'art contemporain islandais," *Art Press* 304 (2004): 28–33. Leydier was invited to introduce Icelandic contemporary art to the readers of *Art Press* in connection with the cultural festival *Islande, de glace et de feu. La Quinzaine islandaise* organised in France from September 27 to October 10, 2004.
[109] Martica Sawin, "Updating the Nordic Sublime," in *Confronting Nature: Icelandic Art of the 20th Century*, 15–20, p. 15.
[110] Ibid, 20.
[111] Ibid, 18.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid, 20.

environment," named *Hraun og mosi* (*Lava and Moss*), first shown in a small gallery named Light Cliff (Ljósaklif), situated in the lava field in the outskirts of Hafnafjörður.[114] Vasulka, a pioneer in video art with her husband Woddy Vasulka, spent most of her adult life in the US.[115] Her opus *Lava and Moss* was a homage to her childhood memories: "My love affair with lava comes from early childhood, when elves and trolls were still part of reality. I remember if I stared long enough at a lava field, it started moving, even making sounds. Many years later I took some potent mescaline in Herdísarvík and was able to revoke those childhood memories and the immense exuberance that goes with it […] if God is everywhere, his presence certainly is most tangible in lava and moss."[116]

Arthur C. Danto also describes Iceland as a primal space, untouched by humans, in his catalogue text "Impressions of Iceland", where he regards "Surtsey – Earth's youngest island" as "[…] a metaphor for Icelandic culture, the components of which had initially to come from somewhere else, adapt to local circumstance, and evolve into something finally unique. Everyone came with the consciousness of having come from elsewhere […]. There were no aborigines, only other outsiders who happened to get there first."[117]

By using geolocation and ethnicity as a cultural and aesthetic category for Icelandic contemporary art and artists, Sawin, Volk and Danto, overlook important critical positions maintained and activated in the work of artists such as Rúrí (Þuríður Fannberg) and many others that will be discussed in this text. This romantic vision continues, to be reiterated by international art critics, who often describe Icelandic artists as being poetic, even naive. These categories or classifications create hierarchies that could contribute to certain marginalisation of Icelandic artists.[118] Such positions are still set in motion in international art journals, such as *Artforum*, when art historian Adam Jasper, focuses on Icelandic history and folklore in a review on Friðfinnsson's

[114] Steina Vasulka, *Hraun og mosi* (*Lava and Moss*), 2000, video installation. National Gallery of Iceland.
[115] Halldór B. Runólfsson, "The Kitchen: An Offspring of Steina and Woody Vasulka," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950–1975*, eds. Tania Ørum and Jesper Olsson (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 88–95.
[116] Steina Vasulka, *Lava and Moss* (2000), Video installation, National Museum of Iceland. Retrieved from: http://www.vasulka.org/Steina/Steina_LavaAndMoss/LavaAndMoss.html
[117] Arthur C. Danto, "Impressions of Iceland," in *Confronting Nature: Icelandic Art of the 20th Century*, 11–13, p. 11.
[118] Discussed in Heiða Björk Árnadóttir, *The Conceptual, the Romantic, and the Nonhuman: The SÚM Group and the Emergence of C4ontemporary Art in Iceland, 1965–1978*, p. 229.

2019 retrospective, "To Catch a Fish with a Song: 1964–Today," in Centre d´Art Contemporain, Geneva.[119]

3.3. Writing Art Histories

Following the global turn of the late 1990's, the moment thus seemed to be ripe for a new national historiography written for the global art market. As it happens, the historiography of art in Iceland had followed a local pattern described by art historian James Elkins: "In smaller and developing countries, newspaper art criticism normally serves as art history, so that reviews and exhibition brochures compose the written self-description of the country's art."[120] In an interview as early as 1944, the art historian Hjörvarður Árnason (Hjorvardur Harvard Arnason 1909–1986), mentions this historical and institutional lacunae when he attempts to describe the characteristics of young Icelandic art. [121] Somewhat reluctantly, he hazards an art historical parallel with Dutch 17th-century art: "What the artists were primarily interested in was the land they loved so much, the nation itself and its possessions."[122] This "self-description of the country's art" is indeed, characteristic of much of the art writing that was published in Iceland in the 20th century. Elkins arrives to a similar conclusion: "It is not-so-harmless truism that art historians' interests have traditionally been driven by their senses of what visual art in their own cultures seem most important."[123]

As earlier mentioned, Icelandic cultural elite was anxious to define Icelandic art as being modern. The national style presented in buildings, monuments, and other public artworks in Reykjavík in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as in the Icelandic pavilion in the

[119] Adam Jasper, "Hreinn Friðfinnsson," *Artforum* 58 no.1 (September 2019): 278.
[120] James Elkins, "Art History as a Global Discipline," in *Is Art History Global?*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3–23, p. 5.
[121] Hjorvardur Harvard Arnason (1909–1986) was born in the Icelandic community in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He immigrated to the US and became an imminent art historian, curator, and director of Walker Art Centre in 1951. Arnason published his famous survey of modern art in 1968, *A History of Modern Art*, still in print. He was field representative in Iceland for the Office of War Information during the second WW. During his mission, he organised an exhibition of American art in Reykjavík and gave a series of popular art historical lectures at the University of Iceland. His talks were translated into Icelandic and published in the literary magazines *Jörð* and *Helgafell*. Hjörvarður Árnason, "Nútíma byggingarlist," *Jörð* 4, no. 5 (1943): 383–99; ibid, "Listastefnur í Evrópu og Ameríku I," *Helgafell*, 3, no. 1–4 (1944): 102–12; ibid, "Listastefnur í Evrópu og Ameríku II," *Helgafell* 3, no. 5–10 (1944): 316–26; ibid, "Listastefnur í Evrópu og Ameríku III," *Helgafell* 4, no. 2 (1945): 134–42.
[122] "Það, sem listamennirnir höfðu fyrst og fremst áhuga á, var landið, sem þeim var svo kært, sjálf þjóðin og eigur hennar." Hjörvarður Árnason, "Íslenzk myndlist" (Icelandic Art), *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, July 2, 1944, 306–10, p. 307.
[123] James Elkins, "Art History as a Global Discipline," 9.

New York world fair in 1939 (discussed in chapter five), was, however, considered reactionary by the modernists of the 1950s and 60s. For them, the national style was a product of the national cultural politics of Jónas Jónsson frá Hriflu (1885-1965).[124] They in turn identified with and celebrated geometric painting as an avant-garde example of their own modern national culture.[125]

However, certain aspects of the vernacular and *volkish* were celebrated during and after WWII, through the avant-garde prism of Nordic primitivism, as discussed and illustrated in the Danish avant-garde anti-fascist journal *Helhesten* (Hell-horse) and documented by painter Asger Jorn (1914–1973).[126] Jorn's interest for the *creaturely* in the Nordic context was expressed not only in his art, but also through his encyclopaedia project of pan-Nordic art to be organised in 28 volumes and titled: *10.000 Years of Nordic Folk Art.* This gigantic opus was launched in collaboration with P. V. Globe, director of the *Riksantikvaren* (Museums and Antiquities for the state of Denmark) and co-founder of Jorn's *Scandinavian Institute of Comparative Vandalism* (1961).[127] Jorn's transnational and interdisciplinary project might be aligned with André Malraux's *Imaginary Museum* (Le Musée imaginaire).[128] Like Malraux, Jorn worked with the French photographer Gérard Franceschi (1915-2001), creating a vast taxonomic archive of Nordic visual culture. Jorn continued to travel to all the Nordic countries to collect documentation and to photograph and create a visual documentation of a Nordic heritage for the publication. He made a journey to Iceland in 1967 with this purpose, even though the project had by then been abandoned by Nordic institutions. Kristján Eldjárn, then director of the National Museum of Iceland (later President of Iceland), who assisted Jorn, as well as art historian Selma Jónsdóttir, then director of the National Gallery of Iceland,

[124] Jónas Jónsson frá Hriflu was an influential Icelandic politician and chairman of the Progressive Party. On his nationalist cultural politics see Benedikt Hjartarson and Ólafur Rastrick, "Cleansing the Domestic Evil – On the Degenerate Art Exhibition in Reykjavík, 1942," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1925–1950*, eds. Benedikt Hjartarson, Andrea Kollnitz, Per Stounbjerg and Tania Ørum (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 879–902.
[125] Discussed in Þröstur Helgason, *Tímaritið Birtingur og íslenskur módernismi. Lítil tímarit, landafræði, menningarsaga.* PhD dissertation. (Reykjavík: University of Iceland, 2015).
[126] Kerry Greaves, *Mobilizing the Collective: Helhesten and the Danish Avant-Garde 1934–1946*. PhD dissertation (New York: The City University of New York, 2015).
[127] Raphaelle Jamet, "Asger Jorn et l'Institut Scandinave de Vandalisme Comparé. La création d'un *boréalisme* endogène," *Études germaniques* 73, no. 2 (2018): 233–53.
[128] André Malraux, *Les Voix du silence* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951).

expressed regrets that the publication was being abandoned, as both were eager to embed Icelandic medieval culture into a larger Nordic and European visual heritage.[129]

These postwar representations of Nordic mythology and the celebration of the primitive in the journal *Helhesten* and the CoBrA exhibitions have been analysed by American art historian Hal Foster as "fissures in the space of meaning"[130] He identifies Jorn's celebration of the "pagan vernacular of the North in opposition to the official Christianity of the South imported by nobility."[131] This research for a Nordic paganism, omnipresent in Jorn's work (including his desire for constructing a catalogue of Nordic art) as well as in the iconography of CoBrA, did not haunt Icelandic artists of the 1950s and 60s. Only sculptor Sigurjón Ólafsson (1908–1982), active in the Danish pre-war avant-garde groups, explored the monstrous or the creaturely, in his totemic wood poles and granite sculptures, often representing animals, imaginary birds and other creatures.[132]

However, these symptomatic crises in culture and the political implications of culture and art in society were in the early 1960s fiercely debated by Icelandic artists and intellectuals. The writer, poet and translator Sigfús Daðason (1928–1996), who was a francophone and spent some time in Paris, was inspired by Jean-Paul Sartres (1905–1980) and Frantz Fanon's (1925–1961) anti-colonial discourses and referred to their writing in his own critical analyses of Icelandic cultural politics. Daðason claim for a radical and organic living culture (as opposed to institutional bourgeois culture), was equally theoretically based in his reading of Francis Jeanson (1922–2009) – the French philosopher and activist. Daðason translated excerpts from Jeanson's *La révolution algérienne. Problèmes et perspectives* and included these quotes in his long analytic article published in the socialist cultural magazine *Mál og menning* (Language and culture in 1962).[133]

---

[129] GÞE, "Hætt við útgáfu 28 binda bókaflokks um norræna alþýðulist," *Tíminn*, August 7, 1966, 1 and 4. Eldjárn promoted photographic mediation of national heritage and wrote a sort of anthology of folk art, textiles and art objects, a visual history of Icelandic heritage, where photographs and short comprehensive texts describe some of the most iconic items kept in the museum. Kristján Eldjárn, *Hundrað ár í Þjóðminjasafni* (Reykjavík: Menningarsjóður, 1962).

[130] Hal Foster, "Creaturely Cobra," *October* 141 (Summer 2012): 4–21, p. 20.

[131] Ibid., 9.

[132] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "'List er ekki hátíðleiki, heldur lífið sjálft'," in *Tracks in Sand*. *Sigurjón* Ólafsson, eds. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir and Birgitta Spur (Reykjavík: Listasafn Íslands, 2014), 13-48.

[133] Sigfús Daðason, "Veruleiki og yfirskin (I)," *Tímarit máls og menningar* 24, no. 1 (1963): 12–26. Sigfús Daðason, "Veruleiki og yfirskin (II)," *Tímarit máls og menningar* 24, no. 2 (1963): 99–112.

Departing from Jeanson's Marxist analyses and interpretation of the cultural imperial ties in Algerian society, Daðason employs Jeanson's claim to social, revolutionary culture in a kind of a cultural manifesto.[134] Here, Daðason draws a parallel between the political situation of Iceland and other colonies and half-colonies of the South.[135] It seems that he is modelling Icelandic future cultural politics on Third World nationalisms and calls for solidarity with the political anti-imperial struggle that was taking place in South America, North Africa and Asia.[136]

How to build a radical social, aesthetic and educational connection between the medieval *golden age*, national heritage, and contemporary art and culture? This was a recurrent question amongst artists and intellectuals and a political problem in the 1960s. In a text, published in the same edition of TMM as Daðason's radical analyses, art historian Björn Th. Björnsson, responded to this urgent cultural demand and called for a governmental, educational and institutional engagement to support artists, build exhibition venues, and foster public access to art.[137] This focus on the local situation, is also evident in cultural critique pointing at the direct lack of governmental action in art education and other promotion of artistic value, to the ontology of cultural objects – even to a certain idea of ethnicity – might be read as resistance to the American pop culture and even a manifestation of the left-wing nationalism that characterised cultural debate in Iceland in the 1960s.[138] However, the radical, (national) art claimed by Daðason, only took form few years later. It can be located in the resistance against bourgeois taste, presented in the material aesthetics of the SÚM group, in the anti-patriarchal position of Róska (Ragnhildur Óskarsdóttir (1940–1996)), and the symbolic anti-industrial and anti-capitalist iconography created by Gylfi Gíslason (1940–2006), such as *Fjallasúrmjólk* (Mountain Sour Milk), 1971. [Fig. 2].

When art historian Björn Th. Björnsson published his comprehensive national art history in the early 1960s and 1970s, he excluded the young artists of the SÚM group and

---

[134] Sigfús Daðason, „Veruleiki og yfirskin (II), 99; Francis Jeanson, *La révolution algérienne. Problèmes et perspectives* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1962), 152. Original text: "La culture n'est pas seulement un phénomène collectif: elle est un phénomène *révolutionnaire*. Il faut qu'une civilisation ait beaucoup vieilli pour qu'elle en vienne à considérer sa propre culture comme patrimoine, un «avoir» un «bien»."
[135] Sigfús Daðason, "Veruleiki og yfirskin (II)," 109.
[136] Daðason, "Veruleiki og yfirskin (I)," 25.
[137] Björn Th. Björnsson, "Staða og stefna íslenskrar myndlistar," [The situation and the direction of Icelandic art], *Tímarit Máls og menningar*, 24, no. 1 (1963): 27–35.
[138] Discussed in Heiða Björk Árnadóttir. *The Conceptual, the Romantic, and the Nonhuman: The SÚM Group and the Emergence of Contemporary Art in Iceland, 1965–1978*.

the new emerging artforms.[139] It was therefore urgent to write a new narrative. However, writing a nationally framed art history in the twenty-first century is, in any case, a problematic process, and participating in such projects provoked theoretical and methodological questions implicit in the writing of such narratives.[140] And as the gaze of the outside world progressively turned toward Icelandic artists (especially in the late 1990s and after) and their transnational relations, the lack of an inclusive art narrative became evident. Consequently, national institutions began to organize and fund the writing of national art-historical surveys, but without much discussion as to how these narratives could be framed.

As Schoen rightly pointed out: "Many previous national and international catalogue projects have dealt with the phenomenon of Icelandic art; nonetheless there is a lack of publications providing an overview of the contemporary scene or even a thorough account of art history!"[141] The publication of *Icelandic Art Today* was indeed the first attempt to inscribe contemporary Icelandic art into a cosmopolitan art historical discourse and it was (and still is) also the first and only survey of contemporary art in Iceland written in English and distributed internationally by a specialized art publisher.

A few years later (2011) an important survey *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar* (*History of Art in Iceland* from the late 19th century to the early 21st century), was published in five volumes by the National Gallery of Iceland, unfortunately not translated into English. In this publication, co-authored by fourteen art historians, an effort was made to provide a deeper understanding of the complexity of art practices within a small territory whose art institutions and art education were for a long time primarily concerned to solidify national identity.[142] The result is a rather conventional historiographical narrative, focused on modern and postmodern interpretations of selected artists and artworks. Based on the paradigm of the Western avant-garde, the importance of Fluxus and the "conceptual" Dutch –

[139] Björn Th. Björnsson, *Íslenzk myndlist á 19. og 20. öld. Drög að sögulegu yfirliti*, Vol. I–II (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1964 and 1973).
[140] National art historical narratives are discussed in Matthew Rampley, "The Construction of National Art Histories and the "New" Europe," in *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2012), 231–46; Martha Langford, "Introduction," in *Narratives Unfolding*: *National Art Histories in an Unfinished World*, ed. Martha Langford (Montreal & Kingston, London, Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 3–41.
[141] Schoen, "Preface," 7.
[142] Heiða Björk Árnadóttir, "Listasafn Íslands (1884)."

Icelandic connection are considered, but no historiographical conclusions are made as to how these relate historically and theoretically to Icelandic artistic production, cultural politics and art markets. However, even though feminist and other critical views are represented by the authors of individual chapters, in general, the book avoids engagement with theoretical arguments that contributed to the development of postmodern cosmopolitanism in Icelandic art. Still, the different authors involved in the writing of the volumes took an important step away from the nationalist framing of the first survey of the history of modern 20th century art in Iceland, written by Björn Th. Björnsson.

Art historian Halldór B. Runólfsson, former director of the National Gallery of Iceland, has written extensively on Icelandic historical and contemporary art in a number of catalogue texts, usually employing the romantic, geographical paradigm as a narrative framework.[143] However, he took a more dispassionate stance in his survey chapter published in *Icelandic Art Today*, explaining that the "unusually high degree of variety and vitality" of the contemporary art scene in Iceland resulted from successful cultural transfers, as "[…] most Icelandic art students continue their studies (in) other Western countries […] after completing their graduate studies at the Iceland Academy of the Arts."[144] The cultural transfer or the transnational exchanges produced during such transfers are however not discussed in his text even though it might be theoretically applied in this context.[145]

In these publications, the history of artistic formations in Iceland has indeed been permeated with a certain romantism and nationalism that persists in international art criticism.[146] They certainly contribute to these romantic readings of Icelandic art that persists. Similarly, discussions about the emergence of contemporary art and the

[143] Halldór B. Runólfsson, "Symbolische Landschaft: Die verschiedenen Ausdrucksweisen in der islandischen Malerei von 1900 bis 1910," in *Landschaft als Kosmos der Seele: Malerei des nordischen Symbolismus bis Munch 1880–1910*, ed. Götz Czymmek (Köln: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, 1998), 47–50; Halldór B. Runólfsson, "Reflections on Icelandic Art," in *Landscapes from a High Latitude*, ed. Julian Freeman (London: Lund Humphries, 1989), 21–92.
[144] Halldór B. Runólfsson, "Times of Continuous Transition," 26.
[145] The concept of intercultural transfers was established by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, eds., *Transferts: Les relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand (XVIII et XIXème siècle)* (Paris: Éditions recherche sur les civilisations, 1988). See also Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (eds.), *Circulations in the Global History of Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).
[146] Discussed in Heiða Björk Árnadóttir, *The Conceptual, the Romantic, and the Nonhuman: The SÚM Group and the Emergence of Contemporary Art in Iceland, 1965–1978*. PhD dissertation (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2019), 229–230.

significance of cosmopolitan practices by Icelandic artists visible in their installation strategies and conceptual thinking, might still inform the work of artists in Iceland through a certain marginalisation "in the deep grain of the inquiry".[147]

3. 4. Urban Regeneration and the Global Branding of the City of Reykjavík

Nation branding is a controversial and highly politicized activity. As discussed by policy advisor Simon Anholt, who coined the term, it is employed as a means for nations to redefine and reposition themselves within the master narrative of globalization.[148] The relationship between art and nation branding was fostered through a new pan-European politics of re-nationalization after the unification of Germany and the creation of new nation states in the Baltic countries and the Balkans in the 1990s.[149] Consequently, Reykjavík (and Iceland) was repositioned on this new geopolitical map and it's selection as a European Capital of Culture (ECOC) in 2000 might have been crucial in this process, however no studies have been made on its long term impact to the capital.

This branding of urban (and national) identity became increasingly important as an economic and political marketing tool amongst young nations as a building block of new *glocal* identity.[150] Art, design and nature became economic assets when marketing and urban studies started to leave their mark on the development of art in the city. "Landscape, including cities, plays a prominent role in helping define the essence of a nation and thus may be regarded as a key component of nation-brand equity."[151] Urban regeneration and the possible branding of the city of Reykjavík followed these trends in late 1990s when international marketing theories and urban studies started to shape the development of city planning, affecting for example the implementation of public art through the Reykjavík Arts Festival.

Due to successful city (and nation) branding, through branding programs like *Reykjavík Pure Energy* (used since 2002) and *Iceland Naturally* and the rise of global

---

[147] Discussed in Roxi J. Thoren, "The Deep Grain of the Inquiry: Landscape and Identity in Icelandic Art," *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 5, no. 1, (2010): 38–39.
[148] Simon Anholt, *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
[149] Greg Richards, "The European Cultural Capital Event: Strategic Weapon in the Cultural Arms Race?," *Cultural Policy* 6, no. 2 (2000): 159–81.
[150] Discussed in John Lovering, "The Relationship Between Urban Regeneration and Neoliberalism: Two Presumptuous Theories and a Research Agenda," *International Planning Studies*, 12, no. 4, (2007): 343–66.
[151] Keith Dinnie, *Nation Branding*. *Concepts, Issues, Practice* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2014), 69.

music stars such as Björk and Sigur Rós, the international art establishment became increasingly interested in the Icelandic art scene. The national paradigm of the modern nation state was abandoned in the new branding programs and modernist aesthetic theories gave way to more neoliberal expectations related to marketing and user-friendly participatory values, where performativity and visuality become important elements of the identity of a city. The mobilization of the urban image became an increasingly important approach and art in public space became a significant component of the visual image of Reykjavík.

Internationally acclaimed artists such as Richard Serra (b. 1939) and Daniel Buren (b. 1938) were invited by the Reykjavík Arts Festival and the city of Reykjavík and their interventions were part of this cultural outreach. The presence of their works became symbolic of this new geographical art mapping and Iceland's participation in the global artworld.[152] Buren accepted an invitation by the Reykjavík Arts Festival in the summer of 1992 and set up an installation in the heart of the city outside the *Gallerí einn einn* (Galley One One) and the National Gallery of Iceland. He called the works *Placed/Projected/Displaced – Situated Works*. Buren was a direct participant in the new wave of art in Paris in 1968 with simple street interventions which he conceived as critical tools in public spaces. He drew attention to the protocols of creation within the institutional system and conceived his art as a process which unveiled "different frameworks that in real life obscure each other."[153] Thereafter, his stripes have become symbols of the global and high end artworld and his permanent and non-permanent installations are visible worldwide.

Richard Serra's permanent environmental work, *Áfangar (Phases)*, which was erected on the island of Viðey in 1990, was also a sign of the Reykjavík Arts Festival's new cultural strategy and the city authorities' international approach to public spaces and the public sphere in general. The work is site-specific, according to Serra's definition, which means that its scale, size, and location are determined by the topography of the

[152] Kevin Robins, "Prisoners of the City: Whatever Could a Postmodern City Be?" in *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*, eds. Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), 303–30.
[153] *Daniel Buren. Staðsetning/Vörpun/Tilfærsla – Staðbundin verk (Placed/Projected/Displaced – Situated Works),* ed. Hannes Lárusson (Reykjavík: Reykjavík Arts Festival, National Gallery of Iceland and Gallerí 11, 1992), 23.

site.[154] It could be argued that Serra's work created a performative experience in nature as the visitor experienced the landscape and the horizon around the island through the work. The basalt columns frame the view and create at the same time a privileged gaze towards the vastness of the view. However, even though Serra's work is an example of the new cultural politics of the city, where art and nature are intertwined *naturally*, the work is isolated and did not become a part of the branded image of the city, such as was the case with *Sólfar* (Sun-Voyager, (1986/1990), by Jón Gunnar Árnason (1931–1989), placed on the urbanised sea promenade facing north of the city.

Other international artists were invited to create permanent works in vicinity of the city. *The Icelandic Lighthouse* by the Italian artists Claudio Parmiggiani (b. 1943) was erected not far from the main highway at Sandskeið in Hellisheiði, a short distance from Reykjavík. Parmiggiani's work signalled Reykjavík's status as one of the European Cities of Culture in 2000, while celebrating Iceland's *islandness*, the passers-by rarely recognize it as being an artwork. The strong visuality of the *Imagine Peace Tower*, a tower of light erected on Viðey island by Yoko Ono in 2007, cannot be ignored when it is lit every year on the birthday of John Lennon (1940-1980).

Art festivals and outdoor exhibitions became part of this regeneration and a significant component of globalization, where art and culture became considered as economic assets rather than social and political constructs.[155] New public art works were commissioned, directly geared towards users, that is, residents and tourists, through

[154] The initiative for the installation came from the Reykjavík Arts Festival in 1990, but the City of Reykjavík oversaw its construction. The work consists of 18 basalt pillars, which stand two and two together, forming a circle around the island. One of each pair is 3 metres long and located at a height of 10 metres, while the other is 4 metres and located at a height of 9 metres. The tops of the pillars are therefore all equal, 13 metres above sea level. There are different distances between the pillars since the gaps are determined by the slope. The work thus refers to the position of the land. If the slope is steep, the pillars are positioned tightly together, but otherwise with wider gaps between them. All of the pillars are visible from the highest point of the island, which has an altitude of 18 metres. Description retrieved from the Reykjavík City Archives: http://borgarsogusafn.is/is/videy/syningar/afangar. Serra defines site-specificity in these terms: "The scale, size, and location of site-specific works are determined by the topography of the site, whether it be urban or landscape or architectural enclosure. The works become part of the site and restructure both conceptually and perceptually the organization of the site. My works never decorate, illustrate, or depict a site," Richard Serra, *Writings: Interviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1994), 202.

[155] A counterexample is the exhibition *Unpacking Europe* initiated by Rotterdam Cultural Capital of Europe 2001, where the curatorial focus was "anti-essentialist, asserting that cultural identities are not given but produced […] where hybrid identities and new ethnicities are constantly being formed." Salah Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi, "Introduction. Unpacking Europe," in *Unpacking Europe. Towards a Critical Reading* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2002), 12–22, p. 13.

outdoor installations in their immediate environment rather than its former historical, cultural and political function in the governmental centre of the city. The "lure of the local" as an important signifier of this new urban art identity was made visible in a series of outdoor exhibitions along the Reykjavík coastline (Strandlengjusýningar / Shoreline exhibitions), organized by the artist-run Reykjavík Sculpture Association (Myndhöggvarafélagið í Reykjavík) in 1998, 1999 and 2000.[156] The exhibitions' objective was to highlight the uniqueness of the environment, i.e., the location of the city on the perimeter between land and sea. Transformation of the natural boarders of the city, such as the coastline had begun already in the 1990s. This became visible when the spatial turn and neoliberal marketing theories started to shape the development of city planning, introducing the implementation of this performative kind of public art in Reykjavík.

The Shoreline project was concurrent with the regeneration of the city, and the chosen locations for the artworks tallied with the cleaning of the shore, the construction of paths along the coast and residents' general access to the shoreline where viewers could enjoy nature on equal terms. Art and nature were intertwined in the gaze and the aesthetic experience of the *promeneur*, and hereby transferred to the natural limits of the city, towards the ocean and mountain range. The works themselves were most of them sensitive to the sites and the *parcours* along the coastline opened a new perspective on the landscape.

The Shoreline exhibitions were also a noteworthy attempt to create an exhibition space for outdoor art on the natural limits of the city. The works gave rise to a new experience of the perimeters of land and sea and fuelled the naturalization of the urban space, fostering closer links between residents and the environment through the city's master plan.[157] At the same time, they were well-suited to the ideas of the city's cultural development, and to which the shoreline exhibitions became part of the city's program on with the advent of Reykjavík as the European Capital of Culture in 2000.

---

[156] The Reykjavík Sculpture Association was founded in 1972 and took over the organisation of outdoor exhibitions, which became part of the Reykjavík Arts Festival in the years that followed. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Formáli" (Introduction), in *Myndhöggvarafélagið í Reykjavík 40 ára. Verk og hugmyndir að verkum í almannarými* (Reykjavík: Myndhöggvarafélagið í Reykjavík, 2012), 6–12.

[157] *Borgarskipulag Reykjavíkur*: *Umhverfi og útivist (Urban planning of Reykjavík: environment and outdoor living)* (Reykjavík: City Plan, 1998). *Svæðisskipulag höfuðborgarsvæðisins 2001–2024.* Retrieved from: https://reykjavik.is/sites/default/files/skjol_thjonustulysingar/greinarg-12-vefur2-lett.pdf

The environmental works *Bollasteinn* (Cupstone, 2005) and *Þúfa* (Tussock, 2014) by Ólöf Nordal are located at the edge of the city where the land meets the sea. The works were conceived as spaces free for use, where the interaction of passers-by is crucial. *Cupstone* is a concave piece of basalt rock, filled with hot water – a "tub" that merges so thoroughly with the rocky shore at Grótta (Kisuklappir, Seltjarnarnes) that it can be hard to spot. The hot footbath invites rest and contemplation by the seashore, while *Tussock,* located by the old harbour, attracts the attention of the passer-by, and draws them up the slope to a small fish-drying shack which serves as a viewing-platform at the "peak". Icelandic cultural traditions are the subtext in these works and are grounded in complex allegorical premises whose origins lie in invented traditions and cultural narratives.

Although there was an aesthetic consensus on most of the works in the shoreline exhibitions, not all residents were happy with City of Reykjavík's policy of placing sculptures and other permanent installations along the shore in order to gentrify and urbanize the coastline. Controversy around the work of Brynhildur Þorgeirsdóttir (b. 1955), *Klettur* (Crag), started immediately after the work was unveiled on the shore in Grafarvogur in 2003. The work, which is a geometrical natural form made of rusty Corten steel, triggered a strong response from residents in the neighbourhood, particularly since the work created a new spatial context, which residents felt disrupted their view over the bay, moreover, residents could not agree on whether the work was in harmony with the environment or competing with nature. Some claimed that *Klettur* spoiled the view, while others argued that the work had created a welcoming space and encouraged passersby to pause: "The crag is visible from my house […] and it's fun to observe how many people stop on the spot where the work stands and enjoy it and the surrounding nature, whereas before most people just passed by. The installation of the work has helped to foster a stronger connection between hikers and nature."[158]

Aesthetic disputes about works of art in public space were nothing new, but arguments about art clashing with nature were indeed new, and confirmed that, despite the mediation in Reykjavík's decisions with regard to purchasing art and the emphasis on an equal distribution of works throughout the city, the disputes about the *Klettur* work highlighted certain tensions based on residents' cultural differences. It also brought out the mistrust in the city's art institutions and a growing demand for greater decision-

[158] "Umdeilt listaverk í Grafarvogi," *Morgunblaðið,* December 4, 2003, 20.

making powers in their own neighbourhoods.[159] These examples suggest that urban regeneration involves changing the ways chosen spaces look, and how they are perceived. These factors deserve more theoretical attention than they are accorded in accounts of the political economy of urban transformation. Regeneration can be conceived as an official strategy to modify the gaze.[160] Aesthetic appreciation of nature would likely be equivalent or score higher than aesthetic appreciation of artworks.

3.5. New Global Art Events

Even though the Reykjavík Arts Festival was not a biennial, its subsequent editions, especially in 2005 and 2008, resembled these newly celebrated global art events. The participation and involvement of art stars and star curators in the Reykjavík Arts Festival, such as Ólafur Elíasson, Hans Ulrich Obrist and major art collectors such as Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza, also marked turning points. As political philosopher, Oliver Marchart observed, "More than any other institution in the art field, biennials mediate the local, national and transnational. In this context, biennials can also be called "hegemonic machines," which link the local to the global within the field of symbolic struggles for legitimation."[161] They also contribute to the marketing of art for the high-end tourist industry as these consolidate the cultural image of a place. Or, in other terms, they operate to transform cities (even countries) into spectacles, into representations. These art events organized by the Reykjavík Arts festival were inspired by an "expanded idea of art" and were constructed as international sites navigating the temporal and historical condition of the "contemporary". As Panos Kompatsiaris argued, "Compared to traditional art shows, the 'new' post-1990s biennials […] are intensely discursive, socially interventionist, theory-driven, and authored by curators as part of the art/theory/critique nexus."[162]

These new strategies were activated by the Reykjavík Arts Festival in 2005, when Jessica Morgan, a young upcoming curator at Tate Modern, London, was invited to co-curate the group exhibition *Material Time, Work Time, Life Time*, a multi-venue program

[159] Einar Falur Ingólfsson, "Listhatur eða náttúrudýrkun? (Abomination of art or nature worship?)," *Morgunblaðið*, December 7, 2003, 34.
[160] John Lovering, "The Relationship Between Urban Regeneration and Neoliberalism: Two Presumptuous Theories and a Research Agenda," 362.
[161] Oliver Marchart, "The Globalization of Art and the 'Biennials of Resistance': A History of the Biennials from the Periphery," *World Art* 4, no. 2 (2014): 263–76, p. 264.
[162] Panos Kompatsiaris, "Curators, Words and Values: The Branding Economies of Curatorial Statements in Art Biennials," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 13, no. 6 (2020): 758–71, p. 760.

that was announced as "the first Reykjavík Arts Festival dedicated to visual art bringing attention to Iceland as a site of cultural production and staging the first major exhibition of the work of Dieter Roth in his adopted homeland."[163]

As early as 1961, as an instigator of a new kind of art, Roth was well represented both in the Icelandic media as well as in more elitist literary circles (see chapter four). This was four years before the formation of the group SÚM, often identified as pioneers in pre-contemporary Icelandic art. Indeed, Roth's direct influence on Icelandic artists was acknowledged early on by the artists such as Jón Gunnar Árnason and Magnús Pálsson (b. 1929), who claimed him as an important mentor.[164] When the *Living Art Museum* in Reykjavík was established in 1978, Roth's friend, the sculptor and ceramic artist Ragnar Kjartansson (1923–1989) donated his important collection of Roth's works to its collection. The presence of Roth and his experimental practices served to legitimate emerging art forms, as well as artist-run organizations like Gallerí SÚM, created in February 1969. This heightened energy in the artistic scene was similarly fostered by the New Art department at the College of Arts and Crafts, where Roth and several of his friends, such as the Fluxus artists Dick Higgins (1938–1998), Robert Filliou and the Vienna Actionist, Hermann Nitsch (1938–2022), were hired as visiting instructors. Finally, Roth's presence in Iceland consolidated the educational framework of the Iceland Academy of the Arts, created in 1998, and further developed by several of Roth's former students. Among these were the artists Kristján Steingrímur Jónsson (b. 1957), Ingólfur Arnarsson (b. 1956), and Guðmundur Oddur Magnússon (b. 1955) all of whom acknowledge the importance of Roth for their artistic formation.[165]

The kinship between Roth's idiosyncratic practices and the younger generations of Icelandic artists that graduated from the Iceland Academy of the Arts shortly after the year 2000 is often acknowledged by Ragnar Kjartansson. He mentions Roth as an important influence and role model for the self-reflectiveness that characterizes his own

[163] Jessica Morgan and Björn Roth (eds.), *Material Time, Work Time, Life Time* (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2005), 5.
[164] "Og margir taka þetta hátíðlega," *Tíminn*, January 6, 1963, 9 and 13; Steingrímur Eyfjörð Kristmundsson and Kristinn G. Harðarson, "Viðtal við Magnús Pálsson," *Svart á Hvítu* 1, no. 2 (1978): 3–13.
[165] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Magnús Pálsson et le département New Art à Reykjavík, 1975–1984: 'Teaching: the Maddest Artform'," 129–51.

practice, where even minor activities are accorded importance. "Each of [Roth's] smallest events were an artwork," Kjartansson remarked.[166]

"He [Roth] is a very influential figure in Icelandic art history. He was a friend of my grandfather's and I used to hear stories about him from an early age. I think my approach to art is related to his. This idea of the "Überkünstler" that he was, and just the notion that anything goes, as long as it is honest and true. His obsession with truth has inspired my obsession with lying or pretending. Just this aura of the fantastic artist […] He is a legend."[167]

Kjartansson is here probably reflecting on Roth's performances and time-based processes where he adopted different roles and played them with great virtuosity, such as the "director of orchestra" or the "poet in his garret," as in his well-known carefully staged video diaries.[168]

This genealogical narrative reactivated in the Reykjavík Arts Festival in 2005, has been successfully maintained by artists, art historians, museums, gallerists, as well as Roth's estate, where Roth's legacy is supported through the Dieter Roth Academy in Seyðisfjörður, (East-Iceland), where Roth lived and worked periodically in the last decade of his life, as well as through the gallery Hauser & Wirth representing the Roth Estate.

The exhibition *Material Time, Work Time, Life Time* brought together 43 artists from Iceland, Europe and North and South America, "whose work could be said to share Roth's interest in collapsing the boundaries between art, life, and materiality."[169] The show was introduced in the local and international art media as an outstanding selection of local and international contemporary artists exhibiting throughout Iceland. Roth's

---

[166] Einar Falur Ingólfsson, "Út úr íróníunni kemur oft hrein og tær einlægni," *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, May 30, 2009, 6–7.
[167] Caroline Corbetta, "Everyone is Decadent These Days," *Mousse Magazine* 15 (Oct–Nov 2008): 32–35.
[168] Dieter Roth, *Solo Scenes*, a monumental video installation that demonstrate Roth's everyday life recorded from 3rd March 1997 to 28th April 1998 in Iceland and various places in Basel. Retrieved from https://www.moma.org/collection/works/88744
[169] Invited artists were Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla, Nicol Assael, Matthew Barney, Margrét Blöndal, John Bock, Libia Pérez de Siles de Castro, Jeremy Deller & Alan Kane, Ólafur Elíasson, Peter Fischli & David Weiss, Hreinn Friðfinnson, Gabríela Friðriksdóttir, Kristján Guðmundsson, Elín Hansdóttir, Thomas Hirschhorn, Carsten Höller, Hekla Dögg Jónsdóttir, Haraldur Jónsson, Brian Jungen, Ragnar Kjartansson, Elke Krystufek, Gabriel Kuri, John Latham, Anna Líndal, Jonathan Meese, Ólafur Árni Ólafsson, Finnbogi Pétursson, Bojan Sarcevic, Wilhelm Sasnal, Lawrence Weiner. A few ears later the exhibition *Nokkrir vinir* (A Few Friends), showing Roth's influence on Icelandic artists, was curated by Björn Roth, Halldór B. Runólfsson and Sigríður Melrós Ólafsdóttir. National Gallery of Iceland 13.2.2009 – 3.5.2009.

close ties to Iceland were memorialized in the exhibition catalogue, where each invited artist had to reply to questions posed by the curator Jens Hoffmann:
"When did you come across the work of Dieter Roth for the first time? What is your particular connection, if any, to the artist and / or his work? The third question (out of eight): What is your relationship to Iceland? Are you familiar with Iceland's history and its current realities?"[170]

Roth's legacy was recognized for its contributions to (and legitimation of) the emergence of postmodern and contemporary art in Iceland, by many of the represented artists. Margrét Blöndal (b. 1970) responded: "I got an artistic upbringing under his influence since my professors were his fellowmen and students. I have heard his name since I was a child, but I never allowed myself to sink into his work. Maybe the reason is that somewhere in my consciousness he was already there, the school was already soaked in his juice (among a mixture of other artists of his generation as well). I work with existential matters and matters that deal with mutability, matters that deal with everyday life, the vulnerability of life and the poles that are good to hold on."[171]

Running concurrently, a monographic exhibition entitled *Dieter Roth Train* was curated by his son, Björn Roth, who was particularly concerned to select works that had strong links to Iceland. Over 400 works by Roth were exhibited in this multi venue exhibition at the Reykjavík Art Museum, the National Gallery of Iceland and Gallerí 100°. On view were some of Roth's monumental installations, artbooks, graphic works, objects, and paintings he made in his Icelandic studios or having Iceland as the subject.

This privileged link between global curating and local art institutions was explored further when the Reykjavík Art Museum and the Reykjavík Arts Festival invited Hans Ulrich Obrist's *Experiment Marathon,* to be the flagship project for the festival in

[170] Jessica Morgan and Björn Roth (eds.), *Material Time/Work Time/Life Time*, 11.
[171] Ibid, 15.

summer 2008.[172] The Swiss curator was already well connected in Reykjavík, since he co-curated the participative project *do it*, for the Reykjavík Art Museum in 1996.[173]

The Reykjavík Experiment Marathon was co-curated by Obrist and Ólafur Elíasson. The *Marathons* were originally initiated by Obrist, as a series of public events he had conceived first in Stuttgart in 2005 and a year later in the Serpentine Gallery, London.[174] In the Reykjavík version, Obrist brought together over forty renowned artists, architects, film-makers, and scientists from the international community for a two-fold event at the Reykjavík Art Museum—Hafnarhús, where a large-scale exhibition and a participatory laboratory open during the opening days of the exhibition.[175]

The presence of international star curators, such as Obrist, and global artists such as Elíasson, Brian Eno, Carolee Schneemann, Marina Abramovic, Jonas Mekas, Tomas Saraceno, and important art collectors such as Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza, marked a symbolic turning point in this cultural context. As an art critic in *Artforum* enthused, "the mood" at the Festival "resembled a summer camp" for the global art world flying in for the events: "As people arrived from all over the world to attend the opening weekend of the Reykjavík Arts Festival and participate in Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Ólafur Elíasson's "Experiment Marathon Reykjavik," the mood resembled a summer camp—albeit one attended by Björk, who was on my flight from London, and the country's president, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson. […] Iceland's intimate social landscape, along with its

[172] As part of The Reykjavík Arts Festival 2008 were also two major exhibitions at Reykjavík Art Museum – Kjarvalsstaðir opening on May 18th. *Dreams of the Sublime and Nowhere in Contemporary Icelandic Art* curated by Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir presented new works by thirteen Icelandic artists, ranging from panoramic landscape photographs to commissioned multi-media installations. The second exhibition was a commissioned outdoor installation entitled *I Hate Nature*, in the museum's courtyard by American artist and landscape architect Martha Schwartz. Both exhibitions addressed ecological strategies and nature conservation in context with the construction of the aluminium plant in Reyðarfjörður, East Iceland.

[173] The Reykjavík Art Museum was one of the first art institutions to host a *do it* exhibition. A catalogue was published with instructions for *do it (museum)*, *do it (home)* and screen shots from *do it (tv)*. *do it (tv)* were screened on RÚV (National Broadcasting Service). *do it (home)* instructions also appeared in the newspaper *Morgunblaðið*, thus making contemporary art strategies available to the public. Hans Ulrich Obrist (ed.), *do it* (Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum, 1996). See also: Eileen Myles, *The Importance of Being Iceland* (Los Angeles:Semiotext(e)/MIT Press, 2009).

[174] The first in the London *Marathon* Serpentine series, was the *Interview Marathon* in 2006. It involved interviews with leading figures in contemporary culture over 24 hours, was conducted by Obrist and the architect Rem Koohaas. This was followed by the *Experiment Marathon*, conceived by Obrist and Ólafur Elíasson in Serpentine Gallery, London in 2007, which included 50 experiments by speakers across both arts and science. There was also the *Manifesto Marathon* in 2008 and the *Poetry Marathon* in 2009 etc.

[175] The Reykjavík Experiment Marathon (15 May – 7 September 2008) was a joint project of the Reykjavík Art Museum and the Serpentine Gallery Marathons that took place in successive Serpentine Gallery Pavilions. Emma Ridgway (ed.), *Experiment Marathon: Hans Ulrich Obrist & Ólafur Elíasson* (London and Reykjavík: Koening Books and Reykjavík Art Museum, 2009).

intimidating physical landscape, brought the eclectic crowd together, and it seemed that whenever someone was mentioned in conversation, they appeared just around the corner."[176]

This description of the protagonists recalls Howard S. Becker's now-classic *Art Worlds*, among many other analyses of the global artworld in the early 21st century, where art and artistic movements are understood in connection with economic and social processes.[177] Art projects thus become part of other logics and what could be termed ecosystems (e.g., the market, the media, politics, social movements). In fact, the *Reykjavík Experimental Marathon*, even though it was not a biennial, summarized what art critic and curator Simon Sheikh characterizes as the phenomenon of politics of translation. He asks: "what is to be translated, and through which method of translation?"[178] Even though Icelandic artists were invited to participate in the *Reykjavík Experimental Marathon*, the translation process was not clear. As hinted in the *Artforum* article, the festival resembled a luxury tour, where "the lure of the local meets the glamour of the global" – or was the glamourous global searching for the lure of the local?[179]

As I earlier argued, Schoen's interpretation of the contemporary art scene in Iceland is symptomatic of a certain hype that had characterized Icelandic society just before the financial crises in 2008. The Reykjavík Arts Festival was keeping up with the global mechanisms of the contemporary art world, holding hands with local museums and grassroot gallery spaces. The *Experimental Marathon* could be understood as the epitome of the global contemporary art scene as defined by art historian Terry Smith: "Contemporary art is the institutionalized network through which the art of today presents itself to itself and to its interested audiences all over the world. It is an intense, expansionist, proliferating global subculture, with its own values and discourse; communicative networks; heroes, heroines, and renegades; professional organizations; defining events; meetings and monuments; markets and museums - in sum, distinctive

[176] Cathryn Drake, "Diary. Amazing Race," *Artforum*, May 25, 2008.
Retrieved from: https://www.artforum.com/diary/cathryn-drake-around-the-reykjavik-arts-festival-20273
[177] For Howard S. Becker, art is a sub-system: "[...] the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for." Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), x; Néstor García Canclini, *Art beyond Itself: Anthropology for a Society without a Story Line* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), xi.
[178] Simon Sheikh, "Marks of Distinction, Vectors of Possibility. Questions for the Biennial," *Open. Cahier on Art and the Public Domain. Issue The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon* 16 (2009): 68–79.
[179] Ibid, 73.

structures of stasis and change."[180] These translation processes managed and organized by the Reykjavík Arts festival and the Reykjavík Art Museum, showed that with a little help of the global art world, Icelandic art was in sync, finally visible outside the country. Artists had caught up with their own contemporaneity.[181]

[180] Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 241.

[181] The question of the contemporary and its contemporaneity has been debated by artists, art historians, and philosophers. Giorgio Agamben, *"What is the Contemporary?,"* in *What is an Apparatus?: And other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 39–54; Hal Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary,'" *October*, vol. 130 (Fall 2009): 3–124; Peter Osborne, "The Postconceptual Condition: Or, The Cultural Logic of High Capitalism Today," *Radical Philosophy* 184 (March/April 2014), 19–27; Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Contemp(t)orary: Eleven Theses," in *e-flux journal* # 12, January 2010; Terry Smith, "Defining Contemporaneity: Imagining Planetarity," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 24, no. 49–50 (2015): 156–74; Terry Smith, "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question," in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, eds. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 1–19; Terry Smith, "Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (2006): 681–707.

4. New Maps for Networks: Reykjavík Fluxus – *A Case of Expanding Connections*

4.1. The artist as a *passeur* or a go-between.

The historiography of art is relatively recent in Iceland although contemporary art has become important as a signifier of a cosmopolitan cultural identity. This chapter is not so much concerned with filling in art-historical gaps by making Icelandic artists visible (even though I believe this is an important issue). Rather, I am concerned with how *contemporaneity* emerged in Iceland through transnational networks (such as Fluxus), transcultural practices (such as Mail Art and other Cold War exchanges), and the ways that contemporary art functioned as an aspect of remodelled artistic identity construction from new postnational viewpoints. These reconfigured identities were (and still are) mobilized through close contact with non-Icelandic Fluxus artists, especially Dieter Roth and Robert Filliou.

Roth played a significant role as a *passeur* or go-between these new artistic formations and earlier iterations of this research focused on the pedagogical influence of Roth and Filliou on the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts in Reykjavík. Other influential foreign figures could be mentioned: the Dutch artists Douwe Jan Bakker (1943–1997) and Pieter Holstein (b. 1934); both stand out as more subtle go-betweens who instructed numerous Icelandic art students both in Holland and in Iceland, where they sojourned and exhibited regularly.[182] Overall, one aspect of this investigation involves consideration of the cultural influence of Amsterdam during the 1960s, and 1970s, and the critical role of artist-run spaces and radical art education. These initiatives collectively produced new paradigms and initiated new thinking about art in the growing capital of Iceland where contemporary art began to be institutionalized through the Living Art Museum (established in 1978) and the 1972 Reykjavík Arts Festival.

4.2. Making Connections

Creating connections between places and making room for art, artists, and curators coming from countries on the periphery of the western art world has become a significant element in the new global approach to writing about art over the past decades. As art

[182] Helgi Þorgils Friðjónsson, "Erlendir gestir (Foreign Visitors)," in *Nýlistasafnið 10 ára. Sýnishorn eldri verka* (Reykjavík: Listasafn Íslands and Nýlistasafnið, 1988), 75–78. See also: Ólafur Gíslason, "Ísland er eyja í alþjóðlegri menningarsúpu," *Þjóðviljinn*, May 9, 1987, 8–9.

historian Terry Smith argued: "The postcolonial turn has generated the need for narratives that work on global, regional, and local levels. These are essential to understanding art, not only as it is created within cultures but also as it enters into the exchanges between them."[183] Consequently, transnational exchanges between cultures have become one of the main subjects in contemporary art historiography as narratives of national artistic identity have become increasingly unsatisfactory. Decentring has therefore become one of the main methods of creating new art historical narratives through curatorial practices, museum displays and writing.[184] The question is, and my main concerns has similarly been addressed by art historians and historians, such as Natalie Zemon Davis who asked: "Can the historian hold onto the subjects of "decentred" social and cultural history, often local and full of concrete detail, and still address the perspectives of global history?"[185]

In this chapter, I will address this important question first by asking where does the "contemporary" begin in terms of a peripheral and small nation such as Iceland, at a time when artists depended so much on personal contacts and on printed material to follow the most recent currents and discussions in international art. As is often pointed out, the contradiction of grouping several decades of chronological time under a concept that denotes now-ness is paradoxical. Terry Smith remarked "By the 1990s, "contemporary" had come to be the predominant descriptor of both current and recent art, and of all of its associated modes of presentation, distribution, and interpretation, almost entirely banishing all other labels, including those associated with "modern.""[186]

On the other hand, in his book *What was Contemporary Art?*, art historian Richard Meyer, asks for a redefinition of the "contemporary" as a "condition of being alive to and alongside other moments, artists, and objects."[187] He in turn, quotes Alexander Alberro, who has (as have other art historians), defined the "the contemporary" as a specific and new historical period. Alberro observes that "Not only has there been the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states and the heralding of the era of globalization, but technologically there has been the full integration of electronic or digital culture, and

[183] Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 259.
[184] Salah Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi (eds.), *Unpacking Europe. Towards a Critical Reading* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2002).
[185] Natalie Zemon Davis, "Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossings in a Global World," in *History and Theory* 50, no. 2 (May 2011): 188–202, p. 188.
[186] Terry Smith, "The State of Art History: Contemporary Art," *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (December 2010): 366–83, p. 371.
[187] Richard Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013), 14.

economically, neoliberalism, with its goal to bring all human action into the domain of the market, has become hegemonic. Within the context of the fine arts, the new period has come to be known as "the contemporary.""[188]

This is often acknowledged by art historians and philosophers who likewise argue that the term "contemporary" signals a paradigm shift in art "[…] marked by globalization, digital media, hegemonic capitalism, and spectacular culture."[189] However, Meyer calls for "a longer view of the history of the new."[190] As he argues, "The temporal existence of an art work is not bound by its moment of production or by the life (or death) of its creator […]. As it persists over time, the artwork may become newly relevant to later works and social-historical contexts."[191] Meyer proposes "[…] that the category of contemporary art might include not only newly produced works by living artists but also those time travellers that arrive "in our midst" from earlier moments and historical contexts."[192] And continues by arguing that "Those time travellers sometimes disrupt the distinction between contemporary and historical art by rendering the past newly present."[193]

Others, such as Anna Brzyski have pointed out that "This understanding of contemporary art assumes a certain geographic hierarchy, even as art history and broader art discourse celebrate the notion of global diversity and local uniqueness of art forms. This hierarchy is based on an implicit assumption that there is a single end point for the history of art or rather that local art histories can be woven together into a narrative that terminates everywhere in contemporary art."[194]

The geopolitical situation of the Cold War created a fertile ground for artists in Europe who organized transnational exchanges from the 1960s onwards, most often through modest artist-run spaces but also through more institutional initiatives. This important cultural traffic taking place in Europe has recently caught art-historical

[188] Alexander Alberro, response to "Questionnaire on the Contemporary," *October* 130 (fall 2009): 55–60, p. 55.
[189] Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?*, 15.
[190] Ibid, 15.
[191] Ibid, 17.
[192] Ibid, 21.
[193] Ibid, 21.
[194] Anna W. Brzyski, "By Whose Rules? Contemporary Art and Geography of Art Historic Significance," in *Artl@s Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 46–51, p. 50.

attention and with it the relativization of the periodization of the modern brings us to the dominant modernist genealogy of the contemporary.[195]

The process of developing the so-called New Art (New art or *nýlist* was the word used in Icelandic to designate all the new art practices after 1960) related to Fluxus and other pre-conceptual practices, was initiated and pursued by Roth, after he moved to Iceland in 1957 and throughout his life he acted as a "*smuggler*" between Icelandic artists and networks in Europe and the United States. Reflecting on Meyer's argument, I would argue that in the Icelandic context, Roth, who played a significant role as go-between these new artistic formations, disrupted the distinction between modern and contemporary art in his first participation in a group exhibition in Ásmundarsalur, Reykjavík, in September 1961.

Roth's site-specific, ephemeral sound installation named *Wind-Harp*, located outside the exhibition space, is a marker of this moment [Fig. 3]. With this work, Roth proposed a new kind of spectatorship in this local environment. The newness of his gesture caught the attention of the public and the local press that viewed the work very favourably. Consequently, the installation transformed its site from being a bare, windy hill into a locus that a couple of years later became a place for a series of outdoor art exhibitions. This gesture contributed to a new urban art identity that later fostered the gentrification of the city.[196] Following Brzyski's definition of contemporary art, the installation of the *Wind-Harp* identifies a starting point in my analyses of the emergence of contemporary art in Iceland.

"From an art historical perspective, contemporary art […] is believed to represent the current phase in an ongoing history of art. It is art that is perceived to be "historically significant," art that has a potential to last, and that is likely to occupy a key position within the art historic narrative, not yet written though certainly began, of the art at the turn of the millennium."[197]

---

[195] Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Naissance de l'art contemporain. Une histoire mondiale 1945–1970* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2021); Valerie Lynn Hillings, *Experimental Artists' Groups in Europe, 1951–1968. Abstraction, Interaction and Internationalism* (New York University: Institute of Fine Arts, 2002).

[196] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Formáli" (Introduction), in *Myndhöggvarafélagið í Reykjavík 40 ára. Verk og hugmyndir að verkum í almannarými*; Inga S. Ragnarsdóttir and Kristín G. Guðnadóttir, *Útisýningar á Skólavörðuholti 1967–1972* (Reykjavík: Minningarsjóður Ragnars Kjartanssonar, 2018).

[197] Anna W. Brzyski, "By Whose Rules? Contemporary Art and Geography of Art Historic Significance," 47.

The paradigm of cultural transfer, as defined initially by French historians Michel Espagne and Michel Werner in their important texts from the mid-1980s, is useful as a model with which to study micro-histories of such transfers.[198] However, it is of limited use in this case, insofar as the networks represented by Roth were initiated, maintained, and multiplied through non-institutional contacts, that is, between individual artists, and therefore not through transfers between cultures *per se*. But the notion of the *passeur*, however, seems pertinent. It has been employed in cultural and literary theory and is discussed by historians Serge Gruzinski and Diana Cooper Richet.[199] My own use of the term *passeur* or the go-between, is closer to the formulation by historian Simon Schaffer: "The go-between […] is thus not just a passer-by or a simple agent of cross-cultural diffusion, but someone who articulates relationships between disparate worlds or cultures by being able to translate between them."[200] I will explore how this articulation was mobilized by artists such as Roth and Filliou through their networks, their pedagogy, and their art production. This was subsequently continued by the Icelandic artist Sigurður Guðmundsson (b. 1942), notably through his involvement in the experimental artist-run space SÚM gallery created in 1969 in Reykjavík and In-Out Center opened in November 1972 in Amsterdam.

I would also like to propose the textual interpretation of the *passeur* as a paradigm of the *trans*- as a privileged individual who crosses boarders, transgresses – also in his art practices (passer outre, franchir, dépasser, aller plus loin…), beyond national boundaries, distinct from the function of the "inter", as discussed by the Italian sociologist Franco Cassano.[201]

As several scholars have pointed out, the global considerations of art at the end of the 20th century are art historiographic questions. [202] Mapping is another useful method

---

[198] Michel Espagne, "La notion de transfert culturel," *Revue Sciences/Lettres* 1 (2013); Joyeux-Prunel, "Les transferts culturels. Un discours de la méthode," *Hypothèses* 1, no. 6 (2003): 149–62; Manuela Rossini and Michael Toggweiler, "Cultural Transfer: An Introduction," *Word and Text. A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 4, no. 2 (December 2014): 5–9.

[199] Diana Cooper Richet, *Passeurs culturels dans le monde des médias et de l'édition en Europe,* (Lyon: Presses de l'ENSSIB, 2005); Serge Gruzinski, *Passeurs culturels. Mécanismes de métissage (*Paris: Éditions de la MSH, 2001).

[200] Simon Schaffer et al., *The Brokered World. Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence 1770–1820* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications, 2009), xiv.

[201] Paul Carmignani, "Introduction," in *Figures du passeur*, ed. P. Carmignani (Perpignan: Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 2002), 17–18.

[202] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, and Catherine Dossin, "Introduction. Reintroducing Circulations: Historiography and the Project of Global Art History," in *Circulations in the*

for collecting fragmentary information. How to locate, for example, exhibitions and other activities of these transnational networks? This, in turn, helps provide an overview, making sense of art connections within a specific place. The hot spots, so to speak, for emerging contemporary Icelandic artists in the 1970s were Amsterdam, Düsseldorf, and Reykjavík, and the history of contemporary art in Iceland is interwoven with both the art education and art venues that emerged in these cities.[203] Tracing the connections between artistic experimentation taking place in grass-root spaces and art schools reveals the synergy between geographic locations and cultural milieux that were important to the individual artists and offers a better understanding of the meaning of these places and actions in the larger perspective of art production.

4.3. The FLUXUS Experiences

The signal importance of Fluxus for the development of contemporary art in general is rarely acknowledged in accounts chronicling the avant-garde movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In an interview about her book *Fluxus Experience*, art historian Hannah Higgins observed "that Fluxus is something besides a group of artists circled around George Maciunas."[204] This emphasis on Maciunas she considers to be historically inaccurate because within the Fluxus community there was no central point of production and certainly no dominant protagonist. Still, Higgins traces the roots of Fluxus to experiments in music education conducted by John Cage (1912–1992) in his classes at the New School for Social Research in New York 1957–1959. In the summer of 1958, students in this class included Allan Kaprow (1927–2006), Al Hansen (1927–1995), Dick Higgins (1938–1998), Florence Tarlow (1922–1992), Georg Brecht (1926–2008), and Scott Hyde (b. 1926).[205] She further argues that Fluxus in Europe had similar beginnings

Global History of Art, eds. T. D. Kaufmann, B. Joyeux-Prunel, and C. Dossin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 1–22; Jorge Sebastián Lozano, "Mapping Art History in the Digital Era," *The Art Bulletin* 103, no. 3 (2021): 6–16.

[203] The German artist Jan Voss has described the transnational flow inspired by Dieter Roth. See: Eggert Pétursson, "Jan Voss á Hjalteyri í júlí 1988," *Teningur* 7 (1989): 37–41; Also discussed in Steingrímur Eyfjörð Kristmundsson and Kristinn G. Harðarson, "Viðtal við Magnús Pálsson," *Svart á Hvítu*, 1, no. 2 (1978): 2–13. The point is made on page 9. It has been maintained by later generations of artists such as Helgi Þorgils Friðjónsson, in Friðjónsson, "Erlendir gestir," 75; Ragnar Kjartansson, *The End*, ed. Chr. Schoen (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009), 66.

[204] Jeff Abell, "hannahhiggins," Interview recorded in Chicago, November 2003. Retrieved from: http://mouthtomouthmag.com/higgins.html.

[205] Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2002), 1. Also see Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963. Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent*

in the class of composer Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928–2007), which included artists such as Nam June Paik (1932–2006), Emmett Williams (1925–2007), and the performance studio of Mary Bauermeister (b. 1934), also based in Cologne.[206]

For Higgins, the secret behind the long life of Fluxus is inscribed in their pedagogical project, the commitment to "experiential learning," and to the notion of "interdisciplinary exploration, self-directed study, collective work, and the nonhierarchical exchange of ideas."[207] Art historian Bertrand Clavez takes this a step further, suggesting that "Fluxus should be considered as the paradigm of our contemporary art."[208] Thus, he claims that Fluxus established the general framework of contemporary art by reshaping the paradigm within which art is made. Consequently, he considers Fluxus as "a point of origin that created a new frame of action and conception within which the works are elaborated without the artists even being conscious of this general frame."[209]

Fluxus has been described as "a piece of reality" and Fluxus artists liked to employ the topological and geographical reality of the map as a visual trope.[210] Fundamentally anti-institutional, Fluxus activities were generated within networks and were most often based on personal relations. One of the important ideas explored by Fluxus artists was their rejection of geographic art centres. Small cities were thus as important for them as art capitals and, according to Filliou's principle, all artists could become a part of the *Eternal Network* on a horizontal level.[211]

The concept of mapping is useful to describe and explore these transnational networks, which, in turn, help provide an overview, making sense of particular art connections within a specific place. That said, I want to focus on the importance of Fluxus in Reykjavík, and show its influence on both pedagogy and art production inspiring new ways of thinking about art. The process of developing the so-called New art was initiated and pursued by Dieter Roth, who and throughout his life acted as a *passeur* between

---

Body (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 28.
[206] Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 11.
[207] Higgins, 189.
[208] Bertrand Clavez, "Fluxus: Reference or Paradigm for Young Contemporary Artists?," *Visible Language* 39, no. 3 (2005): 236–47, p. 246.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Philip Corner, in Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley, Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2002), 103.
[211] Filliou discussed the nature and the aim of his network in: Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* (Cologne/New York: Kasper König, 1970), 204.

Icelandic artists and avant-garde networks in Europe and the United States.[212]

One aspect of my interest in this subject pivots on the difficulties encountered when connecting the local and the global countries inside Europe during the Cold War period. As I have indicated, in Iceland, art production and exhibitions were fostered by transnational networks outside institutions, and between larger cities and peripheries. As already mentioned, Roth became a singularly important figure in the politically and culturally restrictive Cold War environment, partly because of his geographical mobility and his important networks he developed and maintained through his friendships with artists such as Arthur (Addi) Köpcke (1928–1977), Daniel Spoerri (b. 1930), Jean Tinguely (1925–1991), Richard Hamilton (1922–2011), and the already mentioned Robert Filliou.

Artists had become progressively mobile after the Second World War and a few artists started working collaboratively on travelling exhibitions.[213] However, the nomadism of many of the CoBrA artists, such as Asger Jorn did not particularly influence their Icelandic colleagues. It was later, and principally through the example of Roth that nomadism was gradually considered as a positive factor in artistic practice. This shift in "status", or definition by which the artist was transformed from stable studio worker to wandering migrant was not, however, openly discussed in Icelandic art journals or in the press. These geographical displacements and artistic mobilities as cultural condition incarnated by Roth, Filliou (and later Magnús Pálsson and Sigurður Guðmundsson), became the new paradigm. Not only did these artists travel between workplaces, also turning their nomadism into an important aspect of their practice, but also, they implemented direct mobility of artists and artworks, expanding their students' horizons.

The Cold War brought economic prosperity to the island thereby increasing artists' and students' mobility. In this regard, I am interested in surveying the sites of production, the urban spaces occupied by artists or put to use, and how exchanges functioned as networks based on personal connections and public encounters. These include galleries and progressive art schools (as well as more traditional ones), all of

[212] New Art (*Nýlist*) was the word used in Icelandic to designate all the new art practices after 1960.
[213] For example, the 1947 Autumn exhibition (Høstudstillingen) in Copenhagen, a display of paintings by some of the Danish artists related to CoBrA, that Carl-Henning Pedersen and Else Alfeldt brought to Reykjavík in 1948, travelled also to Oslo and to Gothenburg.

which determine what a given influence meant in a specific geographical context, whether it was Reykjavík, Amsterdam, or other Dutch cities frequented by Icelandic art students.

4.4. In and Out of Reykjavík

Earlier, I have briefly mentioned, how art historiographies in Iceland have been constructed over the last decades. New narratives, often tinged with nationalistic ideas and mythologies, have been produced both from inside and outside the country. Art historians have used genealogies of artists and employed concepts of postcoloniality, as well as more pragmatic views based on theories of cultural transfer to explain the processes active in the formation of the new art and the place of contemporary art in Iceland. The lack of deeper analyses draws attention to the importance of studying the ways in which international connections and the circulation of works and ideas play out in localized contexts. We need to ask what were the professional paradigms that artists selected and followed?

In contrast to the contextual and historical specificity of artistic formations, there exists a narrative among Icelandic artists and art historians to the effect that *it all started* with Dieter Roth.[214] As early as 1964, in an interview with Icelandic artist Jón Gunnar Árnason, this genealogy was established, and some years later it is reiterated by Magnús Pálsson (b. 1929), then teacher at the Art School.[215]

Roth had moved to Iceland in 1957 after meeting his future wife, art-therapist Sigríður Björnsdóttir (b. 1929), in Copenhagen some months before. His first bookworks were printed in Iceland, where he began publishing under the imprint *forlag ed* [Einar/Dieter] with the Icelandic poet Einar Bragi (1921–2005), founder and editor of the literary magazine *Birtingur*.[216] Having received the prestigious William and Noma Copley Foundation Award in 1960 for his bookworks, Roth gained international reputation of being an internationally well- connected designer, poet and graphic artist.[217] It is precisely at this time that he was invited to participate in a major art historical

[214] Steingrímur Eyfjörð Kristmundsson and Kristinn G. Harðarson, "Viðtal við Magnús Pálsson," 3–13. The point is made on page 9. It has been maintained by later generations of artists such as Helgi Þorgils Friðjónsson, in Friðjónsson, "Erlendir gestir," 75; Ragnar Kjartansson, *The End*, 66.
[215] "Og margir taka þetta hátíðlega," *Tíminn*, January 6, 1963, 9 and 13.
[216] Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Bók um bók, frá bók …Bókverk Diters Rot á Íslandi, 1957–1961.
[217] Pontus Hultén (ed.), *Bewogen Beweging. Rörelse i konsten*, cat. exp. (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum / Stockholm: Moderna museet, 1961), 29.

travelling exhibition of 1961, *Rörelse i konsten* / *Bewogen Beweging* (Moving Movement or Moved Movement), curated by Pontus Hultén, then director at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, assisted by the electrical engineer Billy Klüver (Johan Wilhelm Klüver 1927–2004), and his friend Daniel Spoerri, in collaboration with Willem Sandberg (1897–1984), then director of the Stedelijk *Museum.*[218]

The exhibition was intended to be "dynamic, constructive, joyful, confusing, ironic, critical, humorous, aggressive," as Hultén described it in the exhibition catalogue.[219] It was conceptualized according to Duchampian notions of "randomness, repetition, intention, growth, balance, and rotation."[220] In the catalogue, Roth is introduced as a designer, a furniture maker, a poet and a filmmaker.[221] Already associated with the German avant-garde Zero group formed in Düsseldorf in April 1958 by Heinz Mack (b. 1931) and Otto Piene (1928–2014), Roth published in their magazine, *Zero* 3 in 1960.[222] His participation in *Rörelse i konsten* might have figured as an important turning point as it was there that he first exhibited his kinetic bookworks in such a historical context. He also designed the exhibition poster translated into three languages, each corresponding to the specific venue: Moderna Museet, Stedelijk and Louisiana. He made sure that the Icelandic artist Jón Gunnar Árnason would also be invited to show his assembled steel-structure that was given the title *Elementskulptur* in the exhibition catalogue. The work was assembled from 120 small individual steel pieces – easily transported and mobile -- that could be compiled in various ways. These were transported in a small wooden box and assembled randomly in each exhibition space, as can be seen in a photograph showing Addi Köbcke assembling the work for the exhibition in Louisiana Museum.[223] The *Elementskulptur* might have been influenced by Spoerri's

[218] The exhibition opened in the Stedelijk *Museum* (10 March – 17 April 1961), Moderna Museet in Stockholm (Rörelse i konsten 17 May – 3 September 1961), and in Louisiana Museum, Humlebæk, Denmark, as *Bevægelse i kunsten* (22 September – 22 October 1961). It showcased 83 artists through 233 artworks. Anna Lundström, "Movement in Art. The Layers of an Exhibition," in *Pontus Hultén and the Moderna Museet. The Formative Years*, ed. Anna Tellgren (London/ Stockholm: Koenig Books and Moderna Museet, 2017), 67–93; Patrik Andersson, "Rörelse i konsten: The Art of Re-assemblage," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift*, 78, no. 4 (2009): 178–92.
[219] Hultén (ed.), *Bewogen Beweging. Rörelse i konsten*, 29.
[220] Anna Lundström, "Movement in Art. The layers of an exhibition," 74.
[221] Hultén (ed.), *Bewogen Beweging. Rörelse i konsten*, 29.
[222] Roth exhibited his optical works in the exhibition *Vision in Motion – Motion in Vision* (1959), in Hessenhuis, Antwerp and in the show *Dynamo 1* (1959), Galerie Renate Boukes in Wiesbaden. Otto Piene and Heinz Mack, *Zero* (Cambridge: MIT, 1973), 236 and p. 269.
[223] Photograph published in *Nordiskt 60-tal: uppbrott och konfrontation*. *The Nordic '60s. Upheaval a Confrontation 1960–1972*, 216.

ideas of the multiple diffused through his Edition MAT – (*Multiplication d'Art Transformable*), but the work seems to be lost and it is not clear how many of them actually circulated.[224]

The theme addressed in *Rörelse i konsten* (*Bewogen Beweging/Bevægelse i kunsten*) recalls László Moholy Nagy's (1895–1946) testament "Vision in Motion,"[225] astutely visualized in the "interactive" exhibition poster designed by Roth.[226] However, as Patrik Anderson explains, "Hultén distinguished the difference between the two words [motion and movement]."[227] This important distinction influenced the selection of the works in the exhibition following Hultén's observations: "Motion appears to imply movement in general […] (whereas) movement implies movement itself […] This belongs to this century's big events to allow an art work to move within itself like a motor or the way a tree moves in the wind."[228]

The exhibition never came to Iceland, given the lack of art institutions or infrastructures able to mount such an important show. Still, the theme of motion, randomness, and play resonated in Reykjavík, through Roth's participation in a collective show in Ásmundarsalur organized by the privately-run Myndlistarskóli Reykjavíkur (Reykjavík School of Visual Arts) in September 1961.[229] According to the exhibition catalogue (which unfortunately, does not include any photographs), Roth exhibited 11 works. Ten transformable or rotational works were displayed inside in the gallery. These

[224] The history of MAT is traced in Katerina Vatsella, Edition MAT. *Daniel Spoerri, Karl Gerstner und das Multiple: Die Entstehung einer Kunstform* (Bremen: H.M. Hauschild, 1998).
[225] László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (Chicago: Paul Theoblad, 1947/1961).
[226] The kinetic and interactive function of the poster resonates in Roth's work *Black page with holes (poetry machine)*, a piece Roth developed as his contribution to the Fluxus publication edited by La Monte Young and George Brecht, *An Anthology of chance operations*, published in 1963. "When the book was first planned in 1961, he [Roth] sent to George Maciunas a black page with holes in it and the following instructions for use: "please take the sheet with holes in, but do it like this: take any printed matter, for instance pages of book, catalogs, logocats, folders, posters, newspaper, emballage cut in size of fluxus make the holes there in to through, put in to fluxus, loose (as the black sheet) would have been; loose, i mean: don't take black sheet, take pages of book, catalogs, logocats, folders, posters, newspaper, emballage, tricotage camouflage, cut as fluxus in size, make the holes therein, put into it fluxum, i mean put the loose sheet then into fluxus."" A reproduction of the poster is in *Roth Time. A Dieter Roth Retrospective*, eds. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter with text by Dirk Dobke and Bernadette Walter (Basel: Schaulager/Lars Müller Publishers, 2003), 70.
[227] Patrik Andersson, "Rörelse i konsten: The Art of Re-assemblage," 185.
[228] Ibid.
[229] The gallery space was constructed and owned by the modernist sculptor Ásmundur Sveinsson(1896–1982). It also hosted the Reykjavík School of Visual Arts, directed by Roth's friend, the sculptor Ragnar Kjartansson (1923–1988). Kjartansson ran a ceramic workshop (Glit) in Reykjavík where Roth experimented but also produced ceramics for commercial purposes. In 1978, Kjartansson donated an important number of works by Dieter Roth to the Living Art Museum.

were made from everyday materials and had to be activated and animated by the viewer, such as *Gummibandbild* (Rubber-Band Picture)[230] and *Kugelspiel* (Bead Game).[231] Outside the exhibition space, on what was then deserted ground on a windy hill, Roth erected a mobile sound sculpture attached to a telephone pole and put in motion by the wind (not by the spectator). This was his first large kinetic piece, called the *Wind-Harp*, a tower-like "assemblage" made from recuperated iron, a sound machine measuring more than seven meters in height.[232] Situated outside the gallery, the work was intended to be a temporary sound sculpture, as Roth's initial idea was to project the sound activated by the wind into the gallery through radio and loudspeakers, but this technical operation failed for lack of all the equipment.[233]

It could be argued that the Reykjavík initiative should be contextualized as an episode or a sequence in Roth's multiple efforts to create an anti-modernist platform in Iceland after his encounter with the Swiss-born sculptor Jean Tinguely.[234] Art-historically it could be interpreted as a variation on *The Tower* constructed by Tinguely's outside the Stedelijk Museum earlier the same year.[235] A connection could also be made with Tinguely's *Homage to New York* (1960), the self-destroying mechanism that blew itself up in front a crowd of invited guests in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden of the Museum of Modern Art on 18 March 1960.[236]

---

[230] A photograph taken in the shop Kúlan in Reykjavík showing kids playing with the *Gummibandbild.* Published in *Roth Time*. *A Dieter Roth Retrospective,* 64.

[231] Two examples of the *Kugelspiel* (1961) are kept in the collection of the Living Art Museum, Reykjavík. One seems to be an original, the other is a later reconstruction. Retrieved from: http://sarpur.is/Adfang.aspx?AdfangID=491539; http://www.sarpur.is/Adfang.aspx?AdfangID=555832

[232] The term "assemblage" was first used as a defining category in the exhibition *The Art of Assemblage*, Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1961. William Seitz defined assemblage art as: "Entirely or in part, their constituent elements are preformed natural or manufactured materials, objects, or fragments not intended as art materials." William Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage*, exh.cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961), 6.

[233] Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann, "Dieter Roth Interview von Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann. Hamburg, 28.–30. September 1976, und Stuttgart, 20.–22. Juni 1979," in *Dieter Roth: Gesammelte Interviews*, ed. Barbara Wien (Cologne: Hansjörg Mayer, 2002), 9–142, p. 45.

[234] The art critic Dieter Schwarz identifies the sequence as being a central element in Roth's work: "Dieter Roth is never concerned to make an individual work a central one; the sequence of work is much more important to him." Dieter Schwarz, "Zum frühen Werk von Diter Rot," in *ZERO aus Deutchland 1957–1966. Und heute*, ed. Renate Wiehager (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2000), 210–212.

[235] Photographs by Harry Shunk and János Kender showing the construction of *Tinguely*'s installation in front of Stedelijk Museum. Museum Tinguely, Basel.

[236] The Museum of Modern Art holds *Fragment from Homage to New York* (1960), the original sculpture described by the artist as a "self-constructing and self-destroying work of art." Retrieved from: http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=81174

The *Wind-Harp* was the beginning of something new, both in Roth's career as well as in the small progressive Icelandic art circles.[237] The impact of the outdoor performance in the urban development of the site was considerable. It was a new experience of public space for the audience, as reported in the daily papers. The innovative display outside the main exhibition venue (Ásmundarsalur) is documented by a number of photographs that were published in the press during its installation. [Fig. 3]. By tempting to connect the sounds of the wind with the inside of the gallery space, an experimental space was created that activated a variety of possible and potential uses of the site, that later, became an important setting for other experimental outdoor exhibitions.[238] Several years later, Roth described how Tinguely influenced his departure from Constructivism: "Everything was so rusty and broken and made so much noise, and I was […] impressed half to death. It was simply a complete different world from my Constructivism, it was something like a paradise that I'd lost."[239]

I have tried to briefly describe how Roth's new strategies of innovative displays, including new technical and immediate modes of addressing the public were translated from the art-historical and institutional contextualization of the *Röresle i konsten*, towards a raw, immediate and uncontextualized cultural space in Reykjavík. The *Wind-Harp* and Roth's simply made, rotating and performative works exhibited in Reykjavík in the autumn 1961 did not raise any eyebrows. This was possibly because its display took place in the art educational and experimental context of the Reykjavík School of Visual Art. Moreover, Roth was an invited guest – underlining the difference in status between him and the other locally based artists participating in the show.

However, the *Wind-Harp* neither figures as a historically important work in surveys of Icelandic art, nor in Roth's retrospectives. Still, another reason to remember this modest Reykjavík exhibition is its demonstration of Duchampian notions via the educational activities of an art school. As for Roth's local engagement and his numerous

[237] Umberto Eco, in his *Opera aperta*, refers to Roth's "mobile sheets" as an example of kinetic art where "("the artist is not alone in accomplishing his act of creation, since the spectator is the one who puts the work in contact with the exterior world by deciphering and interpreting its profound qualities, and thus he contributes *to* the creative process")" Ecco is quoting Claus Bremer (1924–1996), who was member of the Darmstadt group and developed interactive methods in Concrete poetry, theatre, music and through his performances. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, 261–262. See also Döbke, p. 66.
[238] Inga S. Ragnarsdóttir and Kristín G. Guðnadóttir, *Útisýningarnar á Skólavörðuholti* 1967–1972 (Reykjavík: Minningarsjóður Ragnars Kjartanssonar), 2017.
[239] *Roth Time. A Dieter Roth Retrospective*, 64.

crossovers with artists, writers, photographers, architects, potters, and jewellery makers in Iceland, it seems clear that this integration of traditionally separate art and decorative arts was facilitated by his relationships with the art school, and through his social and commercial initiatives. Roth was tolerated – even welcomed in Iceland, *because* he assumed the role of a smuggler, the nomad, and as such, he fostered contacts that also operated in an interdisciplinary manner and inside the local contexts.

However, the tendency to give Roth the credit for introducing contemporary art practices into a putatively stagnant Iceland is problematic. Indeed, Iceland might also be said to have informed his artistic practices. In Reykjavík, Roth encountered intellectuals, poets, writers, architects and artists, already familiar with Concrete art and other modernist formations in architecture, poetry and the visual arts, such as works by Einar Bragi, Thor Vilhjálmsson, Hörður Águstsson and Mannfreð Vilhjálmsson, all ready to launch experimental collaborations.[240] When Roth arrived in Iceland, the country was undergoing important demographic, economic, and cultural, transformation.[241] He became fascinated with and was deeply influenced by Icelandic vernacular culture, which at the time had a particular material rawness representing the convergence of the postwar economic boom and Cold War politics. Roth describes this aesthetic mood in a letter written to his parents: "[…] there's probably no place else in the world where the way people live is so tasteless, ugly, and bad all bloody improvisation […] maybe it's just the converse of the rest of Europe the way they live here is ugly and their souls are more beautiful life is more beautiful there and the souls are ugly."[242]

The dislike expressed in Roth's letter, reflects old ideas about Iceland as a primitive society inhabited by naive or under-civilized people.[243] People living in harsh climate, at the margins of the civilized world, were often described as being monstrous creatures. Many foreign artists and writers visiting Iceland for the first time, such as

[240] Discussed in Þröstur Helgason, *Tímaritið Birtingur og íslenskur módernismi. Lítil tímarit, landafræði, menningarsaga* (Reykjavík: Háskóli Íslands, 2015).
[241] This transformation of life in Iceland during the postwar era is described in several Icelandic novels and short stories, as well as in the film *The Girl Gogo* (79 af stöðinni (1962)), directed by Erik Balling.
[242] Dieter Roth in a letter to his parents, n.d. (February 1957). Translated by Dirk Dobke and Bernadette Walter. In German: "… es gibt wol auf der ganzen erde kain geschmackloseres häslicher wonendes und schlechter lebendes folk ales ist blutige improvisation … es ist hir filaicht nur umgekert als anderswo in oiropa hir haben si das häsliche leben and di schöneren selen dort haben si das schönere leben and di häslichen selen." *Roth Time*. *A Dieter Roth Retrospective,* 40.
[243] These ancient and conflicting images of otherness are also discussed in Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, "Islands on the Edge: Medieval and Early Modern National Images of Iceland and Greenland," in *Iceland and Images of the North* (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec 2011), 41–66.

Xavier Marmier (1808–1892), William Morris (1834–1896), and W. G. Collingwood (1854–1932), were amused, sometimes disillusioned with the social realities encountered, and even disgusted by the uncivilized behaviour of Icelanders. The French writer, Marmier describes Icelanders as being under the burden of the hostile nature.[244] Similarly, Collingwood described Reykjavík as being "a poor place- neglected and bleak – a mere village of wood and iron houses."[245] He describes the houses as "deadly ugly […] Desolate, neglected, disheartened-and all in the middle of a bleak cold windswept sea-cost."[246] "Everybody looks poor and the place entirely forlorn and heartbroken with bleakness and neglect and apparent repression […] There is dirt and disorder, unfinishedness everywhere."[247]

This "colonial" gaze is described in a great number of traveller's accounts. Foreign visitors, many of them well known and respected scholars, writers, and artists, such as Collingwood. Others, aristocrats or scientists, academics, doctors, mostly from France, Great Britain, Germany, Austria, came to study this imagined, "authentic" culture and its pristine nature.[248] Some acquired manuscripts, textiles, embroideries, and other vernacular items to be stored in museums and private collections.

Roth's reaction is particularly interesting in this context as it recalls his own transition from strict geometric expression towards hybrid formless works based on vernacular materials containing food, dirt, and other abject materials. His turn towards scrap materials, not only refers to the importance of his own transculturation (from the civilized Europe to the primitive Iceland) simultaneous to the transculturation taking place in the country. The presence of the American military base in Iceland provoked a profound political and cultural change by its introduction of American consumer culture through music, films, and consumer products. Icelanders were eager to adopt the American lifestyle and leave their traditions behind. Writers and artists acted upon these

[244] "À les voir, on dirait qu'ils sont tous sous le poids de cette nature austère au milieu de laquelle ils sont nés. De toutes parts, leurs yeux ne rencontrent qu'un tableau sinistre, des souvenirs de calamité ou des sujets de terreur, une terre aride et volcanique, de la cendre et de la lave, et pas une fleur, pas une plante; une mer orageuse et des montagnes de glace." In Xavier Marmier, "*Lettres sur* l'Islande," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1er August 1836, Vol. 7, No. 3: 342–51, p. 348.
[245] Letter from W.G. Collingwood to his father William Collingwood. Hotel Island, Reykjavík, June 11, 1897, in *W.G. Collingwood's Letters from Iceland. Travels in Iceland 1897 by W.G. Collingwood and Jón Stefánsson*, eds. Mike and Kate Lea (Cardiff: R. G. Collingwood Society), 2013, 39.
[246] Ibid. Letter from W.G. Collingwood to his daughter, 42.
[247] Ibid. Letter from W.G. Collingwood to his wife, 36.
[248] Anne Brydon, "Inscriptions of Self: The Construction of Icelandic Landscape in Nineteenth-Century British Travel Writings," *Ethnos* 60, no. 3–4 (1995): 243–63.

transformations in their work and there exists many examples of their blunt criticism of American economic and cultural influences in literature and the press. Later, in the 1970s, protests against the Vietnam war, anti-American events and anti-NATO happenings took place in Gallerí SÚM and in the public space. [249]

It might be argued that Roth possibly lived Reykjavík as a frontier, or a *contact zone* as theorized by Mary Louise Pratt. Pratt uses the term contact zone to "refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations." [250] In this context, I would suggest that the transculturation taking place in Iceland during the postwar and Cold war period, characterized by the tensions arising from the presence of the American military base and the penetration of American consumer culture, was also an important node in so far as its cultural and economic dominance produced social and political frictions and was constantly debated. This situation may well have accelerated Roth's research into popular culture and his use of vernacular and commercial materials, such as postcards and comics, and the deployment of everyday materials, appropriated into his work. Roth was principally interested in the rawness of the urban environment, printing processes, maps and touristic representations, and expressed his interest in Icelandic nature largely through these already mediated representations. Through all his prolific production, Iceland remains present as a physical place and his Iceland experiences are exemplified in several works for which local visual culture and language provided the raw material.

Roth's *Postkarten an Emmett Williams*, an important series of overpainted tourist postcards showing the emblematic North Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula Arctica*), in various sites and positions, can be interpreted as direct examples of both *appropriation* and *détournement* of stereotypical representations.[251] Appropriation and/or détournement? Appropriation as an art historical term has been described as: "The direct duplication,

[249] The 1973 anti-NATO exhibition in Gallerí SÚM and other anti-war manifestations are discussed in Heiða Björk Árnadóttir, *The Conceptual, the Romantic, and the Nonhuman: The SÚM Group and the Emergence of Contemporary Art in Iceland, 1965–1978*. PhD dissertation (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2019), 258–62.
[250] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London/New York: Routledge, 2005/1992), 6.
[251] *Postkarten an Emmett Williams* (Postcards to Emmett Williams), after 1975. Synthetic polymer paint on postcards, 29 cards, each 10.5 x 14.7 cm. Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg; *Roth Time. A Dieter Roth Retrospective*, 123–24.

copying or incorporation of an image (painting, photograph, etc.) by another artist who represents it in a different context, thus completely altering its meaning and questioning notions of originality and authenticity."[252] The term has recently been scrutinized by art historian Arnd Schneider who argues, "appropriation […] is more than one-to-one transferral; its hermeneutic potential implies a resignification of meaning against the background of a structural imbalance between what (or who) is appropriated, and what (or who) is alienated."[253]

The Situationists argued that the spectacle constitutes the entirety of modern capitalist society, incorporating everything from production to consumption.[254] *Détournement* was defined by the French situationist Guy Debord as an avant-garde gesture. "Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can be used to make new combinations."[255]

Here the puffin refers to an invented national symbol turned into a mass-produced touristic commodity. The selected card possibly suggests that the bird contains a personal message or a sign from Roth to his friend, as the *détournement* seems to be an ironic gesture rather than an "issue of resistance to the spectacle."[256] The tourist postcard is *détourné*, as an idiosyncratic signifier and turned into a valuable "authentic" artwork through the mechanisms of appropriation.

But why the puffin? The puffin selects its home in rough outposts of the North Atlantic and as many tourists and travellers before him, Roth was drawn to this bird and its commodification might have prompted for a re-contextualisation. Environmentalist Jamie Lorimer observes that the bird's resemblance to the penguin provides it with some human attributes that gives it the quality of in-betweenness, or awkwardness.[257] "It is not human but human-like as his various names indicate: a brother, a monk, a clown."[258] The

[252] Herbert Read and Nikos Stangos, *Thames and Hudson Dictionary of Art and Artists* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994/2012), 19.
[253] Arnd Schneider, "On Appropriation. A Critical Reappraisal of the Concept and its Application in Global Art Practices," *Social Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (2003): 215–29, p. 225.
[254] Discussed in Julian Eagles, "The Spectacle and Détournement: The Situationists Critique of Modern Capitalist Society," *Critique*, 40, no. 2 (2012): 179–98, p. 189.
[255] Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, "A User's Guide to Détournement" (1956), in Ken Knabb (ed.), *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006 [1981]), 14–21, p. 15.
[256] Julian Eagles, "The Spectacle and Détournement," 189.
[257] Jamie Lorimer, "On Auks and Awkwardness," *Environmental Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2014): 195–205.
[258] As discussed in Katrín Anna Lund, Katla Kjartansdóttir, and Kristín Loftsdóttir, "'Puffin Love': Performing and creating Artic landscapes in Iceland through souvenirs," *Tourist Studies* 18, no. 2 (2018): 142–58.

Latin name, *Fratercula*, derives from how their black and white feathers resemble a monastic robe. This monastic association is also known in Icelandic and the name *prófastur* (i.e., priest) is commonly used for the bird. The puffin is also called "clown of the sea", referring to its clumsiness and the colourful beak. Apart from its awkwardness and its comical nicknames, Lorimer points out its alterity in the world of birds and its habit of nesting on remote islands. "Auks feed in the sea and only come to land to breed."[259] As Lorimer remarks "They were mobile and liminal, moving between earth, sea and sky. They defied categorization as terrestrial or aquatic, animal or bird. They would appear from the sky or ocean to take up waddling residence on land; fodder for both metaphor and superstition."[260]

The crossing of cultural borders through tourism is the most active crossing in contemporary Western society, but Roth established his family in Iceland and took up Icelandic citizenship. In that way, the puffin seemingly corresponded to his own personal alienated situation. But also, the island became itself a creative metaphor. This is present in his interest for Icelandic postcards as well as in his multiple iconographic and material versions of the theme in the series *Insel* (1968).[261] Another example of this practice, can be identified in his series *Surtsey* (1973–1974), consisting of eighteen prints (collotype) showing the island of Surtsey that emerged in 1963 in an explosive volcanic eruption originating from the ocean floor.[262] Personification of nature has a strong tradition in Icelandic language and this phenomenon also caught Roth's attention.

The prints are based on several stages of mixed-media rendition of a well-known aerial view published and sold as a postcard.[263] The most interesting aspect of this ingenious appropriation is how Roth plays with the two historical genres in painting. He turns the aerial view into a still life (*nature morte*) by representing the erupting volcano literally as hot food on a serving dish, posed on a table covered with a chequered tablecloth.[264] For Roth, the landscape genre was enemy number one as it represents a

[259] Lorimer, "On Auks and Awkwardness," 199.
[260] Ibid, 200.
[261] Sammlung Birgit und Ulf Bischoff. A reproduction is in *Roth Time. A Dieter Roth Retrospective*, 109–11.
[262] This new volcanic island that emerged in November 1963 was given the name Surtsey, but Surtur is a destructive god of fire in Norse mythology (*Völuspá*).
[263] Original photo by Garðar Pálsson. Postcard no. 36 published by Sólarfilma.
[264] Dieter Roth, *Surtsey*, 1973–74. 18 prints in cassette; collotype printing (1–8 colours) on white paper on cardboard, 50 x 65 cm each, edition of 70; Discussed in Marion Daniel, "Dieter Roth, Processing the World," in *Dieter Roth, Processing the World* (Frac Bretagne 14 December 2013 – 9 March 2014), ed.

romantic depiction of natural scenery, one of the principal genres of Western art. However, the series *Surtsey*, is evidence of a symbolic, rather than a mimetic approach to the genre. Here nature is ready for consumption, but at the same time the volcanic island is a *lieu d'absolu* – a stark place in the process of being created. A symbol of alterity, and as such, related to romantic ideas that Europeans projected on Iceland, the volcanic island of Hell.

Roth's exploration of other Icelandic cultural material such as maps, newspapers, architecture, texts, express his profound relationship to the place. His interest in the island as a motif and a metaphor recurred in his multiple variations created in the late 1960s onwards. These visual interpretations of the island recall how the French cultural geographer Joël Bonnemaison defined islandness: "Islandness is separation from the rest of the world and thus describes a space that is not part of space, a place that is not part of time, a naked place, an absolute place."[265] First seen in Roth's portfolio *Unterhaltungsmusik 1* (Popular Music 1, 1966) and followed in 1967 by his 120 variations of *Kleine Insel* commissioned as Christmas gifts.[266] These *Insel* series are formless pressings and crushings, made of bread, milk, plaster, nails, oil, and other materials, but they look like mimetic renditions of natural landscape. Roth describes them (all made of "organic, rotting materials") as evoking "a kind of wistfulness",[267] while in the aquatint series *Kleine Insel* (*Small Islands,* 1973), the island is a definite place, with contours akin to old maps of Iceland and similar graphic approach is activated in *Medium Sized Island* (1973). A map of Iceland is also the formal base of the work *Iceland from the Air* (1970).[268] [Fig. 4].

For Roth, Iceland functions as an *Insulæ fortunatæ*, that is, a distant trading post in the far North, but also as a heterotopia, both real and unreal.[269] This islandness could thus be interpreted as expressing his personal alienation as an artist and as a human being. It is what Michel Foucault called a heterotopia; a place that differs from the spaces that

Marion Daniel (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2014), 17–31. Exhibition catalogue. A portfolio is in the collection of MoMA: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/91899.

[265] Joël Bonnemaison, "Vivre dans l'île. Une approche de l'îléité océanienne," *L'Espace géographique* 2 (1990): 119–25, p. 119.

[266] *Roth Time. A Dieter Roth Retrospective*, 106.

[267] *Roth Time*. *A Dieter Roth Retrospective,* 106–7.

[268] Dieter Roth, *Iceland from the Air*, screenprint on masonite, 1970. Yale University Art Gallery.

[269] Islands "as locales of desire" are discussed in Godfrey Baldacchino, "The Lure of the Island: A Spatial Analysis of Power Relations," *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* 1, no. 2 (2012): 55–62.

surround it, suspending the established schemata ordering the space-time order, and thus experienced aesthetically.[270]

In Iceland, Roth also created works that might be considered as isolated documentary projects, conducted over a long period of time. His visual interests still focused more on the manmade and the urban rather than landscape. These are represented in his well-known series *The Reykjavík Slides* (1973–75/1990–93). In this work, the stated intention was to document every single house and building in the capital.[271] A similar approach, based on long-term visual documentation, is found in the series *Seyðisfjörður Slides* (1988–1995), where each house in the small village was photographed twice: in winter 1988 and summer 1995 (including 886 slides). Other "memory" series keeping track of time and places are *Gas Stations and Hotels, Road 1, Iceland, 1988–2005*.[272] All these function as inventories, diaries, and as documentations manifesting Roth's close connection with Iceland as a place where the distinction between the urban and the rural is conflated in a personal material archive, where he, the nomad, the wanderer, is he primal actor.

4.5. Early Networks

However, despite Roth's multiple engagements in various networks, and collaborative shows with American and European Fluxus artists, it was only in the spring of 1965 that the Icelandic public first viewed a Fluxus performance. Nam June Paik and cellist Charlotte Moorman (1933–1991) were invited to Iceland by composer Atli Heimir Sveinsson (1938–2019), who had studied with Karlheinz Stockhausen in Cologne. The performance (with *Robot 345*) was advertised as a concert by the experimental music society Musica Nova and created a scandal among music lovers in Reykjavík, appalled at the eroticization of classical instruments and explicit body performance.[273] Described in detail in the press, journalists claimed that the public was outraged by the "male strip-

[270] Knut Ove Eliassen, "The Archives of Michel Foucault," in *The Archive in Motion: New Conceptions of the Archive in Contemporary Thought and New Media Practices*, ed. Eivind Rosaak (Oslo: Novus, 2010), 29–53.
[271] *Reykjavík Slides* 1973–1975 and 1990–1993. A work composed of approximately 31,000 slides, showing the distinctive character of Icelandic twentieth-century architecture. Shot by artist Pétur Magnússon and Roth's sons.
[272] Jessica Morgan and Björn Roth (eds.), *Material time/Work Time/Life Time*, 120–21. The installation of the work was finalised post-mortem by Björn Roth.
[273] "Skrípalæti trúða í Lindarbæ," *Morgunblaðið*, May 19, 1965, 27.

tease" enacted during the concert, especially when the artist Nam June Paik pulled down his pants and turned his bare bottom toward the audience.[274] This was also the year of the creation of the avant-garde group *SÚM* and its first shows in Reykjavík.[275] The catalogue of their first show, *SÚM I,* was designed by Roth in the form of a folded poster printed on both sides. It received international attention through Roth's network, showcasing his use of archives such as personal photographs and vernacular documents. However, it did not directly represent the works in the show. Instead, the poster includes family photographs, photographs of the artists participating in the show, bills, American comic strips, Roth's drawings, and a photograph showing one of Árnason's transformable sculptures.

The works exhibited in this first SÚM show were in fact more inspired by the encounter with Pop Art than by Fluxus. Sigurjón Jóhannsson (b. 1939) and Hreinn Friðfinnsson (b. 1943) had earlier that year spent some months in London, where Roth introduced them to Richard Hamilton (1922–2011).[276] One of the works in the show was an appropriated ready-made, a simple broken door turned into a painted object, enigmatically titled: *Stopping by at Jón Gunnar's place* (*Komið við hjá Jóni Gunnar*i).[277] It could be characterized as a *combine*, that is, both a painting and a sculpture as invented by Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008). Another combine, possibly a response to Robert Rauschenberg's stuffed Angora goat, the now famous *Monogram* (1955–59), purchased in 1964 by the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, might be mirrored in Þórður Ben Sveinsson's, taxidermized calf titled: *Good morning!* On its back were placed two identical photographs of a cute kitten, and a plant posed beside the calf.[278]

[274] Unnur Arnórsdóttir, "'Bossa-Nova'!!!,"*Tíminn*, May 20, 1965, 13.
[275] The SÚM group was a loose collective of Icelandic artists founded in 1965 by Jón Gunnar Árnason, Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Haukur Dór Sturluson (b.1940), and Sigurjón Jóhannsson. The group was active from 1965–1975 and organised several exhibitions with Icelandic and foreign avant-garde. Gallerí Súm was a separate entity run by the group from 1969 to 1978.
[276] Hamilton and Roth started corresponding in 1962 and that was the beginning of their long collaboration. Dieter Roth and Richard Hamilton, *Collaborations: Relations – Confrontations* (London & Porto: Hansjörg Mayer & Fundação de Serralves, 2003).
[277] Hreinn Friðfinsson, *Komið við hjá Jóni Gunnari*, 1965. Wood, 200 x 172,5cm. National Gallery of Iceland. https://www.sarpur.is/Adfang.aspx?AdfangID=1639425
[278] Photograph published in *The Nordic '60s*, 248.

4.6. In and Out of Amsterdam

In 2009 the Museum of Modern Art in New York produced an exhibition entitled *In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960–1976*. It brought together works by ten European and American artists "active intermittently in Amsterdam during the 1960s and early 1970s to explore the city as a critical nexus for artistic exchange"[279] Unfortunately, this selection limited the story to the usual happy few, and most of the foreign artists living, working, and travelling artists in and out of Amsterdam were relegated to the background. Unsurprisingly, only two women were included: the German artists Charlotte Posenenske (1930–1985) and Hanne Darboven (1941–2009).

As the art historian and curator Christophe Cherix observed: "Amsterdam became one of the first European cities, along with Düsseldorf and Wiesbaden, to host, by 1963, Happenings and performances of experimental music, as well as Fluxus events. Moreover, numerous international artists groups, among them CoBrA, the Situationist International, the German Zero group (together with its Dutch offshoot, the Nul group) […] found in Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum fertile ground in which to develop new ideas about art and contemporary culture."[280] Amsterdam was termed as "a hotbed for Conceptual art" and an important host city for non-Dutch artists.[281] However, "[e]merging Dutch artists […] did not necessarily share this perception of a vibrant cultural atmosphere. Dibbets [Jan Dibbets (b. 1941)], for example, regarded the capital as a provincial city."[282] In this respect, Arjun Appadurai's theory of "locality as primarily relational and contextual rather than a scalar or spatial"[283] is a useful frame for discussing the networks and relationships among Dutch, Icelandic, and other foreign artists in Reykjavík and Amsterdam.

At least a hundred foreign artists are reported to have been working in Amsterdam in 1970.[284] Experimental artist-run spaces, art publications, happenings, concerts, and other events encouraged an artistic culture fostered by Holland's economic prosperity that

---

[279] Glenn D. Lowry, "Director's Foreword," in *In & Out of Amsterdam. Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960–1976* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 7–8, p. 7.
[280] Christophe Cherix, "Greetings from Amsterdam," in *In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art 1960–1976*, 13–22, p. 15.
[281] Cherix, "Preface," 9–12, p. 9.
[282] Cherix, "Greetings from Amsterdam," 19.
[283] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*. *Cultural Dimension of Globalization* (Mineapolis: Minesota Press, 1996), 178.
[284] Camiel van Winkel et al., *Conceptual Art in The Netherlands and Belgium 1965–1975. Artists, Collectors, Galleries, Documents, Exhibitions, Events* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2020), 88.

provided artists with government grants regardless of nationality. "A mix of artists stemming from such diverse countries as Colombia, Mexico, Iceland and Israel all established many contacts with Dutch artists. Artists in those days did not feel divided on the base of nationality or cultural background."[285] The city thus became a melting pot of diverse artistic practices, many of them produced by non-Western-European nationals.

Following Roth's advice, Sigurður Guðmundsson moved to the Netherlands in 1963.[286] After a stint in the open Academie '63 in Haarlem, he moved frequently between Reykjavík and Holland. Inspired by his experience with the SÚM Gallery (established in 1969), Guðmundsson became active in the progressive gallery scene in Amsterdam, co-founding an international multimedia art space, the *In-Out Center* that operated from 1972 to 1974 in collaboration with Hreinn Friðfinnsson, and their Latin American colleagues Miguel-Ángel Cárdenas (1934–2015), Raul Marroquin (b. 1948) and Ulises Carrión (1941–1989) as well as the Dutch artists Hetty Huisman, Pieter Laurens Mol and Gerrit Jan de Rook.

As newcomers in the multicultural art scene in the Netherlands, Icelandic artists, like their South American colleagues, were making claims for inclusion. The creation of the In-Out Center was a step in this process of assimilation. It was one of the first cooperatives created by foreign artists in the Netherlands with its own gallery, attracting publics and artists of diverse cultural backgrounds, some of whose works commented on Dutch art and society from their cultural perspective. The In-Out Center was a historically important non-profit independent artist space, and from 1972 to 1974 it was an influential platform for new art forms.[287] These included performances, video art, conceptual art and artists' books, well before they gained access to institutions such as the Stedelijk Museum. Still, the In-Out Center passed unnoticed by the Dutch dailies and the specialized art press.[288] However, this marginalization of foreign artists in the Netherlands did not prevent other new initiatives. In 1975 Carrión opened the pioneering

[285] Christine Delhaye, "Immigrants' Artistic Practices in Amsterdam, 1970–2007: A Political Issue of Inclusion and Exclusion," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34, no. 8 (2008): 1301–21, p. 1310.
[286] Sigurður Guðmundsson, interviewed by the author in Amsterdam, April 23, 2013.
[287] Christophe Cherix, "Greetings from Amsterdam," 18.
[288] Sebastián López, "Identity: Reality or Fiction?," in *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory*, eds. A. Rasheed, C. Sean, and S. Ziauddin (London: Continuum, 2002), 137–45, p. 140.

artist-run bookshop and gallery Other Books and So, which operated in Amsterdam from 1975 to 1978.[289]

Art historians Jan van Adrichem and Tineke Reijnders have observed how progressive galleries such as the In-Out Center fulfilled a very specific and important function of signalling new currents and presenting the new art to the public.[290] Reijnders points out how In-Out Center represented new forms of media (performances, artists books, mail art, etc.) that the Stedelijk Museum did not present until years later. She argues that In-Out Center inspired Wies Smals "indirectly" to set up De Appel in 1975, as well as Carrión's multi-functional artist-run bookshop and gallery Other Books and So.[291] In-Out Center as well as Other Books and So might be said to have functioned as "in-between space" that is cultural spaces operating to propel "postcolonial artists" from local into global institutions of art as defined by Homi K. Bhabha; "through which the post-colonial artist must pass before he or she becomes a fully recognized historical subject."[292]

4.7. In and Out of SÚM

The SÚM group rapidly expanded.[293] It is notable that women were almost absent not only from the SÚM group, but rarely invited to exhibit with the group or in the Gallerí SÚM. In this early-feminist period, it was easy to assume that the vocation "artist" -- especially avant-gardist artist was synonymous with masculinity. Writer and artist Guðbergur Bergsson (1932–2023), member of the group, gave a more explicit explanation, some years later. He claimed (in his sarcastic manner) that the founders were categorically against women's adhesion and "had a policy similar to that of a white

[289] Christine Delhaye, "Immigrants' Artistic Practices in Amsterdam, 1970–2007."
[290] Jan Van Adrichem, "Progressive Galleries in the 1960s and 1970s: Riekje Swart, Art & Project and Helen van de Meij," in *Positioning the Art Gallery. The Amsterdam Gallery World in an International Context*, eds. Noor Mertens and Astrid Vorstermans (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2012), 55–93, p. 55; Tineke Reijnders, "Ephemeral and Consistent: The Artists' Initiative in Amsterdam," in *Positioning the Art Gallery: The Amsterdam Gallery World in an International Context*, eds. Noor Mertens and Astrid Vorstermans (Amstedam: Valiz, 2012), 151–69, p. 153.
[291] Reijnders, "Ephemeral and Consistent: The Artists' Initiative in Amsterdam," 153.
[292] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and NY: Routledge, 1994), 1–2.
[293] Gunnar Kvaran (ed.), *SÚM 1965–1972* (Reykjavík: Listasafn Reykjavíkur – Kjarvalsstaðir, 1989), 129–40. The group included: Arnar Herbertsson, Gylfi Gíslason, Guðbergur Bergsson, Haukur Dór, Hildur Hákonardóttir, Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Jón Gunnar Árnason, Kristján Guðmundsson, Magnús Tómasson, Ólafur Gíslason, Róska, Sigurður Guðmundsson, Sigurjón Jóhannsson, Tryggvi Ólafsson, Vilhjálmur Bergsson, Þórður Ben Sveinsson. Elísabet Gunnarsdóttir (secretary of the group).

University in the United States regarding negroes, allowing only one to enrol."[294] Here Bergsson, alludes to the Yoko Ono and John Lennon famous pop song "Woman Is the Nigger of the World" (1972). Such discriminatory and sexist attitudes towards women artists were expressed in private correspondence between individual artists of the SÚM group, but also openly in art reviews of the time.[295]

The *SÚM III* exhibition that opened in September 1969 in Gallerí SÚM in Reykjavík displayed for the first time in Iceland an important selection of works by international Fluxus artists such as Addi Köepcke (1928–1977), Ben Vautier (b. 1935), Daniel Spoerri (b.1930), Emmett Williams, George Brecht (1926–2008), Joseph Beuys (1921–1986), Robert Filliou, and Richard Hamilton.[296] The works were mostly easily transported multiples, such as Joseph Beuys's *Intuition* (1968), a simple box of wood, now kept in the collection of the Living Art Museum.[297]

Hildur Hákonardóttir (b. 1938) and Róska (Ragnhildur Óskarsdóttir) were the only Icelandic women exhibiting with the group.[298] Róska was politically active both in Iceland and in Italy and spent most of her adult life in Rome during the so-called Years of Lead, marked by social tensions and police violence. Her work took its distance from her male counterparts in the SÚM group through her activism, gender-oriented approach, and her use of texts and political slogans. Her important solo exhibition in Reykjavík in 1967, and her contribution to *SÚM III*, stirred the restricted Icelandic art world because of its direct political content, an aesthetic that sprang from Róska's direct participation in the riots and demonstrations in Italy.[299]

---

[294] "Einnig var leitast við að laða konur í félagið. Það mætti harðri andstöðu "frumkjarnans" sem hafði svipaða stefnu og tíðkaðist þá í háskólum hvítra manna í Bandaríkjunum varðandi að leyfa aðeins einum að innritast." Guðbergur Bergsson, "Andinn sem ríkti í SÚM," in G. Kvaran (ed.), *SÚM 1965–1972*, 105–14, p. 110.

[295] Róska is regularly addressed by Árnason, the founder of the SÚM group, as being cute and angry (Private Archive). Kjartan Guðjónsson, "Rótækir listamenn – eða óróttækir," in *Þjóðviljinn*, September 26, 1969, 5; See also Benedikt Hjartarson, "'A Furious Girl from Rome' – Róska and the Mythography of Avant-Garde Bohemianism," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950–1975*, eds. Tania Ørum and J. Olsson (Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 2016), 804–17.

[296] *SÚM III*, exhibition catalogue (Reykjavík: Gallerí SÚM, 1969).

[297] Joseph Beuys, *Intuition* (1968), multiple of wood with pencil additions (30 x 20.9 x 5.8 cm). Produced by Edition VICE-Versand, Remscheid, Germany. https://sarpur.is/Adfang.aspx?AdfangID=577306

[298] Róska was invited into the group in 1967. During this first year of the Gallerí SÚM in 1969, the group organised several solo shows: Sigurður Guðmundsson, Tryggvi Ólafsson, Jón Gunnar Árnason, Kristján Guðmundsson, Magnús Tómasson, and three group shows (SÚM II, SÚM III and an exhibition of Dutch CoBrA artists in co-operation with the Dutch Ministry of Culture, as well as performative events with Kristján Guðmundsson and Þórður Ben. In *SÚM 1965–1972*, 143–144.

[299] Róska arrived from Róm to participate in the exhibition SÚM III with a work called: *Student's and Worker's Movement in Italy* produced in collaboration with her husband, the filmmaker Manrico

Hákonardóttir was also a political artist and an active feminist in Iceland. She addresses issues of work, class, patriarchy, sexuality and gender in her works where she often juxtaposes images and texts, sometimes creating storyboards she turns into woven or knitted images and objects.[300] The work *Úr sögu mannsins* (*From Human History*), created for her 1971 solo show in Gallerí SÚM, consists of 6 panels. She knitted six penises of different sizes and colours: each fixed on a cardboard. The first is brown, superposed on a handwritten text discussing the sacrifices related to Freyr, the Norse god of fertility and his dwarf-bore Gullinbursti (Gold Mane). The seccond penis is fixed on a drawing showing a woman's profile, the third is fixed on a black and white tourist vista showing the fountain of Neptune in the Piazza della Signoria, Florence. The fourth is violet and juxtaposed with a blue graphic print representing Alexander the Great; the fifth is orange juxtaposed with a black and white photograph showing a worker drilling into the ground, and the sixth penis is black, attached to two superposed unidentified press photographs both representing military violence; naked prisoners facing a wall, as if waiting to be shot. Each panel seems to represent a particular patriarchal institution: mythology, mariage, art, industry, racism and war.[301] [Fig. 5].

The *SÚM III* catalogue was intended to become an important instrument of international communication and through Guðmundsson's Dutch contacts, the group was invited to exhibit in Stedelijk's Museum Fodor in Amsterdam. The *SÚM IV* exhibition opened March 20, 1971. Seventeen Icelandic and foreign artists are listed in the catalogue (all male).[302] Róska was the only woman artist that participated, and the only woman registered as a SÚM member of the 21 names listed in 1971, but, her work is not mentioned in the catalogue.[303] According to Carlo, Róska's assistant and close friend, her

Pavalettoni. Einar Guðmundsson, "Barist gegn afturhaldi og tregðu," *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, March 11, 1989, 8–10.

[300] Sigrún Hrólfsdóttir, "Red Thread. Hildur Hákonardóttir Weaver," in *Hildur Hákonardóttir. Rauður þráður/Red Thread*, eds. Ólöf K. Sigurðardóttir and Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir (Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum, 2023), 173–223.

[301] Hildur Hákonardóttir, *Úr sögu mannsins* (*From the History of Man*), 1971, knitted wool and wood, 6 units 18 x 18 x 1 cm, 20,9 x 17 x 0,8 cm, 20 x 15 x 1 cm, 24 x 21 x 1 cm, 25,5 x 19 x 1 cm, 20 x 20 x 1cm. Living Art Museum, Reykjavík.

[302] *SÚM IV, 20 maart t/m 25 april* 1971 (*Amsterdam*: Museum Fodor, 1971). Artists: Arnar Herbertsson, Emil Schult, George Brecht, Guðbergur Bergsson, Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Kristján Guðmundsson, Magnús Pálsson, Magnús Tómasson, Johannes Geuer, Jón Gunnar Árnason, Pieter Holstein, Robert Filliou, Sigurður Guðmundsson, Sigurjón Jóhannsson, Tryggvi Ólafsson, Vilhjálmur Bergsson, Young Voss, Þórður Ben Sveinsson.

[303] *Nordiskt 60-tal: uppbrott och konfrontation*. *The Nordic '60s. Upheaval a Confrontation 1960–1972* (Helsinki: Nordiskt Konstcentrum, 1991). Document reproduced on p. 228.

participation in the Fodor show, consisted of creating a series of small explosions in an adjacent space accorded to performances.[304]

The *SÚM IV* exhibition was planned to be an important breakthrough for the Icelandic artists and for the group SÚM. They had never been given this kind of visibility in a major art venue. They arrived in Amsterdam from Copenhagen, London, Madrid, Paris, Rome, Germany and Holland, as only two of the then 20 SÚM members lived in Iceland. Their respective European residencies and migratory trajectories are shown on a geographic map inside the catalogue cover underlining their transnational status. "They have all lived and studied abroad: in Rome, Madrid, Limoges, Amsterdam, Düsseldorf, Copenhagen, Lund and Stockholm." These locations are indicated visually on the map, but not discussed further in the catalogue. The artists are, however, introduced as a homogenic group considering "Iceland as their centre." [305] The role of Dieter Roth as a catalyser, described in the introduction written by Dutch art historian and co-curator Gijs van Tuyl is, however, downplayed, and the historical importance of SÚM is consolidated by saying that the group introduced kinetic and pop-art into Iceland, when in fact Dieter Roth and Jón Gunnar Árnason exhibited kinetic and transformable art in Ásmundarsalur already in 1961, as previously indicated. Van Tuyl praised the international relevance of the works, while the Icelandic press speculated over the personal significance of the event for the individual Icelandic artists in such an important institutional context.[306]

However, this exceptional show of Icelandic contemporary art in Amsterdam was described in a slightly comic mode by the Copenhagen based SÚM artist Tryggvi Ólafsson, art critic for the Icelandic daily *Þjóðviljinn*. He characterizes the exhibition as a manifestation of Icelandic provincialism, affirming the alterity or difference of the Icelandic artists by calling them "children of other environment," in contrast to the foreign participants. These are characterised as belonging to "the technological nervous systems of the industrial spaces."[307] Ólafsson also signals the melancholic mood of Friðfinnsson's

[304] My interview with Carlo in Rome, March 2021. He installed the devices and technically organised the performance.
[305] Gijs van Tuyl, "Introduction." in *SÚM IV* (*Amsterdam*: Museum Fodor, 1971), no page numbers.
[306] *SB, "*Súmmarar opna í Stedelijk í Amsterdam: Koma í kjölfarið á Matisse og Picasso," *Vísir*, March 24, 1971, 1; "Íslenzk nútímalist – Súm 4 stórsýning í Amsterdam," *Þjóðviljinn*, February 10, 1971, 12; Ari and Ásgeir, *"*SÚM IV í Amsterdam," *Þjóðviljinn*, February 23, 1971, 6.
[307] Tryggvi Ólafsson, "Frásögn af SÚM IV í Amsterdam (ekki algildur gæðadómur)," *Þjóðviljinn*, April 28, 1971, 6–7 and 9, here p. 7.

and Guðmundsson's conceptual works and reads these as representations of certain *Icelandicness* – as poetic time /space-based contemplations.

Ólafsson seems to have deliberately avoided direct references to Icelandic culture in his own works. He addresses several political topics in works such as *Gastarbeider*, 1970 (mixed media, 183 x 122 cm) and in a photo collage called *Niks biezonders (Nothing Special*, 1970), showing riots (probably in Vietnam). The topic of colonialism and whiteness is also addressed in some of his works. [Fig. 6]. This confrontation between cosmopolitanism and provincialism is not discussed in the SÚM III catalogue, but provincialism and *Heimat* are ironically twisted in a series of large black and white photographs by Sigurður Guðmundsson.[308] One, sometimes titled *Heimþrá* (Homesickness) – sometimes *Uitzicht* (*View*, 1970–1971),[309] shows the artist and his brother standing together on a shore. They show their profile to the viewer, pointing at the distant horizon. Both are wearing peculiar homemade props attached to their head, that look like speech bubbles coming out of their head and mouth. These homemade thought balloons steam like clouds over their heads. Traditionally, in comic stripes, thought bubbles have a fluffy cloud-form and a tail consisting of a sequence of small bubbles. Here they are material constructions – one with the contours of an Icelandic map, and the name Iceland has been written inside on the photographic surface. One bubble says: *Somewhere there* and the other: *It's there.*

In another version of the same theme *Horizontal Thoughts* (1970–1971), the two men similarly sit close together on the shore, their backs turned to the viewer, and they stare into the distant horizon. They are wearing the thought bubble headgear, that gives the impression of floating over their heads. [Fig. 7].

Each photograph is constructed as an isolated single frame, identical to these often used in comic books. By employing simple graphic signs, or cartoon symbols, Guðmundsson mocks the mystic of landscape photography and instead activates other semiotic strategies of storytelling, those associated with juvenile mass culture. Enlarged and printed in large exhibition formats that conflict with the banality of the image, and its

[308] These are now considered to be a part of his photographic series *Situations*. The central concern of most of these works was the (tense) relation between the personal inside world (mostly visualized by the artist himself) and the impersonal outside world, full of strict rules, geometry and natural laws.
[309] The work was later given the name *Útsýni* (View). Gunnar Kvaran (ed.), *SÚM 1965–1972*, 76.

landscape. It is a landscape degree zero, just a grey horizon, of no particular place or possible place and devoid of interest.

Speech and thought balloons have been defined by Will Eisner as a "desperation device" as "an artificial means of capturing that which does not have visual form."[310] The most informative part of a balloon is its written content, usually a character's utterances or thoughts. Yet balloons also communicate other meanings via their shape, colour, location, size, and the orientation of their tails or thought bubbles. They may contain pictograms, complex images, stand-alone punctuation marks, or non-mimetic flourishes. According to Eisner, balloons can communicate meaning in several ways: by the shape of the balloon; by the text contained in the balloon; and by the formal characteristics of the text. "The tailed balloon is one of the most defining visual conventions of the comics medium. One need only insert a stereotypical balloon-with-tail into an image—whether an advert, a photograph, a film still, or even a piece of high art—to turn that image into a comics panel."[311] However, here the use of the balloons dislocates the visual form, a frequent strategy in conceptual art, fostering "reflective thinking."

Guðmundsson not only used the semiotics of the comics as a visual language in his photographic series, but he also employed the bubbles as props in performances before audiences.[312] The bubbles might be read as melancholic self-reflections, expression of the artist's physical existence or state of mind. The irony, expressed in these works through the forms of the thought balloons, takes homesickness as a more complex signifier than a simple longing for the homeland. Or, as Guðmundson explains: "But I am, I must admit, frequently homesick for the beautiful experiences I enjoyed during my journey through the landscape of art."[313]

In *Horizontal Thoughts*, the two men seem to be contemplating the *beyond*. A personal idiosyncratic narrative like that expressed in *Homesick*, where the two young men isolated on the shore, are supposedly daydreaming about their home country.[314] The

[310] Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (Tamarac, Flor.: Poorhouse Press, 1985), 26.
[311] Charles Forceville, Tony Veale, and Kurt Feyaerts, "Balloonics: The Visuals of Balloons in Comics," in *The Rise and Reason of Comics and Graphic Literature: Critical Essays on the Form*, eds. Joyce Goggin and Dan Hassler-Forest (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2010), 56–73.
[312] Sigurður Guðmundsson performing in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1971. Photographs showing how Guðmundsson used the bubbles as props are published in *The Nordic '60s* (133) and in Gunnar Kvaran (ed.), *SÚM 1965–1972*, 77.
[313] Sigurður Guðmundsson in *Sleeping Beauty*, 63.
[314] Tryggvi Ólafsson articulates this feeling of distance and longing for a place in Ólafsson, "Frásögn af SÚM IV í Amsterdam (ekki algildur gæðadómur)," *Þjóðviljinn,* April 28, 1971, 6–7.

potential of irony to subvert nationalist tropes, as already discussed in connection with Roth's *détournement* of Icelandic tourist postcards, is likewise mobilized in Guðmundsson's photographic series by its ingenious adaption of comic strips.

As the philosopher Linda Hutcheon argued in her important work, *Irony*, irony is defined as engaging the difference between an explicit, stated meaning and an implicit, unsaid one, for humorous or contentious purposes. However, because of its reliance on implicit meanings, irony is particularly open to differing and contradictory interpretations that collide with one another. Interpreters may disagree on whether statements (e.g., in literary works or everyday conversations) are meant sincerely or ironically. The semantic characteristics of irony have led to discussions about its possible social functions and ambiguities: if there is so much space for differing interpretations, can it be used as an effective communicative strategy?

4.8. Probing Land and Language

The last important *SÚM* exhibition organized in Iceland, *SÚM 1972*, was both as transnational and transitional as were the artworks represented. The exhibition was largely international in scope and formed an important part of the Reykjavík Arts Festival. Fifty-eight artists from sixteen different countries presented approximately two hundred works including paintings, sculptures, installations, performances, films, and slide projections.[315] Needless to say, only five women participated in the show, and two of these, Dorothy Iannone and Helena van der Kraan were the companions of the participating artist: Axel van der Kraan and Dieter Roth.

Different aspects of specific locale or *Icelandicness* were activated in several works featured in the exhibition and the catalogue, illustrating several project-based

[315] SÚM 1972 was divided between three venues in Reykjavík: The Gallerí SÚM, Ásmundarsalur, and performances took place in Lindarbær. List of artists: Alistair Park, Anthony McCall, Arnar Herbertsson, Atli Heimir Sveinsson, Axel van der Kraan, Helena van der Kraan, Barry McCallion, Bas Jan Adler, Ben Vautier, Bernd Löbach-Hinweiser, Bruno Bussmann, Carolee Schneemann, Chris Welch, David Mayor, Dennis Oppenheim, Dieter Roth, Douwe Jan Bakker, Dorothy Iannone, Felipe EhrenBerg, Ferdinand Kriwet, Gabor Attalai, Géza Perneczky, Guðbergur Bergsson, Gylfi Gíslason, Hildur Hákonardóttir, Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Imre Bak, Jónas Tomasson, Janos Urban, John Latham, Jón Gunnar Árnason, Kata Heiskanen, Jörgen Dobloug, Klaus Groh, Kristján Guðmundsson, Marcelle Filliou, Magnús Pálsson, Magnús Tómasson, Michael Gibbs, Mike Parr, Mike Quee, Miroljub Todorovic, Peter Kennedy, Petr Stembera, Pieter Holstein, Richard Kriesche, Robert Filliou, Ronald Louis Anthony Illardo, Sigurður Guðmundsson, Tom Winnet, Tryggvi Ólafsson, Vilhjálmur Bergsson, Vito Acconci, William Louis Sörensen, Wilhelm & Birgit Hein, Wolfgang Kliege, Þórður Ben Sveinsson, Young Voss. *SÚM á Listahátíð í Reykjavík* (Reykjavík: Galerie SÚM, 1972).

works and works based on documentation, mail art and instructions. The historical photographs published on the front and back cover of the SÚM 1972 catalogue depict an old Icelandic turfhouse in Keldur á Rangárvöllum in South Iceland. This interest in ethnographic documentation, including archival photographic material related to landscape, cultural heritage, and rural life, represented an important inclusion of popular vernacular culture into the category of the contemporary. The interest in turfhouses had already been initiated by Hörður Ágústsson in early 1960s and vernacular architecture, became a source of inspiration for architects and artists in the 1970s onwards.[316]

Magnús Pálsson employed photographic documentation taken from a farmer's magazine relating the genealogy of prized rams and other sheep. It depicts the ram *Dvergur 90*, a celebrity and much photographed animal with his eight offsprings (sons) and his owner, the farmer Pálmi Jónsson, Akri, Torfalækjarhreppi. The ram *Dvergur 90*, then six years old, obtained first prize for his descendance and his superb genealogy as detailed in the article.[317] Pálson's work seems to be referring to a certain anthropomorphic ontology that has a long tradition in Icelandic culture. This personification, or anthropomorphisation of animals, particularly the sheep, is a common feature in human geography, literature and popular culture.[318] The sheep is embedded in the landscape as well as the culture, as the writer Halldór Laxness described as an Icelandic characteristic in many of his romans.[319] However, the work, as presented by Pálsson, cannot be disassociated from biopolitics and breeding, another popular subject related to sheep farming as discussed by Snæbjörnsdóttir & Wilson.[320]

---

[316] Hörður Ágústsson, "Fyrirlestrar um torfhús," *Tíminn*, November 11, 1964, 2; ibid, "Af minnisblöðum málara," *Birtingur* 9, no. 1 (1963): 9–25; ibid, "Af minnisblöðum málara," *Birtingur* 9, no. 2 (1963): 20–36; Arndís Árnadóttir and Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir, "Documentation of Vernacular Architecture in Iceland," in *Documentation of Nordic Art*, ed. Charlotte Hanner (München: Saur, 1993), 42–57.

[317] The photographs by Björn Bergmann were originally published in the farmer's journal *Búnaðarritið*, p. 384 and 386. Árni G. Pétursson, Sveinn Hallgrímsson and Egill Bjarnason, "Afkvæmasýningar á sauðfé 1970," *Búnaðarritið* 84, no. 2 (1971): 379–407.

[318] The importance of sheep culture in Iceland is discussed from the point of view of human geography in Karl Benediktsson, "A Stroll through Landscapes of Sheep and Humans," in *Conversations with Landscape*, eds. Karl Benediktsson and Katrín A. Lund (London: Routledge, 2011), 173–91.

[319] Halldór Laxnes, *Innansveitarkrónika* (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1970), 26–27.

[320] In their project, *Feral Attraction*, Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, describe how a small flock of feral sheep that had lived independently of humans for some decades on Mt. Tálkni in an inaccessible part of the Westfjords, was rounded up by a team of men and dogs from the neighbouring communities in October 2009. Observations by local farmers suggested that these sheep possessed some physiological adaptations, including a supposed increase in leg length. Nineteen sheep were caught but five perished as they fell from the towering cliffs. All those captured were taken to slaughter immediately and information concerning their physical changes lost in the process. The incident, and subsequently this work, serve to highlight tensions that surface when our will to categorise and contain meets the will of domestic animals

These local narratives also form the basis for a national identity created by this sense of place and in some instances contextualised within a landscape setting, often related to specific locations. As archeologist Oscar Aldred notes: "these included burial mounds, big stones moved by people, assembly sites (þingstaðir), ruins such as fortifications, smithies, underground passages."[321] One could add natural caves and cairns, elf-rocks and other signs in the landscape.

Such narratives became the subject, the topos, of works like *Álagablettir* (*Sacred and Enchanted Places*) by Hreinn Friðfinnsson (discussed in chapter 3.9).[322] This kind of relational ontology present in many of Friðfinnsson's works could be contextualised with what Aldred describes as *holistic entity*, mentioning that "in the nineteenth century landscape was a holistic entity that included its topography, vegetation as well as its culture through history and archaeology […] lives, routes and geology were tied to the landscape."[323] This holistic approach is activated in Friðfinnsson's work such as *Sheep and Horses of my Nephew* (2001). A series of photographs showing sheep in landscape, images shot by his nephew who now runs the sheep farm where Friðfinnsson grew up.

Danish ethnographer Kirsten Hastrup has also described how Icelandic landscape has been deeply historicized, marked by cultural meaning, and performs local memory. "It is not simply a surface, or a stage upon which people play their social roles; it is part of the social space. It infiltrates practices and makes history. There is, as it were, agency on both sides; the opposition between wilderness and culture dissolves."[324] These analyses, written in 2008, indeed repeat a certain romanticized view of Icelandic culture, still present in the 1970s, that might already belong to the past. Icelanders have mostly abandoned their performative cultural relation to landscape and handed its social relations over to the tourist industry, creating new narratives of *Icelandicity*, as earlier discussed,

---

who transgress the invisible and unspoken boundaries that separate landscapes of domestication and wildness. Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, *Feral Attraction: The Museum of Ghost Ruminants* (Billdal: 248 Publishing, 2019), 34–35.

[321] Oscar Aldred, "The Idea of Landscape in Icelandic Archaeology," *Archaelogia Islandica* 5 (2006): 9–26, p. 10.

[322] The enchanted place is a subject in Icelandic art since early 20th century. See: Jóhannes S. Kjarval, *Álfakirkja (Elf-Church*), 1919, lithography on paper 30 x 43 cm. National Gallery of Iceland.

[323] Aldred, "The Idea of Landscape in Icelandic Archaeology," 12.

[324] Kirsten Hastrup, "Icelandic Topography and the Sense of Identity," in *Nordic Landscapes: Region and Belonging on the Northern Edge of Europe*, eds. Michael Jones and Kenneth R. Olwig (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 53.

even giving new touristic place names, such as Black Beach and Diamond Beach, while the traditional names on the map are Reynisfjara and Fellsfjara.

In the 1972 SÚM exhibition, Douwe Jan Bakker (who later represented Holland at the Venice Biennale in 1978) exhibited *Sketches for Iceland Report* (*Visibility in exile or perception revisited*) from the series: I. Travelling / II. Sound-Earth / Eating Lava / IV. Ecostry / V. 22 Apr. 1972. The work consisted of a photograph showing (on the left) the rugged texture of a lava formation located in Þingvellir, August 14, 1971, and, on the right, a photograph showing a palm holding the moulded paper, presenting a cast of the rugged lava called: *Moulded paper in my Hand*. Haarlem, Netherlands. April 16, 1972. [Fig. 8]

Bakker was an important mentor for many young Icelandic artists. He first visited Iceland in summer 1971 invited to exhibit in Gallerí SÚM with his installation *A Portrait of the Cultural Inventor as a Young Artist*. He encouraged his students to work with their own language, culture and environment and explored traditional vernacular architecture and landscape as a source or basis for his own conceptual investigations, featured them in a series of photographs and bookworks.[325] An example of this ethnographic archival research are the photographic series created by Birgir Andrésson *Eyktarmörk séð frá Hækingsdal í Kjós* (1977).

First made as a bookwork dedicated to Bakker, who sparked Andrésson's interest for vernacular architecture and the relationship between landscape and language. The work is based on landscape photographs Andrésson made in 1976, documenting how landscape was used as to measure time in Iceland, as an agrarian clock. He explains this ancient agrarian tradition: "During the 18th and early-19th centuries there were no clocks in the country of Iceland, except for those owned by officials and some rich farmers. When the sun was shining a system called *eyktarmörk* was used for time measuring (sic). People would know the time by comparing the position of the sun with certain marks in the landscape."[326] This historical and spatial reading of landscape suggests a non-

[325] Douwe Jan Bakker, "Foto's uit Ijsland /Photos from Iceland," *Forum: Voor architecktuur en darmee verbonden Kunsten* 25, no. 2 (November – December 1975), 26–59; Douwe Jan Bakker, *Een vokabulaire beeldveerzameling in het Ijslandse landschap* (Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 1977). Exhibited in State Museum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, Holland, January to February 1978 and in Venice Biennale the same year; "Gallerí tímaritsins," *Svart á hvítu* 2, no. 2 (1978), 36–49, here 37–39.
[326] Birgir Andrésson, *Eyktarmörk séð frá Hækingsdal í Kjós*, Maastricht: Jan Van Eyck Academie, 1977. Quoted in Þröstur Helgason, *Birgir Andrésson. Í íslenskum litum*, 151–152.

modernist sense of place. A phenomenological position that moves beyond the local narrative to encompass a larger sociopolitical, cultural anthropology of time, an ecological sense of nature, revealing Andrésson's engagement with the past and time's embeddedness in the landscape.

Bakker, continued his research into Icelandic culture, studying the relationship between Icelandic language and landscape. His semiotic-based *Vocabulary Sculpture in the Icelandic Landscape* (1976–1977) was defined as a photographic sculpture. It is composed of seventy-two landscape photographs taken in Iceland, each detail paired with the Icelandic noun for a certain topography or feature of landscape. The installation, or the row, gives a view on landscape and language. Each image was identified by the artist as a pronunciation or a form of the Icelandic word describing a characteristic detail in the landscape. [327] In fact, it mimics the form of the mouth's shape when pronouncing each word, as Bakker does in his series *236 Pronounceables*, where the word's pronunciation takes form in an object. Such works are exemplary of what art historian Benjamin H.D. Buchloh calls "mapping of the linguistic onto the perceptual"[328], as argued in his influential text "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of the Administration to the Critique of Institutions."[329]

Another version of Bakker's performative works, also dealing with anti-naturalism as a semiotic riddle, turning landscape into culture, is his 1976 performance *Hringrás bókmenntanna* (Circulation of literature) carried out with some of his Icelandic friends. Here the performers read aloud from the saga *of Njáll,* the performance staged in the landscape where Njáll, one of the main protagonists, lived. The documentation of the action forms a series within which the spatiality of the landscape is integrated into the

[327] First exhibited in State Museum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, Holland, January to February 1978 and in Venice Biennale the same year. "Gallerí tímaritsins," *Svart Á hvítu* 2, no. 2 (1978), 37; Douwe Jan Bakker, *Een vokabulaire beeldveerzameling in het Ijslandse landschap* (Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 1977).
[328] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of the Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter, 1990), 105–43, here p. 113.
[329] This shift is defined by Buchloh as: "Just as the readymade had negated not only figurative representation, authenticity, and authorship while introducing repetition and the series (i.e., the law of industrial production) to replace the studio aesthetic of the handcrafted original, Conceptual Art came to displace even that image of the mass-produced object and its aestheticized forms in Pop Art, replacing an aesthetic of industrial production and consumption with an aesthetic of administrative and legal organization and institutional validation." Buchloh, 119.

viewers movement in the exhibition space.[330] Bakker's innovation in this context was to pose semiotics as a model example of cultural systems, and in his works, he demonstrates how language activates other semiotic systems (such as time) in the landscape.

For the 1972 SÚM exhibition Robert Filliou proposed an intentional sculpture based on the idea of translation between different cultures. He described project thus: "Summer 1972, I intend to start translating all the names of all the people of Iceland – in English first, in Chinese later, with the help of [his friend] Takako.

1) group all the names of the 250.000 Icelanders (+-) in common 1st names – as there are no last names on the island – a few 1000's probably.

2) Translations.

3) eventually, a tower bearing all the names of all the Icelanders in English and Chinese to be built at the tip of Iceland, or on a small island, for example before reaching, say Reykjavík."[331] Here Filliou addresses Icelanders as a homogenic "simple" group composed of "brave, beautiful, poetic people." [332]

Other works in the exhibition were likewise related to conceptual, performative, eco- and land art, including works by the Americans Dennis Oppenheim, Carolee Schneeman, Vito Acconci; the Dutch conceptual artists Pieter Holstein, and Bas Jan Ader; the French Fluxus artists Ben Vautier and the Hungarian artists Gábor Attalai and Géza Perneczky, then living in exile in Cologne, Germany. The catalogue, as is the case with all the SÚM catalogues, has few texts, it is, rather compiled as a visual document, information about the participating artists. Unfortunately, it gives only sporadic documentation on the artworks that were exhibited and many of these are lost.[333]

4.9. The Vernacular as Paradigm

In the 1972 SÚM catalogue Friðfinnsson is represented with a photographic diptych called *Two Pictures from the Park.* On the left, a small branch is depicted on a white

[330] "Röð ljósmyndanna í verkinu gefur hugmynd um rými. Ef verkið er skoðað í lestrarátt, færast myndirnar sífellt ofar innan rammans, frá láglendi til fjallstoppa" Eggert Pétursson, "Douwe Jan Bakker," *Teningur* 6 (1989), 48–64.

[331] Robert Filliou, *SÚM á Listahátíð í Reykjavík* (Reykjavík: Galerie SÚM, 1972), no page number.

[332] "Þetta verk mun ég tileinka þessu kjarnmikla, fagra, ljóðræna fólki." Ibid.

[333] Alexander Alberro has pointed to the new crucial role of the exhibition catalogue at that time: "The catalogue becomes a show's physical trace, evidence of it, the remains that can be examined, the fossil, as it where, that also dates the exhibit, placing it in history. The exhibition catalogue that memorializes the artwork, archiving for the future, also serves as a marketing tool." Alexander Alberro and P. Norvell (eds.), *Recording Conceptual Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2001), 11.

ground, the other, on the right, depicts the trace of that same branch in the muddy earth. In this work, as so often, Friðfinnsson plays with the double, the trace and the mirror effect. This doubling is also characteristic of his work *Álagablettir* (*Sacred and Enchanted Places*, 1972). This is a series of 12 (sometimes exhibited as four individual triptychs), a sequence of text and photo works. Each tryptic contains two black and white photographs separated with framed dactylotyped text, each relating a different story about enchanted places located in Iceland. The photographs show the sacred rocks discussed in the text. In Icelandic folklore such rocks were (and still are) thought to be habited by elves – often called the hidden people in contemporary popular culture.

Later, Friðfinnsson described the work in an interview with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist "I collected material about the places, and then I visited and photographed them. They were special places in nature – a little piece of stone or a part of a meadow or a hill- or buildings and farmhouses in the countryside. But they were all places that had spells on them."[334]

But the hidden people might not be the focus here as such. Or should they be interpreted as shadows or traces? The work points at traces in the earth, be they human or non-human, but also at a humoristic chance encounter that resembles a popular riddle. The imagined falling stones form an imagined trajectory. The objects (cows or stones) conceptualize human relationship with space and how that space is mediated through language.

The House Project departs both from material reality, in this case based on the life of Sólon Guðmundsson, an outsider living in the small town Ísafjörður in the far Westfjords in Iceland, and a well-known textual narrative written by Þórbergur Þórðarsson, one of Iceland's most celebrated 20th century authors, published in *Íslenskur aðall* (Icelandic Nobility, 1938). The book relates the life of marginal people, social outcasts, represented ironically as the only aristocracy of Iceland. Sólon Guðmundsson is one of the aristocrats described in Þórðarsson's story. He is remembered for his peculiar house, Slunkaríki, constructed with his own hands in the outskirts of Ísafjörður. Where the exterior of the house was covered with wallpaper made of newspapers and other scrap, Friðfinnsson took inspiration from Guðmundsson's improvised shack. While his house

[334] "Hans Ulrich Obrist interview with Hreinn Friðfinnsson," in *Hreinn Friðfinnsson*, London: Serpentine Gallery 17 July – 2 September 2007/ Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum 10 November 2007 – 27 January 2008, 51–62, p. 56. See also Adam Jasper, "Hreinn Friðfinnsson," *Artforum* 58 no.1 (September 2019): 278.

was in the outskirts of his hometown Ísafjörður, Friðfinnsson's installation was located in a remote untouched lava field, unseen from the road, but only a few kilometres from the urban area close to Reykjavík.

This work explicitly incorporates ideas and strategies of locality and hybridity, the original is already a hybrid, a statement countering the purity and nobility in the national narrative (incorporated in Þórðarsson's title: *Icelandic Aristocracy*). Denying purity, and originality, as Friðfinnsson puts it, the outside of the house "has shrunk to the size of a closed space formed by the walls and the roof of the house. The rest has become inside."[335]

This turn to locality and ethnology in the work of many of the SÚM group members has been discussed by Heiða Björk Árnadóttir as being related to the dematerialisation of the art object.[336] I would like to add to this analysis, that these art practices seem to be informed directly by Joseph Kosuth's writings. He not only described the conceptual method as a linguistic approach but also as "anthropologized art."[337] He wrote that: "The artist perpetuates his culture by maintaining certain features of it by "using" them. The artist is a model of the anthropologist *engaged*."[338]

What is important here, and this has been argued by Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, that "Kosuth's perspective is distinct as it does not draw on the anthropological trope of otherness for artistic imagination. Kosuth in fact critiques this trope as it existed in the 1970s: "what may be interesting about the artist-as-anthropologist is that the artist's activity is not outside, but a mapping of an internalizing cultural activity in his own society. The artist-as-anthropologist may be able to accomplish what the anthropologist has always failed at," suggests Ssorin-Chaikov.[339] An analysis based on Hal Foster's 1995

[335] Hreinn Friðfinnsson, *House Project. First House. Second House. Third House* (Hafnarfjörður: Hafnarborg, 2012), 11.
[336] Heiða Björk Árnadóttir, *The Conceptual, the Romantic, and the Nonhuman: The SÚM Group and the Emergence of Contemporary Art in Iceland, 1965–1978*, 228.
[337] Joseph Kosuth, "The Artist as Anthropologist," *The Fox Magazine* 1 (1975):18–30. Reprinted in Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After, Collected Writings, I966–I990* (London and Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 107–128.
[338] Kosuth, "The Artist as Anthropologist," *The Fox Magazine*, 24.
[339] Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, "Ethnographic conceptualism. An Introduction," in *Laboratorium*, 5, no. 2 (2013), 5–18, p. 5, footnote 1; Joseph Kosuth, "The Artist as Anthropologist," 121.

essay "The Artist as Ethnographer?" who resumed: This is not the "artist as ethnographer" who is "locating truth in terms of alterity."[340]

Authenticity, that is "the quality of being genuine, being true to oneself," is an idea or a concept that can be traced back to Socrates, who referred to the "authenticity of the self", the genuineness of one's thought and actions. Reflecting on the concept of authenticity in the work of the SÚM group, Guðbergur Bergsson, addressed its aesthetic and curatorial context of the SÚM exhibition *H_2O*, opened in March 1974 at the St. Nicholas Church in Copenhagen.[341] In the exhibition, Ólafur Gíslason introduces water as a mirror to art. Both are socially and historically conditioned. "We make history, we make water, we make art, we make revolution."[342] Bergson's text "In our times the primal source can't be known from the water that springs from it", is written both as a curatorial statement for this last exhibition of the SÚM group, but also as a definition of the Icelandic specificity of SÚM art. He introduces Icelandic "artists, writers and intellectuals" as provincial, "rather undeveloped and cautious characters and reactionary on the whole that sector of society which usually is rebellious, brave and unconcerned about, what the neighbours might think about their doings." He describes the SÚM group on rather ironic terms, what they had in common was "their dissatisfaction".

Further, Bergson explains, the "SÚM-art does not go into the monumental in art but searches for the *petites choses*, the primal movement, the flickering of light […] SÚM-art makes, so to speak, an effort to create a retrogressive evolution. The group's sculptures have turned from the sculpture towards the thing or even the idea of a thing."[343] Anti-modernist in its implications, Bergson concludes that it is the "Icelandic wisdom of eccentricity penetrates all SÚM-art, that extraordinary individual and only wisdom known in Iceland, the wisdom of isolation, of the individual outlawed human being." In this text Bergsson insists on the otherness of Icelandic culture, but he makes a clear

[340] Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer?" in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, eds. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 203–309, p. 204.
[341] The St. Nicholas Church was a progressive art venue famous for having hosted the successful 1962 Fluxus festival. Peter Alexander Meijden, "The Festum Fluxorum in Copehagen 23–28 November 1961," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950–1975*, eds. Tania Ørum and Jesper Olsson (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 492–507.
[342] *Udstillingen H_2O*, no page number.
[343] Guðbergur Bergsson, "In our times the primal source can't be known from the water that springs from it," in *Udstillingen H_2O*, no page number.

difference between the beauty that lies in the little things, and the great ideas, the sublime (national) nature.

The relation between the contemporary, cosmopolitan art, folk art and cultural heritage was an important cultural issue that is addressed in the catalogue. Taking water as a point of departure, as a chemical formula, *H_2O*, as a semiotic system was a way to address water as an anti- metaphor. In the exhibition, water was explored as an object and a narrative, in a variety of photographic works and documentation, installations, drawings, and paintings. The artists were mostly members of SÚM, but the show also included geometric abstract artists, or concrete, such as Eyborg Guðmundsdóttir. Hörður Ágústsson exposed a series of Icelandic turfhouses, as an example of social and vernacular architecture. The poet Jón Svafár, cinematographer Þorgeir Þorgeirsson, and the folk artist Ísleifur Konráðsson also exhibited with this heterogenous group. The conceptual idea of water was exemplified in the 1974 *Rainsculpture*, by Sigurður Guðmundsson, that consisted of a photograph depicting a rake lying on the ground with the spikes pointing upwards. Only the ground and the rake are visible on the photograph, no landscape, no horizon. The photograph is accompanied by a text: "If a rake is left lying in the field during the hay-making season and its spikes are pointing upwards, it will rain. (a popular belief in Iceland)."[344]

Indeed, the *H_2O* exhibition brought to the foreground new epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and interpretations, and consequently, other art politics. The interdisciplinary aspect of the exhibition collectively activated a common goal of mocking the elitist and institutional rule that national heritage should be separated from progressive modernism and contemporary art. The exhibition was constructed as an archive related to, in some cases, to heritage and popular narratives. Or could it be read as an attempt to ironize national culture? The sublime waterfall, with all its symbolic and cultural references, its notions of *Icelandicity* is nothing but *H_2O*. It reflects a certain absurdity embedded in the creation of elite cultural products.

The catalogue – or rather the bookwork published in connection with the exhibition *H_2O* is organised in the spirit of conceptual art thinking –and might be contextualised further with the idea of the dematerialization of the art object. However, the organic flow between conceptual and archival art, mavericks, and so called naive artists, present in *H_2O*, was

[344] *Udstillingen H_2O*, work no. 11.

an innovative approch, implying a certain non-hierarchial continuity between art and life, culturally accepted in the Icelandic context. The same year another experimental exhibition *Alþýðulist á Íslandi 1974* (Icelandic folk art 1974) was curated by Bergsson and organised by SÚM, in collaboration with Reykjavík Arts Festival. Again, in order to make a nonsense of the modernist distinction between "high" and "low" art, but also to celebrate the millennium of the Icelandic nation.[345]

Bergsson had also that spring (1974), received an important travelling exhibition from the Argentinian organisation CayC (Centro de Arte y Comunicación), curated by Jorge Glusberg (1932–2012) later director of Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires.[346] The exhibition was mounted in two small venues (Gallerí SÚM and Mokka). It included 148 works by 69 artist from 16 nationalities and was reviewed in the Icelandic press as being the first important international exhibition of conceptual art in Iceland.[347] The CAyC exhibition introduced a new kind of collaboration between artists, scientists, philosophers, ecologists, semioticians, etc.. The Icelandic word *hugmyndalist* is employed as translation of conceptual art for the first time in daily media.[348]

Neither the SÚM IV exhibition in Amsterdam, nor the *H_2O* exhibition in Copenhagen brought international recognition to the SÚM group, and the public showed little interest in their art. The Icelandic artists from Amsterdam, the brothers Guðmundsson with Hreinn Friðfinnsson and Þórður Ben, exhibited in the Biennale de Paris in 1973, The transfer from their local artist-run spaces into the international institution was finally achieved when they were invited by museum director Pontus Hultén to exhibit at the inauguration of the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1977. Their delicate bookworks they created for the event were presented in a small brown box under the title *Ça va? Ça va. 4 constats islandais*, introduces however a more cosmopolitan aspect of their art.[349] Hultén introduced the artists in a short text published at the back of

[345] "Þetta á ekki að vera nein sparifatasýning," [Interview with Guðbergur Bergsson], *Þjóðviljinn*, March 14, 1974, 4.
[346] Eve Kalyva, "Some Reflections on International Exchanges and the Avant-garde after Conceptual Art," in *Modernidad y vanguardia: rutas de intercambio entre España y Latinoamérica* (Madrid: Reina Sofía, 2015), 351–361, p. 355. The exhibition *Hacia un perfil del arte latinoamericano* toured to several locations: Buenos Aires, Pamplona, Madrid, Medellín (3rd Coltejer biennial), Warsaw, Reykjavík, Quito, Panama, Cali, Oberlin (Ohio) and Richmond (Virginia).
[347] "Argentísk sýning hjá SÚM," *Morgunblaðið*, May 25, 1974, 19.
[348] "Hugmyndalist í SÚM," *Þjóðviljinn*, May 18, 1974, 3.
[349] *Ça va ? Ça va. 4 constats islandais.* Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Kristján Guðmundsson, Sigurður Guðmundsson, [Þórður] Ben Sveinsson. 31 janvier – 7 March 1977. Musée National d'Art Moderne (Paris: Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou,1977).

the box: "Four very distinct individuals, but a common spirit. A very pronounced taste for nature which conditions human life and the secrets that each man carries within himself; the same subtle humor, which insinuates itself into the smallest gestures and does not hesitate to be ironic about philosophical claims. All four express, with the help of contemporary means, though new forms, ageless, limitless truths."[350] The reference to nature is evident in the photographic work by Hreinn Friðfinnsson, representing the slender white arms of a young woman lying on ferns. The photographs are printed on thin transparent paper superimposing different layers of images when the reader turns or flips through the pages. Þórður Ben's book *Je l'embrasse si elle m'embrasse* (I will kiss her if she kisses me) contains 12 black and white photographs all featuring different flowers and plants. Some are shot in parks and gardens, two are *nature morte*, plants growing in flowerpots, one is posed on a windowshelf, another on a table. On the first image – the face of a young beautiful blonde girl is hidden behind a palm tree. Sigurður Guðmundsson's *Journey-Book* is composed of white empty pages and only one black and white selfportrait after the middle of the book. Finally, Kristján Guðmundsson, also made a flip book called *Faster and Slower Lines*, containing lines drawn with red ink on blotting paper. The simple elegance of the bookworks contrasts with the rawness of other SÚM projects. However, even though the title is *4 constats islandais*, the small books have no relation to Iceland other than the name of the artists. The nature of the works was far from the bold and do it yourself aspect of the earlier SÚM. A page was turned.

4.10. Inside and Outside the Gallery

Through these established connections, the important signalling function of artist-run galleries continued simultaneously in Amsterdam and Reykjavík. Following on these processes of integration into the Dutch international art scene, Rúrí (Þuríður Rúrí Fannberg b. 1951), founded Gallery Lóa in 1976 with the artists Kees Visser (b. 1948) and Helgi Þorgils Friðjónsson (b. 1953).[351] Visser was the prime mover, and the gallery, operating both in Haarlem and in Amsterdam (1976–1983), became an important site of

[350] In the original text: "Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Kristján Guðmundsson, Sigurður Guðmundsson et Ben Sveinsson, Quatre individualités très distinctes, mais un esprit commun. Un goût très prononcé pour la nature qui conditionne la vie humaine et les secrets que chaque homme porte en soi; un même humour subtil, qui s'insinue dans les moindres gestes et n'hésite pas à ironiser sur les prétentions philosophiques."
[351] The gallery was first located in Lange Raamstraat 6, Haarlem.

contact between Icelandic and foreign artists, some from the Eastern bloc. Friðjónsson later continued such hosting activities through his home gallery, *Gangurinn* (*The Corridor*) in Reykjavík, from 1980 (and still ongoing), to maintain the networks he had established abroad.

Gallery Suðurgata 7 (1977–1981) was established in the centre of Reykjavík and operated as an artist-run space on a transnational level. It became an important incubator for the experimental actions of the youngest generation of artists and introduced contemporary artistic debates in the pages of its journal *Svart á hvítu* (Black on White).[352] Through the influence of Margrét Jónsdóttir and Svala Sigurleifsdóttir, feminist artists were invited into this primarily male art scene, such as The Feminist Improvising Group (1978) and Mary Beth Edelson (discussed in chapter five).

The *Living Art Museum*, an artist-run exhibition space founded in 1978, was simultaneously an aftermath and a continuation of the networks initially established by Roth, Guðmundsson, and other Icelandic artists living for shorter or longer periods in Holland. The museum's collection, based on donations from artists, is yet another manifestation of the grassroots activities that shaped the current art scene in Reykjavík, which was active in circulating international art works, especially those associated with conceptual art and Fluxus. Still another consequence of all these transnational activities was that many Icelandic artists and art students moved to Holland and stayed for longer or shorter periods in the late 1970s and 1980s. The art students enrolled principally at De Vrije Academie in Den Haag and the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht. Rúnólfsson confirms that by 1979 there were more than twenty Icelandic art students in the Netherlands and at that time both Sigurður Guðmundsson and Magnús Pálsson were teaching in Dutch academies.[353]

[352] Founded by the brothers Friðriks Þórs Friðriksson and Þórleifur Friðrikssonar, Bjarni H. Þórarinsson and Margrét Jónsdóttir. About fifty exhibitions were organized in the Gallery Suðurgata 7. The invited artists had close links to the Fluxus movement, mail-art, conceptual art, performance art, or feminism. These were i. e. Dick Higgins, Dorothy Iannone, Douwe Jan Bakker, Endre Tót, Eric Andersen (b. 1949), Gabor Attalai (1934–2011), Jacek Tylicki (b. 1951), Jan Voss, Mary Beth Edelson (b. 1933), Maurizio Nannucci (b. 1939), Michael Gibbs (1949–2009), Peter Schmidt (1931–1980), Robert Filliou, Robin Crozier (1936–2001), and Wolf Kahlen (b. 1940). See Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Through SÚM to Suðurgata 7. Some Recent Trends in Icelandic Art."; Magnús Gestsson, "Gallerí Suðurgata 7," *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, July 12, 1997, 6. The gallery archives are kept at the Living Art Museum in Reykjavík.
[353] Halldór B. Runólfsson, "Times of Continuous Transition," 19.

4.11. Inside and Outside the Classroom

Hannah Higgins has discussed the discursive function of Fluxus in art education, and in a very practical sense the Fluxus toolbox or the Fluxus experience (as Higgins calls it) became a model for art practice in the New Art Department of the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts.[354] This was created in 1975 as an experimental hub under the direction of artists Hildur Hákonardóttir and Magnús Pálsson. The department was launched in response to pressure from students to create a new kind of artistic training, including new media. Many of Iceland's most prominent and successful contemporary artists received their art education there. The department functioned in close connection with certain artist-run spaces, such as Gallery Suðurgata 7. It became a part of the network that hosted foreign artists in Reykjavík and a locus of experimentation where a new generation of artists emerged. Among them, were Birgir Andrésson, Ívar Valgarðsson, Kristján Steingrímur Jónsson, Ingólfur Arnarson, Eggert Pétursson, and Ásta Ólafsdóttir.

Roth, Filliou, Dick Higgins, Douwe Jan Bakker, Pieter Holstein, and many others provided art students with a range of tools and ideas that allowed them to abandon modernist orthodoxies and focus on their own experience as sources for theory and practice despite the complaints by some that Roth's idea of "teaching as non-teaching" was not helpful, and other comments about Filliou being a "kind of God."[355]

Magnús Pálsson, the leading art teacher in the New Art Department from 1978 to 1981, met Filliou in Düsseldorf in 1969, where both were allied with Roth and Daniel Spoerri. That year, Filliou was preparing the publication of *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, in which he presented his theories about "permanent creation and audience participation."[356] The book also contains interviews with Allan Kaprow (1927–2006), Roth, Cage, and Beuys, each replying to Fillou's questions about the relation between their art practice and teaching. Beuys repeated often, as in an interview with the artist and curator Willoughby Sharp, "To be a teacher is my greatest work of art. The rest is the waste product, a demonstration" [357] With Kaprow, for example, he discusses the

[354] Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience,* 189.
[355] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Magnús Pálsson et le département New Art à Reykjavík, 1975–1984:'Teaching: The Maddest Artform,'" 144.
[356] Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* (Cologne/New York: Kasper König, 1970), 7.
[357] Willoughby Sharp, "An Interview with Joseph Beuys," *Artforum* vol. 8, no. 4 (December 1969): 40–47, p. 44.

interrelation between happenings and environments and Kaprow's thoughts about art outside the classroom.[358]

In her excellent book, *Fluxus Experience*, Higgins discusses Fluxus's educational ideas in depth, exploring the correlation between Filliou's thought and the philosophy of John Dewey (1859–1952) in his famous work *Art as Experience*.[359] Similarly, in his introduction to Kaprow's *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Jeff Kelly considers Dewey as "Allan Kaprow's intellectual father."[360] Kaprow's and Filliou's ideas about art as experience in the classroom were important sources for Pálsson, who later described them as "a great inspiration" for his further development not only as a teacher, but also as an artist.[361] The implications of the educational network promulgated by Robert Filliou and his disciple Pálsson were therefore, crucial ones and solidified the institutional shifts taking place and exemplified in the New Art Department at the College of Arts and Crafts in Reykjavík, when Filliou was teaching there in 1978.

Several Icelandic artists have reported that *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* was used as a sort of manual among art students and became as popular a reading as Spoerri's *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance.*[362] Dick Higgins's definition of *intermedia* and its overlap with Fluxus's experiential approach was likewise employed as a pedagogical model in the Iceland Academy of the Arts founded in 1998 by new generations of artists. [363]

Pálsson developed Filliou's ideas inspired by Kaprow (and Dewey) about involvement and sharing through friendship into his concept about collective production as a method of artmaking. Doing things together and creating collective artworks became a paradigm and a long-lasting method of developing art projects and actions among the young generation of artists in the mid-1970s and later. Between 1981 and 1989 Pálsson organized four international workshops (*Mob Shops*/*The Summer Mobile Workshop*) in

---

[358] Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, 127–130.
[359] Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 188.
[360] Jeff Kelley (ed.), *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2003), xxvi. Yoann Barbereau has also traced the contours of the dialogue that took place between Allan Kaprow and John Dewey in Yoann Barbereau, "Expérience et performance: Fragments d'un dialogue pragmatiste," *Revue d'Esthétique* 44 (2003): 24–35.
[361] Magnús Pálsson, "List og kennsluList," *Teningur* 3 (1987), 19–21. See also interview with Magnús Pálsson, in Fríða Ingvarsdóttir, "Andstaðan var okkur innblástur," *Morgunblaðið*, October 26, 2002, 8–9.
[362] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Magnús Pálsson et le département New Art à Reykjavík, 1975–1984: 'Teaching: The Maddest Artform,'" 141.
[363] Dick Higgins and Hannah Higgins, "Intermedia," in *Something Else Newsletter* (1965). Reprinted with an appendix by Hannah Higgins in *Leonardo* 34, 1 (2001): 49–54.

Iceland and in Denmark, inviting (amongst others) Filliou and Philip Corner as instructors.[364]

Filliou was generous with his research and his international contacts, and he encouraged correspondence between artists across borders.[365] The Gallery Suðurgata 7 reached out internationally through Filliou's network to establish contact with likeminded artists and offered them to show in the gallery and/or send their works through mail. The mail art project *Iceland Blue Show* that opened 7 October 1978 in Gallery Suðurgata 7, organised by the British artist Robin Croizer (1936–2001), with the Icelandic artist Ingólfur Arnarson, is a good example of the exchanges initiated through Filliou's network operated. The Hungarian artist Endré Tót also exhibited mail art in Gallery Suðurgata 7 and in the art journal *Svart á hvítu*, published by the gallery.

Filliou's collaborative and open pedagogical thought can be grasped directly through his work *Poïpoïdrome*, which he constructed with Joachim Pfeufer (b. 1935) and performed with art students in Gallerí Suðurgata 7 in 1978.[366] "Poï" is the first syllable of the verb poi*ein* (Greek), which means "to make or create."[367] The work is a proto-relational art piece, a model of participatory art with a strong pedagogical component – a space open for public engagement through texts and various forms of visual information. It has a fixed structure (twenty-four square meters) divided into four spaces, each devoted to a particular theme. It is open to everyone and allows pedagogical, emotional, and physical experiences through interactive public practice.[368] The work is a frame, where convivial relations and spectator participation would take place. It was rebuilt in the Living Art Museum in 2007, for the show *Presque Rien*, re-enacted by French and Icelandic artists and art students who explored Filliou's idea of "permanent creation," this time, however, framed by the notion of "relational aesthetics" rather than by Filliou's

[364] Baldvina Sigrún Sverrisdóttir, "'Í listinni felast lykilsamskipti fólks.' Mob Shop, alþjóðlegar sumarvinnustofur listamanna í ljósi kenninga John Deweys og heimspekilegrar verkhyggju." Master's dissertation (Reykjavík: University of Iceland, 2014).
[365] This correspondence. Including the *Iceland Blue Show*, and a list of addresses from Filliou's network is kept in The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives, The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík.
[366] Robert Filliou, *Poïpoïdrome*, 1978. Installation, mixed media. Living Art Museum, Reykjavík.
[367] Cyrille Bret, "Les performances pédagogiques de Robert Filliou. Pour une histoire de la 'création permanente' comme science de l'éducation," in *Transmettre l'art. Figures et méthodes – Quelle histoire?*, 111–28, p. 120.
[368] See description and a photograph of the model in Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, 191–97. The work (as it was exhibited in 1978) is kept in the Living Art Museum, Reykjavík. Retrieved from: http://www.sarpur.is/Adfang.aspx?AdfangID=1407558

utopia of expanding the limits of art.[369]

4.12. Writing Art History from the Inside and the Outside

In this chapter, I have tried to put into question the various ways in which contemporary art in Iceland has been (and is being) historicized. I have focused on transnational movements between different geolocalisations and demonstrated how locality and *Icelandicity* is articulated in works by Dieter Roth. Even though considerable institutional effort has been invested over the last decade to foster art historical narratives about Icelandic artists and their art, Icelandic artists remain marginalized, if not excluded from the Western European narrative both of modern and of contemporary art. This is the case even for artists who have lived and worked in European and North American centres. And while a certain gap has been filled from the inside, only Sigurður Guðmundsson and Hreinn Friðfinnsson have been considered as members of the foreign diaspora in Amsterdam. The Icelandic artist-run galleries have not been acknowledged as active participants in the progressive European gallery scene and the networks of the 1960s, '70s or '80s. Events and actions created by internationally known artists such as Roth and Filliou that took place in Iceland, have also been excluded. Roth's *Wind-Harp* is never mentioned as an important manifestation of kinetic or sound art, even though it could be seen as a significant translation or even as a simultaneous event mirroring the historicised *Rörelse i konsten* exhibition in 1961. The construction of the *Wind-Harp* is thus rendered invisible primarily because it took place outside recognized art centres and is therefore excluded, as are so many other art events that took place in Iceland from the late 1960s. Like the widespread but now-recognized exclusion or marginalization of women artists internationally, such silences and absences raise several important questions. Among them are those relating to the mechanisms of selection, contextualization, and canonization (i.e., the master narrative). What criteria are involved in the choice of artistic activities that merit inclusion in such narratives? What links are established (or ignored) between specific events and between the art production and networks?

Art histories of the near-contemporary period – the 1960s and after – as we have seen, are histories of networks and cities, individual artists, affiliations, travelling exhibitions, grassroots activities, and art education. Institutional art-historical surveys

[369] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002), 30–31.

such as the exhibition *In & Out of Amsterdam* tend to reduce this plural, heterogeneous and eminently social configurations into simple genealogic narratives and remain focused on a specific canon of artists, a lineage of individual and often heroic figures. They show limited interest in investigating the complexities of artists' networks, diasporas, and related art projects.

However, the understanding of the post-1960s art worlds is now undergoing a shift, fostered by the opening of borders and archives in the former Soviet Union and its satellites. Also, there are the effects of globalization, itself, defined by Alberro as "the contemporary" and characterised as a new discursive spectatorship.[370] New national art histories are being written, motivated by dissatisfaction with existing ones and the recognition of how much remains to be investigated. This recognition of multiplicity and heterogeneity is itself a rejection of essentialism or notions of national schools or styles.

Roth, Filliou, and Sigurður Guðmundsson have not only been elevated as role models for artists and art students, but their practices, writing and views about art and the art world have likewise became dominant paradigms for contemporary art practice in Iceland as it searches for a cultural, artistic identity. However, even though Roth was *primus motor* of multiple and interdisciplinary collaborations, contributing to local cultures internationally, he remained a stranger in Iceland and a foreigner operating on the margins, although one far more involved than a simple passer-by. He established connections and maintained the networks, and as a go-between, he created an international traffic that intersected with local contexts over a lengthy period. His numerous examples of crossovers and collaborations reveal that this manoeuvring between different practices was furthered by his interaction with locally established architects and designers, as well as his own commercial initiatives.[371].

---

[370] Alex Alberro, "These new forms of art and this new spectatorship have come to be discursively constructed as 'the contemporary'". Alexander Alberro, response to "Questionnaire on the Contemporary," *October* 130 (fall 2009): 55–60, "Periodising Contemporary Art," *October* 130 (Fall 2009): 55–60, p. 55.

[371] Roth launched several artistic and commercial collaborations in Reykjavík, starting in 1957 his editorial project (ed [Einar/Dieter]) with the Icelandic poet Einar Bragi, founder and editor of the literary magazine *Birtingur*. Together they started printing Roth's transformable and kinetic book-works. Roth exhibited his jewellery rings with an Icelandic group of designers in the Nordic exhibition *Formes scandinaves* in Paris 7 Novembre 1958–31 January 1959. Åke H. Huldt (ed.), *Formes scandinaves: Danemark, Finlande, Islande, Norvège, Suède* [exposition, Musée des arts décoratifs, Palais du Louvre, Pavillon de Marsan, 7 novembre 1958–31 janvier 1959] (Paris: Les Presses artistiques, 1958); "Norræna listiðnaðarsýningin í París (The Nordic Decorative Arts Exhibition in Paris)," *Þjóðviljinn*, February 27, 1959, 3.
In April 1962 Roth launched a gallery store named *Kúlan* located at Skólavörðustígur 10 in Reykjavík. It sold furniture and toys made by Roth, architect Manfreð Vilhjálmsson, and Magnús Pálsson. The pieces of

This discussion is thus intended to shed some light on the important connections between nomadic transnational identity, migrating lifestyles, and the development of contemporary art in peripheral urban capitals such as Reykjavík. It also illustrates the current paradox that while global inclusivity tends to draw different art categories and different geographical locations into a unified narrative, artists working on the peripheries of the so-called global art world are nevertheless excluded from the account, as well as from most contemporary art journals, biennales, and documentas. The transnational educational role of Fluxus highlights the way in which avant-garde pedagogical experiments, developed collectively, were applied in a variety of ways depending on local particularities. Investigating these other histories (often repressed or silenced) and writing different narratives enables us to examine the discontinuities of historical discourse and consider the possibilities for drawing new maps of cultural production. This research remains as urgent as ever, as the dominant art historical narratives continue to exclude these presumably "marginal" artistic phenomena in the present, just as they did in the past.

jewellery were produced by Roth and his wife, Sigríður Björnsdóttir. It also proposed ashtrays by Roth and sculptor Jón Gunnar Árnason, photographic works by Rafn Hafnfjörð, Guðmundur Vilhjálmsson and Andrés Kolbeinsson, and fine art by Hörður Águstsson, Rolf Weher and Jón Gunnar Árnason. It was not a commercial success. "Kúlan – ný húsgagnaverzlun fyrir vandláta og félitla," *Frjáls þjóð*, April 14, 1962, 8. Roth also created ceramic objects for Glit, a commercial ceramic workshop run by his friend Ragnar Kjartansson. "500 handunnir keramikmunir á sýningu (500 handmade ceramic objects exhibited)," *Morgunblaðið*, June 17, 1960, 11.

5. THE GUERILLA PARADIGM OR "FEMINIST AVANT-GARDE" – TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE FEMINIST CANON

5.1. Woman artist, feminist artist, feminist art or art by women

"Feminism is the conviction that gender has been, and continues to be, a fundamental category for the organization of culture."[372] In Iceland, as elsewhere, women's radical art was closely related to the struggle for gender equality and women's political empowerment.[373] In this chapter I will examine the interconnected but complex relations between women's radical movements, feminism and the Icelandic avant-garde as they were manifested in women's art in Iceland from 1975 to 2000 and beyond. As the American feminist art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau has pointed out: "Woman artist, feminist artist, feminist art or art by women. They are all different entities".[374] With these distinctions in mind, I will trace how these categories took form in Iceland through exhibitions and publications. I will investigate how artists and art students were exposed to feminism in the arts via art centres and galleries abroad, such as De Appel in Amsterdam, but also in Copenhagen and in the United States, and how discussions of feminism and gender developed among Icelandic women artists. Finally, I ask if a recent label such as "Feminist Avant-Garde" is useful in this context, or whether it is perhaps too simplistic for a deeper understanding of the complex intersections between avant-garde practices, radical politics and feminism in the 1970s and 1980s.

5.2. Gender Equality, Feminist Difference or "Feminist Avant-Garde"

Women's art, avant-gardes and feminism in art are mutually implicated terms and categories that are not easy to disentangle. In 1976 the pioneering American feminist critic and curator Lucy R. Lippard observed that "Feminism, or at least the self-consciousness of femaleness, has opened the way for a new context within which to think

[372] Peggy Phelan, "Survey", in *Art and Feminism*, eds. Helena Reckitt and Peggy Phelan (London: Phaidon Press, 2001), 14–49, p. 18.
[373] I would like to thank Guðrún Erla Geirsdóttir, Svala Sigurleifsdóttir and Rúrí for their valuable comments during the writing of this chapter.
[374] "Abigail Solomon-Godeau in a Conversation on Feminism and Art with Katarina Rosengren Falk". http://www.truewomance.com/en/abigail-solomon-godeau-in-a-conversation-on-feminism-and-art-with-katarina-rosengren-falk/

about art by women."[375] Since then, a certain version of feminist art history, based on Linda Nochlin's pioneering approach, has been constructed and manifested in a number of exhibitions and publications. As Nochlin claimed: […] feminist art history is there to make trouble, to call into question, to ruffle feathers in the patriarchal dovecotes. It should not be mistaken for just another variant of or supplement to mainstream art history. At its strongest, a feminist art history is a transgressive and anti- establishment practice, meant to call many of the major precepts of the discipline into question."[376]

In Iceland, no feminist art history has been written, but several exhibitions were organized from 1975 on in order to make women's art practices visible. These were motivated by the need to demonstrate gender equality in public space. The first women's only art exhibitions were institutional, organized to celebrate the International Women's Year (IWY was the name given by the United Nations to address women's rights internationally). Other women's exhibitions followed, and numerous articles published in the daily press mirror the changing attitudes and responses to feminist politics and cultural production between 1975 and 2000. The first generation of women artists who focused on gender issues in their work were politically active, such as Hildur Hákonardóttir, Guðrún Erla Geirsdóttir (b. 1951) and Svala Sigurleifsdóttir (b. 1950). Others, such as Margrét Jónsdóttir (b. 1953) and Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir (b. 1933), were also highly visible. The younger generation (born in the late 1950s and in the 1960s) was not as politically active but included feminist discourse in their work by addressing gender in their exhibitions, such as the nature of gendered identities, exemplified by Anna

[375] Lucy R. Lippard, "Projecting a Feminist Criticism," *Art Journal* 35, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 337–39, p. 337.

[376] Linda Nochlin, "Introduction," *Women, Art, and Power: And Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), xi- xvi, here p. xii. Amelia Jones gives an overview of this "resurgence of interest" in "The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts 1970/2009," in *Feminism is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiograhy and Curatorial Practices*, eds. Malin Hedlin Heyden and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 11–56. The main exhibitions that have set a feminist art canon in an art-historical perspective: *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles (2007), which travelled to the National Museum of Women in the Arts (2007), PS1/Museum of Modern Art, New York (2008) and the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver (2008–2009); *Global Feminisms*, curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin for the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Elizabeth Sackler Centre for Feminist Art (2007), which travelled to Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA (2008); *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang: 45 Years of Art and Feminism*, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Bilbao, curated by Xabier Arakistain (2007); *Elles@centrepompidou. Artistes femmes dans la collection du Musée national d'art moderne*, MNAM, Paris, curated by Camille Morineau et al. (2009–2011); and *Donna: avanguardia femminista negli anni '70 dalla Sammlung Verbund di Vienna* (Milan: Galleria d'Arte Nazionale, 2010).

Líndal (b. 1957), Hildur Bjarnadóttir (b. 1969), Ólöf Nordal (b. 1961) and the post-feminist "bad girls", The Icelandic Love Corporation.[377]

These multiple initiatives were not directly connected, but collectively their radical practices constitute a neglected history that has yet to be integrated into other European feminist art histories, even though art-historical scholarship in Iceland parallels in many ways that of Anglo-Saxon and American feminist art-historical discourses.[378]

Through several exhibitions and publications, the Austrian art historian Gabriele Schor has indicated that even the most comprehensive historiographies, such as the *Metzler Lexikon Avantgarde*, edited by Hubert van den Berg and Walter Fähnders, fail to note the multiple and complex intersections between feminism and avant-garde. Schor anchors her notion of a "feminist avant-garde" by quoting Lawrence Alloway (1926–1990), who in his seminal article of 1976 wrote: "The women's movement in art can be considered as an avant-garde because its members are united by a desire to change the existing social forms of the art world."[379]

Alloway thus refers indirectly to the original definition of the avant-garde as described by the French Saint-Simonian Olinde Rodrigues (1795–1851) in 1825: "It is we artists that will serve as your avant-garde; the power of the arts is indeed the most immediate and the fastest. We have weapons of all sorts when we want to spread new ideas among people."[380] However, as several art historians have pointed out, the Saint-Simonian use and definition of the term are uniquely social and do not bear any direct aesthetic connection with the formal inventions that took place in the French visual arts

[377] *The Icelandic Love Corporation* is a women's art collective formed in 1996 by Sigrún Hrólfsdóttir (b. 1973), Jóní Jónsdóttir (b. 1972) and Eirún Sigurðardóttir (b. 1971). Until 2001 Dóra Ísleifsdóttir (b. 1970) was part of the group.

[378] Such comparison is evident in group shows such as *In the Flesh* (*Flögð og fögur skinn*) at the Nýlistasafnið (The Living Art Museum) in 1998, and *The Will as a Weapon: Review 1970–1980* (*Með viljann að vopni. Endurlit 1970–1980*) in 2010 and the more recent *Women's Time – Here and Now Thirty Years Later* (*Kvennatími – Hér og nú þrjátíu árum síðar),* in 2015, both organized in Reykjavík Art Museum.

[379] Laurence Alloway, "Women's Art in the 70s", *Art in America* 64 (May–June 1976): 64–72, here p. 72; Gabriele Schor, "The Feminist Avant-Garde: A Radical Transvaluation of Values", in *Woman. The Feminist Avant-Garde of the 1970s. Works from the Sammlung Verbund* (Brussels: Bozar, 2014), 10–16, p. 10.

[380] "C'est nous, artistes, qui vous servirons d'avant-garde; la puissance des arts est en effet la plus immédiate et la plus rapide. Nous avons des armes de toute espèce : quand nous voulons répandre des idées neuves parmi les hommes […]." Henri de Saint-Simon, "L'Artiste, le savant et l'industriel," in *Œuvres complètes de Saint-Simon et d'Enfantin*, vol. 10 (Paris: E. Dentu,1875), 201–58, p. 210.

in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[381] For example, as Marie-Josèphe Bonnet has noted:

> "When analysing the status of women in avant-garde movements, one discovers that they were mainly spouses and partners of the "great creators". One thus needs to reconsider the articulation between the aesthetic and the sociological in order to raise the following questions: how does the concept of the avant-garde — which relies on the break with the past, with "fathers" and "masters", with academic art — operate as a new way of marginalizing women at the very moment when they get a new status in society?"[382]

All of which is to say that the label "feminist-avant-garde' remains somewhat problematic, even though it might be considered apt as an umbrella term for a variety of practices. In the Icelandic context, complex intersections with the radical left political parties (including the Redstockings group and the Women's Alliance), the rapidly institutionalized male-dominated neo-avant-garde SÚM group (1965–1972) and other semi-institutional structures, such as the Nýlistasafnið (The Living Art Museum) in Reykjavík, must be considered. SÚM and The Living Art Museum both acted as radical grassroots organizations, and their collective impetus derived from dissatisfaction with the cultural politics of the city of Reykjavík and the Ministry of Culture as well as the artist syndicate FÍM, which prioritized modernist painting over the so called "new art" (Fluxus, pop and conceptual currents). Women artists were in the minority in these artist-run groups, and feminism was not on their agenda.[383]

5.3. Anti-Patriarchy in Public Space

In Reykjavík, Róska exhibited her anti-patriarchal installation *Tilvonandi húsmóðir/Súper-þvottavél* (Future Housewife/Super Washing Machine) in an outdoor exhibition organized by the Reykjavík Art School in September 1967. At that time Róska

---

[381] Linda Nochlin, "The Invention of the Avant-Garde: France, 1830–1880," in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 11–18; Neil McWilliam, *Dreams of Happiness. Social Art and the French Left, 1830–1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[382] Marie-Josèphe Bonnet, "L'avant-garde, un concept masculin?," *Itinéraires* 1 (2012), 173–84.

[383] Only three women were active in the SÚM group: Hildur Hákonardóttir, Róska and Þorbjörg Höskuldsdóttir. Ásta Ólafsdóttir, Guðrún Ágústa Þorkelsdóttir, Hildur Hákonardóttir, Róska, Rúrí and Svala Sigurleifsdótir were founding members of The Living Art Museum. Margrét Jónsdóttir and Svala Sigurleifsdóttir formed the closed group that ran the Gallery Suðurgata 7.

was an art student in Rome, where she became rapidly involved in political activities on the margins of the local student upheavals. The work with this provocative title is well documented in photographs that show an assembled object based on the wreck of an old washing machine. By transforming the washing machine into a simulacrum of a phallic weapon Róska alluded to the Cold War and the ongoing war in Vietnam. By attaching a tag representing the nuclear bomb, Róska had created a work that was anti-patriarchal in form as well as meaning and which can be justly characterized as feminist. But who was the "Future Housewife"? The work had both a public and a personal resonance. Róska's disdain for the domestic role of the housewife is legendary, but the title of the work speaks directly to the feminist debate as the "discovery of housework" was central to the politicization of women from the mid-1960s on.[384]

During her short summer trip to Reykjavík, Róska was invited, as a new member of the avant-garde group SÚM, to present her first solo exhibition, which opened on 3 September 1967 in an art space in the centre of Reykjavík. She exhibited there several paintings, installations and collages – mostly political works that alluded to the social events she had experienced in Italy – but also images that had their resonance in contemporary pop culture. In one of her large paintings, *Modesty Blaise* (1967), she identifies with the British comic-strip heroine created by Peter O'Donnell and illustrator Jim Holdaway in 1963. Modesty Blaise was an exceptional young woman able to perform unexpected visual metamorphoses and transfigurations. The story was turned into a film in 1966 with the Italian actress Monica Vitti in the main role of the *femme fatale*. Vitti's juvenile silhouette pops up in some of Róska's works in 1967. Her identification with the transgressive heroine demonstrates that, while making no direct use of her own persona in her drawings and paintings, she is nevertheless there as a constant presence, a gothic character in line with the sexy comic heroine. As Modesty, Róska was independent, transgressive, intelligent, active, seductive and violent. She created her own extravagant urban identity so distanced from the reality of Reykjavík, that Icelandic journalists and

[384] Maud Anne Bracke, "Between the Transnational and the Local: Mapping the Trajectories and Contexts of the Wages for Housework Campaign in 1970s Italian Feminism," *Women's History Review* 22, no. 4 (2013): 625–642.

art critics refer to her as being "Italian", dark and foreign, characteristics that were associated with the oriental: sexual, mysterious and unscrupulous.[385]

Two years later, Róska again exhibited new works in Reykjavík. In between these two visits to Iceland, the political situation had changed in Italy. Róska had become an active participant in political actions both in Rome and in Fabbrico (Reggio Emilia), and as she relates in her correspondence, street- actions, and participation in radical groups took up all her time.[386]

One of her large 1969 photocollages includes an enlarged press photograph and is particularly striking in this context. The photo was probably shot during the occupation of the architecture Faculty in Rome, which led to a violent confrontation between Italian militants of both the left and the right and the Italian police on 1 March 1968, historically referred to as the Battle of Valle Giulia. The work depicts a group of Italian policemen holding phallic-shaped truncheons behind their backs. On the surface, Róska added the words *Afturhald, kúgun, morð* (Reaction, repression, murder).[387] These words function rhetorically on different levels. Róska directly identifies the corresponding iconic signs on the photograph by circling their matching objects: *reaction* refers to the heads (helmets) of the policemen in the upper left corner, *oppression* to the truncheon held by the policemen and *murder* to the gun carried by the policeman in the upper right corner of the image. The work could be interpreted as referring directly to the violent events that took place in Valle Giulia, where more than 600 people were injured.

While collaborating with Italian activists, Róska, as a member of the Icelandic political organization Fylkingin (the Revolutionary Socialist League/ Fylkingin baráttusamtök sósíalista, after 1976 named the Revolutionary Communist League/Fylking baráttusinnaðra kommúnista), was equally involved in political activities in Iceland.[388] Her political commitments were equally expressed in her activism, her art work, and in graphic design and cover art for the Revolutionary Socialist League's

[385] Þráinn, "Jú, víst er hægt að lifa á myndlist – ef maður er nógu lélegur", *Morgunblaðið*, June 28, 1967, 10 and 20; Benedikt Hjartarson, "'A Furious Girl from Rome' – Róska and the Mythography of Avant-Garde Bohemianism."
[386] Letter from Róska written to her father. Private collection.
[387] Róska, *Afturhald, kúgun, morð*, 1969, photography and collage, 122 cm x 184.5 cm, Reykjavík Art Museum. https://safneign.listasafnreykjavikur.is/is/verk/LR-3359
[388] Robert Gildea et al., *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

newspaper *Neisti*, created in 1963. She made contact with experimental theatre and cinema producers in France and Italy, working with directors such as Marc'O (b. 1927).[389]

Her work significantly expanded the experimental uses of photography, graphic design, painting and political printed matter. Subsequently she produced a few documentaries for the Italian state television, RAI, and directed a romantic fiction film (*Sóley*, 1982). More generally, Róska boldly addressed women's issues with respect to sexuality and violence, although never using her own body, as many performance artists of her generation did. In a number of press interviews she identified herself as a revolutionary artist but never referred to feminism. Her use of press photography, texts and collage techniques targeting patriarchy and institutional violence link her work to the Situationist International as well as to other avant-garde aesthetics as they were originally manifested in Russian constructivism, dada and surrealism.

Furthermore, the radical political content of Róska's work, her direct activism and her hybrid media practice distinguish her from the neo-avant-garde SÚM group, whose members worked almost exclusively within the "white cube' of the gallery space. Her contribution to SÚM III stirred the Icelandic art world because of its direct political content reflecting her participation in the riots that took place earlier that year in in Reggio Emilia.[390] Nonetheless, she was highly respected, both personally and as an artist, by her male colleagues in SÚM, while her brothers-in-arms in the Revolutionary Communist League criticized her erotic imagery and even tried to censor one of her political posters representing a naked actress. Her distinctive political approach is equally manifest in her striking graphic layouts and her photographic documentation featuring the queer Brazilian anti-military theatre group Dzi Croquettes in Paris (1975), performances that could be described as political gender-bending. Róska was exceptional in addressing queer sexualities long before these became integral to Icelandic feminist discourse.

Rúrí is also recognized in art historiographies for her political interventions in public space.[391] On 8 August 1974 she executed her first performance in Reykjavík, an action called *Golden Car* (also called *The King of the Animals*), featuring the destruction of a gold-coloured luxury car in front of astonished spectators in Reykjavík's old centre.

[389] Róska and the photographer Dominique Issermann played the two main roles in the film *L'impossibilità di recitare* Elettra *oggi*, directed by Marc'O in 1969.
[390] Hjálmar Sveinsson (ed.), *Róska* (Reykjavík: Nýlistasafnið and Mál og menning, 2000), 174.
[391] Christian Schoen, "Preface", *Rúrí* (Ostfieldern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011), 6–7.

The title was obviously a reference to the biblical story of the golden calf, targeting both patriarchal religion and consumer society, even though Rúrí claims she was only targeting consumerism through this violent critical action. A few months later she performed another provocative street action, *Tillaga um breytingu á íslenska þjóðbúningnum til að laga hann að nútíma þjóðfélagsháttum* (*A Proposition to Change the Icelandic National Costume to Meet with Modern Icelandic Society*).[392] In this anti-military performance that took place in front of the University Cinema and Conference hall, where a public celebration of Iceland's sovereignty took place, the artist wore an Icelandic national costume made of an American flag and a belt made of cartridges and decorations resembling hand grenades.

Two years later Rúrí settled temporarily in the Netherlands, where she studied at De Vrije Academie in The Hague (1976–1978) and started following the performance program at De Appel. During her first visit to Amsterdam, in 1974, she became acquainted with the curator Wies Smals (1939–1983), who later became director of De Appel, when they met in Smals's progressive Galerie Seriaal (1968–1975). Some years later, in the spring of 1978, Rúrí was invited by Smals to perform at De Appel and exhibited photographs in the front room of the gallery. The *Performance for Two Persons That Do Not Understand Each Other's Language* was performed with the Brazilian artist Flavio Pons (b. 1947). It reflects how the ethno-cultural composition of the population in many Dutch cities was changing as a result of Latin American and Turkish immigration.

Neither Róska nor Rúrí were members of feminist groups in Iceland, Italy or the Netherlands, nor did they frame their works within a specifically feminist discourse. Rúrí never embraced feminism and refused to participate in all-women exhibitions. Even today she distances herself from feminist ideas, although her first performances could be interpreted as being anti-patriarchal and self-reflective and can thus be seen as influenced by feminism in their performative content. "I have always considered myself as an artist (*tout court*) not a woman artist."[393] In her *An Attempt to Make Oneself Nicer* (1976), a body performance she enacted in two different restaurants in Haarlem every evening for seven days, her face symbolized the painted canvas. The title was ambiguous as it related both to the face and to the soul. "The first night my face was painted modestly in brown

[392] Performed in front of the University of Iceland conference building, on the 1 December celebration, 1974. Retrieved from: https://ruri.is/category/performances-solo/
[393] Correspondence with Rúrí, 2018.

and yellow tones, but the make-up got heavier and in the end my face became overpainted like an abstract painting." Such a performance tested the reactions of the audience, especially women's relations to their own appearance, the role of make-up in self-representation. She was addressing questions of consumerism and identity in a multicultural society, rather than investigating her own identity in this cosmopolitan context or exploring gender as such within her performances.

As with many performance artists and sculptors of her generation, Rúrí's interest in land art began in the late 1970s, and she became an important organizer of pan-Nordic environmental art projects produced under the aegis of the Experimental Environment Group which she created with Jón Gunnar Árnason, one of the founders of SÚM.[394] The exhibition *Experimental Environment II* presented at Korpúlfsstaðir on the outskirts of Reykjavík in the summer of 1980 employed the coastline as an outdoor exhibition space and included works by forty-five Scandinavian artists. A few years later Rúrí began her direct engagement with environmental global politics in works such as *Forest* and *Desolation* (1984). Later her political engagements intensified, focusing on the consequences of war in Rwanda, Burundi and the former Yugoslavia. She represented Iceland at the 2003 Venice Biennale with the multimedia installation *Archives – Endangered Waters*. Through sound recordings and photographs of fifty Icelandic waterfalls she criticized corporate energy politics and demonstrated in an interactive multimedia installation how the destruction of nature is a side-effect of capitalism.

5.4. The De Appel Influence

Many young Icelandic women were exposed to the burgeoning theories and practices of feminist art during their travels and studies in the late 1970s. Svala Sigurleifsdóttir became acquainted with women's art history and feminist theory during her studies at the University of Denver (1975–1976), where she read with enthusiasm Eleanor Tufts's

[394] The Nordic artists William Louis Sørensen (1942–2005) and Hannu Siren (b. 1953) and the Bulgarian–born Vassil Simittchiev (b. 1938) were the most active members, and together they mounted several environmental and outdoor exhibitions in the Nordic countries between 1978 and 1995 that led to collaboration between more than 100 Scandinavian artists. Aldís Arnardóttir, *Experimental Environment II. Norræn myndlistarsýning að Korpúlfsstöðum árið 1980.* MA dissertation (Reykjavík: University of Iceland, 2014).

important study of women's art practices called *Our Hidden Heritage: Five Centuries of Women Artists* (1974) and became familiar with contemporary American feminist art.[395]

Guðrún Erla Geirsdóttir (Gerla) had already defined herself as a feminist while enrolled at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam (1976–1980). In 1978 she worked as a part-time intern at the De Appel Foundation, which put her in close contact with its charismatic director Wies Smals. She closely followed the extensive program of feminist activities hosted at De Appel from 29 November 1978 to the end of January 1979. [396] It was a part of the exhibition *Feministische kunst internationaal: performances, video, film, documentatie* that opened in the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, organized by the Dutch feminist group SVBK (Stichting Vrouwen in de Beeldende Kunst). The show is now considered to be one of the most important European exhibition of feminist art of the decade. [397]

Gerla and Sigurleifsdóttir began writing about their experiences of feminist art in the Icelandic press. They spoke both for women's art and feminist art, even though they did not discuss this distinction as directly as it was argued amongst feminist artists and scholars at the time. In a lengthy article published in *Helgarpósturinn*, Geirsdóttir and Sigurleifsdóttir describe the multimedia work *Salto Mortale II* performed by the German video and performance artist Ulrike Rosenbach (b. 1943) on December 8 at De Appel.[398] Two days later, Geirsdóttir listened to the panel discussion "What is Feminist Art?" organized by the SVBK at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Prominent feminist artists and critics were on the panel, such as the American critic Lucy R. Lippard, the German artist Ulrike Rosenbach, and art historians Cecilia Rentmeister and Marlite Halbertsma.

However, the speakers disagreed on the definition of feminist art, and the discussion resulted in a heated debate between the panellists and the audience. Halbertsma considered feminist art as being "engaged art. Art with a message, in content visionary

[395] Interview with Sigurleifsdóttir in Copenhagen, October 2018.
[396] During two weeks in December a programme of videotapes, films and documentaries was projected by artists like Ulrike Rosenbach and Hannah Wilke. Every Thursday there was a performance.
Liesbeth Brandt Corstius, *Feministische kunst internationaal. Performances, video, film, documentatie* (Amsterdam: Stichting De Appel, 1978).
[397] Ingelies Vermeulen, "Feminist Art: an (un)Achievable Ideal? A Consideration of the Exhibition *Feministische kunst internationaal*," in *Rebelle: Art & Feminism, 1969–2009*, ed. Mirjam Westen (Arnhem: mmka, 2009), 57–68.
[398] Svala Sigurleifsdóttir and Guðrún Erla Geirsdóttir, "Að vera kona," *Helgarpósturinn*, June 8, 1979.

and activist."[399] The writer Hanneke Dantuma and Halbertsma defined "three types of art made by women: neutral art, women's art and feminist art. Neutral art was made by women artists who subscribed to the same concept of art as male artists. In 'women's art', however, the main focus was the artist's personal experience and included subjects like their own body, birth and motherhood. In feminist art, finally, the feminist engagement was immediately recognizable. Feminist art points to a change in the status quo. Which is why feminist art is often visionary and aggressive."[400]

In their article in *Helgarpósturinn*, Geirsdóttir and Sigurleifsdóttir do not discuss this conflict among women artists and feminists but focus on Rosenbach's definition of feminist art and explain why the representation of women's bodies – both their own and those of others – was a key strategy in feminist art practices. In a statement made in 1975 Rosenbach had indeed defined feminist art as "the elucidation of a woman-artist's identity: of her body, of her psyche, her feelings, her position within society. […] Feminist art is the artistic elucidation of woman's historical role: as a mother, a housewife, a woman prostituted by men, as a saint, virgin, witch."[401]

Sigurleifsdóttir became an active and influential art critic during the years 1977–1985. She wrote extensively about women artists, feminism in art and women's art history and art historiography and introduced feminist theory and criticism through several newspaper articles (*Dagblaðið*, *Vísir*, *Helgarpósturinn*, *Þjóðviljinn*), in the art journal *Svart á hvítu* (Black on White) and in the women's rights magazines *19. júní* and *Vera*. That the discussion took place principally in the news media rather than in the specialist art press was a consequence of the lack of art magazines and critical art discussion in Iceland, but it also signals feminism's strong social and political presence in newspapers and the mainstream media.

Sigurleifsdóttir studied painting, printing, photography and art history at the Pratt Institute, New York, from 1982 to 1984. She introduced Icelandic readers to several American artists, such as Cindy Sherman (b. 1954), Mary Beth Edelson (b. 1933) and

[399] Vermeulen, "Feminist Art: an (un)Achievable Ideal? A Consideration of the Exhibition *Feministische kunst internationaal*," 57.
[400] Vermeulen, 60–61.
[401] Ulrike Rosenbach, "Statement (1975)," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, eds. Peter Selz and Kristine Stiles (2nd ed.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 885–86.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles (b. 1939).[402] Her interest in photography as a technology especially adaptable to feminist visual culture is clear in her own photocollages. Like the American artist Martha Rosler (and many other contemporary feminist artists), she used found photographs to produce politicized collages: for example, her series *They Have Filled the World with Killing Machines* was specially produced for the anti-NATO exhibition organized at the Reykjavík Art Museum in 1979 to protest against the presence of the American military base located in Keflavík since 1951. As it happened, her work was refused by the selection committee on the grounds that the pictures were unframed.[403] In all likelihood they were probably considered too controversial to be exhibited because of their representation of male genitalia, which she juxtaposed with cut-outs of weapons as phallic symbols. The collages were later published in the socialist daily newspaper *Þjóðviljinn,* where she wrote articles about art and culture.

Geirsdóttir and Sigurleifsdóttir launched a series of women-only exhibitions in Reykjavík in the spring and summer of 1979. Sigurleifsdóttir was familiar with American feminist artists from her earlier visits to the A.I.R. gallery in New York.[404] She also describes in her articles, how the feminist Women's Ad Hoc Committee influenced the exhibition policy of the Whitney Biennials, raising the proportion of women artists from 5 per cent to 20 per cent.[405] Her observations were, however, ahead of their time, and it took another twenty years for a woman to be selected to represent Iceland at the Venice Biennale.[406]

Having encountered Mary Beth Edelson's work in New York, Sigurleifsdóttir invited Edelson to Iceland for a one-person show at the artist-run Gallerí Suðurgata 7, which opened on 15 May 1979. Edelson exhibited photographs and collages such as the *Moon Mouth series* (1973–1974) and other images representing her feminist goddess rituals performed in natural settings such as in the prehistoric Grapceva cave on Hvar island (Croatia). She also produced some new works in Iceland, where she staged performances in the lava field close to Hafnarfjörður. Edelson's own description of her

[402] In one of her detailed articles, she analyses the performative element in Sherman's photographic work, including those based on imagery from male porn magazines. Svala Sigurleifsdóttir, "Hver er Cindy Sherman eiginlega?" *NT*, February 17, 1985, 12–13.
[403] Svala Sigurleifsdóttir, "Róttæk myndlist í gylltum römmum," *Þjóðviljinn*, March 23, 1979, 8.
[404] A.I.R. (Artists in Residence) in New York, founded in 1972, was the first all-female artists' gallery in the US.
[405] Sigurleifsdóttir, "Atlaga gegn feðraveldinu," *Vísir*, April 29, 1978, 4–5.
[406] Steina Vasulka represented Iceland at the Venice Biennale in 1997.

Raising Firebird Energy performance reveals the *transcendental* meaning of her rituals: "Pulling fire into my body begins a physical metamorphosis as I become a deep well of a cave that releases the great firebird."[407] Edelson claimed that the patriarchal avant-garde was dead and that only women had something new to say: "The avant-garde in the 1970s is women's art."[408]

In her own art works Sigurleifsdóttir explored the tensions between the concepts of female and male avant-gardes. In her series of collages published in the women's rights journal *19. júní*, alongside Edelson's *Raising Firebird Energy* from the Grapceva-series, Sigurleifsdóttir, plays with art-historical iconography where women are either represented as goddesses or martyrs. In these two published collages juxtaposing Venus de Milo and St Agatha, she shows a photograph of herself in front of imagined monuments. In the first, she is sitting as a tourist in front of a fragment of Venus de Milo, with a text saying: "Ef að er gáð eru minnismerki um kúgun kvenna hvar sem við komum." (If you look carefully you notice memorials about women's oppression anywhere). On the second image, she is crawling into a giant bowl of soup decorated by a photograph of a housewife in the guise of St Agatha, exposing her breasts as cupcakes on a plate. The title says: "Er vonlaust að reyna að sleppa við að lenda í þessari hefðbundnu súpu?" (Is it hopeless to try to escape from this traditional soup?).[409]

5.5. Exhibiting Equality and Gender Politics

The first exhibition in Iceland devoted exclusively to women artists was organized in Reykjavík in February 1975: *Listsýning íslenzkra kvenna* (Icelandic women's art exhibition), celebrating International Women's Year.[410] In this exhibition too, the all-women participation leaves open what might be the distinction between artists who are women and artists who are feminists, especially with respect to the kinds of work produced. Characteristically neither Rúrí nor Róska participated, since they did not consider themselves women artists. The show included works by well-established

[407] Mary-Beth Edelson, "Two Photographs," *A Journal of Women Studies* 14, no. 1 (1993): 131–33.
[408] Sigurleifsdóttir, "Framúrstefna 7. áratugarins er kvennalist," *Helgarpósturinn*, May 18, 1979, 19.
[409] Sigurleifsdóttir, "Tvær listakonur kynntar," *19. júní*, 29 (1979), 50–51.
St Agatha because she is usually depicted with her breasts posed on a plate, as she was tortured in prison for refusing a noble marriage.
[410] The exhibition was organised in the Nordic House with the participation of 40 women artists. A pendant to the exhibition was held in the National Museum of Iceland celebrating old textiles created by women in in the past.

Icelandic women painters such as the landscape painter Kristín Jónsdóttir (1888–1959) and modernist Júlíana Sveinsdóttir (1889–1966), as well as the abstract sculptor Gerður Helgadóttir (1928–1975).

However, visual imagery was now considered to be a strong political tool rather than an independent aesthetic project, and new work made specifically for this exhibition included textiles with social realist subjects by Hildur Hákonardóttir and Þorbjörg Þórðardóttir (b. 1949).[411] These took as their themes the fragile position of women in both the home and the workplace.

Hákonardóttir was one of the founders of Rauðsokkahreyfingin (the Redstockings group), active from 1970 to 1982, whose slogan was "Manneskja – ekki markaðsvara" (A human being – not a product). The Redstockings group was inspired by the Danish Rødstrømperne, the New York City Redstockings group and the Dutch Dolle Mina. However, even though several artists were active within the movement, the visual arts were not a priority in the group's journal, *Forvitin rauð* (Curious Red), which focused on equality and class struggle, sexuality and family life.[412] In addition to her political activities, Hákonardóttir was also an active member of the neo-avant-garde and male-dominated SÚM group and had her first solo exhibition at Gallerí SÚM, where she showed her politically charged textile works. By introducing radical iconography addressing domesticity and gender into her woven tapestries, Hákonardóttir intended to contribute directly to the political and social struggle for women's equality. She not only reinvigorated textile practices, implicitly interrogating the hegemonic status of modernist (male) abstract painting, but all her subsequent work has dealt variously with political topics, gender included. Appointed head of the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts from 1975 to 1978, she influenced a new generation of textile artists and introduced new media art practices into the art academy's curriculum by opening a multimedia department under the direction of the Fluxus-influenced artist Magnús Pálsson.

Parallel to the equality discourse present in Hákonardóttir's works, a more aesthetic discourse is represented in the work of Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir, who developed a distinctive, sensuous, feminist iconography. This was exemplified in her powerful

[411] Ólafur Kvaran, "Listmyndin sem baráttutæki," *Þjóðviljinn*, October 17, 1976, 10–11.
[412] The title *Curious Red* was a pun on the Swedish films *I Am Curious* (*Yellow*) and *I Am Curious* (*Blue*), by Vilgot Sjöman, which caused a scandal when they came out in 1967 and 1968 because of their explicit sex scenes.

etchings illustrating the unity and solidarity demonstrated in the legendary Women's General Strike on 24 October 1975, in which 90 per cent of Icelandic women participated by ceasing all working activities for the day. Jónsdóttir excelled in etching, an "old master" technique par excellence, and her series of prints represent symbolically female conditions such as pregnancy and social passivity. Her works bear titles such as *24th October* and *Anonymous* (both 1976), where abandoned women's gowns or aprons lie on chairs – the bodies are absent, and the dresses left like empty carapaces. In *Deluxe and Delightful* (1979) she features herself as a woman's bust, imitating a classical male bust, but blindfolded and coiffed with fruit and cream cake.

Compared with the discussions arising from the *Kvindeudstillingen* (Women's Exhibition) at Charlottenborg in Copenhagen from 8 to 21 December 1975, Icelandic women artists lagged behind their Danish contemporaries with respect to a serious engagement with gender, gay and queer sexualities and identities. If art in general is not only male-dominated but also defined in patriarchal and masculinist terms, what might a female art look like? This was the question posed by the Danish artist Hellen Lassen, co-editor of the influential book *Billedet som kampmiddel: kvindebilleder mellem 1968 og 1977* (Image as Weapon: Women's Pictures between 1968 and 1977) and discussed at length in the socialist daily *Þjóðviljinn.*[413]

Drawing on the apocryphal biblical Lilith, the demonic first wife of Adam, conscripted as a metaphorical figure for feminine creativity, the question concerned the relation between gender and creativity. How could women become self-motivated and let free their imaginations. This query had been previously addressed in the *Women's Exhibition* in Copenhagen, and in the further development of this problematic, Danish feminists sought to explore women's creativity beyond that of gender equality which had largely dominated Nordic feminist art. A revolution in sexual and gender relations required dreams and new visions, not only freedom from oppression. It required an expression of women's authentic emotional experience, as distinct from their cultural isolation or marginalization. Women artists therefore had to invent new forms of expression, a feminist aesthetic with new content.

[413] Hellen Lassen (ed.), *Billedet som kampmiddel: kvindebilleder mellem 1968 og 1977* (Copenhagen: Information, 1977); Ingibjörg Friðbjörnsdóttir, "Draumaraunsæi. Sagt frá danskri bók um myndlist kvenna þar í landi," *Þjóðviljinn*, October 28, 1978, 8 and p. 18.

Collage became the predominant aesthetic tactic in feminist art. Historically, it is a radical, avant-garde method and in the 1960s and 70s it served as a critical medium with which to address a range of feminist and other political issues as already exemplified in the work of Edelson, Rosler and many others. The photocollages by Valdís Óskarsdóttir (b. 1949) provide another example of this critical practice. Óskarsdóttir, a photojournalist and writer, who later became a prize-winning and internationally recognized film editor, introduced cinematographic visions of cross-mediality between collage and photography, where she played with dystopic and poetic visual language in images that go beyond the straightforward feminist criticality seen in Sigurleifsdóttir's collages. Óskarsdóttir published her collages in two photobooks: *Rauði svifnökkvinn* (The Red Hovercraft, 1975, with a text by Ólafur Haukur Símonarson) and *Fosterjord* (Native Soil, 1979, with text by Gurli Lindén 1979).

The title *The Red Hovercraft* could be understood as a pun on the famous song *The Yellow Submarine* by The Beatles (1966). The book did not attract much attention as a visual and textual object, and it is identified as a book (not as a bookwork) in library catalogues and like several other books of this genre, has often disappeared into second hand bookstores and private collections without having been considered as experimental. For the images, Óskarsdóttir used avant-garde and surrealist visual language in order to tackle critical and political subjects such as climate crises, war, militarism, gender and ecological issues dealing with consumption and waste. Using collage, she constructed complex levels of signification by juxtaposing and mixing her own photographic images with generic press images, organic forms with industrial and cultural imagery. The authors play both with poetic and dystopic textual and visual language – referencing Karl Marx on the dissolution of old ideas and life forms, quoting Freud and André Breton on dreams and the political power of imagination as defined in Breton's manifesto of surrealism: "Beloved imagination, what I most like in you is your unsparing quality."[414]

The first half of the book is presented as an observation of earth "Ferðin til jarðarinnar" (Voyage to earth), while the second part is titled "Á jörðinni" (On the earth). It can be read as a critical reflection on patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism and warfare, as oil culture, violence and gender politics are variously articulated in the images. The

[414] André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 4.

book is also a collection of materials in itself and could even be interpreted as a time capsule. However, if displaced in the current context of Anthropocene other interpretations appear. A political arena is constructed in the work rather than represented through the images. Óskarsdóttir takes these readings further by juxtaposing them with vegetal, mineral or other non-human elements such as birds, shells, plants and rocks. These photomontages activate diverse strategies of disjunction for social resistance.

Placed within critical photomontage practice and the political context of the Cold War with its multiple references to American imperialism and its global references to the arms race and its disastrous consequences – the images mirror the climate catastrophe of today, illustrated through pictures of hunger, pollution, and waste. Its chronological span similarly parallels the expanding commodity culture, and the contested influence of the USA in all sectors of economy and culture. It also parallels the political crises, mobilizations against the American war in Vietnam, the student and feminist activism of the 1970s – that is, the larger historical and political context within which the artists were formed. Óskarsdóttir and Símonarson consider themselves as political and cultural critics – and visually they make use of aesthetic re-negotiation and a rejection of modernism and its institutions. [Fig. 9].

In her well-known text, "Beyond Fragmentation: Collage as Feminist Strategy in the Arts" Gwen Raaberg, claims that feminist artists have been attracted to this mode. She cites art critic Lucy R. Lippard who went so far as to claim "that the collage aesthetics […] is particularly feminist."[415]

In Óskarsdóttir's collages, masculine identities are constructed through well known sign systems, but she puts in question the social construction of gender by turning conventional sexual signifiers upside down. The naked body is male, and the desire is female as represented by the graphic lips covering the male genitals. Óskarsdóttir directly interrogates the sign systems of contemporary media, especially the representation of power, imperialism, patriarchy, gender as well as its subsequent ecological disasters. She explores these in their relation to patriarchal power, and the fragmenting of various

[415] Gwen Raaberg, "Beyond Fragmentation: Collage as Feminist Strategy in the Arts," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 31, no. 3 (September 1998): 153–171, 153 and p. 157; Lucy R. Lippard, "Introduction: Moving Targets/Concentric Circles: Notes from the Radical Whirlwind", in *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: New York Press, 1995), 3–28, p. 25.

cultural signifiers, she also juxtaposes "high" and "low" culture, possibly in reference to the capitalist consumer systems that sustains them.

5.6. Institutional Politics

The political significance of gender issues was brought to a new level of visibility in Iceland with the creation of Kvennaframboðið (The Women's Alliance), a women's political party active from 1983 to 1999. This served to resituate the private directly into the public sphere, using the traditional means of political organization to promote gender balance in institutions and administrations at both a local and a national level. Several artists were active members, and many came from the former Redstockings group. Art and feminism were now discussed in a new feminist journal *Vera* (founded in 1982), and in its pages space was allotted to feminist theory and discussions of cultural topics. Additionally, new art works were created by women artists for each cover.

The Women's Alliance's program supported the second wave "feminism of difference," based on the belief that there was an important cultural difference between men and women, as a reaction to feminism of equality.[416] Politically, they targeted patriarchy as such, but the main objective of the party was to foster women's liberation through increased representation of women in political formations and in national government. The political success of the Women's Alliance list of candidates (*Kvennalisti*) mobilized women to become direct actors in public life and created a new generation of politicians.

The socialist daily *Þjóðviljinn* continued to provide important space for discussion of feminist politics and gender issues. Sigurleifsdóttir covered the World Conference for Women: Equality, Development and Peace in Copenhagen (14–30 July 1980), which was an influential platform for a global discussion of women's rights. Simultaneously, artistic exchanges were organized between American and Nordic women artists. Impressed by the quality and quantity of art performances in Copenhagen, Sigurleifsdóttir singled out Barbara Hammer's participatory action *Camera Woman*, which took place in the Ny

[416] David Koester, "Gender Ideology and Nationalism in the Culture and Politics of Iceland," *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 3 (August 1995): 572–88.

Carlsberg Glyptotek, as a particularly important example of feminist experimental media work.[417]

These international events encouraged young women artists and politicians, such as Geirsdóttir, to organize *Listahátíð kvenna* (Women's Art Festival) during the autumn of 1985 in order to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Women's General Strike and International Women's Year. The festival was an important cultural manifestation launched by the Women's Alliance that sought to make visible women's important cultural contribution in Iceland. The main art exhibition was in Kjarvalsstaðir, a new exhibition hall run by the city of Reykjavík, where twenty-eight contemporary women artists had been selected to exhibit their works. This was the first major show of women's art in Iceland at which a new generation of women artists emerged, such as Brynhildur Þorgeirsdóttir (b. 1955) and Hulda Hákon (b. 1956), both educated in New York.

In an important collective photographic exhibition, curated by Sigurleifsdóttir, women's vernacular and professional photographic practices were jointly featured, with no hierarchical distinctions made between art photography, historical photography and vernacular forms of the medium. In her accompanying text she contextualizes women's amateur practices in terms of their producers' social condition, including their roles as mothers and wives, to illustrate how material conditions shaped various practices. In so doing, she suggested that photography as a medium created a new social context for the photographic expression of women's lives.[418]

5.7. The Guerrilla Girls Effect

The feminist discourses of the 1990s and the prominence of identity politics informed by new media eclipsed the class battles and the social critique of the previous generations of feminists, while gender equality in art institutions became a dominant topic. The critique of the masculinist bias of the art world was brilliantly documented in the *Guerrilla Girls* poster exhibition, which travelled from Sweden to Reykjavík in 1994.[419] The exhibition

[417] Sigurleifsdóttir, "Kvennalist í Köben. Kvennabarátta í orðum og myndum," *Þjóðviljinn*, July 25, 1980; ibid, "Kvennalist í Köben. Að glíma við frumstæð öfl," *Þjóðviljinn*, July 31, 1980; ibid, "Kvennalist í Köben. Saga myndlistarkvenna," *Þjóðviljinn*, August 1, 1980.

[418] Aró. "Listahátíð. Ljósmyndir og bókverk." *Þjóðviljinn*, September 28, 1985, 9; Kristín Blöndal, "Listahátíð" (Interview with Guðrún Erla Geirsdóttir), *Vera* 4:6 1985 (Special issue concecrated to the Women's art festival), 8–10; Guðrún Erla Geirsdóttir, "Ritstjórnargrein," *Vera* 4:6 (1985), 2.

[419] The exhibition was organised by the artists Erla Þórarinsdóttir (b. 1955), Brynhildur Þorgeirsdóttir (b. 1955), Guðrún Erla Geirsdóttir, Harpa Björnsdóttir (b. 1955) and Svala Sigurleifsdóttir.

was mounted in The Living Art Museum by a group of young Icelandic women artists, drawing attention to the fact that, despite the equality struggles of the previous two decades, Icelandic women artists faced the same problems as elsewhere in the Western world. Specifically, it was evident that women's art works had far less market value and less institutional visibility than the works of their male colleagues. The particular conditions of Icelandic women artists were thus appended to the original *Guerrilla Girls* posters. The inspiration for these modified posters derived from one of the *Guerrilla Girls'* observations that for women artists, "It's even worse in Europe." One of these posters pointed out that no woman had ever represented Iceland at the Venice Biennale. Others enumerated the number of public art works by women in the city of Reykjavík and documented the paucity of grants received by women artists. This collective effort prompted a shift in institutional cultural politics so that the video pioneer and musician Steina Vasulka was selected as the first woman to represent Iceland at the Venice Biennale in 1997 with her multi-screen video installation *Orka* (Power).

The generation of women artists born in the 1960s and 1970s belong to the so-called third wave of feminism, characterized by their strong media representation, self-assertive critical methods, their humour and their intellectual approach to their work, including themes of gender, identity and difference. Taking their distance from the political struggles that informed women's art of the 1970s and 1980s, many of them – among them Anna Líndal, Ólöf Nordal and Hildur Bjarnadóttir – created works infused with gendered metaphors and allegorical content. Líndal addressed care as a gendered activity in her installation *The Mender*, consisting of 1,128 needles and threads, while in the photographic series *Indoors* (1996), exhibited at Malmö Art Museum, she showed women performing tasks such as mending and ironing.[420]

Bjarnadóttir graduated in 1997 from the Pratt Institute in New York, where she studied in the New Form Department. In her *Swan-Hildur* (1998) crocheted swans were transformed into guns or penises depending on the angle from which they are viewed. Still more confrontational was her *Shooting Gallery* (1998), a large doily made from silver yarn, sculpted into miniature weapons. In her *Reconstructed Canvas* series (2003), she subverted modernist abstraction by unravelling the threads of a canvas and then

[420] Anna Líndal, *Leiðangur/ Expedition,* ed. Ólöf K. Sigurðardóttir (Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum, 2017).

reweaving it into a rectangular shaped wall piece, or she recycled the yarn into crocheted "table mats".

Ólöf Nordal also worked with textiles at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, but received her graduate degree in sculpture from the *Yale* University School of Art. In her early work she created hybrid objects containing cultural and gender references, informed by the cultural clash she personally experienced in the United States. In her photographic series *Horny* (2002), against a red monochrome background, she staged one of her idiosyncratic hybrid objects in a variety of equivocal sexual positions. The object is a "combine" of an Icelandic sheep's horn (traditionally used as a child's toy) joined to the lower part of a Barbie doll, forming a quirky sex toy.[421]

Nordal's interest in these fragmented bodies of humans and animals derives from the quality of the uncanny, the Unheimlich. For Sigmund Freud the sensation of the uncanny is forged in the unconscious, but for artists it could be pursued for aesthetic ends.[422] The work speaks of this kind of mutation, grotesque transgression between a cultural narrative and the estranged object thereby seeking to destabilize cultural values and national myths.

The group Icelandic Love Corporation (ILC) also adopted the feminist strategy of masquerade by stylizing the body, exaggerating and gimmicking "the mask of womanliness" or a "female" behaviour in their performances, as theorized by Butler.[423] The three-women collective began their collaboration in 1996 with actions that dissolved distinctions between high art and popular culture and have since created a number of performances developing a playful approach to museums and other institutional spaces. Using a mix of performance, video, photography and installation, the instant mediation of their performances singled them out when their first performance, *Kiss* (1996), was broadcast live on Icelandic National Television (RUV). It was a short time-based sequence that was a little bit longer than a friend's kiss but a little bit shorter than a lover's

[421] *Hornklof*, whose title evokes the word *hornklofi* [meaning: square brackets], the word *horn* (an animal horn) and *klof* (crotch), as well as alluding to the English word *horny*, In the video, Nordal made the doll/horn/hybrid twist, bump-and-grind to a song from a well-known American porn movie of 1978, *Debbie does Dallas*. Ólöf Nordal, *Hornklof*, 2002, photography (370 x 480 cm) and video installation. Courtesy of the artist.

[422] Freud took the term from the German psychologist Ernst Jentsch who described it in his essay "Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen" from 1906.

[423] The performative aspect of womanliness is discussed in Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitutions: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31.

kiss. At the end one of the women kissed the camera lens, directly bringing her kiss to every home in the country.

It was not, however, until the new millennium and its cultural and economic circumstances that permitted real collaboration between art institutions in Iceland and ones abroad. The international success of Björk opened multiple collaborations with Icelandic women artists such as Gabríela Friðriksdóttir (b. 1971), and Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir (b. 1969) aka Shoplifter, both artists represented Iceland at the Venice Biennale respectively in 2005 and in 2019.

The Icelandic Love Corporation also accepted commissions for Björk, and these intermedia activities brought their practice closer to theatrical stage performance. The costume they created for Björk called *TheWildWomanWoodooGrannyDoilyCrochet* was commissioned for the cover of her *Volta* album (2007). It was based on the crocheted costumes already seen in several of ILC performances, such as *Cardiac Circus* (2004), *Eruption-Corruption* (2004) and their three-hour performance *Creation-Corruption-Celebration* at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt (2005), in which their roles were described as "creative, resourceful, sly, glamorous, greedy and can deserve to be killed. They sometimes commit crimes against other species. That is their nature. In many ways they are related to humans."[424]

The *WildWomanWoodooGrannyDoilyCrochet* performance was described as "an electro-neon Icelandic domestic joyous force of nature", it was introduced as a metaphor of creative growth enacted through their collective knitting performances, and it could also be interpreted as a tongue-in-cheek reference to the goddess mythology in 1970s feminism. [Fig. 10].

As earlier discussed, Björk was an important intermediary between Icelandic artists and foreign art and cultural institutions. In addition, she commissioned or produced costumes and ornaments that bridge cultural spheres in a digital world that levels little differences between music, design, fashion, art and advertising. Björk's use of the latest technology within the international cultural machine had a direct and indirect role in the mainstreaming of these new technologies in Iceland, solidifying collaboration between visual art and music, resulting in a collective branding where yet another mythic *Icelandicity* could be identified.

[424] ILC website. https://www.ilc.is/

The braided hair sculptures Shoplifter made for Björk's stage costume in 2004 were photographed by the well-known fashion photography duo Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin, and propelled Björk (wearing Shoplifter's headgear) to the front page of the *New York Times Style Magazine*.[425]

The hair sculpture occupied a space between stage design and art and circulated between different cultural spaces: theatre, fashion, and performance art. Their cultural and folklorish reference to traditional uses of Icelandic women's headgear could also be compared to the politicalized use of wigs in Lorna Simpson's (b. 1960) artwork, examining the material culture, fashion and hair styles of black women. In contrast to Simpson, however, Shoplifter did not connect the head ornament with whiteness nor any other object of social criticism. The hair braids were simply part of a larger multimedia collaboration with Björk in relation to the release and promotion of the music of the album *Medúlla*.

Shoplifter's hybrid practices similarly demonstrate the expansion of the art space encouraged by the new capitalism, where the artwork becomes part of an all-encompassing cultural production. As such, it finds fertile ground within art institutions, fashion and design companies. In her expansive installations, the use of decorative synthetic hair functions as a symbol of both playfulness and feminine creation. In 2008, in collaboration with A.V.A.F. (Assume Vivid Astro Focus), Shoplifter installed a colourful hair wall titled *Aimez vous avec ferveur!* in a window of the restaurant in MoMA in New York. The hair subsequently became her signature, that she described in an interview forming a bridge between high and low culture, between painting, popular culture, and fashion: "This synthetic hair is a very lo-fi type of material, very raw and fast to work with. It's Halloweenish hair. To me it conveys sweetness, optimism and light. It resembles abstract expressionist painting and addresses pop culture, pop art and fashion."[426]

Shoplifter has since continued to develop synthetic hair installations in this space between visual art and design. The monumental installation *Chromo Sapiens* at the Venice Biennial in 2019 was a new version of the immersive, sensory installation

[425] William Van Meter, "Head Case," *The New York Times Style Magazine*, February 20, 2005, 164.
[426] Isabel Kirsch, "Wild & Woolly: The Creative Mind of Shoplifter Arnardottir," *NY ART BEAT*, August 25, 2008. Retrieved from: http://www.nyartbeat.com/nyablog/2008/08/wild-woolly-the-creative-mind-of-Shoplifter-arnardottir/

Nervescape that Shoplifter made for the *Nordic Fashion Biennale* in Frankfurt in 2014 and has since been exhibited in The National Gallery of Iceland, Kiasma in Helsinki and in several other contemporary art museums around the world.

In the Icelandic pavilion in Venice, guests were invited to a stroll through three connected, artificial cave spaces covered by colourful synthetic hair from floor to ceiling. The space was built as an open-mouthed cave where viewers were drawn into an abyss that suggests all the orifices of the human body. It was possible to walk quickly through the caves, sit or lie down, listen, or even take in the heavy metal music of the band HAM that rumbled like a heartbeat inside of the furry bulge. The first cave, called *Primal Opus*, referred to the primal nature of man, where the animalistic sounds of the band HAM were intended to connect the viewer to some sort of primal force of Icelandic nature. Then the path led to *Opium Natura*, where the soft pastel-coloured fur environment embraced the viewer. It was tempting to recline in Shoplifter's soft embrace and let the mind wander into the feminist concept of bodily subject and rebellious poetry. The experience could also be connected to the oblivion that Kristeva calls *chora*; a concept describing the archaic origins, the condition that arises in the motherly safety of the cave where sound prevails over language.[427] The furry texture awakens infantile, yet luxurious feelings, at the same time as the cave operates as a metaphor for the womb.

The word *grotesque* is derived from the Latin word *grotto*, which is a hole, a hiding place, a small cave. Originally such places were parts of the buildings built in the times of the Romans, a construction that was then revived during the Renaissance. Such grottos were decorated with beastly, open-mouthed heads, decorations that adorn many buildings in Venice. They have been described as strange, weird, ugly, horrible, even disgusting.

The metamorphosis of man into animal is one of the oldest permutations of the grotesque, and the title of the work, *Sapiens*, signals the origin of man as a species. It is an open question as to whether the artist is inviting the viewer to experience this construction as an environment, possibly referring to which the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin described as formless, an open bodily abyss that is characterized by inexhaustible creative energy, or does the hairy, colourful, vivacity refer to the calm warmth of a child's room? [428]

[427] Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 2018 (1974)).
[428] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 317.

Chromo-Sapiens is a polysemic work undoubtedly meant to prompt a strong emotional reaction in connection to childhood memories. It emphasizes the divide between high and low culture. It reflects on the monstrous imagery of the middle ages, to contemporary practices where the grotesque appears in the hybrids and the cyborgs of the digital game world. In English *chromo* means colour and in French the word means multicoloured, so the witty title could be understood as twisting, or even a critique of anthropocentrism. The cave dwellers of the work, the exhibition guest, is then neither black nor white, they are colourful and decorated – they are *chromo*. It is possible that Shoplifter wants to redefine homo sapiens as a multicoloured, utopian, ethical being based on conditions neither coloured by speciesism nor human chauvinism. In the context of the 2019 Venice Biennial, one of the hottest summers in Europe since records began, there is a reason to consider the work with respect to global warming. It is then unpleasant that, even as the artist applies the historical symbolatry and feminist perspectives of the grotesque, intended primarily as criticism of patriarchy, the artist engages in– what seems at first to be folly – producing the work from plastic. The textile and plastics industry threatens life on Earth, and it seems ironic to connect the work to an experience of Icelandic nature, for as critics have pointed out it requires a few hundred kilos of coloured plastic hair to produce the installation. Others have pointed out, among them the philosopher Timothy Morton, that the work possesses the characteristics of *hyperobjects*. That it is neither object in time or space, but that in it there is a presence that has permeated our whole reality, in the same way that plastic has infiltrated our bodies and the whole of the natural environment. This is how Morton reads Shoplifter's work (and art more generally) as an interconnecting, devilish, informative energy:

> In an age of ecological awareness, we will come again to think of art as a demonic force, carrying information from the beyond, that is, from nonhuman entities such as global warming, wind, water, sunlight and radiation. From coral bleaching in the ocean to the circling vortex of plastic bags in the mid-Atlantic.[429]

From this point of view the installation changes from being a liberating feminist performance into being a heathen place to contemplate the climatic and biological life

[429] Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic. Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Open Humanities Press, 2013), 22.

crisis that faces mankind. However, do artists, curators and art lovers have an ethical responsibility toward the climate, and are they obliged to respond to the carbon footprint of art? The guests in Venice cannot avoid taking a stance toward this question since many of the artists at the biennial engage with climate anxiety, the destruction of ecosystems, the climate crisis, and ask questions in their work about the future of man. On top of this, the damage on the environment of Venice is obvious to all tourists and travellers. The work *Chromo Sapiens* thus sparks questions about the fragile state of contemporary art in a globalized and biennial-centric artworld.

By appropriating the symbolic qualities of champagne, girlishness, glitter, sweets and high heels into the austerity of the white cube, the ILC also mocked the seriousness of the masculine avant-garde.[430] Still, their multiple characters, often utilizing animal masks, were not direct subversions of exaggerated gender stereotypes, as is often the case in queer performance. Their outfits, constructed as simple and practical garments appropriate for action, and by their adoption of a uniform look, they negated individual characteristics to affirm a collective identity.

The practices developed by the so called "third wave generation" reveal a desire for professional recognition in an international context and for more attention from critics and institutions in a more global art world. Even though many of these artists work with textiles, and address gender, sex and misogyny, as did the earlier generations, they seem to differentiate themselves from the avant-garde positions of their predecessors. They advocate for sexual behaviour on their own terms and their hybrid appearances are developed without any connection to pre-given feminist paradigms. Their work could simply be read as a manifestation of female desire – as a "libidinal license" that permits them to claim for themselves new authority-free and autonomous zones inside and outside the pre-defined avant-garde.[431]

[430] Camilla Skovbjerg Paldam, På røde strømpefødder i avantgardens fodspor / In the footsteps of the avant-garde in red-stockinged feet: The Icelandic Love Corporation spreder kærlighed på ARoS / The Icelandic Love Corporation spreads love at ARoS, in *Love Conquers All!: The Icelandic Love Corporation* (Aarhus: ARoS Publishing, 2016), 20–29.
[431] Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

5.8. Conclusion

I have traced how Icelandic women artists adapted to new art practices and feminist discourses through their contacts with diverse art institutions from Denver and New York but also, with De Appel in Amsterdam, as well as women's festivals in Amsterdam and Copenhagen. The 1994 *Guerrilla Girls* poster exhibition finally produced tangible results in institutional gender politics. Feminism in the political sphere culminated in the creation of the Women's Alliance, and many of its active members were artists, writers, art critics and journalists. However, art never became an important part of its utopian social model. *The Women's Festival* of 1985 nevertheless represented a turning point as a collective initiative exhibiting women's art in institutional spaces in Reykjavík. It can thus be interpreted as a result of the feminist "traffic' mediated through art criticism in the public media. However, despite the continuous effort to further feminist art discourse, the theoretical impact was modest and the most important figures in Icelandic contemporary art have remained male. Furthermore, recent art historiographies have overlooked the important output and the organizational role of women artists, many of whom had a prominent role in the creation and management of now historical artist-run spaces, travelling exhibitions and festivals.

But recent publications, exhibitions and other analyses of feminist art are an example of expanding discourses, often including artists who did not necessarily share a feminist agenda.[432] Icelandic women artists did not develop the self-referential point of view that has become the characteristic of a now institutionalized feminist avant-garde. Nevertheless, even though they chose other forms of expression, their work had a strong feminist content and was no less critical of patriarchy. Still, their artistic choices and isolation from global art markets may be one of the reasons for their omission from recent international feminist historiographies and exhibitions. This oversight is unfortunate, and my intention is therefore to call attention to the peripheral status of these artists but, no less importantly, to point to the lack of a more expansive contextualization in contemporary feminist narratives. Certainly, the label *feminist avant-garde* might be a useful tool for recognition and a unifying umbrella term for the art market and cultural institutions. However, it does not describe the complex political situations, topicalities,

[432] Discussed in Kathleen Wentrack, "What's So Feminist about the *Feministische Kunst Internationaal*? Critical Directions in 1970s Feminist Art," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 33, no. 2 (2012). Special Issue: *Feminist Art and Social Movements: Beyond NY/LA*: 76–110.

or generational shifts, all of which belongs to the crucial category of context. "Critical cartographies" need to be written because, as Marsha Meskimmon puts it:

> These critical cartographies begin a process of conceptual decolonization; exploring affinities between diverse geographical positions is a strategy that makes it possible to both expand our knowledge of the global parameters of "feminist art" and interrogate the concepts by which we define its limits.[433]

All the artists here discussed display characteristics of avant-garde practice, in the sense that they sought to dismantle the forms of everyday social relations, institutions, power structures and the ideological foundations of gender divisions. In addition to their critical political positions, they experimented with new media, participated actively in public initiatives outside the studio, created and ran artist-run spaces, exhibited in Iceland and abroad, and were publicly active in national and Nordic contexts.

[433] Marsha Meskimmon, "Chronology through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally," in *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), 322–35, p. 325.

6. MEMORY AND IDENTITY: WHITENESS IN THE CULTURAL ARCHIVE

6.1. Whiteness in the Cultural Archive

The term "whiteness" has been seldom used in Icelandic art criticism, even though it has been central in the construction of Icelandic identity.[434] Historian Sverrir Jakobsson has demonstrated that references to whiteness as an important element of differentiation have a long tradition in Icelandic literature and language. A clear distinction was made between Icelanders and the others in the Icelandic Sagas, written in the 12th and 13th where the *others*, physically different, are called *skrælingjar*, a derogative term for the native inhabitants of Greenland and Vínland (North America), but also, blacks from Africa.[435] However, the association between Nordic identities and whiteness is neither natural nor archaic, but the product of ongoing circumstance and social constructions.[436] Catrin Lundström and Benjamin R. Teitelbaum have pointed out that "Nordic whiteness is by no means natural or static […] Finns, and Icelanders [and Sami people] have at various times and settings had their whiteness questioned or rejected."[437] Consequently, the anxiety of not being considered white, civilized and European haunted Icelandic

[434] There is an important bibliography allocated to the subject of the political and cultural construction of Icelandic national identity. Historians have studied the formation of political and cultural nationalism and have approached Iceland's national identity historically as being constructed by national ideologies. Discussed in Guðmundur Hálfdánarson og Ólafur Rastrick, "Culture and the Constitution of the Icelandic in the 19th and 20th Centuries," 87–104; Joep Leerssen discusses racial essentialism in historical context in Joep Leerssen, "The North: A Cultural Stereotype between Metaphor and Racial Essentialism," in *Northern Myths, Modern Identities. The Nationalisation of Northern Mythologies Since* 1800, ed. Simon Halink (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 13–32; Anthropologists Gísli Pálsson and Kristín Loftsdóttir discuss social racism in contemporary Iceland; Kristín Loftsdóttir, "Belonging and the Icelandic Others: Situating Iceland Identity in a Postcolonial Context," in *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region: Exceptionalism, Migrant Others and National Identities*, eds. Kristín Loftsdóttir and L. Jensen (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 57–71; Kristín Loftsdóttir and Sanna Magdalena Mörtudóttir, "'Where Are You From?': Racism and the Normalization of Whiteness in Iceland," J*ournal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* 1, no. 2, Mixed Race in Nordic Europe (2022): 215–32; Gísli Pálsson, "Genomic Anthropology Coming In from the Cold?," *Current Anthropology* 49, no. 4 (2008): 545–68.

[435] Sverrir Jakobsson, "Black Men and Malignant-looking": The Place of the Indigenous People of North America in the Icelandic World View," in *Approaches to Vínland: A Conference on the Written and Arhaeological Sources for the Norse Settlement in the North-Atlantic Region and Exploration of America,* eds. Andrew Wawn and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (Reykjavík: Sigurður Nordal Institute, 2001), 88–104. Simon Halink (ed.), *Northern Myths, Modern Identities. The Nationalisation of Northern Mythologies Since 1800* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019); Simon Halink, "The Good Sense to Lose America. Vinland as Remembered by Icelanders," in *From Iceland to the Americas. Vinland and Historical Imagination,* eds. Tim William Machan and Jón Karl Helgason (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 160–78, p. 164.

[436] Catrin Lundström and Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, "Nordic Whiteness: An Introduction," *Scandinavian Studies* 89, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 151–58.

[437] Ibid, 151.

intellectuals in late-19th and early-20th centuries. Icelanders were eager to (re)invest their Nordic identity as a part of the fight for independence and their cultural renaissance as a civilized Nordic nation with European values, including physical whiteness which became one of the main signifiers of *Icelandicness*.[438] These concerns were often expressed in connection with the various displays of Icelandic culture in French and Danish colonial exhibitions such as the *Musée Islandique*, at the Palais Royal, Paris in 1856 and in the Icelandic representation in the Danish pavilion at the Paris World Exhibition 1900. Icelandic students and scholars consistently protested the representation of Icelanders in such colonial contexts. Within these, Icelandic artifacts and photographs of Icelandic women were juxtaposed with those from the Danish colonies, that is, the non-European cultures established in Greenland and the Danish West Indies (i.e., the islands St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix). This concern became particularly vocal in the context of the 1905 colonial exhibition in the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen (*Dansk koloniudstilling (Grønland og dansk Vestindien) samt udstilling fra Island og Færøerne,* København).[439] Those displays, including Icelandic artifacts, animals, architecture, and natural phenomena, such as an artificial Geysir, as well as the presence of Icelandic women dressed in national costumes, were vigorously criticized by Icelandic students and scholars. These representations within these colonial and racial contexts were considered to be abject and degrading for Icelanders.[440] Loftsdóttir has argued that such protests need

[438] Discussed in Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir and Kristín Loftsdóttir, "Cultivating Culture? Images of Iceland, Globalization and Multicultural Society," in *Images of the North: Histories – Identities – Ideas* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), 205–16.

[439] *Dansk koloniudstilling (Grønland og dansk Vestindien) samt udstilling fra Island og Færøerne*, København, 1905. Andreas Bruun, *Illustreret Vejledning over dansk Koloniudstilling, Grønland og dansk Vestindien samt Udstilling fra Island og Færøerne, aut. Udg. med 45 Billeder ved F. Hendriksen 31. maj til den 24. september 1905.* Retrieved from: https://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/den-danske-koloniudstilling-i-tivoli-1905/

[440] "Þar á að sýna moldarkofa frá Íslandi, til þess að mönnum gefist á að líta, að þeir sóma sér vel andspænis Skrælingjahreysunum frá Grænlandi eða reyrskýlum Svertingjanna. Þar verður einnig skopstæling af Geysi (til þess hjálpa auðvitað íslendingar) og Grænlandsjöklar í hraukum. Það á að fá íslenzkar stúlkur til þess að sýna sig þar í þjóðbúningum, jafnframt því, að heill hópur hálfnakinna Svertingja og selskinnsvaðra Skrælingja verður rekinn þangað. Sömuleiðis stendur til að smalað verði þangað ýmsum skepnum, þeim er þrifist geta á „hjáleigunum", svo sem sauðkindum frá Íslandi og grísum Blámanna frá Vesturheimseyjum." Gísli Sveinsson, "Sýningin í Kaupmannahöfn frá hjáleigum Danaveldir," *Fjallkonan*, December 16, 1904, 197–98, p. 198. Discussed in Jón Yngvi Jóhannsson, "Af reiðum Íslendingum: deilur um Nýlendusýninguna 1905," in *Þjóðerni í þúsund ár?*, eds. J. Y. Jóhannsson, K. Ó. Proppé and S. Jakobsson (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2003), 135–59. The Zoological Garden and the amusement park Tivoli were the main venues for larger ethnographic exhibitions in Denmark from the 1870s to 1905. Around 50 exhibitions of so-called exotic people were organised in this period and they were hugely popular with the Danish public and press. Anne Folke Hennigsen, "Performance and politics of authenticity in live ethnographic exhibitions," *Bodyworks. Nordisk Museologi* 2017, no. 1: 21–36; Rikke Andreassen, *Human*

to be understood in relation to Iceland's marginalized position. She observes that while "Iceland did not participate directly in the […] colonial project, the interwoven racial, gendered, and nationalistic ideologies associated with the colonial project were very much a part of Icelandic identity as shaped by parallel discourses in Europe."[441] Loftsdóttir has also remarked that the importance of racial classifications in anthropological discourses granted Icelanders a new status; by virtue of inclusion among the "white and civilized race" their prior representation as subordinate Danish colonial subjects was replaced by more "noble" identity.[442]

These alterations were debated and theorised by academic scholars such as the historian Jón J. Aðils (1869–1920), who constructed the grand narrative of Icelandic authenticity rooted both in the medieval literary heritage and in pagan culture.[443] Cultural production (including visual arts) thus became an important element in the construction of national culture. Art historian Ólafur Kvaran, former director of the National Gallery of Iceland, has discussed the important influence of Bjarni frá Vogi (1863–1926) who defined the national role of Icelandic art as an outgrowth of Icelandic soil and the Icelandic mind.[444] However, slightly different connotations associated with literature and

---

Exhibitions: Race, Gender and Sexuality in Etnic Displays (New York: Routledge), 2016; Anne Folke Henningsen, "Producing and Consuming Foreignness. 'Anthropologicalzoological' Exhibitions in Copenhagen," in *Nordic Perspective on Encountering Foreignness*, eds. Anne Folke Henningsen, Leila Koivunen and Taina Syrjämaa (Turku: University of Turku, 2009), 55–70; Kristín Loftsdóttir, "The Colonial Exhibition in Tivoli. Racism and the Colonial Others," in *Crisis and Colonial Reality at Europe's Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 30–45; ibid, "'Pure Manliness': The Colonial Project and Africa's Image in Nineteenth Century Iceland," *Global Studies in Culture and Power* 16, no. 3 (2009): 271–93.

[441] Kristín Loftsdóttir, "Negotiating White Icelandic Identity: Multiculturalism and Colonial Identity Formations," *Social Identities* 17, no. 1 (2011): 11–25, p. 11.

[442] Kristín Loftsdóttir, "Negotiating White Icelandic Identity," 16.

[443] Jón Jónsson Aðils, *Íslenzkt þjóðerni. Alþýðufyrirlestrar* (Reykjavík: The author, 1903). Discussed in Simon Halink, "Noble Heathens: Jón Jónsson Aðils and the Problem of Iceland's Pagan Past," *Nation and Nationalism* 23, no. 3 (2017): 463–83.

[444] Ólafur Kvaran, "Brautryðjendur í upphafi aldar," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*, vol. I, 46–75, p. 74; Bjarni Jónsson, "Einar frá Galtafelli og Ingólfur. Erindi flutt á Ingólfskvöldi 31. janúar," *Huginn*, February 7, 1908, 1: "En oss, íslendingum, mun þó auðskilið að hér er íslenzkur gróður vagsinn í íslenzkri jórð af íslenzkum rótum. Sést það bæði á því, að yrkisefnin eru valin úr vorum eigin hugarheimi og á hinu að maðurinli hefir meira auga fyrir aflmikilli og hrikalegri fegurð, en mjúkum yndisleik, þótt hann geti og brugðið honum fyrir sig." The linguist Alexander Jóhannesson also largely contributed to defining a national role of art, discussed its national content, and spoke for the importance of a national art museum. Alexander Jóhannesson, "Síðustu listaverk Einars Jónssonar," *Eimreiðin* 1, no. 1 (1915): 1–7. Several other scholars, such as Ágúst H. Bjarnason, and Guðmundur Finnbogason contributed to the idea of a national Icelandic art and the importance of an Icelandic Art Museum. Guðmundur Finnbogason, "Íslenzkt myndasafn," *Fjallkonan*, January 4, 1907, 1–2. Discussed in Ólafur Kvaran, *Einar Jónsson myndhöggvari. Verk, táknheimur og menningarsögulegt samhengi* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2018), 180.

language were activated in arguments for political independence in 1918, when Iceland obtained sovereignty from the Danish King. "We deem that these circumstances, a particular language and distinctive culture, give us a *historical and natural* right to total independence."[445] A more inclusive vision of *Icelandicness* was represented in other evocations of I*celandicity* as in the case of politician and poet Hannes Hafstein (1861-1922). In his poem *Landsýn* (Landvision), he asks what will happen to the waterfalls and the volcanic fires in the future? He sees them as possessing invaluable economic potential as natural resources awaiting exploitation. Promising economic growth through industry, he celebrates electricity as a trope of modernity, imagining it as the wheel in an industrial social utopia.[446]

Through these multiple national discourses, here briefly described, it is possible to distinguish between *Icelandicness* and *Icelandicity*, each employing and referring to different signifiers. On one hand, an anti-modern nationalism based on ideologies of historical authenticity, is expressed as a politic of an imagined unified past. On the other hand, there emerges a more liberal nationalism referring to modern capitalist development in which natural resources such as water and volcanos are seen as a future promise for economic growth. These are in all cases based on patriarchal ideologies, visually symbolised in the public space, through buildings and monuments created by architect Guðjón Samúelsson and sculptor Einar Jónsson. These representations of national history included many monumental statues erected in the administrative and cultural centre of Reykjavík, all representing male Icelandic politicians and poets, as well

[445] "The Icelandic nation is the only Germanic nation to preserve the ancient language, which was used in all the Nordic countries 900–1000 years ago, with so small changes that all Icelanders still understand and can use perfectly the literary treasures of both our own ancient culture and the one of the other Nordic countries. With the language, people have preserved a distinctive nationality, distinctive customs, and distinctive culture. And, with the language, the consciousness of the country's special status in relation with our kindred nations has always lived with the nation. We deem that these circumstances, a particular language and distinctive culture, give us a *historical and natural* right to total independence." The statement is translated into English in Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "Icelandic Nationalism: A Non Violent Paradigm?," in *Nations and Nationalities in Historical Perspective*, eds. Guðmundur Hálfdanarson and Ann Katherine Isaacs (Pisa: Edizioni Plus, 2001), 1–13, p. 12–13.

[446] Hannes Hafstein (1861–1922), was a politician, the first Icelandic minister of the Homerule in 1904, and a poet. The line: "Land mitt! Þú ert sem órættur draumur. Óráðin gáta. Fyrirheit! (My country! You are like an obscure dream. Unsolved riddle. A Promise!), was used as a walltext by Hjálmar R. Bárðarson, who contextualised it with his photograph showing the sublime waterfall Gullfoss. It was placed at the entrance of the industry fair (Iðnsýningin) organised in Reykjavík in 1952. The show mirrored the industrial exhibitions running in Europe in connection with the Marshall Plan and its dissemination in the early 1950s. Photograph reproduced in Guðrún Harðardóttir, *Ljósmyndun á Íslandi 1950–1970* (Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 1999), 59; Guðbjörn Guðmundsson, "Iðnsýningin 1952," *Tímarit Iðnaðarmanna* 25, no. 3 (1952): 48–51, p. 49.

as a statue of Danish King Christian IX conferring the first constitution to Iceland in 1874.[447] By positioning this cultural archive within critical theories that have addressed race and colonialism as constituent ideologies of modernity, in this chapter, I will, explore how whiteness has been constructed and signified in Icelandic culture and how contemporary artists have questioned the authenticity of these narratives that represent Icelandic culture as autonomous and removed from history and its determinations. Furthermore, the entanglement of gender and race will also appear in my analyses as they are at the core of my discussion of *Icelandicity.*

6.2. The Toppling of Þorfinnur Karlsefni

In the early hours of Oct 2nd, 2018, and as reported by NBC, unidentified activists beheaded a hundred-year-old bronze sculpture representing an Icelandic landfarer Þorfinnur Karlsefni (b. ca 980) and hurled it into Philadelphia's Schuylkill River. "Weighing thousands of pounds and standing more than seven feet tall, the statue of Þorfinnur was discovered the next day, completely submerged. […]. Because the Philadelphia Eagles were scheduled to play the Minnesota Vikings that same week, some wondered if a zealous football fan had targeted the statue. But those well-versed in the history of the left-wing activist movement in Philadelphia inferred a deeper significance to the dramatic toppling of Þorfinnur."[448]

The statue of Þorfinnur Karlsefni was originally commissioned from the Icelandic artist Einar Jónsson in 1916 by the Fairmount Park Art Association, in charge of commissioning sculptures depicting the history of white American pioneers. [Fig. 11]. The artist spent two years in Philadelphia to complete the work, whose task should address "the theme of the settlement of the eastern coast and the emergence of the U.S. as an independent and democratic nation."[449] The inclusion of the Viking in this vast

[447] Discussed in Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir, "Monuments to Settlers of the North: A Means to Strengthen National Identity," in *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson with the collaboration of Daniel Chartier (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2011), 205–27.
[448] Jodie Childers, "The Toppling of Þorfinnur: Vandalism as Dialogue and Direct Action," December 21, 2020, *U.S. Studies Online*. Retrieved from https://usso.uk/the-toppling-of-thorfinnur-vandalism-as-dialogue-and-direct-action/
[449] Retrieved from: https://www.associationforpublicart.org/artwork/ellen-phillips-samuel-memorial/
A description of the initial project: J. Bunford Samuel, *A Word Sketch of Fairmount Park* (Philadelphia: 1917). Discussed in Ólafur Kvaran, *Einar Jónsson myndhöggvari. Verk, táknheimur og menningarsögulegt samhengi*, p. 185 and 187; Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir, "Monuments to Settlers of the North: A Means to Strengthen National Identity," 205–27.

public project was linked to the racialization of Scandinavians, including Icelanders, in American immigration history. Historian Dag Blanck has demonstrated how "Scandinavia and Scandinavians were being embraced by old-stock Americans and in the increasingly polarized American ethnic landscape, the academic interest in Scandinavia in this way helped by placing the group in a privileged [racial] position."[450] This ideology was supported by several Scandinavian scholars, such as William Hovgaard, who claimed that "The Scandinavian peoples are as a race closely related to the Anglo Saxons, and through these to the people of the United States."[451]

Unveiled in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park in November 1920, at a ceremony commemorating the Norse settlement of America, the work celebrates the Icelandic Viking who, as recounted in *Grænlendinga saga* (Saga of Greenlanders) and *Eiríks saga rauða (Saga of Erik the Red),* sailed with his wife Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir to Vínland, where their son was born. [452]

Monuments are symbols, whose changing contexts begin with their initial construction, the identity of the subject, and by their presence in public space. As related by Jodie Childers, "Since 2007, the white supremacist group Keystone State Skinheads, or Keystone United, have held annual rallies in Fairmount Park on Leif Erikson Day October 9 (an obscure holiday first designated by Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964), using the sculpture of Þorfinnur as their symbolic meeting point."[453] When anti-racist activists discovered the ideological appropriation of the statue by white supremacist groups, they staged protests and counter-events at the site. Iconoclasm is not new, but before the beginning of Black Lives Matter (BLM) activism in July 2013, iconoclastic activities were essentially practiced during colonial wars, such as Algeria in 1962, and in the former Eastern Bloc as a post-Soviet phenomenon. [454]

---

[450] Discussed in Dag Blanck, "Scholars across the Seas: The American-Scandinavian Foundation and the Sweden-America Foundation in the Trans-Atlantic Exchange of Knowledge," *American Studies in Scandinavia* 40, no. 1–2 (2008): 110–25, p. 116 and 117.
[451] William Hovgaard, "The American Scandinavian Movement," *American Scandinavian Review* 3, no. 5 (September–October 1915), 290–295, p. 290.
[452] Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir, "Monuments to Settlers of the North: A Means to Strengthen National Identity," here 220–24.
[453] Jodie Childers, "The Toppling of Þorfinnur: Vandalism as Dialogue and Direct Action,"
[454] Dario Gambioni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism Since the French Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Nicholas Mirzoeff, *White Sight. Visual Politics and Practices of Whiteness* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2023), 197–225.

Although it might seem farfetched to incorporate the toppling of Þorfinnur Karlsefni into a narrative of contemporary Icelandic art, the toppling of statues during the past decades has become one of the important actions deployed by activists to protest against patriarchy, colonialism, racism and white supremacy. Recent destructions of monuments are generally carried out through civil actions in order to transmit a direct message through social media. [455] However, as Richard Dreyton argues "There is a legitimate case for renegotiating the idea of heritage so that it means a claim to many silenced pasts and not just a bondage to that claim on the future made by those who once enjoyed the privileges of domination."[456] The attacks against patriarchal and colonizing historical figures can therefore be understood as a part of an ongoing reckoning with the historical legacies of domination and oppression. However, in some cases the activism does not target the represented historical character as such, but rather the institutional, national or governmental uses, contexts and discourses and draws on historical sources.

In the summer of 2022, two Icelandic artists, Bryndís Björnsdóttir and Steinunn Gunnlaugsdóttir, incorporated a small bronze, a public sculpture, originally dating from 1938, into their own work named: "*Carry On: The First White Mother in Outer Space*", erected in front of the Living Art Museum. They were accused of having stolen the cast located in Laugarbrekka, the birthplace of Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir. The bronze was unveiled in 2000 to commemorate the memorable exploits of this extraordinary female explorer and the millennium of the birth of her son, often referred to as the first white child born in North America.

The original statue had been created by the sculptor Ásmundur Sveinsson (1893-1982) for the 1939 New York World Fair.[457] It depicted Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir, the wife of Þorfinnur Karlsefni, standing upright on a Viking ship, with their son Snorri, naked, perched on her shoulder. Þorbjarnardóttir, celebrated as a feminist hero as the first female Viking to sail to Greenland and America, not only in the sagas, but also in modern literature and cinema.[458] However, the title of the sculpture, *The First White Mother in*

[455] Discussed in Dave Beech and Mel Jordan, "Toppling Statues, Affective Publics and the Lessons of the Black Lives Matter Movement," *APS (Art & the Public Sphere)* 10, no. 1 (2021): 3–15; O. V. Borysovych, T. A. Chaiuk, and K. S. Karpova, "Black Lives Matter: Race Discourse and the Semiotics of History Reconstruction," *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* 9, no. 3(2020): 325–40.
[456] Richard Drayton, "Rhodes Must Not Fall?," *Third Text*, 33, no. 4–5 (2019): 651–66, p. 665–666.
[457] Another small cast in bronze is kept at the Reykjavík Art Museum, H 92 cm, 1938.
[458] Another copy of the statue was unveiled in Ottawa, Canada to celebrate the discovery of America by the Icelandic landfarers. See also the exhibition *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*, (April 29–August 13, 2000)

America, was recognized by Björnsdóttir and Gunnlaugsdóttir as a racialized icon as such, deserving of iconoclastic destruction, such as those that featured in BLM activism. They described their action as a protest to the official narrative surrounding Þorbjarnardóttir, indicative of "an attempt to align Iceland's national identity with imperialist nations" and "a small state's inferiority complex."[459]

In 1939, *The First White Mother in America* [Fig. 12] was exhibited outside the Icelandic pavilion on a central square in the World Fair's exhibition ground.[460] In this context of the Fair, one might wonder why the artist excluded the father, depicting only the mother and child standing on the ship, a rather unusual iconography. What is less known, is that for his 1939 commission, Sveinsson employed an iconographic model developed by the sculptor Einar Jónsson for his monument *Þorfinnur Karlsefni and family* (1922) commemorating the first white family in America.[461] This work (now lost but documented in photographs) probably was intended as a large public monument. But here, it is the father, Karlsefni, elevating his son Snorri, wielding a large, carved Viking sword, while the mother, Guðríður stands rapt in adoration. The group is placed in front of a half globe depicting the American continent with Greenland at the North.

Monuments are social and historical constructions shaped by political, religious, or commercial interests.[462] Iceland's inclusion in this transatlantic narrative stressing the links between Icelandic landfarers and the first white settlers in America were celebrated in yet another monument commissioned by the American-Scandinavian Foundation.[463]

---

in Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Washington. "Commemorating the 1,000-year anniversary of the Vikings' landing in North America, this exhibition explores the impact of Leif Ericsson's journey and introduces new archaeological evidence that expands knowledge of early Scandinavian and North American life." Retrieved from: https://www.si.edu/exhibitions/vikings-north-atlantic-saga%3Aevent-exhib-4413. Discussed in Tinna Grétarsdóttir, "Á milli safna: útrás í (lista)verki," *Ritið* 10, no. 1 (2010): 83–103.

[459] Sarah Rose Sharp, "How a Racist Statue in Iceland Ended up Insidede-a-rocket-ship." https://hyperallergic.com/728392/how-a-racist-statue-in-iceland-ended-up-inside-a-rocket-ship/

[460] Anonymous, "Glæsilegur sigur Ásmundar Sveinssonar myndhöggvara. Viðtal við listamanninn," *Alþýðublaðið*, March 30, 1939, front page and p. 4.

[461] Benedikt Gröndal and Charles Gl. Behrens (eds.), *Einar Jónsson* (Stockholm: KF:s Bokforlag / Bókaútgáfan Norðri, 1954), 52.

[462] Discussed by Adam Hjorthén, "Transatlantic Monuments: On Memories and Ethics of Settler Histories," *American Studies in Scandinavia* 53, no. 1 (2021): 95–120, p. 97–98; Adam Hjorthén, "Global Histories and Cross-Border Commemoration," in *Commemoration: The American Association for State and Local History Guide*, ed. Seth C. Bruggeman (Lanham, M.D.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 59–67; Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 199–256.

[463] Discussed by Dag Blanck, 116–117. "Scandinavia and Scandinavians were thus being embraced by old-stock Americans and in the increasingly polarized American ethnic landscape, the academic interest in Scandinavia in this way helped by placing the group in a privileged position." A special "Icelandic number"

Similarly, it was intended to celebrate Nordic whiteness as well as the transatlantic connection between Iceland and the US for economic and strategic purposes. This time, the American sculptor, Alexander Stirling Calder (1870–1945) was chosen to create a large-scale monument, a statue of Leif Eiríksson, claimed to have been the first European to "discover" North America, probably circa 1000 CE.

The statue was presented as a gift from the US government to the Icelandic people commemorating the centenary of the Alþing in 1930 and was unveiled in Reykjavík in July 1932.[464] However, as is often the case with such prestigious foreign gifts, its presence and placement in the centre of the city was fiercely debated.[465] To install it, an old local monument built by students in 1793 had to be destroyed to make place for this newcomer, an American-Icelander.[466] According to a contemporary *New York Times* report, the statue showed "a heroic figure symbolizing humanity's unending quest—the urge which moves men to fly around the globe today as it drove them to sail the unexplored Atlantic centuries ago."[467] The imposing figure, now located in Reykjavík in front of another large national monument, the Hallgrímskirkja (a church dedicated to the clergyman and poet Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614-1674)), stands sturdily on the deck of a ship, gazing towards the horizon, his hands clasping a cross and a long-handled axe.

6.3. The World Fair in New York

Iceland's inclusion in the American-Scandinavian transatlantic cultural narrative was again typically manifested in the *World Fair* in 1939. Here too, whiteness was displayed and clearly articulated in the Icelandic pavilion, implicitly understood as representing cultural, as well as political and economic interest.[468] The display also included

---

was published by *The American Scandinavian Review* (Vol 3, number 2 (March- April 1915), including cultural, literary, and political analyses, including an introduction into the art of Einar Jónsson.

[464] The deeds of Leifur heppni (Leifur the brave) are related in several texts in the Sagas. Svavar Sigmundsson, "Var Leifur heppni lánsamur eða frækinn?," *Orð og tunga* (Reykjavík: Árnastofnun, 2019), 153–57.

[465] Letter dated 20 March 1931 to the Prime minister of Iceland from Knútur Zimsen, mayor of Reykjavík, Matthías Þórðarson, director of the National Museum of Iceland and sculptor Einar Jónsson. National Archives of Iceland, *Forsætisráðuneyti 1989-B/40. Alþingishátíðin 1930. Mappa II og III).*

[466] "Leifur heppni," *Tíminn*, August 1, 1931, 1.

[467] Adam Hjorthén, "Transatlantic Monuments."

[468] The transatlantic connection, Vínland and the Icelandic landfarers were some of the themes of the exhibition.

a) Siglingar Fornislendinga og Vínlandsfundur (Sailing routes of ancient Icelanders and the discovery of Vinland).
b) Stjórnarfar, elsta löggjafaþing (Rule, the oldest legal parliament).

photographic representations of "authentic" life, with important representations of animals including hunters holding dead seals, farmers herding their sheep, and other traditional rural scenes from Iceland. It was the first time Iceland was represented as an independent nation in an international event and the first time the Icelandic government designed their self-representation for a world fair. This participation was therefore an important step in creating the national narrative that was later sustained and promoted through nation branding or trademarking as discussed by Joep Leerssen.[469]

The steering committee that organised the Icelandic pavilion, also insisted on including representations of Icelandic modernity in keeping with the fair's unifying theme: "Building the World of Tomorrow".[470] The photographer and filmmaker Vigfús Sigurgeirsson was commissioned to provide a modern, youthful view of the Icelandic nation. Still and moving images played an important part in the exhibition through colour and black and white films focusing on Iceland's contemporary occupations and industries. Tourism was not yet developed and describing the photographic agenda Sigurgeirsson remarks that "Great emphasis has been placed on taking these photos in places where Icelandic nature shows it's best face […] The nation's industries and cultural life should appear in as many pictures as possible. Also, it would be important to show the characteristics of the people who make up the country, in order to overturn the general opinion of foreigners that Eskimos live here. Finally, it is important to show the country's geographical location and the effects of currents on climate and vegetation, also to refute the view that here is eternal ice and cold."[471]

---

c) Bókmenntir, fornar og nýjar (Literature old and contemporary).
d) Almennt menningarlegt ástand þjóðarinnar (General cultural state of the nation).
e) Ísland sem ferðamannaland (Iceland as a tourist destination). Document stored in the National Archives of Iceland, Utanríkisráðuneytið 1967, nr. B/64. File III and IV.

[469] Joep Leerssen, "Trademarking the Nation: World Fairs, Spectacles, and the Banalization of Nationalism," in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities. International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851–1958* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 31–52.

[470] The steering committee was headed by Vihjálmur Þór, assisted by Ragnar E. Kvaran and Haraldur Árnason.

[471] "Mikil áherzla hefir verið á það lögð, að taka þessar myndir á stöðum, þar sem islenzk náttúra nýtur sin bezt. […] Æskilegt væri að atvinnu- og menningarlíf þjóðarinnar kæmi. fram i sem flestum myndum. Einnig væri mikils vert að sýna einkenni fólksins, sem landið byggir, meðal annars til að hnekkja þeirri almennu skoðun útlendinga, að hér búi Eskimóar. Loks liggur beint við að sýna legu landsins og áhrif strauma á loftslag og gróður, einnig til að hnekkja þeirri skoðun, að hér sé eilífur ís og kuldi." "Kvikmyndir og þátttaka Íslendinga í Heimssýningunni í New York 1939. Viðtal við Vigfús Sigurgeirsson," *Tímarit máls og menningar* 1, no. 1 (1938): 23–24. The exhibition is discussed in: Íris Ellenberger, "Íslendingar í heimi framtíðarinnar: kvikmyndir Vigfúsar Sigurgeirssonar og landkynningarvakningin 1935–40," in *Þjóðin, landið og lýðveldið: Vigfús Sigurgeirsson ljósmyndari og kvikmyndagerðarmaður*," ed. Inga Lára Baldvinsdóttir (Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2008), 27–48.

A similar approach was taken in the 1945 photo book *Iceland and the Icelanders*, published in the US. The book opens with Vigfús Sigurgeirsson's pastoral scene of a golden field under a blue sky. The text glosses it with a geopolitical and racial statement: "Iceland is one of the great steppingstones between America and Europe. It is disputed whether it belongs to the Western or Eastern hemisphere. Geographically it is closer to the great landmasses of the American continent than to Europe. It would therefore be natural to regard it as the eastern most outpost of America. The people of Iceland and its culture are, however, completely European. Of the many nations that inhabited America before white men ever saw it, those living in the northernmost parts are called Eskimos. As far as we know they have never penetrated to Iceland. While they roamed over the islands of North America in skin-covered boats, the Scandinavians called Vikings roamed over the Islands of Northern Europe in wooden boats."[472] Not only is race specified as a signifier in this mythic narrative, but organic materials such as skin and wood are hierarchised, respectively contrasting the primitive skin-covered boats with the Vikings' wooden ones. The modern image of Iceland's whiteness in many national photobooks is not always as explicit, but represented through synecdoches; the *civilized*, the *pastoral* and the *sublime*. The whiteness of the waterfalls and the glaciers, the vastness of the landscape and the grandeur of nature are typical tropes. The pastoral image of nature is folded into a broader romantic ideal, while the mountain experience present in the glacier pictures alludes to quintessentially modern experience – for example, hiking, skiing, sport -- rather than tradition.[473]

According to Melissa Nobles, "race is not something that language simply describes, it is something that is created through language and institutional practices."[474] I have elsewhere discussed representations of whiteness in landscape photography and demonstrated how this is closely allied to the concept of purity as an important aspect both of modernity and nationalism.[475] The national photo-book, through its particular

[472] Helgi P. Briem, *Iceland and the Icelanders*. Color Photography by Vigfús Sigurgeirsson (Maplewood: John Francis McKenna Company, 1945), 3–4.
[473] Sigurgeirsson was a member of The Icelandic Touring Club, established in 1927 and its activities included photographic practices. The club organized photo exhibitions and became an active publisher of photobooks.
[474] Melissa Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship: Race and Census in Modern Politics* (Stanford University Press, 2000), 2.
[475] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "'Land mitt! Þú ert sem órættur draumur. Óráðin gáta. Fyrirheit!' Um ódauðleika ægifegurðarinnar í Íslandsmyndabókum."

form privileging the imagery of Iceland's pristine nature, initiated a new photographic nation branding. In this visual rhetoric, water takes on major importance through its various forms - - ocean, waterfall, glacier and snow, all which prompt associations of purity, but also, the promise of electricity and industrialisation. As reflected in their photographic portraits, Icelanders wished to be represented as prosperous bourgeois and their portraits conformed to the aesthetic conventions of films and photographic studios.[476] These images of respectability and "European-ness" are far from the ethnographic images produced by French, German and Danish photographers, often showing poorly dressed, "uncivilized" subjects.[477]

6.4. The Archival Turn in Art Production in Iceland

Historian Andreas Huyssen described the "archival turn" in the humanities as symptomatic of "Memory discourses of a new kind […] in the wake of decolonization and the new social movements and their search for alternative and revisionist histories."[478] The archival turn has been further contextualised by art historian Cheryl Simon who remarks that:

> "First and foremost, the idea of an "archival turn" makes reference to the increased appearance of historical and archival photographs and artifacts, and the approximation of archival forms in the art and photographic practices of the 1990s. A phenomenon encompassing both art production and curatorial activity, by the end of that decade it was common to find ephemera from police, public, medical, and social science institutions, as well as documentation from the art museum's own archives, within the aesthetic repertoire of the contemporary art museum."[479]

Simon further noted that "Nonetheless it is significant that the historical materials and forms presented in these works are derived from or make reference to institutional

[476] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, *Sigríður Zoëga.* Ljósmyndari í Reykjavík (Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2000); ibid, "Sigríður Zoëga: Icelandic Studio Photographer," *History of Photography* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 28–35; ibid, *Til gagns og til fegurðar. Sjálfsmyndir í ljósmyndum og klæðnaði 1860–1960.*
[477] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "French Photography in Nineteenth-century Iceland," *History of Photography* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 10–17.
[478] Andreas Huyssen, "Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 21–38, p. 22.
[479] Cheryl Simon, "Introduction: Following the Archival Turn," *Visual Resources* 18, no. 2 (2002), 101–107, p. 101–102.

settings. Insofar as the archival turn typically involves the movement of visual materials from extra-artistic contexts into the field of art, the phenomenon can also be interpreted as a late-stage manifestation of postmodernist appropriational practices; the turning inside-out of the institutions of modernism, if you will."[480] Here Simon quotes (indirectly) the French historian Paul Ricoeur and his seminal text about what he called "Hermeneutics of Historical Consciousness", a part of his opus *Time and Narrative* (1978). In this work Ricoeur discussed the status of the document in European historiography, that is, the historical definition of a document being a monument. "As Jacques Le Goff reminds us […], archives were for a long time designated by the term "monument" […] What makes a monument suspect, even though it often is found *in situ*, is its obvious finality, its commemoration of events that its contemporaries – especially the most powerful among them – judged worthy of being integrated into the collective memory."[481]

Similarly, art historian Charles Merewether, in his introduction to *The Archive. Documents of Contemporary Art*, observes that "One of the defining characteristics of the modern era has been the increasing significance given to the archive as the means by which historical knowledge and forms of remembrance are accumulated, stored and recovered. Created as much by state organizations and institutions as by individuals and groups, the archive, as distinct from a collection or library, constitutes a repository […] that is the foundation from which history is written." And he continues by claiming that: "For it is in the spheres of art and cultural production that some of the most searching questions have been asked concerning what constitutes an archive and what authority it holds in relation to its subject"[482]

The recognition of the multiple uses and function of archives, not only as monuments of memory, but also as a form of raw material for artistic purposes was inspired by Michel Foucault's archaeology of knowledge, that is his important re-articulation of the archive-notion as described in his foundational text, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, originally published in 1969. This work defined the archive as a discursive

[480] Ibid, 102.
[481] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. III., trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 118.
[482] Charles Merewether, "Introduction. Art and the Archive," in The *Archive. Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Charles Merewether (London/Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel /MIT Press, 2006), 10–17, p. 10.

site where meanings are constructed and whose boundaries are constantly shifting. For Foucault, the archive is defined as the ordering principle guiding the production of knowledge in the modern episteme. By employing institutional archives as material, artists thus raise questions of authority and authenticity in the production of historical narratives. In *The Archeology of Knowledge,* Foucault likened the study of the archive to the practice of learning about the past through its material remains. For Foucault the archive is inevitably linked to the question of power, a privileged area for analysis and ideally, revealing its internal mechanics. "[The archive] It is no longer a monument for future memory, but a document for possible use."[483]

These diverse possible uses of historical documents in art practice were explored in major art exhibitions and publications before and after year 2000. Such curatorial processes culminated in Owkui Enwezor's *Documenta 11* in 2002 and in his Venice Biennale in 2013.[484] In these exhibitions, Enwezor displayed archival practices by selecting artists who employed "the tools of the documentary and the function of the archive as procedures for inducting new flows and transactions between images, texts, narratives, documents, statements, events, communities, institutions, audiences. And each confounds the role of the documentary in establishing a hierarchy between images and artistic forms, between ethics and aesthetics, politics and poetics, truth and fiction."[485] He argued that the pre-eminent forms of archival material, photography and film, were the privileged media for the investigation of the archive in the visual arts as these medias have the capacity to establish a direct relationship between time and event in order to demonstrate their imbrication with memory, history and identity.[486]

The common feature of these otherwise disparate artistic practices (those drawing on existing material from historical or museological sources) consists in the fact that they derive consciously or unconsciously from that branch of postmodern thought exemplified in the work of Foucault. Then could be further contextualised in Simon's terms: "a late-

[483] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage books, 1995), 184.
[484] Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever – Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Centre of Photography, 2008); ibid, "Documentary/Verité: Biopolitics, Human Rights, and the Figure of 'Truth' in Contemporary Art," in *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 5, no. 1, 11–42.
[485] Okwui Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité,"37.
[486] Enwezor, *Archive Fever*, 11–13.

stage manifestation of a postmodernist appropriational exercise."[487] Or, as Enwezor discusses these practices he included in documenta 11: "And each confounds the role of the documentary in establishing a hierarchy between images and artistic forms, between ethics and aesthetics, politics and poetics, truth and fiction."[488] Furthermore, the utilization of archival-based knowledge is supplemented by the uses of digital media opening multiple forms of access to limitless quantities of archival material. This, in turn, has ushered in a vast expansion of research methods that concomitantly, is reflected in the expanded field of digitally generated work produced by artists making films, video installation, or still photography.

Drawing on Foucault, Hal Foster, in his 2004 essay *An Archival Impulse*, describes this attraction to the historical past within contemporary art, as an archival *impulse* that he relates to Foucault's theories on the desire or yearning for origins.[489] He describes archivally informed art as a manifestation of "the will to connect what cannot be connected".[490] Foster examined these artistic practices from a number of points of view: "In the first instance archival artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present. To this end they elaborate on the found image, object, and text, and favour the installation format as they do so." [491] He explains how presentation of such work in a museum or gallery is often systematic, even formulaic, as if dealing with mineral or archaeological samples. The objective is to approach the past in a new way, possibly in order to understand it better, or even to be able to pose new questions based on new critical terms.[492] Foster argues that by this method, artists uncover the discourse of power and knowledge stored up in the archives.

6.5. Unpacking Whiteness

Racialized notions of whiteness have been an important element in the Nordic regions to generate a nationalist sense of belonging. Such discourses are predicated on deeply-

[487] Cheryl Simon, "Introduction: Following the Archival Turn," in *Visual Resources* 18, no. 2 (2002): 101–7, p. 101.
[488] Okwui Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité," 37.
[489] Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Autumn 2004): 3–22, p. 15, footnote 44. Foster quotes Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge Translated by* Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 130–131.
[490] Foster, "An Archival Impulse," 21.
[491] Ibid, 4.
[492] Ibid, 21–22.

rooted- ideologies, which in the US, as in their equivalent European versions, are based on assumptions of white, Western superiority. Such social constructions have been scrutinized by many scholars describing the political significance of race and whiteness in Europe as well as in America.[493] As Uli Linke (quoting Diana Fuss) has argued, unpacking the category of white requires "making visible its "founding metaphoric and ideology of invisibility"".[494] As Linke argues "But until quite recently, the multiple ways in which whiteness has been politically manipulated, culturally mediated, and historically constructed have, in large part, been ignored […] Since "white" defines itself through a powerful and illusory fantasy of disembodiment, it is important to investigate the place of such phantasms and desires in the exercise of social power."[495] It has therefore been essential for artists to unmask and/or destabilize the cultural and institutional conventions and practices that continue to normalize whiteness, rendering it invisible. However, the larger question is how the discursive transparency of whiteness is sustained. As Fine, Weis, Powell and Wong have remarked: "[…] we worry that in our desire to create spaces to speak, intellectually or empirically, about whiteness, we may have reified whiteness as a fixed category of experience; that we have allowed it to be treated as a monolith, in the singular, as an 'essential something'"[496] Sara Ahmed thus asks "If whiteness gains currency by being unnoticed, then what does it mean to notice whiteness? What does making the invisible marks of privilege more visible actually do? "[497]

These are some of the questions raised (directly and indirectly) in the work by Ólöf Nordal who interrogates anthropometrical, racial, and gendered classifications in her multi-layered and interdisciplinary photographic work, videos, sculptures, and installations. During her student years in the USA, Nordal began to examine well-known Icelandic tropes in their visual and historical forms and explored ways to connect discrete objects with their imaginary properties. This self-reflective process led her to focus on her perception of her own "whiteness." Referring to Icelandic national culture, this pre-occupation was already manifest in her 1993 Yale graduate exhibition entitled *At*

[493] Teresa J. Guess, "The Social Construction of Whiteness: Racism by Intent, Racism by Consequence," *Critical Sociology* 32, no. 4 (2006): 649–73.
[494] Uli Linke, "Formations of White Public Space: Racial Aesthetics, Body Politics and the Nation," *Transforming Anthropology* 8, no. 1–2 (1999): 129–61, p. 129; Diana Fuss, "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification," *Diacritics* 24, no. 2–3 (1994):20–42, p. 22.
[495] Linke, 129.
[496] Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149–68, p. 149.
[497] Ibid.

Twilight. The title refers to the folkloric witching hour, when supernatural creatures are at large, while in the turf houses people sat at their work – spinning wool, knitting or wood carving – and a household member (most often the father or the patriarch) reads aloud by the faint light of a fish-oil lamp. An idyll based on August Sciött's (1823–1895) domestic, rural visualisation of Icelandic life, drawn from his ethnographical sketches made during his visit to Iceland in 1861.

In her early works, Nordal employed texts from ancient Eddaic verse and combined them with visual material from the National Museum of Iceland and other archival sources. Seeking inspiration in *þjóðsögur* (folktales) and other popular narratives, she sought to create conceptual, symbolic frameworks that permitted her to integrate personal as well as cultural narratives. This work, however, should not be considered as a nostalgic or revivalist enterprise. On the contrary, for Nordal, its rationale resided in her own paradoxical situation. Although a member of a privileged group, as a young, white Icelandic woman studying at an elite institution, her language, nonetheless, "belonged" to a foreign Nordic culture which, to her fellow students, was incomprehensible. She has described her experience as a kind of translation problem, even as a conflict between disparate cultures:

> When I got to the USA, I had a shock; I realised that I had little or nothing in common with these people, other than mass culture – and when we started to talk seriously about art, my terms of reference were completely different from theirs. I was so reliant on my culture, which these people knew nothing about, and could not understand.[498]

Nordal's response could be interpreted as a reaction to the general assumption of "sameness" attributed to her as a white, female, art student, like many others at Yale. Her national origin, including her whiteness, had been, however, constituted differently from those of her American cohort and she found herself constantly having to translate her Nordic signifiers of whiteness and their meaning between one white culture and the other. It was thus her existential situation that encouraged her to deploy self-examination and an ability to look critically at her home country from afar as elements in her work. In

[498] Sigríður Ólafsdóttir, "Sagan mótuð í leir," *Andblær: Tímarit um bókmenntir og listir* 9 (1999): 68–75, p. 68.

other words, this tense relationship between place and identity informed her early work, engaged with the complex process of translation.

The exhibition *At Twilight*, held in Yale in 1992, consisted of three installation works in which she began to develop a contemporary artistic language based on her cultural specificity. The works in the show were all rooted in images and material culture that were textually and visually interrelated. Allegorizing her whiteness in its physical manifestation, her installation *Dream* included four white Plexiglas pillars standing in whitish water that covered the floor of the exhibition space. On the four sides of the white pillars were sandblasted images of specific vernacular objects identified with Icelandic culture: a *langspil* (a form of zither), a horn spoon, an *askur* (a carved wooden eating bowl), a carved bed board and a fish-oil lamp. Such objects, stored in the National Museum of Iceland and other heritage collections, are often displayed as a cultural repository representing the collective memory of the nation. Each of these were also suffused with personal significance. Hanging in a white frame on the wall was the reproduction of a vintage photograph of Nordal's grandfather -- the university professor and prolific writer Sigurður Nordal (1886-1974) -- photographed in his youth reading inside the traditional *baðstofa* (communal living/sleeping space) of the sod farmhouse at Eyjólfsstaðir in northern Iceland, where he grew up.[499] Nordal spliced herself into the photograph, depicting herself sitting next to her grandfather in a visual "time-warp."

Another image is a reproduction of a well-known photograph made by the Danish military officer and archaeologist Daniel Bruun (1856–1931), who travelled throughout Iceland collecting antiquarian items, objects, costumes and textiles in order to display them in the Danish colonial pavilion at the 1900 Paris Exhibition. It depicts an elegantly dressed woman wearing a national costume, an old-style riding coat with a high headdress and a tall riding hat, staged for Bruun's publication on Icelandic culture.[500] Again, Nordal inserted her own face into the image, thus identifying herself with the woman in the photograph, but also using it as a kind of an illustration for the folktale entitled *Sýslumannsfrúin á Burstafelli* (*The Sheriff's Wife of Burstafell)*, that constituted still another narrative inside the installation. This is a well-known Icelandic folktale, and

[499] The photograph was taken in 1905 by the Swedish writer Viggo Zadig (1880–1973). National Museum of Iceland (VZ-9).
[500] Daniel Bruun, *Færøerne, Island og Grønland paa Verdensudstillingen i Paris 1900* (Kjøbenhavn: Nielsen & Lydiche, 1901).

Nordal reproduced the text in a white frame on the wall. It recounts the story of a woman abducted at twilight and transported into the world of the Elves or Hidden People. In the folktale, she assists an Elvan woman in labour. When the infant is safely born, the Elven mother hands her a pot of ointment to apply to the child's eyes. But she stealthily smears a little on her own right eye, giving her the power to see into the hidden world of the Elves. What knowledge she gains from the Elves, she passes on to other humans. One day, the woman meets the Elven woman she had helped in childbirth and greets her. Furious to learn that the woman can see her, the Elven woman spits in her eye, and she loses her supernatural gift. Such stories about humans crossing the borders between the visible and the invisible are common in Icelandic folklore. Nordal interprets the story as a cautionary tale about the acquisition of psychic powers, and the importance of not misusing them, applying them correctly and with humility. Accordingly, the work affirms the artist's belief in a comparable gift, that of possessing and nurturing a cultural heritage invisible to those around her in the USA, or, alternatively, as an example of a hybrid knowledge distinct from Western narratives based on science and technology.

The third work in the exhibition consisted of two long tiled boxes – one white, the other black – lying side-by-side on the floor. They are reminiscent of old, carved gravestones with an Icelandic traditional decorative motif cut into the upper surface of the form. On the white box, the engraved pattern was filled with yellow fish- liver oil. Here, certain material elements of Icelandic culture, such as the use of fish-liver oil, stone and wood carving, take on the symbolic meaning of *Icelandicity*. The work *At Twilight* may be considered as the artist's self-reflection in a particular temporal and geographic situation. It is simultaneously a bold statement and address to her social and professional world – a confirmation of her new identity as an artist who sees into worlds to which others are oblivious.

Inventing a contemporary language based on her own cultural heritage that visualizes her own whiteness while displaying in a critical way as part of the wider (white) ideology of Western culture was not an easy task. The colour white and the generalized whiteness of Nordal's culture has become a *topos* in her work. This was further employed in her 1994 solo show, *Sjálfsmynd* (*Self-portrait* or *Identity)*, at the Gerðuberg Arts Centre in Reykjavík, in which all the objects in the exhibition were white, alluding to its ubiquity in Icelandic art and poetry.

Among the exhibited work was Nordal's drawings of a (white) waterfall and a (white) hot spring, as well as four (white) porcelain figures. The first, *Hrímhvíta móðir* (Rime-white Mother) represented an Old Norse goddess: the second, was the Madonna; the third an Elven woman and the fourth, the Lady of the Mountains (a national personification of Iceland).[501] The title, *Hrímhvíta móðir* (Rime-white Mother), refers to a famous patriotic poem by the Icelandic poet and natural scientist Jónas Hallgrímsson in which he likens Iceland to a nurturing "rime-white mother."[502] In Hallgrímsson's verse, the purity of the waterfall is linked to ideas of patriotism, heroism, and the exaltation of nature. Reflecting on Iceland's imagined past glories, with melancholy, he contrasts this mythic heroic time with the grim reality of 19th century.

The *Self-portrait* exhibition may also be understood as Nordal's attempt to apply Whiteness theory to frame her observations on Icelandic discourse on national identity. It also represents Nordal's engagement with popular Icelandic cultural symbols, within which *Icelandicness* and *Icelandicity* are intertwined in a symbolic object. Nordal seeks to reveal how cultural heritage is moulded as a discrete ideology, in which "authenticity" is required of cultural production within its institutions. At the same time, the exhibition testified to Nordal's profound relationship with her Icelandic heritage, whose

[501] Fjallkonan or the Lady of the Mountain is the Icelandic version of similar patriotic figures such as Gemania and Denmark. She is represented in the poem *Íslands minni* (To Iceland) by Bjarni Thorarensen (1786–1841). According to Egilsson the poem was probably written 1802–1811, when Thorarensen was a young student in Copenhagen. It was first printed in 1819 and relates a nostalgic desire for the homeland. However, Icelandic patriotism, symbolised with the features of a woman, was articulated much earlier by writer and naturalist Eggert Ólafsson (1726–1768). The German artist Johann Baptist Zwecker (1814–1876) made a watercolour of this symbolic female (Now kept in Aberystwyth University School of Art Museum and Galleries). An engraving of the image appeared as frontispiece for the first English translation of Icelandic folktales collected by Jón Árnason, *Icelandic Legends, Collected by Jón Arnason* (1846–1866), eds. Eiríkur Magnússon and G. E. J. Powell (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1866). The image was described in a letter by Eiríkur Magnússon to Jón Sigurðsson: "Konumyndin á að tákna Ísland, því hefur hún ískórónu á höfði, sem eldar gjósa upp úr. Á öxl hennar er hrafninn, Íslands einkennilegasti fugl, Óðins forni vin og skáldanna eftirlætisgoð, fréttafugl mikill og margkunnugur." (The female image symbolises Iceland, because she is wearing a crown of Ice. On her shoulder sits the raven, Icelands most peculiar bird, the firend of Óðinn and the most beloved god of poets, the great storyteller and full of wisdom. Retrieved from: https://jonarnason.is/mynd-category/icelandic-legends-ii/ Discussed in Simon Halink, "The Icelandic Mythscape: Sagas, Landscapes and National Identity," in *National Identities, Special Issue: The Making of Landscape in Modernity* 16, no 3 (september 2014): 209–23, p. 217–18. The artist Sigurður Guðmundsson (1833–1874), designed a symbolic national dress that could be worn and by Icelandic women in order to perform and celebrate Icelandicness in public ceremonies. His designs are inspired from female descriptions in the sagas. This festive attire became popular amongst Icelandic women after 1860 and is still used on some stately occasions. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, *Til gagns og til fegurðar. Sjálfsmyndir í ljósmyndum og klæðnaði 1860–1960.*

[502] The poem *Ísland* (Iceland) by Jónas Hallgrímsson was published in the first edition of the periodical *Fjölnir* 1 (1835): 21–22.

conservation she considers vital. By turning her attention to the whiteness of her own cultural roots, Nordal raises the question of whiteness in a broader ideological context. In order to challenge the ideological invisibility of whiteness in Icelandic national culture, her work reveals how whiteness is seen as an indisputable standard (one invisible to Icelanders).

6.6. The Uncanny Animal

Human-animal relations are mediated by a range of cultural practices filtered through a spectrum of institutional discourses and fantasies.[503] In some cases, symbolic birds and other animals become carriers of national politics and ideologies, and these animal ontologies were questioned in Nordal's exhibition *Hvítir hrafnar* (White Ravens) at the Living Art Museum in Reykjavík in 1996. [Fig. 13].

At the entrance of the exhibition space, four white ravens were standing on black steel pedestals, with busts of a ptarmigan and a gyrfalcon, while bas-reliefs of heads of a polar bear and an arctic fox were attached to the wall. Another reiteration of Icelandic cultural objects, these casts were formed in snow-white plaster, and occupy a well-established place in Icelandic modern culture, folktales and Norse mythology. The ravens Huginn (Thought) and Muninn (Memory) were the friends of Óðinn, his messengers who reported everything seen and heard in the world. In folktales. Considered as both an augury and symbol of certain moral or immoral qualities, an ordinary black raven, for instance, portends death and misfortune, while a rare white raven was considered a sign of good fortune, and even, in Nordal's words, an incarnation of the divine. That idea is expressed in an old Icelandic saying: *A white raven is a rare sight*."[504]

The animals were uncannily evocative of the nationalist discourse of past decades. The raven, the gyrfalcon and the ptarmigan, all well-known symbolic art objects of Icelandic popular culture as represented in the ceramics of the artist and potter Guðmundur Einarsson frá Miðdal (1895-1963). These remain, still today, prized

[503] National, cultural references, objects and language were articulated in the 1990s by Birgir Andrésson, Hannes Lárusson, Hulda Hákon and Steingrímur Eyfjörð. Discussed in Eva Heisler, "Hugmyndir, hlutir og rými," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*, vol. V, 216–301.

[504] The work was developed in consultation with natural scientist Kristinn Haukur Skarphéðinsson of the Institute of Natural History, who directed Nordal towards various sources on white ravens.

ornaments in Icelandic homes.[505] Miðdal's animal figures created in clay from the 1930s onwards are nationalist emblems that became domesticated through his ceramic production, whereas Nordal's casts of the same animals are an example of defamiliarization of the same phenomenon. The critical distinction is important, because the domestic status of the object obscures the contextual readings of the object.

Art critics failed to register Nordal's defamiliarization of national symbols but were easily able to recognise their local folkloristic meaning.[506] Through these works, Nordal, affirms that Icelandic national culture that still employs symbols alluding to Nordic myths of supernatural guardians of the land, is grounded in an aesthetic developed for the purpose of supporting cultural nationalism, domestically and nationally. She is not "ghost- catching," as the art historian Donald Preziosi calls it, but exploring the complex relationship between discrete objects and nationalism.[507]

In Icelandic historical annals and folklore, deformed animals and hybrids of various sorts, are often considered to be an evil omen. In the photographic work *Icelandic Natural History Collection,* Nordal again draws attention to the discrepancy between national folklore and institutional knowledge. With tongue in cheek, she demonstrates how science sometimes disrupts the grand national narrative of a pure culture and race. In many of these popular narratives, the animal is a hybrid, a kind of transgendered specimen. Well known examples are the *skoffín* and *skuggabaldur,* thought to be the offspring of a fox and a cat or fox and a dog. The word *skoffín* is also often used broadly to refer to any kind of mythical hybrid, or chimera. Nordal's photographic work *Skoffín* depicts a taxidermied furry animal catalogued and displayed under this name in the Natural History Institute in Akureyri in north Iceland. Another example of these uncanny taxonomies counterpointing classification versus folklore in the Icelandic Institute of Natural History, the creature was categorized as a "natural" *skoffín* as though it was a real hybrid. Recent genetic tests, however, proved that the animal preserved as a *skoffín* was just a taxidermized dog.

---

[505] Ari Trausti Guðmundsson, "Leirmunir Guðmundar frá Miðdal," *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins,* August 7, 1999, 8–9.

[506] Defamiliarization is a concept developed by Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Device," trans. and introduced by Alexandra Berlina, *Poetics Today* 36, no. 3 (September 2015): 151–74.

[507] "It's essential to avoid the trap of what might be called "ghost-catching"—the temptation of presupposing that "national narratives" have an existence independent of the institutions and occasions in which we imagine them to be "staged." Donald Preziosi, "Narrativity and the Museological Myths of Nationality," *Museum History Journal*, 2, no. 1 (2009): 37–50, p. 45.

Taxidermy is a cultural practice, embedded by ideologies such as nationalism and colonialism, where Nature is used as a paradigm of Reality. However, according to Rachel Poliquin, "all taxidermy is deeply marked by human longing."[508] Nordal's photographs of deformed taxidermied lambs belonging to the series *Icelandic Natural History Collection – Sleipnir, Cyclops, Janus* (2003), draw attention to those animals whose anatomical anomalies were considered worth preserving for scientific purposes, or simply as a freakish spectacle, as they were displayed for in the Icelandic Natural History Collection in Reykjavík in the 1970s.

These were thought to be educational, possibly because they had links to the folktales that described such animals as hybrid creatures, entertaining for children, and producing the concept of the animal as a spectacle - - dead or alive in the zoo, or as a taxidermed object. Nordal's ambivalent memories of these exhibits during her childhood motivated her to search for these abandoned taxidermic examples, in staging them before the camera, in landscape. This intrinsic instability of taxidermed animals displayed in dioramas in natural history or science museums, were part of the renewed interest among artists questioning the staging of nature under the guise of "authenticity".[509]

Unpacking of the institutional version of national narratives is also the topic of her work *Geirfugl*, ((Great Auk (*Pinguinus Impennis*), from 1998, where the allegorical function pivots on the extinction of the animal, exterminated by Icelanders themselves. The work is a cast made in aluminium, a larger-than-life model (120 x 50 cm) of the bird, placed at the tideline just south of Reykjavík Airport where it perches, facing the sea. The aluminium cast, as Nordal puts it, is a satirical allegory; a sort of "mirror of the past." An ethical rebuke and a critique of heavy industry whose shiny surface alludes to the human greed that led to the animal's extermination. [510] The choice of material – aluminium -- may also refer to Iceland's policy of favouring heavy industry and new power plants, a continuation of its destructive consequences on nature.[511] The Great Auk's extinction mirrors that of many other animals, and like the dodo bird, it has become an "an icon of

[508] Rachel Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo. Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 6.
[509] Discussed in Giovanni Aloi, *Speculative Taxidermy: Natural History, Animal Surfaces, and Art in the Anthropocene* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).
[510] Discussed in Auður A. Ólafsdóttir, "Nútímaafsteypur táknmynda: Um myndlist Ólafar Nordal," *Skírnir* 177 (Autumn 2003): 515–25.
[511] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Attraction of Origins," in *Ólöf Nordal. Úngl*, ed. Ólöf K. Sigurðardóttir (Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum, 2019), 135–63, p. 155.

extinction".[512] Like the dodo, it is also considered as a tragicomic figure, a bird incapable of flying and therefore a victim of its own incapacities.

In the work *Great Auk † Pinguinus Impennis Extinction of Species – The Last Exemplars* (2016), Nordal activates the story of two great auks, kept in the Natural History Museum of Denmark, believed to have been the last surviving examples of the species, slaughtered on Eldey island on Iceland's southwest coast on 3rd June 1844. Her research narrates the well documented story of these last killings of this much hunted, inoffensive bird, that was sought by Europeans and sold to private collectors and natural history museums. Nordal's installation is composed of photographs, maps, a video and text. The photographs depict a stuffed Great Auk, purchased by the Natural History Museum in Iceland in 1971, juxtaposed with an old map of Geirfuglasker (Great Auk Skerry) from 1770, illustrating the slaughter of the birds, as well as eleven photographs taken by the artist displaying the 11 jars in the Natural History Museum of Denmark, containing the bird's innards. In addition, the textual description of the killing of the last birds on Eldey island written by one of the farmers involved in the slaughtering, and finally, a film sequence of the traditional hunting of seabirds in the Westman Islands.[513] In this work, as in Nordal's other human-animal narratives, she "reshuffles" national and institutional narratives, and her investigations could be identified with what Guasco calls "multispecies justice" in the museum. As Guasco argues, "museums do not just *tell* stories about extinction, they are also *characters* within extinction histories."[514]

6.7. Musée Islandique

A transdisciplinary conversation is also the motivation behind Nordal's *Musée Islandique*, an important installation of photographic prints first exhibited in 2012 at the National Gallery of Iceland. Here Nordal examined institutional conventions and practices that continue to normalize white invisibility. [515] She juxtaposed her large, staged

[512] Anna Guasco, "'As Dead as a Dodo': Extinction Narratives and Multispecies Justice in the Museum," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 4 no. 3 (2021): 1055–76.
[513] Ævar Petersen, "Brot úr sögu Geirfuglsins," *Náttúrufræðingurinn*, 65, no. 1–2(1995): 53–66; Gísli Pálsson, *Fuglinn sem gat ekki flogið* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2020); Katla Kjartansdóttir, "The Changing Symbolic Meaning of the Extinct Great Auk and Its Afterlife as a Museum Object at the Natural History Museum of Denmark," *Nordisk Museologi* 26, no. 2 (2019): 41–56.
[514] Guasco, "'As Dead as a Dodo'," 1070.
[515] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "The Attraction of Physical Anthropology in Ólöf Nordal's *Musée Islandique*," in *Musée Islandique: Ólöf Nordal*, exhibition catalogue (Reykjavík: National Gallery of Iceland, 2012), 5–16.

photographs of French anthropological casts from the Musée de l'Homme in Paris with a photographic series she made in the (confidential) research archive assembled by anthropologist Jens Pálsson (1926–2002), the founder of the University of Iceland Anthropological Institute.

The idea for the *Musée Islandique* originated with Nordal's chance encounter at El Museo Canario in Las Palmas where a cast of the head of her great-great-great-grandfather, Björn Gunnlaugsson (1788–1876), a teacher of mathematics and a cartographer is preserved. Displayed in the museum, along with casts of other Icelanders, they were originally exhibited as models of the "pure" white race. As it happens, the head was a cast of a cast, and Nordal's further research led her to a 19th century collection of anthropological casts at the Musée de l'Homme. She conducted the working process as a historical and archival research project and the title *Musée Islandique* thus functions on multiple levels to expose the racial ideology of colonial exhibitions and anthropological museums. It also refers to the eponymous exhibition organized in Palais royal, Paris, in December 1856, displaying natural science specimens, diverse cultural objects, photographs and anthropologic casts collected during Prince Napoléon's 1856 summer expedition to Scotland, Iceland, Greenland, the Faeroe and Shetland Islands, Norway, Sweden and Denmark on the imperial yacht Reine Hortense.[516] The expedition became a royal progress, a luxury cruise for the prince; but it was also a major political event, which attracted important media interest in France and in Scandinavia during that summer.[517]

Nordal pursued her documentation while negotiating complex administrative procedures with the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, including correspondence with officials and obtaining the requisite permissions. Eventually, she was granted permission to photograph the casts of Icelanders and Greenlanders preserved in the Musée de l'Homme. Gaining access to the storage rooms of the museum, as an "archival" artist, she was thus able to examine the casts that she subsequently staged and transformed into her own

[516] Napoléon Jérôme Bonaparte (1822–1891) was the cousin of Emperor Napoléon III and his close advisor. Charles Edmond, *Voyage dans les Mers du Nord a bord de la Corvette La Reine Hortense* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frère, 1857); M. Laumé, "Expédition scientifique du prince Napoléon dans les mers du nord," *L' Illustration. Journal universel,* January 10, 1857, 21–22.

[517] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, *Ísland í sjónmáli. Franskir ljósmyndarar á Íslandi 1845–1900/Islande en vue. Photographes français en Islande 1845–1900* (Reykjavík: JPV forlag, 2000); ibid, "French Photography in Nineteenth-Century Iceland," *History of Photography* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 10–17; However, one of the multipurpose of the expedition was to explore the possibility of establishing French fish-processing bases in Iceland to serve the large number of French vessels fishing off Iceland.

photographed displays.

Photography and colonialism were mutually intertwined in the time of industrial and imperial expansion. It was a conventional practice to simultaneously use diverse media – painting, photography, and plaster casts –in order to reproduce nature for scientific purposes. Casts and photographs were considered as exact methods for recording information, free of the more personal interpretation in paintings and drawings, whose role in scientific research was declining. The casts were deemed "unpretentious and unartistic," considered as scientific proof for racial studies and as didactic museum objects for the general public.[518] In addition to constituting a visual "scientific" confirmation of racist theories, these made their mark on knowledge and politics throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, when the head shape, bone structure, eye colour, the shapes of ear, hands and feet were taken as indicators of purity or interbreeding of races.[519]

Nordal approached the casts as a political form. She arranged them in front of the lens as in a stage setting, both individualizing each cast as a physical representation of the actual person, but also exposing the gendered and colonial violence embedded in these body fragments. Here we see the facial features of farmer Árni Magnússon of Þorlákshöfn and housemaid Þórunn Árnadóttir of Reykjavík, samples of the navel, breasts, hands, and feet of Friðrika Guðmundsdóttir, and the right hand of the teacher and cartographer Björn Gunnlaugsson. Only the head of Bjarni Jónsson (1809-1868), principal of the Latin School in Reykjavík, was painted in natural colours to bring out his Nordic characteristics: fair hair, blue eyes and strong bone structure. The bust was exhibited as a scientific object.[520] His rubicund face served to confirm his whiteness; the French scientists, who perceived Jónsson as an outstanding example of the Nordic type, describing him as a big man and a heavy drinker.[521] The French naturalists were indeed

[518] Florian Gaget, "Modèles artificiels en plâtre polychromé, étude et restauration. Préparations anatomiques de chimpanzé et d'orang-outang moulées sur nature," in *CeROArt*, 2013. Retrieved from: http://ceroart.revues.org/3121

[519] Discussed in Gísli Pálsson and Sigurður Örn Guðbjörnsson, "Homo Islandicus – inn að beini," in *Tímarit Máls og menningar* 73, no. 2 (2012): 4–24.

[520] Bust in plaster showing Bjarni Jónsson, moulded by Stahl, painted by Froment, 1855. Laboratoire d'anthropologie, Musée de l'Homme, Paris.

[521] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, *Ísland í sjónmáli. Franskir ljósmyndarar á Íslandi 1845–1900*, 31. The relation between photography and anthropology in France in mid and late 19th century is also discussed in Pierre-Jérôme Jehel, "Une illusion photographique. Esquisse des relations entre la photographie et l'anthropologie en France au XIX^{e} siècle," *Journal des anthropologues* 80–81 (2000): 47–70.

impressed by Jónsson's physique and he was the sitter for two anthropologic photographs taken in Paris in 1860 that bear the annotation "very pure race".[522] Contemporary Icelandic sources also mention Jónsson as being an extremely big man with the voice of a giant.[523] Apparently, he corresponded to the French idea of the typical Nordic male.

Even though the casts represent the face and the body parts of identified individuals, little is known of how they were selected for the sittings for the plaster casts. [Fig. 14]. However, they are clearly intended to represent different genders and social strata: farmers, small town workers, and intellectuals. They must also be considered as specimens, fragments of the extensive racial studies undertaken by French scientists affiliated with the Muséum (Muséum national d'Historie naturelle), paving the way for a system of racial classification that subsequently provided the collections of Musée de l'Homme.[524]

Representing fragments and body parts, limbs, busts, heads, hands and chests, these are grounded in aesthetic standards that can be traced back to classical sculpture. They were employed by artists, physicians and scientists who used casts as they did photography, i.e. as a method of reproducing an exact copy of natural phenomena, in this case, information about the human body.[525] On the basis of cranial and bodily measurements, incorporating the pseudoscience of phrenology, scientists claimed to deduce and define the relationship between cranial measurement and intelligence, morality and criminality they considered specific to each race.[526] Informed by a variety of imperial and racist discourses developed in France during the mid- and late- 19th century, such documentation offered a form of knowledge that served as research

[522] Unfortunately, Jónsson never mentioned being photographed, not sitting for a bust, neither in his letters written in Paris in spring 1845 nor in his later correspondence. Bjarni Jónsson. Two photographs by Louis Rousseau. Collection Jacques-Philippe Potteau (1807–1876). Photothèque du Musée de l'Homme, Paris. Nos. 4933 and 4934.
[523] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, *Ísland í sjónmáli. Franskir ljósmyndarar á Íslandi 1845–1900*, 31.
[524] Carole Reynaud-Paligot, *La République raciale. Paradigme racial et idéologie républicaine 1860–1930*, préface de Christophe Charle (Paris: PUF, 2006).
[525] Marie-Dominique de Teneuille, ed., *A fleur de peau. Le moulage sur nature au XIXe siècle*. Exhib. cat. (Paris: Musée d'Orsay/RMN, 2001).
[526] Phrenology originated with French physician François Joseph Gall (1758–1828), who proposed a theory that intelligence and personality traits such as morality could be deduced form the shape of the skull. The Société de Phrénologie was created in 1831 and the Musée de la Société Phrénologique de Paris established in 1836. The theory was developed further in the methods of Alphonse Bertillon (1853–1914) and Francis Galton (1822–1911) through their documentation of the physical proportions of criminals and developed in police photography. See Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," in *The Contest of Meaning, Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 1999 (1989), 343–88. Originally published in *October* 39 (1986): 3–64.

evidence and information in administrative contexts, military archives, archives of science, in travel accounts and finally in the popular illustrated press such as *L'Illustation*.

But, while *Musée Islandique* reflects on the colonial and racial history of physical anthropology, Nordal's intention was not limited to the display cultural history as such. The casts attracted her attention primarily because they incarnate the racial ideologies of a colonial power and have a close relationship to her own family story. The casts speak of a repressed colonial history and demonstrate the connection between physical anthropology and racist ideology that the French scientists employed to verify the racial purity and whiteness of the habitants of Iceland (as well as other geographical places).

This second half of Nordal's project (and exhibition), called *Das Experiment Island*, is based on her research into the understudied, photographic and biometric collection compiled by anthropologist Jens Pálsson. The title refers to one of his late lectures, "Das Experiment Island. Entstehung, Entwicklung und Erhaltung des Islandischen Volkes," given at a conference in Greece in 1983.[527]

As Gísli Pálsson and Sigurður Örn Guðbjörnsson observed in an article published in the exhibition catalogue for *Musée Islandique*: "All around the world, in the collections and archives of universities, institutions and individuals, a vast amount of data and objects is stored, accumulated by anthropologists and archaeologists – in overwhelming quantity."[528] Pálsson's enormous collections into physical anthropology were pursued through his and his colleagues extensive work, through the late 1960s and 1970s, with a major support from American and German Universities. They were carried out on living Icelanders, upon people in Norway, Denmark, Ireland, Scotland, Lapland, and on Icelandic descent living in North America. The archive contains a wide range of documentation based on photographs, as well as hair, blood and tissue samples, and collated physical measurements of Icelanders. These served the purpose of "proving" the geographical and racial origins of the Icelanders conceived as a "homogeneous, strong, stock".[529]

---

[527] Jens Pálsson, "Das Experiment Island. Entstehung, Entwicklung und Erhaltung des Islandischen Volkes," *Árbók Háskóla Íslands* 1982–1984, ed. Þórir Kr. Þórðarson (Reykjavík: Háskóli Íslands, 1986), 223.

[528] Gísli Pálsson and Sigurður Örn Guðbjörnsson, "Musée Islandique: An Encounter between Physical Anthropology and Art," in *Musée Islandique. Ólöf Nordal* (Reykjavík: National Galery of Iceland, 2012), 41–55, p. 41; Gísli Pálsson and Sigurður Örn Guðbjörnsson, "Homo Islandicus – inn að beini."

[529] Pálsson and Guðbjörnsson, "Musée Islandique: An Encounter between Physical Anthropology and Art," 49.

Again, in front of the camera, Nordal selected and arranged locks of hair, palm prints, and photographs by the hundred. The samples possess a material presence and a mysterious allure that imbues them with a certain visual power, regardless of the ideas they stand for. Focusing on these traces, Nordal, presents the individual subject towards the spectator, so as to elicit the observer's personal curiosity. The uncanniness of each sample is transformed into a ghostly memory, be it of the fair hair of "Ólöf búðarstúlka Vík í Mýrdal (Ólöf, girl working in a shop at Vík í Mýrdal)" or "Sóley hjúkrunarnemi á Landspítalanum (Sóley, trainee nurse at the National Hospital)," as these samples are labelled in the archive – providing the viewers with the possibilities of a projected connotation. [Fig. 15].

Nordal's photographs in *Das Experiment Island* are taken from a medium distance, not from so far away that the details cannot be discerned. These are overviews; the framing is central and frontal, as in photographs of a crime scene. However, by these formal choices – overview or close-up, collective or individual – Nordal subverts the epistemological premises of this now obsolete items, intended as proofs of the white racial origins of Icelanders. At the same time, she alludes to a certain reluctance among Icelandic scholars to address these problematic practices from the past. Similarly, she puts in question contemporary discourses on the Icelanders' biological and cultural origins, under discussion in relation to the important sequencing of the genome of Icelanders carried out by Decode Genetics in Reykjavík.

By juxtaposing her photographic representations of these two archives, Nordal created a new timeline, illuminating the connection between these colonial ideologies with anthropological racial search for the origins of the Icelanders. In order to decipher the complexity of these obsolete anthropological findings, and with the help of these fragmented sources, she illustrates the discrepancy between the individual and institutionalized history. Furthermore, by turning herself into "archaeologist of knowledge," Nordal investigates how the archive shapes political relations to the past as well as to a collective and ideologized national memory. Through surprising juxtapositions, she disturbs a certain historicity of the archive by decontextualizing the material and re-arranging it according to new formal and thematic principles. In so doing, she draws on the anthropological discourse that grounds her archival uses; conflating time periods that can produce an uncanny effect prompted by the viewer's recognition of

certain images shot in Icelandic public schools by Jens Pálsson in the late 1970s.

6.8. With an Icelandic Accent

Contemporary artists, such as the writer Hallgrímur Helgason, and the performance artists Magnús Sigurðarson (b. 1966) and Ragnar Kjartansson, have unpacked, twisted and struggled with the sticker of Islandicness. Helgason has reflected on his own masculinity, self-awareness, and his self-representation in his paintings, drawings, and prose. His gendered unease was initially expressed through his alter-ego cartoon character *Grim* in a number of works mocking his provincial desire for a cosmopolitan identity.[530] [Fig. 16]. These gendered identity crises were also the subject of the internationally popular fiction film *101 Reykjavík*, based on Helgason's novel *101 Reykjavík* (1996). His identity is further explored in his autobiographical novel *Seasick in München* (2015). Helgason, describes (with tongue in cheek), the process of his metamorphoses thus: "When people ask me "so what language do you speak in Iceland?" I sometimes answer, "we speak English with an Icelandic accent."[531] For him, the Icelandic language is "like some strange exotic spice that you can't eat on its own, but which serves well when you are cooking."[532] Helgason refers here indirectly to an attitude or a situation often described by Sigurður Guðmundsson, who turned the Icelandic language into an anthropomorphic hybrid female-animal creature in his book *Tabúlarasa*, first published in 1993. Guðmundsson, who has spent his life abroad in Holland and in China, reflects on the structural and cultural meaning of the Icelandic language for his art practice both in his texts and in his visual works. He has argued that "the tragedy of the contemporary Icelandic artist is that Iceland is too small for him [sic] to live in, but too big for him to carry around the world in his stomach."[533]

Magnús Sigurðarson and Ragnar Kjartansson have been playing with Nordic and Icelandic masculine myths from a more ironical viewpoint. While Sigurðarson focuses on stereotypes and clichés in contemporary popular culture, exploring how these are used in the entertainment industry, tourism, and other commercial sites, Kjartansson explores how various mythologies of male artistic genius are staged, re-enacted, destabilized, and

[530] Hallgrímur Helgason, *Tales of Grim. Paris 1995–1996* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2004).
[531] Hallgrímur Helgason, "This Island," *Siksi* 3 (1994): 3.
[532] Ibid, 3.
[533] Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Tabúlarasa* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1993), 127.

subverted. Kjartansson, mimicking the heroic (national) great narrative of the romantic male figure (the poet, the painter, the writer, the singer) in his performative works, that are often based on self-mockery and the detournement of Western artistic narratives and art historical canons. These are reflected ironically in Kjartansson's play on the plein-air painter and in his multiple performances poking fun at national narratives and clichés of Western culture, as in his recent enactment of the TV series *St Barbara a Living Sculpture* created for the GES-2 House of Culture, Moscow in 2021-2022.

In Kjartansson's approach to the idea of the "Überkünstler" (p. 45), he adopts different roles and performs them with great virtuosity. Playing with the Nordic myth of the drunken artist, Kjartansson turned heavy consumption of beer, endurance, repetition, and indulgent self-representation into a "mythical" performance in his installation *The End*, created for the Venice Biennale in 2009. In this nine-month long performance, Kjartansson worked every day in a theatrically staged studio on the ground floor of an old palazzo on the Grand Canal, producing one painting per day throughout the duration of the Biennale. His subject was his friend, the artist Páll Haukur Björnsson (b. 1981), whom he depicted naked, except for a black and yellow Speedo. The exhibition was staged as a *tableaux vivant* deploying the concept of the "mise en abyme," of a painting in a painting, as the artist painted his model compulsively every day in the same setting and wearing the same Speedo.

The exhibition also included a five-channel video piece titled *The End — Rocky Mountains*, which featured Kjartansson and the musician Davíð Þór Jónsson (b. 1978). Both clad in Davy Crockett costumes, they sang and played bluegrass and country music on various instruments, including a piano placed outside in the scenic snowy landscape of the Rocky Mountains near Banff, Alberta.[534]

Using this setting as a stage set within which to perform the romantic role of the artist in communion with nature, Kjartansson, alludes to the intersections between the historical narratives of settlement and the modalities of masculine and homosocial friendships as these can be observed in the construction of both settlement and gender,

[534] *The End – Rocky Mountains* is a five-channel video installation synched together as a single disfigured country music arrangement in the chord of G. Produced with the support of the Banff Centre (Alberta) for the Icelandic Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale, the piece was developed by Kjartansson in collaboration with Davíð Þór Jónsson at Banff Centre in February 2009.

present in Icelandic literature and represented in national discourses of settler nation states such as Iceland and Canada.

Similarly, he mocks the cultural branding of "Viking masculinities" as they are performed and reinforced through the prism of Nordic exoticism, often in relation to hunting mythologies staged in the wilderness, a cultural image parodied in Kjartansson's video work *The Guilt Trip* (2007). Here, the Icelandic comic actor Laddi is filmed in an absurd shooting game, alone in the white snowscape, with a yellow plastic bag from the Icelandic Bónus supermarket chain as his only equipment. Such strategies evoke Roland Barthes's famous suggestion; "Truth to tell, the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology."[535]

However, *The End*, equally reflects on Kjartansson's own desire for a role model conforming to certain Romantic precepts of masculine artistic identity. His desire for creating a "total" and organic oeuvre – a Gesamtkunstwerk – that he seeks for in literature and music, taking Goethe (1749-1832), Novalis (1772-1801), and Robert Schuman (1810-1856) as ideals, was expressed in his performance, *The Schuman Machine* (2008). Produced for Manifesta 7, Kjartansson spent several hours every day for two weeks singing the romantic *Dichterliebe* cycle by Robert Schumann with Davíð Þór Jónsson playing the piano. This theatrical mode of pretending became Kjartansson's way to approach different art practices, such as lyrical song and painting, as in *The Blossoming Trees Performance* (2008), staging himself as the "artiste-peintre," enacting the role of a landscape painter for two weeks while residing in the Rokeby house, an historic estate, in the Hudson River Valley, in upstate New York. His investment in the notion of Romantic masculinity is, however, not only influenced by Dieter Roth's large-scale installations and music performances, but also, in the film-works by the American artist Matthew Barney (b. 1967), who contributed to the Icelandic art scene through his collaboration with the singer and composer Björk.

As several critics noted, Kjartansson's investment in the notion of Romantic masculinity could also be likened to the idea of self-realization and individual maturation inherent in the German/Scandinavian masculinist notion of *Bildung*.[93] There is, needless

[535] Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," 134.

to say, no feminine equivalent of a *Bildung* in this particular concept, although this exclusion has not been addressed by Icelandic women artists.[536]

Kjartansson who grew up in the theatre, slips like an actor into different identities, claiming his favourite paintings to be stage sets. His mother, Guðrún Ásmundsdóttir (b.1935), is a renowned actress and his father a playwright, actor and director. Consequently, Kjartansson always stages his works meticulously and performs his different roles in the "right" visual and cultural settings. His video series *Me and My Mother* consists of four videos shot in 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015, and could be possibly interpreted as a symbolic description of the *Bildung* process, as the artist evolves from young son to a mature artist. The work is typically staged according to an approach joining sincerity with cruelty.[537] Every five years he created a new chapter with his mother, both facing the camera, while his mother repeatedly spits on him. The scene always takes place in his mother's living room, bookshelves in the background filled with Icelandic literature, including first editions of the novels by Nobel Prize author Halldór Laxness, an inspiration for so many of his works.

Similarly, the audience can follow Kjartansson's education from his adolescent roles as the troubadour and trickster *Rassi Prum* (The Farting Ass) and the anti-heroic *Knight* posing in shining paper armour (2002) to a more complex, historical roles. For the Reykjavík Arts Festival in 2005, Kjartansson performed a quirkier role as the lonely troubadour in the lengthy performance *The Great Unrest*. In his month-long installation executed in an abandoned youth clubhouse a few steps from the busy road nr 1, some 150 km distance from the capital, he staged one of his favourite characters, the troubadour Rassi Prump in a colourful dreamlike abandoned TV set. In a small, abandoned community centre in the countryside, he performed before an amateurishly painted backdrop of mountains, glaciers and flames. Dressed in childish knight costume, Kjartansson sang the blues for six hours a day. The dramatic role of the sad clown so dear to Kjartansson is also the subject of the video loop *God* (2007). Comparably, but in a much more sophisticated fashion, he staged himself in an elaborate video installation as a melancholy crooner repeating a single line: "Sorrow Conquers Happiness," performed

[536] Ian Biddle, *Music, Masculinity and the Claims of History: The Austro-German Tradition from Hegel to Freud* (London, Ashgate, 2016 (2011)), 86.
[537] Discussed in Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin Van den Akker, "Utopia, Sort of: A Case Study in Metamodernism," in *Studia Neophilologica* 87, sup. 1 (2015): 55–67.

in a loop with an old -fashioned big band, the walls of the exhibition space draped in pink satin for the occasion.

Even though Kjartansson avoids direct historical references, and seeks innocence and "authenticity" in his performances, his works are marked by numerous cultural and literary tropes. One of his most beloved characters, Ólafur Kárason, is a literary personification created by Halldór Laxness; a precociously brilliant orphan poet who lives and dies in extreme poverty. This personification is inspired by the real life of the pauper-poet Magnús Hj. Magnússon (1875–1916) as related in his own diaries and ego-documents. [538]

Kárason is the main character in Laxness's romantic Bildungsroman *Heimsljós* (*World Light*), published in four volumes between 1937 and 1940. According to Kjartansson, this literary opus is still invoked by Icelanders as "religious scripture," and he describes it as "the blueprint of Iceland's artistic DNA." [539] Kjartansson's own theatrical adaptions of the novel, both in the form of an opera (with music by Kjartan Sveinsson) in *Der Klang der Offenbarung des Göttlichen* (*The Explosive Sonics of Divinity*, 2014), as a multimedia installation, and as a post-performance exhibition created in TBA21's Augarten (*The Palace of the Summerland*, 2014)[540] is a complex enactment of the creative process undertaken by the artist and his friends. Exploring principally the dynamics of the troupe and the practice of producing a theatrical collaborative work, he. responds, however, with tongue in cheek, to the veneration of the romantic hero in Icelandic culture. This is epitomized by the tragic faith of Ólafur Kárason, who in the novel, faces death by disappearing into the wilderness, where "beauty shall reign alone."[541]

Linda Hutcheon has argued that irony, both as it figures in literary genres and as a personal way of perceiving the world, is a kind of "play on the edge."[542] This rhetorical ploy was taken to the edge in Kjartansson's pink neon installation *Scandinavian Pain* (2006), where he mocked the melancholic identities of August Strindberg (1849–1912),

[538] Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson, *Minor Knowledge and Microhistory. Manuscript Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 123–125.
[539] See: https://artmap.com/schwarzwaelder/exhibition/ragnar-kjartansson-and-friends-2014?print=do
[540] Retrieved from: https://tba21.org/Summerland.
[541] This is the last phrase in the novel *World Light*, a sentence repeated in Kjartansson's adaption.
[542] Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*. *The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London/New York: Routledge, 2005 (1994)).

Edward Munch (1863–1944), Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), and Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007), turning their "Scandinavian Pain" into a retro-looking brand, using the language of advertising employing the old fashioned pink light sign, well known in the Reykjavík skyline.[543] It could thus be argued that Kjartansson's multiple performances and references to the masculine hero (be it the artist, the poet, the crooner, the knight), are essentially ironic, even though the boundaries between irony and sincerity remain ambiguous and fragile, or indulgent and cruel, as in *Me and My Mother*. Similarly, the thin line between irony and straightforward theatricality, even earnest engagement, is often ambiguous and left open for interpretation.

In his video opus *Figures in Landscape* (2018), created as a site-specific installation in the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences in Copenhagen, Kjartansson returns to the theatrical form of the social realist plays of his childhood. In these, he reflects on his admiration for the modernist utopia as represented during the 1920s and 1930s in public spaces, in wall decorations in hospitals, schools and other official buildings.[544] Again, Kjartansson evokes well-known Icelandic tropes as historical influences, "national treasures" such as the famous stage backdrops painted by Sigurður Guðmundsson (1833–1874) in the 1860s. Furthermore, the collage work *Seventh Day in Paradise* (1920) by Guðmundur Thoroddsen (1891–1924), could be added as yet another visual reference in this palimpsest. As before, Kjartansson makes uses of handcrafted clichéd representations of landscape (the forest, the snow-covered mountains, the meadow, the desert, the beach), for the immobile stage sets where "scientists" clad in white lab coats drift about as staffage in a desolate apocalyptic landscape. Here, Kjartansson seems to be looking for a way to escape the self-indulgent references that have characterized his works by casting international actors in their performance.

The simple background of each scene is in dramatic contrast to the technical complexity of the work, mounted in real time, like a clock, around seven chapters, each representing a day in a week. Viewing the entire work simultaneously on seven screens would therefore take a whole week. A play on the Nordic Social Utopia, the Scandinavian

[543] Kjartansson installed the pink sign *Scandinavian Pain* first on the roof of a constructed barn in the Norwegian town Moss, where the Norwegian expressionist Edvard Munch (1863–1944), worked on several of his well-known melancholic paintings. Since, the installation has been reproduced in various settings.
[544] Ragnar Kjartansson, *Figures in Landscape*, 2018, single channel video, 168 hours. Commissioned by the Danish Building and Property Agency for the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences. Exhibited in Reykjavík, i8 Gallery, January 31 – March 16, 2019.

Welfare State facing current climate crises, or simply a parody of the scientific community that commissioned the work? "When a person puts on a white lab coat it instantly represents the nobility of man," he comments cynically.[545]

The repetition of stories reinforces basic cultural and ideological assumptions, turning them into screen savers, as Kjartansson had already indicated in *Scenes from Western Culture,* 2015. In *Figures in Landscape*, the viewer can enjoy in the sleek beauty of the screen and the hypnotic time-based aspect of the work. Again, Kjartansson acknowledges the potential of irony to undermine master narratives, and in *Figures in Landscape*, the "good scientists" roam around as fallen angels in an idyllic and artificial nature.

6.9. The Great White One

In several of his photographic and performative works, Magnús Sigurðarson, employs the history of the killer-whale Keiko as a political allegory. Ironically, he explores the misfortunes of the male killer whale Keiko whose life was exploited in Hollywood movies and transformed into a commodity. Keiko became a global symbol, engaging the politics of animal protection versus the commodification of the animal through strategies of spectacle.[546]

Keiko (originally called Siggi or Kago), was captured outside the Vestmann Islands, south of Iceland in 1979, and placed on display in a small marine park in Hafnarfjörður (which closed in 1987).[547] Sold in 1982 to the *Marineland Amusement Park* in Ontario, Canada, he was then trained to become an entertainer. After some time spent in poor living conditions at an aquarium in Mexico, he ultimately found his way to Hollywood, where he became an international star as the orca Willy in the *Free Willy* films.[548] Through the Free-Willy-Keiko Foundation, established in 1995 with the royalties from his films, Keiko was then transported to Newport, Oregon Coast Aquarium

[545] Ragnar Kjartansson Quoted in *The Reykjavík Grapevine*, January 31, 2019.
[546] Discussed in Anne Brydon, "Whale-Siting. Spatiality in Icelandic Nationalism," in *Images of Contemporary Iceland. Everyday Lives and Global Contexts*, eds. Gísli Pálsson and E. Paul Durrenberger (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1996), 25–45; Anne Brydon, "The Predicament of Nature. Keiko the Whale and the Cultural Politics of Whaling in Iceland," *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2006): 225–60.
[547] Jón Már Halldórsson, "Hvað varð Keikó gamall?," *Vísindavefurinn*, October 31, 2002. Retrieved from: https://www.visindavefur.is/svar.php?id=2828.
[548] The *Free Willy* films were made in 1993, 1995 and 1997.

in the USA. He was eventually returned to Iceland in September 1998, transported in a US military cargo aircraft to the Westman Islands off the south coast. The intention was to release Keiko into the sea where he had been caught two decades earlier. Kept in an enclosure off the island, he was trained to hunt for himself, and in 2002 he was released into the wild, and swam to Norway. On 12 December 2003 the media reported that Keiko had died off the coast of Norway.

In 1997 Sigurðarson travelled across the USA to meet his "fellow countryman" Keiko in the marine park in Oregon, intending to promote the bonds between these two mammals and analyse their new existence in American consumer society. Taking on the role of the traveller, with a camera and wearing cowboy boots. He was a choirboy singing Icelandic patriotic songs, and a heavily armed barbarian in the Reykjavík Family Park and Zoo. In the photographic work *Sá stóri hvíti* (*The Great White One*), he sits naked in a feminine mermaid pose, on an inflatable plastic mattress that has the form of a whale.[549] His large blue eyes, his pink naked body, his red, sunburned face is covered in white powder, matching the pink, blue and white coloured shades of the whale's plastic body floating on milky water.[550] [Fig. 17]. In this work, everything is subverted. A white man on a beach in a submissive, feminine, seductive pose, in a photograph whose title invokes the classic portrayal of masculinity in literature, Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick*, published in 1851. Its narrative traces the whaling hunt for the imagined great white whale and refers to the economic success of the non-sustainable whaling industry, a crucial element in the economic boom of the United States and its intensifying capitalism, which, among other destructive effects, caused the extinction of several species.

The Great White One can be interpreted as an allegory of the shipwreck of white male identity. It also reflects on Sigurðarson's own identity, his discovery of his own whiteness in the privileges accorded to a white man in the United States.[551] Thus, the work involves a reversal of accepted values, where gendered symbols are inverted in the spectacle of the white male posing like a mermaid sunbathing on an inflated mattress. The artist seems to ask: How do people negotiate race and gender in a predominantly white male context?

[549] The work was first shown at the exhibition *Artists on the Brink of Something*, Living Art Museum, Reykjavík July 1998.
[550] Discussed in Eva Heisler, "Hugmyndir, hlutir og rými," 241.
[551] Email from Magnús Sigurðarson to the author.

Sigurðarson, who lives and works in Florida, has written that: "One does not always understand the complexity of one's environment nor society in which one exists. For example, the iconic parrot, symbol of Florida sun and fun, is an immigrant, all native species of parrot were wiped out in the 1900's and the species that we now find in and associate with Miami and South Florida were all imported one way or another. Immigrants are the new mascot of Miami, the parrot searching for a home, the Icelander seeking melancholy, all species and immigrants at one point must redefine their identity based on their current reality. While they will never be native, they will through time be blended into the palette of their new home as the lines of identity are blurred, smudged, and redefined. This is the beginning of a post-melancholic identity through the power of myth and occasional mayhem."[552]

On several occasions, Sigurðarson has staged his performance work *Requiem for a Whale,* a performance/lecture produced in the swimming pool in Kópavogur in October 2018, as part of the Cycle Festival in Reykjavík. It is a sequel to *Dances with Whales (Keiko – Always on my Mind),* a street performance in which an inflatable orca and white foam were used to imitate the spectacular scenes in the *Free Willy* films and other displays in marine parks.[553]

In these performances Sigurðarson refers to Iceland as the "northernmost Caribbean Island" since like the Caribbean islands of St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas, Iceland was once under Danish rule, even though Iceland was legally not a colony. His critique seeks to show how overseas territories are seduced by American consumer culture, which objectifies and transforms their own nature and fauna into a fetish that has lost all connection with its ecosystem. In these performances mimicking Keiko's life, it becomes clear that the representation of the animal cannot be separated from human violence performed against humans and animals, be it Hollywood filmmakers, Icelandic whale hunters, or spectators in a zoo.

By choosing the inflated Keiko as an alter ego, Sigurðarson questions the "neutrality" of the human body and demonstrates how the relationship between humans

[552] Quoted in Tyler Emerson Dorsch, "Icelandic Parrotry." Retrieved from http://www.cycle.is/magns-sigurdarson.
[553] The performance was first shown at PS1, New York, then remade for a dance group in collaboration with choreographer Danielle Georgiou. It was also shown at a spring event at the art festival *Cycle, Cryptopian States* in Berlin, 2018. Retrieved from: https://icelandicartcentre.is/blog/cryptopian-states-berlin-germany/.

and animals is mediated through colonial violence and the Disneyfication of the ecosystem in Iceland and worldwide. [554] By turning the inflatable Keiko into a symbol of *Icelandicness*, he presents a distorting mirror similar to that displayed by Nordal in her aluminium *Great Auk*. He illustrates how the life of Keiko, controlled by humans, was transformed into a generic, meaningless national icon. At the same time, he mocks the cultural spectacle controlled by Western consumer culture and criticises the way it has gained the upper hand in Iceland, the relationship between humans and animals being mediated through image-clichés of nature. Simultaneously, Sigurðarson links ideologies of whiteness with the disputes over whaling in Iceland as these have been combined with the image of Icelanders as inheritors of pure Nordic fishing cultures.[555] Clear examples are seen in the fetishization of animals in Iceland that adopts a national symbolism, whether in whale-watching trips, or souvenirs sold in shops deprecatingly known in Iceland as "puffin shops."[556]

[554] Alan Bryman argued that "Disneyization is depicted as a process by which the principles of the Disney theme parks dominate more and more sectors of society. " Alan Bryman, *The Disneyization of Society* (London: Sage Publishers, 2004).
[555] Discussed in Anne Brydon, "The Predicament of Nature: Keiko the Whale and the Cultural politics of Whaling in Iceland."
[556] Katrín Anna Lund, Katla Kjartansdóttir and Kristín Loftsdóttir, "'Puffin Love': Performing and Creating Artic Landscapes in Iceland through Souvenirs," *Tourist Studies* 18, no. 2 (2018): 142–58.

7. FASHION THAT CAME IN FROM THE COLD WAR. TWO FACES OF COLONIALISM IN THE ARCTIC

7.1. The White Arctic

In this chapter I will discuss how the Arctic has been staged as a territory for articulating whiteness and heroic masculinities in fashion photography and popular media and further explore how these cultural meanings activated notions of *Icelandicity* in fashion media already in the 1970s. The current economic and political interest in the Arctic and its important status in climate politics drew my attention to three different fashion spreads shot on location in Canada, Greenland, and Iceland, by the British photographer John Cowan (1929–1975) and by the French-born (Eugene) Gene Laurents (1931–2016), in 1964, 1965 and 1970.[557]

Fashion photographs are traditionally published in fashion magazines which themselves may be considered as textually embedded knowledge systems, mobilizing notions of difference, gender and sexuality and articulating the social and sexual relation between these.[558] As art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau has observed, "And surely another significant aspect of the genre is its ideological address, its complex orchestrations of spectatorial desire, projection, identification, fetishism, voyeurism, and all the other psychic mechanisms that account for the power, the influence, and indeed the pleasure such pictures produce".[559] Fashion photographs should therefore be analysed, like any photographic image, through the prism of its cultural and economic histories, its recent postcolonial manifestations, as well as ecologically based analyses of cultural commodities and global politics in a specific time and place.

However, fashion photography has played a minor role in the history of photography. Despite its powerful presence in visual media and its important ideological, semiotic and rhetorical functions, these have been largely ignored as vectors within the cultural narratives produced in photographic fashion spreads in magazines.

---

[557] My gratitude goes to photographer Kristinn H. Benediktsson (1948–2012) who first told me about John Cowan's fashion shooting in Iceland. I would also like to thank photo historian Philip Garner and Cowan's daughters, who generously gave me access to Cowan's photo archive in London.
[558] Roland Barthes, *Système de la mode* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967); ibid, *The Fashion System*, transl. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983).
[559] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Modern Style. Dressing Down," *Artforum* 42, no. 9 (May 2004): 192–96, 194–95.

During the Cold War, the Arctic regions became a new stage for fashion photography, within which racial and colonial ideas of whiteness were widely represented and disseminated. In this context, I expand on Elspeth H. Brown's analysis of whiteness and race in fashion. With reference to her discussion of how "the subdued gestures of the couturier model performed a corporeal language that consolidated a discourse of Anglo-Saxon white supremacy for its elite viewers",[560] I will thus discuss how fashion images have consistently constructed whiteness as the template for style and beauty for their American and European readership. This was especially evident in the period when fashion magazines flourished under the editorial direction of figures such as Diana Vreeland (1903–1989), *Vogue*'s editor-in-chief from 1963 to 1971, an epoch characterized by widespread racism and discrimination in the USA.[561]

I also wish to consider fashion photography as a medium rather than a genre, demonstrating that it shares a certain "Western-ness" traditionally attributed to the aesthetic of European landscape painting. Likewise, the "imperialism" of fashion photography, as mediated through high-end fashion magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, can be viewed as a social hieroglyph, as well as a fetishized commodity. This might be likened to W.J.T. Mitchell's analysis of landscape painting. As he argues, images of landscape are "embedded in a tradition of cultural signification and communication […] functioning as a special sort of commodity that plays a unique symbolic role in the system of exchange-value".[562] Through these representational operations, geographical areas like the Arctic were staged as theatres of imperial whiteness, departing radically from the older dystopian image of cold and darkness that dominated European ideas about the North.

These magazine spreads have been chosen, first, for their topicality, in so far as they reveal the power of fashion to articulate stereotypes of race and gender. Second, they illustrate how the Arctic has been used as both frame and stage for fashion photography,

[560] Elspeth H. Brown, "De Meyer at *Vogue*: Commercializing Queer Affect in First World War-era Fashion Photography," in *Photography & Culture* 2, no. 3 (November 2009): 253–74, here p. 267.
[561] Black fashion models entered the fashion magazines sporadically during the 1970s, but it wasn't until 1974 that Beverly Johnson became the first black cover girl for American *Vogue*. Donyale Luna (Peggy Ann Freeman 1945–1979) was the first African American model to appear on the cover of the British edition of *Vogue*, in May 1966. *TIME* magazine declared 1966 "The Luna Year," in an article calling her "unquestionably the hottest model in Europe at the moment".
[562] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002 (1994), 5–34, p. 14.

capitalizing on the place of the Arctic within the colonial imaginary and refiguring already established mythologies of whiteness. Third, these images demonstrate how the concept of "whiteness" has contributed to the contemporary branding of the Arctic, and of the North in general, through a mélange of racialized, gendered and touristic stereotypes originating in the colonial project. This imaginary – let us call it the Western Imaginary of the North – was – and still is – adapted as a staple of advertising and fashion iconography.[563]

Here, I would suggest that these two photographers, Cowan and Laurents, mobilized already existing mythologies (in the Barthesian sense) in which the Arctic is imagined as a space of "purity", and as a signifier of whiteness. Which is to say that they identified and codified this geography for cultural and racial whiteness in a global context through printed media.

Finally, these photo spreads parallel the military power struggles and rivalries in the northern hemisphere during the Cold War. They are therefore underpinned by political and cultural contexts and discourses whose representations of the Arctic, disseminated in popular culture at a specific historical moment, were emanations of the postwar world order. Thus, while military installations and corporate mining were dominant realities in these regions, the mechanisms of what Antonio Negri termed "empire", effaced the ecological consequences and consequent sufferings of displaced Inuit populations.

7.2. The Arctic in the Fashion Magazine

John Cowan is commemorated in several publications and exhibitions as one of the self-styled British photographers of the so-called Swinging Sixties. However, Cowan is rarely included in histories of fashion photography with the "Terrible Three" – that is, the fashion photographers David Bailey (b. 1938), Terence Donovan (1936–1996) and Brian Duffy (1933–2010). But Cowan was no outsider; his London studio at 39 Princess Place, Princedale Road, off Holland Park Avenue in Notting Hill, was used for the studio scenes in Michelangelo Antonioni's celebrated film *Blow-Up* (1966). Several of his photographs are featured in the film, including those from his popular London exhibition

[563] A recent example is the exhibition *The Weather Diaries. Nordic Fashion Biennale 2014***.** Sarah Cooper and Nina Gorfer (eds)., *These are the Weather Diaries* (Reykjavík: Nordic House, 2014).

Interpretation of Impact Through Energy (1964), showing his favourite model Jill Kennington (b. 1943), tied to a speedboat and paragliding in culottes.[564]

As exemplified in *Blow-Up*, the youth culture of the Swinging Sixties permeated a range of media, including photography, cinema and music. However, the photo studio remained the principal site for creating high-end fashion photography. Inspired by the mobility of cinematography, Cowan sought unusual visual angles made possible by shooting from above, below and around the model. Kennington, who started working with Cowan in 1962, commented that the main character in the film, the photographer Thomas, played by David Hemmings (1941–2003), was probably modelled more on Cowan and his working methods, than on David Bailey as is often claimed. She describes a famous scene where Thomas photographs the model Veruschka (Vera Gottliebe Anna Gräfin von Lehndorff-Steinort), removing the camera from the tripod, circling her like a hunter around an animal. Shooting from downwards, she characterized his method as "completely fluid, unhindered by tripods, etc., [which] was typical Cowan".[565]

Cowan established a close and demanding relationship with his models, and as Kennington observed, he constructed his own stylistic identity through his dynamic ways of staging the model – also outside the studio setting. Capitalizing on Kennington's youthful energy, Cowan's approach allowed him to create a ludic space between fantasy and reality, altogether distant from the dreary urban reality of most Londoners. Their intimate relationship inspired some of his most well-known images, including those involving dangerous situations where the model was photographed hanging off buildings or jumping from heights, alluding to cinematic precedents.[566]

Cowan orchestrated such extreme situations, rendering direct homage to memorable cinematic moments, for example, when he reconstructed a famous helicopter shot from the James Bond film *From Russia with Love* (1963), with Kennington as the model.[567] Such apparently spontaneous images were already the hallmark of sports photographers, but Cowan's approach contributed to the integration of this kind of

[564] Philippe Garner, *John Cowan. Through the Light Barrier* (Munich, Paris and London: Schirmer Mosel, 1999), no page number.
[565] Philippe Garner, "Antonioni's *Blow Up* and Swinging 1960s London." Interview with Jill Kennington, *Vanity Fair*, April 2011: Retrieved from: http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2011/04/the-making-of-blow-up-201104.
[566] Ibid.
[567] The photograph was subsequently reproduced in the *Daily Mail* (1963). Philippe Garner, *John Cowan. Through the Light Barrier*, no page number.

spontaneous fashion imagery in the popular press.[568] This was part of the strategy of photographing fashion "out of place," as when Kennington, clad only in a bikini, posed on a table at the World's End pub on Chelsea's King's Road.[569] In such pictures, Cowan mobilized fantasies of various kinds intersecting with the period's social tensions and generational conflicts played out in London's public space. More erotically charged high-end fashion photography, focusing on the relationship between the photographer and the model, as exemplified in *Blow-Up*, was enacted in the protected space of the studio's white cube.

7.3. Fashion as Colonialism

Diana Vreeland was among the first fashion editors to encourage fashion photographers to assume the role of explorer-reporters, charged with locating exotic and extreme locations. New consumers were increasingly mobile, thus prompting the assimilation of more aesthetic and, indeed, touristic landscape photography. The act of shooting "on location," that is, transporting models and photographers to various sites, both urban and natural, similarly enhanced the aesthetic and economic value of the clothing they wore. Departing from the traditional form of studio photography, location shooting was believed to provide a more complex and exciting visual iconography for a young, sophisticated, white urban readership.

In 1964, Vreeland commissioned Cowan to take a long and physically demanding journey to the Arctic, in order to photograph luxury furs as well as glitzy "space outfits." These were staged in the extreme landscape, the "wastelands" of the isolated Resolute Bay in Canada's Cornwallis Island – one of world's coldest, remote, and sparsely inhabited regions. The airport in Resolute Bay had become a busy hub in the 1960s not only because of the scientific and military activities in the region, but also due to multinational excavations for oil and gas. At the time, such a photographic voyage

[568] Martin Munkacsi (1896–1963) and Louise Dahl-Wolfe (1895–1989) are usually credited with the development of open-air fashion photography. Munkacsi worked as a sports photographer in Germany and advised: "Never pose your subjects. Let them move about naturally. All great photographs today are snapshots." See: "Think While You Shoot," *Harper's Bazaar*, November 1935, 92–152. Quoted in Gretchen Gardner, *Disappearing Witness: Change in Twentieth-Century American Photography* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 84–85; Susan Morgan, "America: Creating the Impromptu Attitude," *Aperture* 128 (1992). Special issue on Martin Munkacsi: 46–61, p. 47.

[569] John Cowan, "What happens when a photographer plans to shoot swimsuits outdoors and it rains?," (1963). Philippe Garner, *John Cowan. Through the Light Barrier*.

constituted a great technical challenge, but was considered by Vreeland as an ideal location in which to dramatically stage the models in this harsh environment, that indeed fuelled readers imaginary, an imaginary construction that was rooted in the Victorian Age but revived by science fiction narratives of the 1950s.[570]

During the trip, Cowan assumed the "heroic" role of the photojournalist and in an accompanying text he wrote for *Vogue*, he described the shoot as an exciting, adventurous expedition. After several days of travelling with his small crew, consisting of the photographer Allan Ballard, fashion editor and jewellery designer Mary Kruming, and the models Antonia Bioeckesteyn and Jill Kennington, they waited for days at the military airbase in Resolute Bay for the right meteorological condition. Eventually, they were escorted by Royal Canadian troops (Mounties) into the tundra where the shootings took place.

Cowan describes in detail how he and his crew had more than the cold to contend with: "it was fantastically hard work […] for the girls, just wearing these thin clothes".[571] As always, Cowan tried to shoot the models in free movement, but this proved impossible. Every step had to be controlled as the models were literally standing on the edge of an ice floe. Consequently, he experimented with static animal-like poses and gestures, evoking the elongated curve of a bird, the contours of a resting seal and the seductive qualities of a sexy cat-pose, appending their futuristic bodies on the white estranged landscape, as though they were some exotic animals gone astray.

The presumed objectivity of photography was, in fact, influenced by the geographical and climatic conditions of production. Because of the cold, technical problems prevented the cameras from functioning: the Hasselblad cameras froze, and the film bent and cracked.[572] Still, the inhospitable landscapes dominated by white and blue hues of ice and the spectacular scenery were described by Cowan in sublime terms: "A glittering world," he writes, resembling "the inside of an enormous diamond".[573]

[570] Robert G. David, *The Arctic in the British Imagination 1818–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
[571] John Cowan, "Flash: The Arctic," *Vogue*, November, 1, 1964, 127–141.
[572] Ibid.
[573] Cowan, 127.

The photo spread "The Girl Who Went Out in the Cold," reproduced in American *Vogue*, is still considered one of Cowan's most successful projects.[574] For the first time, he worked in ways close to reportage, using the natural site as an alternative to the space of the studio. Landscape thus becomes the new "background," and its emphasis on whiteness effectively functions as an equivalent of the space of the white cube studio. All the military, industrial, and ethnographic components of the site were collectively excluded from the images (the military crew is only mentioned in the text). Moreover, the whiteness of the models clad in luxurious clothes and the whiteness of the landscape operated in a social vacuum, excluding any reference to the indigenous Inuit population and their actual conditions.

The use of an unusual location, that is, fashion staged in the "wrong place", was similarly employed in another Arctic fashion reportage published in the English *Weekend Telegraph* on the 10th of December 1965.[575] The cover story "Land of Ice", was shot in Thule in Greenland and accompanied by a fashion spread called "The Fur North" by the fashion photographer Gene Laurents. The accompanying text "Greenland: The Ice – Bound Giant", was written by journalist Patrick Skene Catling (b. 1925).[576] The text refers both to the mythology of the "Ultima Thule" and to the notion of the sublime as an "ancient frightening concept". Catling gives detailed historical information on Greenland's colonial history and recounts the violent story of the American military occupation of Thule, as well as the cultural devastation orchestrated by the Danish government displacing the isolated Inuit communities when the US military Thule base expanded in 1953. During this period of emerging scientific internationalism, the US military "colonized" geophysical research in the Arctic, which increasingly became subject to militarization and regulation. Because of security reasons, the military base could not be photographed or used as a backdrop for the photo shoot but the "the highly

[574] See Patricia Mears et al., *Expedition: Fashion from the Extreme* (New York: Fashion Institute of Technology, 2017).
[575] Merja Salo, "On Location. Proper and Not so Proper Places of Fashion in Finnish Fashion Photography," in *Images in Time. Flashing Forward, Backward, in Front and Behind Photography in Fashion, Advertising and the Press*, eds. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir and Michael A. Langkjær (Bath: Wunderkammer Press and Bath Spa University, 2011), 61–74.
[576] Patrick Skene Catling, "Greenland: The Ice-Bound Giant," *Weekend Telegraph*, December 10, 1965, 16–23.

polished Air Force control room", visited by the crew is described as "like something in *Dr Strangelove*".[577]

Despite the cultural and political situation of the local populations documented in the photographs and described in the text, Greenland is viewed through abstract notions of the sublime. It is described as a "land of vast white emptiness," a "frozen country" with winters of "almost perpetual darkness," where "The cold hurts and it is dangerous […] breathing was like inhaling razor blades."[578]

Greenland is characterized as "the natural setting for furs," but obviously, there is nothing natural in staging models clad in luxurious fur coats with the white ice as a backdrop. Members of the local population were placed in their shadow as colourful props or as servants. The use of the title "Fur North" refers not only to fur as a valuable commodity, and fur as a sexual fetish, but also to fur as livestock for the local populations. Such rhetorical play with the language of fashion (as theorised by Barthes) highlights the provocative element of the images.

A particular characteristic of the spread is that the models are framed both inside and outside the social and colonial reality of the place. Laurents constructs a complex visual rhetoric for the spectator by employing a variety of fetishized signifiers, juxtaposing colourful touristic visions of the Inuit population with the shabby colonial reality represented in the black and white documentary photographs accompanying Catling's text. He also demonstrates how fashion can produce an idealized and desirable image, not merely by staging the models within the sublime white and blue landscape, but by playing with connotations of sex and gender, race and difference, colour photography against black and white.

The local populations thus figure in the photographs as a decorative element, a form of *staffage*. They are anonymous extras – detached from their actual public and social role. Their juxtaposition with the white fashion model furnished with the tokens of white colonial power such as the rifle, the fur and the boots, implies her dominance. Whereas the hunter is placed in the docile position of a servant and deprived of his own possessions such as fur, kayaks, and rifles. Dogs and hunting rifles function only as props for the fashion shots rather than an integral part of the local economy. The model becomes

[577] Catling, "Greenland: The Ice-Bound Giant."
[578] Ibid.

a proxy for the colonizer, and the rifle is deployed in a gesture playing on male–female tropes. The hunter's role is resignified as an ornamental element, creating an "effect" of authenticity and harmonizing with the sophisticated colour combinations in the fashion outfits. Likewise, the local girls (called Eskimos in the article) in their colourful, embroidered clothing frame the model against the landscape. These ambivalent racial combinations might not have been possible in the streets of New York or London, but here in the white colonial "no-man's land," they seem like "natural" elements in the images.

7.4. Fashion as Landscape

Cowan's desire to find new photographic viewpoints, and his effort to capture the moving body in space, may have contributed to his photographic experiments and travels to exotic and extreme places. His most elaborate fashion spreads were published in American *Vogue*, as *Vogue's* format offered him the opportunity to assume the role of reporter and travel to distant locations, constructing extended visual narratives extending over numerous pages. His last published spread for *Vogue* included a 20-page visual story, again referring to discovery and exploration in the title "The Landfarers".[579] This was shot in Iceland in August 1970, with a small crew, at several, now-famous tourist sites.[580]

At this point in his career Cowan had already made several fashion shoots in exotic places, all published in *Vogue*.[581] The Icelandic trip replaced a cancelled journey to Argentina, but Cowan had also asked the editor of *Vogue* for support to travel to Greenland but was refused. Still, Iceland was a desirable location, recently developed as a tourist destination for Americans, and the crew spent two weeks travelling around the country shooting the fashion models in touristic locales on the south coast such as Reykjanes Peninsula, Stokkseyri, Skógar, Reynisfjara, Vík and Jökulsárlón. Cowan always looked for unusual angles that would create a particular sense of space. In Iceland, he would obtain these by climbing mountains, rappelling down dangerous cliff faces, and sailing into a glacier lagoon.

---

[579] John Cowan, "The Landfarers. Racy New Looks," American *Vogue*, October 15, 1970.
[580] "Ísland í hausthefti Vogue: Tízkufólkið klífur jaka og sígur í björg á Íslandi," *Morgunblaðið*, August 12, 1970, 10 and 13.
[581] Cowan had been exploring and staging his models in extreme conditions in Sahara (1966), Peru (1968), and Daliah Lavi in Israel (1969).

The story's title "The Landfarers" expresses Cowan's masculine persona as an intrepid photographer and as an "explorer" with a camera. The shooting sessions are well documented through both the text and photographs, providing insight into Cowan's working methods, and his experiments with oblique angles. Consulting his negatives, one can follow his movements around the subject, searching for the most dynamic expression in space – more like a cameraman than a photographer. Conversely, he also employs the stasis and classicism often employed in high-end fashion photography. In his accompanying text, he relates how he became overwhelmed with the sublimity of the landscape and describes the sense of space as "colossal". "Here, you know that nature is boss. In the open country of spectacular waterfalls, foaming rivers, boiling geysers, brooding glaciers, a staggering sight is the sculpture of the lava plains ranging from greens to blacks to purples."[582]

The models clad in their urban couture are staged as staffage within these spectacular tourist sites. But as Roland Barthes observed, the rhetoric of the fashion magazine actively aims to conceal the semantic character of the proposed relations.[583] Nordics have long functioned as the standard bearers of whiteness in pseudoscientific race typologies. "To be white is to be Nordic; to be Nordic is to be white."[584] These are buttressed with connotations such as pure water and ice; between the texture and colours of fabric and accessories corresponding to the textures of nature, where the model blends into the land, into the "sexy moss, unbelievable green, deep and spongy (that) grows on certain kinds of lava".[585] Certain of the images incorporate other cultural markers, for example, the hybrid ethnic look, mixing high fashion with local handicraft, indigenous or vernacular objects. Some can be associated with American cultural tropes such as wild horses, braided hair and hats, avoiding explicit forms of *Icelandicness* in the juxtaposition of culture and nature, instead, these sharpen the signifiers of *Icelandicity* through transparency and the whiteness of water and the ice.[586]

---

[582] John Cowan, "Vogue's Spotlight Travel," American *Vogue*, October 15, 1970, 36.
[583] "Car la rhétorique du journal de mode s'emploie, elle, activement, à masquer le caractere sémantique des relations qu'elle propose." Roland Barthes, "Le Bleu est à la mode cette année. Note sur la recherche des unités signifiantes dans le vêtement de la mode," *Revue française de sociologie* 1 (1960): 147–162, p. 148.
[584] Catrin Lundström and Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, "Nordic Whiteness: An Introduction," *Scandinavian Studies* 89, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 151–58, p. 151.
[585] Cowan, "Vogue's Spotlight Travel," American *Vogue*, 15 October 1970, 36.
[586] Cowan, "The Landfarers. Racy New Looks," American *Vogue*, October 15, 1970; "The Landfarers. Viking Coat in White Mink," *Vogue*, October 15, 1970.

Cowan describes the landscape as a timeless and static world. A model clad in a white fur "Viking" cloak standing in a middle of an abandoned rowboat in the middle of a glacier lagoon is described as "a figure from some ancient Norse legend."[587] The inhabitants, absent from the photographs, are described as innocent savages, the women characterized by their "beautiful blue eyes" and "open faces".[588] Indeed, the "primitivist fantasy", the ancient image of Icelanders as Hyperboreans, is hard to kill.[589] Those who in antiquity were believed to be sacred people, in a perfect balance with nature, known for their land's various wonders are still described as "hardy, good-looking people who speak an ancient Norse tongue".[590]

Describing the country as featuring "Jet-black beaches and milk-white waterfalls, smoking volcanoes and great never-melting glaciers, sprouting geysers, sea fretted fjords – Iceland's got them all",[591] the "Landfarer" feature is an amalgam of tourist brochure, travelogue, and fashion catalogue. Tourist and fashion discourses combine with the visual *mise en scène* of clothing in the landscape, creating an inventory of signifying units that perfectly correspond to Barthes analysis of the fashion system. It also reiterates both ancient ideas and colonial discourses that have long dominated representations of Iceland in literature, history and travel accounts as discussed earlier in this text.

As W.J.T. Mitchell pointed out, "Landscape as a cultural medium thus has a double role with respect to something like ideology: it naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site."[592] The transparency of clear water, powerful waterfalls and white icebergs on a blue glacier lagoon become signifiers for the upper-class status or luxuriousness of the clothing, while fur, feathers, human and horse hair become potential signifiers for the "barbaric" nature of Icelandic wilderness. Iceland is not only presented and represented as an exotic destination, an undefined place of wonders ready to be consumed, but also as a space that can offer

[587] John Cowan, "The Landfarers. Viking Coat in White Mink."
[588] "Ísland í hausthefti Vogue: Tízkufólkið klífur jaka og sígur í björg á Íslandi."
[589] The myth of the Hyperboreans is discussed in Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 23.
[590] Cowan, "The Landfarers".
[591] Ibid.
[592] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Introduction," in *Landscape and Power*, 2.

spiritual transcendence: "It has distance, space, beauty – a place to be alone, a place to get lost in. Or a place to find yourself."[593] Like Laurents' photographs of Greenland, here again the land is imagined as an "Eden before the fall" where the exotic can be consumed "innocently" without any acknowledgment social or material relations, let alone contemporary Icelandic realities.[594]

7.5. Conclusion

According to Richard Dyer, "Racial imagery is central to the organization of the modern world."[595] By introducing concepts of "whiteness" in fashion imagery and analysing various representations of white racial identity in these fashion spreads, it is evident that the Anglo-American fashion press was an important generator of imperial narratives and their expression during the Cold War. In these three fashion spreads, the Arctic is represented as an empty place and it is commodified as an unexplored white territory waiting to be "discovered". Both Cowan and Laurents approached the idea of the Arctic on the premise of this figure of speech (another example of Barthes' notion of mythification), and as a semiotic strategy, rather than as a description of a real inhabited geographical place where contemporary Cold War issues of militarization and decolonialization were variously acted out.

Cowan's limiting of the narrative boundaries, his aesthetic approach, and his selective decisions work to contain his photo spreads, just as the white cube gallery space functions to exclude everything outside itself. This is quite different from Laurents' approach, which employs the shock effect of cultural contrasts aimed at a broader readership. Whereas Cowan ignored the social, cultural, and economic situation of Resolute's displaced Inuit population, just as he ignored the Canadian military presence outside the frame in order to create an image of unsullied whiteness, Laurents took a somewhat different approach by including the colonial presence as a rhetorical supplement, thus making it possible to imagine gendered, colonial and racial tensions inside the frame. Contrasting the whiteness of the landscape against the dark skin of the Inuits and their colourful clothing, they are represented as a robust ethnic tribe

[593] Cowan, "The Landfarers".
[594] Discussed in Kristín Loftsdóttir, "The Exotic North: Gender, Nation Branding and Post-colonialism in Iceland," *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 23, no. 24 (2015): 246–60, p. 257.
[595] Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1.

counterpointed with the elegant, sophisticated whiteness of the models.

The different visual editorial choices that feature in the three fashion stories can, of course, be explained by the fact that while John Cowan was shooting for the elite American *Vogue*, Laurents's photographs were produced for a different readership. The reading can be taken further as an example of differential colonialism, merging with social identity and branding when published in a British journal like the *Weekend Telegraph*, which published sophisticated fashion spreads along with content articles and social documentary photography for a more middle-class mixed female/male audience. Nevertheless, all the spreads were produced for a primarily urban, white audience.

In retrospect, when the Arctic is again present on the global radar, these fashion spreads raise questions about the staging of ideology within visual representations of the Arctic in the Cold War context. They also demonstrate how colonial ideas of the North as a pristine and empty place minimalizing human presence were, and still are, articulated and disseminated worldwide. These in turn require attention to the iconography of colonialism, its occlusions and its inventions. Recently, contemporary Greenlandic artists, such as Inuuteq Storch (b. 1989), re-appropriates in his work centred on archival photography and footage, to create new personal narratives. Rooted in a politics of place, his work reveals another facet of a decolonising narrative, by drawing on embodied experience, self-care, and self-determination, reflecting on the potential of healing thereby by creating new narratives that resonate with, but also function as a counter-monument to the established colonial narrative.[596] His work calls attention to ecological issues, current military conflicts and the new political and economic challenges faced by the local populations in a new globalized context.

[596] Discussed in Chris J. Gismondi, "Why is the Arctic Always White? Circumpolar Indigenous Artists in the Age of the Anthropocene," *Esse arts + opinions* 97 (Autumn 2019): 92–95.

8. THE NEW NORDIC COOL: BJÖRK; FASHION; AND ICELANDIC ART

8.1. The National Fabric.

It was only in the early twenty-first century that Icelandic fashion captured international attention, and Icelandic designers began to dream of recognition in the global fashion system. Inspired by the international success of Björk as a global style icon, young Icelandic fashion designers referred to their historical past with their use of wool and other natural materials. Over the last decades, they have oscillated between affirming a cosmopolitan vision of the now trendy North, and the desire to identify their products through a reconstructed identity – rooted in *Icelandicity*. As discussed in the introduction this is predicated on notions of cultural authenticity based on a presumed relationship to nature.

In her book *The National Fabric: Fashion, Britishness, Globalization*, Alison L. Goodrum, argues "that the apparently straightforward and economically driven process to do with the globalization of fashion is, in fact, a far more culturally nuanced and locally embedded encounter than has previously been suggested."[597] Local embeddedness describes equally well contemporary art and design in Iceland as characterized by New-York-based art critic Gregory Volk, who wrote that young Icelandic artists have their homeland always at the back of their mind.[598] Perhaps this obsession with place is a characteristic of small nations? Be that as it may, Volk's sharp-eyed analysis of the Icelandic art scene in the year 2000 might still be relevant and can be extended to compass Icelandic fashion and design. Like Icelandic artists, fashion designers are preoccupied with national identity and consequently seek for authenticity and cultural specificity.

In this chapter, I explore how the desire for a particular identity is similarly manifest in contemporary art, fashion, and culture. I suggest that the narratives and visual productions produced by fashion designers are the result of many factors, both historical and economic. These can be identified as expressions of cultural hybridity, in which artists and designers transpose cultural materials from one format or medium to another, or

[597] Alison L. Goodrum, *The National Fabric: Fashion, Britishness, Globalization* (London: Berg Publishers, 2005), 12.
[598] Volk, "Report from Reykjavik: Art on Ice," 41.

simply react against the standardization and commercialism of global art and fashion production.

Avtar Brah and Annie Coombes describe hybridity as a "key concept in cultural criticism, in post-colonial studies, in debates about cultural contestation and appropriation, and in relation to the concept of the border and the ideal of cosmopolitanism."[599] Hybridity has also been used to describe the creolization of cultures, considered not as "pure," but mixed, often symptomatic of a postcolonial situation. In the case of Iceland, the hybridity in question is not rooted in cultural diversity, or in tension or contestation with the colonizer (as Iceland was legally not a colony). Rather, it is rooted in Iceland's position on the periphery of Europe, a community in search of its cultural singularity and difference, premised on historical concepts of alterity and geographical specificity. The question of exotism is equally characteristic in the systematic crossover between art, fashion, music, and the extensive use of new media as exemplified by Björk.

For this reason, Néstor García Canclini's use of the term hybridization seems the most appropriate: "The word hybridization seems more ductile for the purpose of naming not only the mixing of ethnic or religious elements but the products of advanced technologies and modern or postmodern social processes."[600]

The so-called creative energy that has characterized art and fashion production in Iceland over the last decades is therefore associated with Iceland's global condition, manifested in the constant need to rethink identities. After the end of the Cold War, Iceland had to be reconstructed politically and economically. Later, the economic meltdown in 2008 made the reconsideration and potential reinvention of cultural values and the search for new identities even more urgent. Björk's role has been essential in these intersecting processes as they feature in a range of media. More than anyone else, she has influenced music and fashion and contributed to the growth of a new creative space in Iceland that sparked international attention at the end of the 20th century. Simultaneous with her ascent as a global fashion icon, she has collaborated with many of Iceland's most innovative artists, musicians, and film directors, retaining control of her own productions and actively commissioning masks and stage costumes. She has

[599] Avtar Brah and Annie Coombes (eds.), *Hybridity and its Discontents* (London: Routledge, 2000).
[600] Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving* Modernity (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2005), xxxiv.

constantly referred to her Icelandic roots as an important source and inspiration for her creative process and her intense personification of nature.[601] Her extravagant outfits function to express difference, even weirdness, that she herself defines as signifying aspects of her "Icelandicness."

But this is also in evidence in her more recent manifestations of cyber-feminism represented by her futuristic and technologically advanced performances and collaborations with high tech designers. These include such figures as Neri Oxman, who conducts research at the MIT Media Lab, at the intersection of computational design, digital fabrication, and synthetic biology. Based on Björk's own facial structure, Oxman and her team created 3D wearable headpieces, or masks, named *Rottlace*, conceived as "muscle textile", to symbolize her psychological healing process that was the theme of the album *Vulnicura*.[602]

8.2. Constructing Icelandic Identity in Dress and Fashion.

Icelandic fashion is a relatively recent phenomenon prompted by the political and cultural construction of national identity forged in the in the mid-19th century. In this respect, the painter Sigurður Guðmundsson (1833–1874) might be considered as the first Icelandic designer. After studying drawing and painting at the Royal Academy of Arts in Copenhagen, he launched the idea of a specific national dress for daily use, and, in 1857, wrote the first account of Icelandic dress history.[603] Guðmundsson's enthusiasm was fostered by ideas about the cultural definition of nations as these were debated by European intellectuals. His designs, based on research into historical dress, were also inspired by literature, botany, and ancient textiles, leading to a national dress reform that was launched in 1860.[604] The sartorial recommendations he initiated amongst Icelandic women were initially aimed as a political critique of the Danish (and Icelandic) elites who wore contemporary French-style clothing.

However, Guðmundsson's national dress reform was not an organized movement renouncing modernity as such. It was rather an "invented tradition," and he insisted

[601] Nicola Dibben, "Nature and Nation: National Identity and Environmentalism in Icelandic Popular Music Video and Music Documentary," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 18, no. 1, (June 2009), 131–51, p. 137.
[602] *Rottlace* refers to the Icelandic word *roðlaus*, or "skinless."
[603] Sigurður Guðmundsson, "Um kvenbúninga á Íslandi að fornu og nýju," *Ný félagsrit* 17 (1857): 1–53.
[604] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, *Til gagns og til fegurðar. Sjálfsmyndir í ljósmyndum og klæðnaði 1860–1960*.

equally on the importance of defining, performing and visualizing an individual public self, making use of clothing as an element of modern individual expression. According to this bourgeois ideal of women's emancipation, his version of national dress was not only aimed at rural populations but conceived as ceremonial garments for a cultural elite. Therefore, he encouraged Icelandic women to wear national dress as a personal statement as well as a cultural/nationalist one.

The new designs proposed by Guðmundsson were a long-term success; a visual paradigm, rather than a directive, feeding into the nationalist cultural process. His models were continuously reinvented locally and were regularly updated by women of all classes, often at critical historic and memorial moments.[605] In this respect, Guðmundsson's designs exemplify Eric Hobsbawm's "invented traditions," defined by him as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past."[606] However, since the 1980s, national dress has gradually lost its initial rationales, but has been retained for memorial occasions and as a formal state dress.

8.3. Woollen Dreams

Nationalism was embedded in daily life through consumption, education and visual culture. Patriotic consumption became closely associated with wool products and, indeed, the wool industry grew rapidly during the 1920s and 30s. It was considered to represent a potentially modern industry that would provide employment for the emerging working classes. Furthermore, wool had a direct natural link to nature and long woollen underpants were ironically named "the fatherland". Wearing "plus-fours" made from Icelandic tweed became a declaration of patriotic modernity, as if wool embodied a magical link between the past and the present. Production steadily shifted from the domestic sphere and small local factories were created for the production of outdoor and daily wear, for seamen and

[605] These would include events such as the granting of a constitution to Iceland by King Christian IX in 1874; the period of Home Rule (1904–18); the state visit of King Frederik VIII, the King of Denmark and Iceland, in 1907, the Millenary Celebration of Iceland's Parliament in 1930; and 1944, when Iceland became an independent state.

[606] E. Hobsbawm, and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

others working in the growing fishing industry. At the same time, traditional homemade outfits from sheepskin were replaced by denim garments and oiled waterproofs.

The 1930s, however, witnessed a change in cultural discourse and a corresponding redefinition of national identity. The modernist culture of the period promoted a functionalist aesthetic, associated with modern industries and new technologies. Photographic representations of nature and the vogue for wilderness hiking provided an alternative notion of the sublimity of Icelandic nature. Modern agriculture and the industrialization of the fishing industry also provided different models for a new conception of *Icelandicness*. These replaced the historical references that figured in earlier periods and were variously represented in the photographs and films exhibited at the Icelandic Pavilion at the New York World Fair in 1939.[607] Yet again, this was a re-invention of "new" authenticity through tropes related to the natural environment and the cultural homogeneity of the Icelandic population.

Even though this history of industrial production is brief, it became a signifier of authenticity, conscripted to the successful branding of several contemporary products. For example, this was employed in a campaign orchestrated by the Design Group Italia, Milan for their active wear 66°North, with the slogan "Keeping Iceland warm since 1926."[608]

Parallel to industrialization, domestic production retained some of its role. Knitting has been practiced by men and women since the sixteenth century, and the handcraft revivals in the late 1920s led by women's associations inspired creative experiments with wool both as material substance and as a final product. This is evident in the knitted sweaters, based on Norwegian and Swedish models, that have since become symbols of Nordic fashion identity. Wool thus retained its strong national connotations, as Icelandic sheep are the last remaining breed in the world that naturally produce wool in several colours. The most popular Icelandic sweater, the *Lopi*, is made from unspun wool with its characteristic circular yoke and patterned borders. Originally, its design was inspired by the "Eskimo" jumper created in 1930 by the Norwegian writer and designer

[607] Íris Ellenberger, "Somewhere Between 'Self' and 'Other': Colonialism in Icelandic Historical Research," in *Nordic Perspectives on Encountering Foreignness*, eds. Anne Folke Henningsen, Leila Koivunen and Taina Syrjämaa (Turku: University of Turku, 2009), 99–114.
[608] Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Andinn, landið og brandið," *Morgunblaðið – Menningarblað Lesbók*, November 22, 2008, 8–9.

Annichen Sibbern Bøhn (1905-1978), and probably also influenced by the Swedish economic and social project *Bohus-knitting* launched in 1939 to develop a home-based industry for women living in Sweden's harsh Bohus region. However, the *Lopi* sweater only became fashionable in the late 1950s through the influence of designers such as Auður Laxness (1918–2012). Since then, it has been developed by a number of designers and domestic knitters and still retains its place as a utilitarian garment, a tourist souvenir, and a fashion item.[609]

The Cold War was a determining factor not only for the wool industry, but also for an emerging popular culture and local fashion production in the following decades. Because of its geographical location, Iceland became a strategic location during the Cold War period. Consequently, American popular culture was a powerful influence on the1950s cultural scene, generated by the important US military base in Keflavik. But the Soviet Union was also a close neighbour, and woollen goods were exported both to the USA and the Soviet Union. Accordingly, Icelandic designs had to appeal to both US and Soviet markets.[610] However, by the early 1990s, this production of woollen clothing and the industry suffered an economic meltdown as factories were closed and dismantled as a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European markets.

The first designer to have introduced urban masculine street fashion in Reykjavík was the British tailor and designer Colin Porter (b. 1934). He arrived in Iceland in the mid-1950s as a representative of a British clothing company supplying civil clothing to the US army base. Soon, he started designing menswear for local Icelandic companies, basing his style on English tailoring traditions. Later, he drew upon London street fashion and started designing and organizing production for a small Icelandic market. Free import–export was restricted until Iceland became a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1970.

However, it was only after the elimination of tariffs on industrial goods in trade between the EEC and the EFTA states in 1977 that free trade really took off (EFTA 2009), and imported fashion became available in Reykjavík's shops in the early 1970s. Simultaneously, the Icelandic government had ambitious dreams of developing a modern

[609] Ásdís Jóelsdóttir, *Íslenska lopapeysan: Uppruni, saga og hönnun* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2017); Astrid Oxaal, "Et norsk strikkemønster fra Grønland," *Kunst og kultur* 3 (2003): 158–71.
[610] Magnús Guðmundsson, *Ull verður gull. Ullariðnaður Íslendinga á síðari hluta 19. aldar og á 20. öld* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1988).

competitive textile and fashion industry. They thus invited the Swedish designer Jan Davidsson as a consultant, tasked with the creation of a new brand of street wear fashion for export. His *Don Cano* became a popular brand and was exported to Europe throughout the 1980s.[611]

These interconnected areas of globalization, as it incorporated fashion, music and popular culture during the Cold War were stimulated by international economic agreements, fostering a synergy between domestic and international developments manifested, for example, in local punk culture on both sides of the iron curtain. In Iceland, this synergy nurtured a local youth culture not only influenced by foreign pop music, but also turned out to be a fertile ground for grass root movements. This was represented in music, art and literature as in the collaborative publishing company Smekkleysa (Bad Taste), established in 1986 by the *Sugarcubes*, producing, for example, the first albums of the group *Sigur Rós*.

8.4. Björk: A Global Hybrid

Björk is indisputably one of the most innovative international stylistic icons in recent decades. She is, one might say, the ultimate global hybrid, continuously making use of new media and advanced technology through which her persona is both projected and circulated. Famous for collaborating with iconoclastic figures such as Alexander McQueen, Bernhard Willhelm, Iris Van Herpen, James T. Merry, Jeremy Scott, KAIMIN, Maiko Takeda, Marjan Pejoski, Sophia Kokosalaki, and many others, she is also adored by international fashion and music media. Consequently, she has influenced not only fashion internationally, but popular culture in general.[612]

Björk's style has its roots in Reykjavík punk culture, as demonstrated in Friðrik Þór Friðriksson's film *Rock in Reykjavík* (1982). Her personal style is composed of elements that range from implicit social critique to elaborate self-display. These features first emerged in the early 1980s among the younger generation, reacting (when not repudiating) the national emblems and institutions that had been key elements in the nation-building process of the twentieth century. Björk already figured as an icon when

[611] Helgi Snær Sigurðsson, "Manstu eftir…Don Cano," *Morgunblaðið*, November 9, 2009, 28.
[612] Discussed further in Dirk Gindt, "Performative Processes: Björk's Creative Collaborations with the World of Fashion," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 15, no. 4 (December 2011): 425–49.

she appeared on the album cover of *Rock in Reykjavík* wearing a frilly dress with fairy tale allusions, her cheeks painted a clownish red. Her masquerade look, a mix of Pierrot and Columbine, was immediately established. The film was a pioneering attempt to present Reykjavík as a world capital within which avant-garde musical culture thrived. It showcased a place-specific alternative scene, and thus helped to promote the idea that a nation formerly considered a peripheral cold-war outpost could nonetheless nurture significant grass-root creativity.

Since the beginning of her international career in the early 1990s, Björk often refers to Icelandic nature and folklore (elves, gnomes and other supernatural creatures), as a source of inspiration. However, she is especially preoccupied with the concept of difference as defining a structural space, as opposed to a narrative revival of folkloric traditions. Her international position and status have permitted her to freely transgress or combine cultural boundaries and aesthetic styles of all types. Like her music, her stagecraft and costumes are always interwoven with utopian aspirations through her constant technological research into technology.[613] This helps account for her influence on the borderlines of music, art and fashion, as distinct from discourses of national identity and the "invention of tradition" employed by many Icelandic fashion designers.

Björk's costumes often look more like wearable art than actual clothing. Her extravagant style thus combines lavish costume, global folk and ethno-fashion, and fetishist accessories. It could be argued that these elements produce a general impression of "weirdness," or simply another version of cosmopolitan hybridity. This is especially evident in certain of her early costumes depicting her adaption of an African Japanese Geisha look, created by Alexander McQueen for the cover art of *Homogenic* (1997).[614] But this ethnic masquerade (mixing several cultural signifiers) is also evident in the music video *Who is it?* (*Carry My Joy on the Left, Carry My Pain on the Right*) directed by Dawn Shadforth. In this video, Björk dances in a silver bell dress accompanied by joker-like bell-clad figures, also designed by Alexander McQueen. The scene is staged on one of the black sand beaches in southeast Iceland, under the intense brightness of the northern sun, a space of undefined and dreamlike otherness.

[613] Peter Webb and John Lynch, "'Utopian Punk': The Concept of the Utopian in the Creative Practice of Björk," *Utopian Studies* 21, no. 2 (2010): 313–30.
[614] Photographed by Nick Knight. The same year, Knight photographed the Japanese model Devon Aoki for Alexander McQueen wearing a similar look.

Since her album *Homogenic*, Björk has mobilized this visual heterogeneity to suggest a utopian borderland space, one that freely traverses genres and mediums, embracing equally mythic notions of the "savage" and the "civilized" such as those depicted in the video *Wanderlust* (Directed by Encyclopedia Pictura and written by Björk and Sjón in 2008). However, Björk's most dramatic visual turning point was expressed in Chris Cunningham's video *All Is Full of Love* (1999), where she presented herself as androgynous erotic cyborg transgressing all boundaries between the human and the machine. There, as the feminist philosopher Donna J. Haraway wrote in her now-foundational text, "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction […] the cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is trangressed. Far from signaling a walling off of people from other living beings, cyborgs signal disturbingly and pleasurably tight coupling."[615]

This concept is a fundamental element in Björk's visual (and musical) appearances, developed further in *Medúlla* (2004) whose title means the "Latin word for "marrow," the inner or deep part of an animal or plant structure."[616] As musicologist Árni Heimir Ingólfsson has noted: "*Medúlla*, marked the beginning of an expanded view of nature that included the human body and involved bones, blood, heart, kidneys, and lungs."[617] This biological and environmental approach was explored further in her multimedia Gesamtkunstwerk *Biophilia* (2011), where she appears as a futuristic techno-goddess, merging technological utopias with a bucolic representation of nature. Here, as discussed by Anne Sophie N. Gremaud, Björk interprets Edward O. Wilson's biophilia hypothesis concerning the connections between humans and plants and other metaphors in a manner like that of the material vitalism developed by ecology philosopher Jane Bennett.[618]

---

[615] Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Natur*e (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 149–81, p. 150.

[616] Árni Heimir Ingólfsson, "'Follow My Voice': Structure and Improvisation in Björk's 'Mouth's Cradle'," in *European Journal of Musicology* 18, no. 1 (2019): 84–98, p. 85.

[617] Árni Heimir Ingólfsson, "'Follow My Voice'," 85–86.

[618] Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia: The Human Bond with Other Species* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). Discussed in Ann- Sofie Nilsen Gremaud, "From within the Porous Body. Modes of Engagement in Björk's Biophilia Album," in *Artistic Visions of the Anthropocene North*. Climate Change and Nature in Art, eds. *Gry Hedin and Ann-Sofie Nilsen Gremaud* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 128–153, p. 128.

While collaborating with some of the most acclaimed international designers and artists, Björk also has drawn attention to several Icelandic artists and designers. These include the artist Shoplifter (Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir), who has collaborated with Björk on several occasions as artist, stylist, and designer. Arnardóttir's hairpieces created for *Medúlla* were inspired by the vanitas symbolism of Victorian flowers braided in ways suggestive of African hairdos. Her collaboration with Björk and the photographic team of Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin was reproduced on the cover of *The New York Times Style Magazine*.[619]

As with all masques, the hair sculpture expressed a fusion of the wearer's body. It was also situated at the edge stage design or art, fluctuating between differing cultural sites: the theatre, fashion, performance art. Their folklorish references to Icelandic uses of women's headgear could also be associated with the politicized use of wigs in Lorna Simpson's (b. 1960) artwork, that examines the material culture and fashion of black women's hair. In contrast to Simpson, Shoplifter did not link the head ornament either with her own whiteness nor any other social criticism. The hair braids were simply a thread within a larger multimedia collaboration with Björk in relation to the release and promotion of the music of the album *Medúlla*.

Shoplifter's hair sculptures are situated in this grey area between art, fashion and performance. Her hybrid practices similarly follow the idea of the expansion of the artistic sites promoted by the late capitalism, where the artwork becomes part of an all-encompassing cultural production that thrives within art institutions and fashion and design companies. In her expansive installations, decorative synthetic hair is introduced as a ludic symbol of feminine creation. In 2008, in collaboration with the collective A.V.A.F. (Assume Vivid Astro Focus), Shoplifter installed a colourful hair wall titled *Aimez vous avec ferveur!* in a window at The Modern, New York MoMA's restaurant. The hair subsequently became her signature, that she described in an interview as building a bridge between high and low culture, between painting, popular culture, and fashion: "This synthetic hair is a very lo-fi type of material, very raw and fast to work with. It's

[619] William Van Meter, "Head Case. Case: Meet Björk's Favorite Hair Sculptor," *The New York Times Style Magazine*, February 20, 2005, 164.

Halloweenish hair. To me it conveys sweetness, optimism and light. It resembles abstract expressionist painting and addresses pop culture, pop art and fashion."[620]

Several other Icelandic women artists of the same generation have also worked with handicrafts and notions of domesticity, using techniques such as needlework, knitting, and crochet in artworks that refer to gender and sexuality. *The Icelandic Love Corporation,* has likewise worked in these forms, similarly alluding to gender and sexuality. They use their crocheted wearable artwork as costumes in performances in a variety of museum settings. Among these, the performance *Creation—Corruption—Celebration* (Frankfurt 2005) celebrated the "feminine" as a creative force, reminiscent of 1970s goddess feminism. Their costumes inspired *TheWildWomanWoodooGrannyDoilyCrochet*, one of Björk's spectacular outfits, commissioned for the cover art of her *Volta* album (2007). According to their website, the idea was "to make a new character, an electro neon Icelandic domestic joyous force of nature based on this fiery, pagan earth woman." Again, the photographers Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin collaborated on the representation of Björk's performances.: "We shot it in New York," they remarked, "in a big soundstage—it was extremely cold—and we were in a giant, airplane-hangar-sized space and had her just move and dance around, like a pagan ritual."[621]

By transforming the activity of crocheting into a creative and collective experience, the ILC collective challenged its stereotypic association with domestic and exclusively feminine activity by making experimental pieces that are not simply garments to cover the body, but transforming their materials into something like an autonomous organic growth that they characterize as symbolic of feminine sexual vitality. Their productions are an occasion for a relaxed, convivial practice of friends working collectively on mutual goals. Acknowledging the ephemeral aspects of fashion, many of their works are created from perishable, fragile materials, brought to life when performed before an audience. Procedures and material practices such as these provide significant examples of the crossovers between art, fashion and performance, another demonstration

[620] Isabel Kirsch, "Wild & Woolly: The Creative Mind of Shoplifter Arnardottir," *NY ART BEAT,* August 25, 2008. Retrieved from: http://www.nyartbeat.com/nyablog/2008/08/wild-woolly-the-creative-mind-of-Shoplifter-arnardottir/

[621] Molly Gottschalk, ″As Björk Opens at MoMA, Behind the Scenes of Her Most Iconic Images," March 2, 2005. Retrieved from: https://www.artsy.net/article/editorial-as-bjork-opens-at-moma-behind-the

of the fungibility of contemporary visual culture. In this respect, many of Björk's costumes and performances exude the boundaries of the art system, referring to other spectacles – the fashion show, the circus performance, and the theatre. In a more specific sense, it could be argued that Björk is reinventing a grotesque dialogical body reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque body. Such as body is considered as an uncompleted metamorphosis of growth and becoming: "It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body."[622] Indeed, these features characterize many of Björk's stage costumes through exaggerated body parts, such as hair, fingernails, length of the neck, the legs, and the bosom.

8.5. Nature as a Pagan Mental Space

Björk's use of the newest technologies to advance her music within the international cultural machine has had a direct and indirect role in their mainstreaming in Iceland. It solidified collaborations between visual art and music and made Icelandic artists more visible internationally. Multiple connections between artists and musicians were, for example, staged in the Icelandic pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennial in Björk's collaboration with Friðriksdóttir.[623] These productions were part of an intensifying globalized marketing of Icelandic culture, as Nicola Dibben has observed: "First, the internationalism of Icelandic popular music works against the idea of Iceland as a 'peripheral' nation within a world context and demonstrates that it has a distinctive contribution to make."[624]

Björk's adaption of the weird or the eccentric in her self-fashioning – or self-othering – was rapidly assimilated into yet another articulation of *Icelandicity* by international media. The idea of cultural and geographic difference, deploying cultural references like those inspired by Björk, has subsequently been further integrated into the

[622] Agnes Rocamora and Anneke Smelik (eds.), *Thinking through Fashion. A Guide to Key Theorists* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2016), 97–114.
[623] Friðriksdóttir worked on the visual design of the Björk albums *Greatest Hits*, *Family Tree and It's in Our Hands* (all 2002) and on Björk's video *Where is the Line* (2005), while Björk composed the music for Friðriksdóttir's video installation *Versations Tetralogia*, created for the 2005 Venice Biennale. Other participating artists were Borgar Þór Magnússon, Daníel Ágúst Haraldsson, Jónas Sen, Sigurður Guðjónsson, and Erna Ómarsdóttir.
[624] Nicola Dibben, "Nature and Nation: National Identity and Environmentalism in Icelandic Popular Music Video and Music Documentary," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 18, no. 1 (June 2009): 131–51, p. 134.

activities of national branding, as has her accompanying emphasis on Iceland's unspoiled nature and her romantic belief in nature's creative force.

Björk insisted on her transcendental relationship with nature embedded in her music and her videos.[625] Even as she made use of the Icelandic landscape as a stage, she also figured Iceland as a utopian nowhere, evident in her music video *Jóga*, directed by the French film director Michel Gondry (1997). Here, signifiers of purity are transmitted through images of characteristic feature of Icelandic nature, black sand beaches, volcanic rock formations and delicate wildflowers, as the camera pans over these from a bird's eye view. Then the camera enters her body, revealing her inside being made of the same materials s a lava field: water, rock and moss. These scenes of "primal" embodiment present in the early videos turned into a more structured attitude.

Since 2008 Björk has adopted a strong political position, launching an ecological conservation project *Náttúra* (Nature) and advocating for a shift in global climate politics. She claimed a state of emergency for Icelandic nature at a press conference in Reykjavík on November 6, 2015. Teaming up with author and environmentalist Andri Snær Magnason, this conference was held in conjunction with the Iceland Airways music festival and was intended as the beginning of a global campaign to pressure Icelandic authorities to stop the construction of new hydroelectric dams to produce electricity to fuel aluminium smelters and other industries. The name of the campaign was *Gætum Garðsins* (Protect the Park), referring both globally to the protection of the planet and locally to the enlargement of the National Park in the highlands that nature conservationists are still fighting for. At the conference, Björk was wearing a transparent embroidered headcover, called the *Moth mask*, created by designer James Merry, that masked her head and face, a kind of a camouflage mimicking the insect.

A few months earlier, on March 18, 2014, Björk had organized the concert *Stop, Let's Protect the Park* in conjunction with the Iceland Nature Conservation Association (INCA) and Landvernd, the Icelandic Environment Association, and film director Darren Aronofsky, whose film *Noah*, relating the biblical story of the deluge, was shot on location in Iceland in 2012.

These promotional and social events might be interpreted as ecological activism, a continuation of the debates that split the Icelandic public some years earlier, when the

[625] Nicola Dibben, *Björk*, 55.

controversy over the Kárahnjúkar hydroelectric power project versus the protection of the Icelandic highlands north-east of Vatnajökull reached international media (discussed in chapter nine).

Similarly, Icelandic fashion designers are conscious that living in the outer limits of Europe, perceiving this geographic position as itself a branding element. Steinunn Sigurðardóttir (b. 1960) is an example of an internationally trained fashion designer known by her collections inspired by the natural environment and Iceland's craft heritage. After studying in Paris and New York, then working with Polo/Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Gucci, and Perla, in 2000 she created her own label *Steinunn*. First known for her knitted clothing, she has always been imaginative in her use of texture and structure, exploring different kinds of tactility in her designs. Drawing inspiration from elements such as light, colour, and the surfaces of natural forms, her dramatically textured clothes are inspired by the materiality of Icelandic lava, moss, and black sand. A similar feel for the textures of nature is evident in Björk's description of the music for *Homogenic*, "It should sound like the landscape of Iceland looks […]. Like rough volcanoes with soft moss growing over it."[626]

Steinunn is exceptionally focused on craftsmanship, ensuring that her designs are manufactured in relation to *haute couture* traditions with respect to cut and style. Her sources are based on domestic production and traditional costume elements, incorporating draperies, hoods, and ruffles, although much of the current production is based in Latvia. Her productions are thus fully integrated within the international fashion system, through their production and diffusion, as opposed to the local grass-root fashion, spawned in the wake of the financial crisis, or fostered by the recent eco-trend, as is the case designers' collective Vík Prjónsdóttir.

Vík Prjónsdóttir's production is an example of new ways of conceiving and producing fashion, exploiting the interconnections between global perspectives and local small businesses, exemplifying the injunction to "think globally and act locally." The collective was created in 2005 by five young Icelandic designers, all of whom have studied and worked abroad.[627] At the time of the collective's formation, the Icelandic

[626] Mark Pytlik, *Björk. Wow and Flutter* (Toronto:ECW Press, 2003), 119.
[627] Brynhildur Pálsdóttir, Egill Kalevi Karlsson, Guðfinna Mjöll Magnúsdóttir, Hrafnkell Birgisson, and Þuríður Rós Sigurþórsdóttir.

wool market had been steadily declining, and the export of woollen goods had virtually ended with the collapse of Cold War markets. The project thus links ecological principles of sustainability and the use of local resources. Their designs refer to the specificity of Iceland's nature, culture, and folklore, manifesting a playful and innovative approach to materials and a relaxed attitude to everyday uses. The result is practical, but at the same time experimental as can be seen in such designs as the *Helm of Disguise* (2010), the *Sealpelt* (2005), *The Healing Hands* (2011), or the *Beardcap* (2005). *The Snow Blanket*, for example is oriented the exigencies of daily life, seeking to foster associations of intimacy, healing, and domestic warmth.

Even though all their designs are grounded in ancestral traditions (especially evident in helmets, caps, and cloaks, inspired by folklore rather than material tradition), this trend is not a nostalgic replay of national traditions. Rather than representing a romantic revival, the invocation of survival and protection is self-consciously ironic, linking mythical and heroic narratives to "comfort" clothing in an entirely contemporary way.

Strong bonds between utility and aesthetics, between tradition and craft, are equally manifest in the label *Farmers Market*. Bergþóra Guðnadóttir founded the company with her husband, the musician Jóel Pálsson, in 2005. Previously, she had worked for the company *66°North*, and designed some of their most popular outdoor clothing. Under her own brand, she has revitalized the hand-knit tradition and revived wool designs from the 1960s and 1970s. For inspiration, she also draws upon visual and written narratives inspired by her own family album and the outdated Cold War wool industry, historically represented by brands like *Álafoss* and *Hilda*.

Bringing the Cold War heritage back into circulation, she demonstrates that even items considered as unfashionable and outdated can be a rich resource of memories and emotions for new generations. As is the case with several other Icelandic designers, Guðnadóttir was exposed to domestic creativity during her childhood, when almost everything was made at home. She utilizes photographic snapshots as a trigger for many of her designs and the use of these photographs offers another approach to authenticity for her label. Vernacular snapshots are combined with staged fashion shots and simulations of album-type snapshots in a mosaic that evokes a nostalgic feeling of domestic pastness. Employing this approach as marketing strategy for woollen clothing

was a novelty in Icelandic design and contributed to its popularity with the local tourist market.

This might be considered is a paradigmatic example of what could be called "identity effects", which can operate successfully in two ways. For young Icelandic consumers, their purchase of the label fosters an identification with a place, a home, an imagined past, while for the foreign consumer, it suggests the possession of something "authentically" Icelandic, an intimate connection, via the act of consumption.

The city of Reykjavík took a decisive step in promoting fashion by choosing Steinunn as Reykjavík's Artist of the year in 2009. The Reykjavík Art Museum opened its doors to fashion shows and organized several exhibitions of design and fashion, including Steinunn's retrospective in November 2009. New publications of old pattern books and historical research into fashion and cultural traditions are a part of this effort to accelerate and promote various uses of a heritage little known outside of Iceland. However, the relationship between fashion and nation branding is somewhat fraught, insofar as the mechanisms of branding are inseparable from the commercial identification of the country of origin. In fact, Iceland is rarely the country of origin for fashion products since there are so few production units remaining in the country.

Iceland, as it happens, was one of the earliest victims of the global economic crisis of 2008. In the political turmoil and the economic meltdown that followed, the potential of fashion had, however, been identified as an important creative element of survival and recovery. The new Design Centre (Hönnunarmiðstöð Íslands), opened in 2008, making *Design March* (Iceland's most important annual design festival) an event identifying fashion as a valuable national resource, concluding "it is vital to make use of it." The crisis seems to have initiated a new kind of inspiration and growth in fashion. As consumer habits were turned upside down, new themes emerged with a concomitant shift in attitudes, lifestyle, and marketing. Many young people lost their jobs, and several have started making fashion for fun, mostly for their friends, starting up new businesses, creating designer nests, pop-up markets, selling through the Internet, and making use of social media and networks.

A crisis think-tank accompanied with experimental workshops were launched with Björk in collaboration with KLAK (Seed Forum) and the Innovation Centre Iceland (Nýsköpunarmiðstöð Íslands) as institutions to sustain creativity. As Katrín Júlíusdóttir,

then Minister of Industry, Energy, and Tourism, observed in September 2009. "The creative power of our people is attracting attention and making Iceland a place people want to come and visit […] We must get the message across that we are more than geysers, volcanoes, waterfalls— and now fallen banks. Here you will also find creative people, culture and modern industries."[628]

Creativity is here understood as a collective phenomenon, not ascribed to individual invention, but rather as a natural sustainable resource. Steinunn has stressed the importance of maintaining skills by reintroducing crafts and home economics into education, not only for fashion and design students, but also for schoolchildren, as was the case in the 1960s and 1970s. She claims that such skills can be the key to sustainable creativity and can facilitate the success of the many innovative enterprises that have emerged since the economic meltdown in 2008.

8.6. Conclusion

Iceland's physical, geological, and geographical components have served as a discursive subject, a conceptual idea, and a mental space, rather than as a brute material fact, functioning as a topic in the work of several Icelandic and international artists during the late 1990s. Since then, a mystified notion of nature as an incarnation of the sublime has been the theme of several art exhibitions such as *Nordlicht – Mythos und Melancholie* (Cologne 2005); *Icelandic Fashion and Design—Inspired by Nature* (Cologne 2005); *Dreams of the Sublime and Nowhere in Contemporary Icelandic Art*, Brussels (2008); *Volcano Lovers* (New York 2010), and the traveling exhibition *The Weather Diaries* (2015). Artists and other agents from the cultural sphere have been active in social and political protests since the economic meltdown and many believe that Icelandic artists, musicians, and designers have a significant role to play in restoring their country's reputation and economic well-being.

As anthropologist Kristín Loftsdóttir has pointed out "Within the neo-liberal economy, exotic and pristine nature becomes particularly appealing as a product that marks the uniqueness of countries; the exotic is often seen as symbolizing characteristics

[628]Katrín Júlíusdóttir, "You Are in Control" [speech]. September 23, 2009. Retrieved from: http://eng.idnadarraduneyti.is/minister/speeches/nr/2766. No longer accessible online.

that "modern" people have lost."[629] Iceland's branding was succeeded by promotional programs such as *Inspired by Iceland,* originally created by Matt Springate from the UK Brooklyn Brothers Agency in 2010.[630] Since then, tourism has exploded and Reykjavík has witnessed a substantial growth in festivals, art galleries, small designer shops, and boutiques selling design and fashion labelled as Icelandic even though it is most often produced elsewhere.

I have argued that the construction of *Icelandicness* in fashion and design is premised on the notion of belonging to a singular and specific place. The affirmation of cultural difference has thus been rooted in domestic, handicraft traditions that are themselves related to climate and geography. As we have seen, these have been crucial elements in the marketing of Icelandic products as well as the growth of the tourist industry.

Art in Iceland, like fashion, does not have an embedded tradition, and its contemporary manifestations have been influenced by interdisciplinary practices, collective work, and internal diversity, but Björk has been a key figure. Her success as a fashion icon attracted global media attention, recognizing the inventive and imaginative resources of a small nation, thereby opening a space for others to explore, both artists and designers. Since the late 1990s, there has been a tendency to project Björk's own version of an idiosyncratic *Icelandicnes*s and grass-root methodology, which remains so successful in promoting Icelandic music, art and fashion internationally, all of which benefits the enterprise of nation branding.

Most Icelandic designers still share a strong sense of place and a consciousness of its loss or precarity. Such feelings are not connected to the tasks of reconstructing identity or affirming aspects of its historical past. Rather, their attachment to place is indicated in the ways they employ visual references, indigenous materials, and fabrics associated with comfort and domesticity. This might be understood as a desire to compensate for what has disappeared, as a way of configuring memory, or conjuring an imagined past. In this respect, the cultural theorist Fredric Jameson has observed that evocations of a lost history prompt simulations of that past. "If there is any realism left

[629] Kristín Loftsdóttir, "The Exotic North: Gender, Nation Branding and Post-colonialism in Iceland," *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 23, no. 24 (2015): 246–60, p. 252.
[630] Matt Springate, *Promote Iceland: Inspired by Iceland* (London: IPA, Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, 2001).

here, it is a "realism" which springs from the shock of grasping that confinement and of realizing that, for whatever peculiar reasons, we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about the past, which itself remains forever out of reach."[631]

There seems to be no rule, no overarching structure. The ongoing dynamics of this situation are mostly situated outside the fashion system. In this respect, art, music, and fashion are all interrelated in a place, a context, and a set of circumstances that have prompted young people to forge relations on personal and professional levels. Most of the new designers operate individually, are invited into the museum space to exhibit their works, and commercially, have only recently received some support by entities such as the Trade Council of Iceland and the Icelandic Design Centre. Still, there are some hints as to what the future will look like. Fashion is less dependent on industry, but on creative pools or networks developing out of youth culture, interactive media, and visual education. A relaxed and knowledgeable relationship to crafts seems also to be an important element of creative sustainability. However, what the question leaves unanswered is whether fashion designers can survive outside the global fashion system given the lack of a viable industry to support them. For while fashion is always underpinned by fantasy and desire, in the Icelandic context it seems to be taking on the more important psychological role of sustaining and re-creating pleasure and pride within a society that has been subjected to various identity crises and where conflicting approaches meet.

[631] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 111–25, p. 118.

9. RESISTANCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

9.1. Kárahnjúkar: An Identity Conflict

Since the 1990s there has been a new wave of interest in the social function of art, including collaborative practices, and live encounters, most often taking place in museums or other public contexts, with the aim of prompting environmental and social solutions to given problems. Art historian Claire Bishop calls this tendency an "expanded field of post-studio practices" categorized by various labels. Among them, she lists "socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, […] participatory art, collaborative art, contextual art and (most recently) social practice."[632]

The controversy over the Kárahnjúkar hydroelectric power project during the years 2002–2007 and its gigantic reservoir constructed in the Highlands north-east of Vatnajökull Glacier, forged a new environmental awareness amongst Icelandic artists. It mobilized a public discussion about the value and the meaning of nature as a national and global resource, becoming the locus of a fertile debate among politicians, natural scientists, environmentalists, and economists addressing the intrinsic qualities of nature, and the value of water and land. The conflict also became a productive topic for artists, writers, economists, and philosophers who engaged in a new encounter with the Icelandic highlands, reformulating their aesthetic engagement with nature. Economist Brynhildur Davíðsdóttir argued how anthropocentric values, "directly based on utilitarianism" were responsible for creating economic values. She asks if "a more enlightened anthropocentrism can be consistent with the preservation of nature despite its assertion that nature only has value if it somehow satisfies humans?"[633]

Only few artists reacting to the Kárahnúka project directly addressed this important question in their work. However, the conflict became an urgent topic also for curators and philosophers engaging in a new encounter with the Icelandic highlands, reformulating their political and aesthetic engagement with nature in a number of publications, conferences and exhibitions, turning the debate into a site of resistance. This

[632] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 1.
[633] Brynhildur Davíðsdóttir, "The Price is Right?," in *Art, Ethics and Environment. A Free Enquiry Into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature*, eds. Ólafur Páll Jónsson and Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar Press, 2006), 125–41, p. 126.

aspect of artists' engagement during the protests against the construction of the hydroelectric power plant was also the subject of several conferences, actions and an exhibition that travelled Reykjavík, Brussels, and in Finland 2008–2009.[634]

In this chapter I will discuss artworks, exhibitions and art practices that grew out of this environmental and political debate that took on a more violent form during the economic meltdown in autumn 2008. I will address these different forms of contestation not only as manifestations of resistance, but also works that contest the neoliberal representation of Iceland. These might be understood as a protest against *Icelandicity* as a global brand.

During the conflict around the Kárahnjúka project, artists began to question governmental branding strategies and tried to address the environmental discourse on more political grounds. Ásmundur Ásmundsson, Hannes Lárusson, and Tinna Grétarsdóttir argued that "During these [branding] campaigns, artists are used as mules to pull the marketing wagon, to enter communities across borders and catch foreign attention at critical moments in international politics and business."[635]

This contestation took place in a climate of the intensified global marketing of Iceland perpetually renewed through branding programs (such as the ongoing *Inspired by Iceland*, the biggest campaign ever made to promote Iceland as a tourist destination). As brand manager Hlynur Guðjónsson has argued: "Nation branding is both an economic and a social discipline, and by studying economic and social structures it is possible to identify weaknesses and to execute programs to protect and support a nation's brands."[636] Thus, nation branding functions as a powerful force not only behind (and within) the art, fashion and design industries of small nations, but also, though all cultural construction and consumption. In this respect, the branding of Iceland as producer of "authentic" cultural products as well as an export trademark was inaugurated with *Iceland Naturally*, a long-term pilot program initiated in 1997.[637] The program was meant to represent the

---

[634] Ólafur Páll Jónsson and Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir (eds.), *Art, Ethics and Environment. A Free Enquiry Into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar Press, 2006). Conferences: Nature in the Kingdom of Ends (Selfoss, 2005); The exhibition *Dreams of the Sublime in Contemporary Art. in Iceland*, mounted in Bozar Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels (2008), Reykjavík Art Museum (2008), and the Kunsti Museum of Modern Art, Vaasa, Finland, 2009. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir (ed.), *Dreams of the Sublime in Contemporary Art in Iceland* (Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum, 2008).

[635] Tinna Grétarsdóttir, Ásmundur Ásmundsson, Hannes Lárusson, "Creativity and Crises," 100.

[636] Hlynur Guðjónsson, "Nation Branding," *Place Branding* 1, no. 3 (2005): 283–98, p. 297.

[637] *Iceland Naturally* (Icelandnaturally.com). "Initiated in 1997 and 1998, by the then head of the Icelandic Tourist Board and the commercial attaché of the Foreign Secretariat in New York, the project was formally

"essence" of Iceland, "its purity and unspoiled natural environment."[638] As *Iceland Naturally* defined it on their website (Icelandnaturally.com): "As a combined council of Icelandic brands, we take pride in the way our products define Iceland: pure glacial water, clean and renewable energy, sustainable fresh fish, a totally unique travel experience and best of all, our creativity." An important cultural step, linking tourism with the arts was taken in 2003 in the activities of the program *Reykjavík Pure Energy*, launched by the city in collaboration with the Reykjavík Arts Festival and the Iceland Tourist Board. Placing Reykjavík on the map as an exciting contemporary art and design city was bolstered by the new generation of art, fashion, and design students educated in Berlin, Copenhagen, Milan, Paris, and New York.

Again, artists, such as, Ásmundur Ásmundsson and Hannes Lárusson criticized how "The brand thus becomes a kind of disciplinary institution, dictating the development, management, and streaming of the Icelandic image as it is directed both outwardly at the larger world and inwardly at Icelanders themselves."[639]

In fact, art has rarely been a source of public debate and contestation as occurred with the construction of the Kárahnjúka dam. Where artists took position and produced work in the service of environmental or ecologic concerns, this, served to make their work visible in a context that far exceeded the habitual sphere of contemporary art, usually limited to art magazines, galleries and museums. New forms of production and diffusion of work took place through its dissemination in public media, newspapers, brochures, and direct actions.

In order to examine this shift in attitude towards the place of the natural environment in contemporary Icelandic art, that is the abandonment of the idea of a national landscape in favour of an ecological and phenomenological appreciation of the land, I will discuss several art works that engage with this controversy. Nevertheless, many of these works are still related to the powerful symbolism of nature so important in Icelandic culture, including work by artists who consider land as irreplaceable and unique from an environmental point of view. These works, discussed in this chapter, might

launched in the U.S. in 1999 and in 2006 in Europe, based on the U.S. experience." Edward H. Huijbens, "Nation-Branding: A Critical Evaluation. Assessing the Image Building of Iceland," in *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson with the collaboration of Daniel Chartier (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2011), 553–82, p. 558.

[638] Hlynur Guðjónsson, "Nation Branding," 293.

[639] Tinna Grétarsdóttir, Ásmundur Ásmundsson, and Hannes Lárusson, "Creativity and Crises," 97.

themselves be considered as a form of resistance, a part of a counternarrative, contesting nation branding and the marketing rhetoric that dominated governmental propaganda advocating for the development of globalized industry in Iceland.[640] More generally, these practices they embody the non-heroic and the everyday (just as the pots and pans selected for the Pots and Pan Revolution), focusing on locality, rather than the rhetoric of sublimity dominating visual arts in Iceland.

In many cases, the works reflect upon the conflicts between industrial production, governmental nature conservation policies and tourism. As well, there exists the employment of direct activism performed through improvised actions as well as civil disobedience. However, rarely, have such protests, nor the works produced for them, reached international audiences. The exceptions are Andri Snær Magnason's book *Dreamland: A Self-Help Manual for a Frightened Nation* (2006), translated into several languages and turned into a documentary film, Björk's musical engagement, especially her song "Náttura" released in October 2008, and Ólafur Elíasson´s multipurposed installations in museums and the public space.

The Kárahnjúkar power plant was set to be one of the largest economic investments ever made in Iceland. When the building of the plant began in 2002, and the subsequent construction of an aluminium smelter in Reyðarfjörður, the development of large-scale industry in East Iceland had been on the governmental agenda for over three decades. In fact, the idea of constructing a large hydropower station north of Vatnajökull dates from 1948 (that is four years after the declaration of independence), as an important step in the politics of the postwar economy and the industrialization of Iceland fuelled by the Marshall Plan.[641] The exploitation of natural resources for the production of electricity for industrial use was already a part of the national discourse dominating the economic renaissance in the early and mid-20th century, and the image of the electric hydropower was largely represented and diffused through photographs, articles and features, in newspapers, books and magazines.[642] Hydro- and geothermal energy was, (and still is)

[640] Discussed in Reinhard Henning, "Postcolonial Ecology: An Ecocritical Reading of Andri Snær Magnason's Dreamland: A Self-Help Manual for a Frightened Nation (2006)," in *The Postcolonial North Atlantic. Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands,* eds. Lill-Ann Körber and Ebbe Volquardsen (Berlin: Nordeuropa-Institut der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2014 /2020), 105–26.
[641] Gunnar Á. Gunnarsson, "Ísland og Marshalláætlunin. Atvinnustefna og stjórnmálahagsmunir," *Saga – Tímarit Sögufélagsins* 34 (1996): 85–130.
[642] Hjálmar R. Bárðarson's, self-published popular photobook *Iceland illustrated*, with captions in five languages, is an extraordinary example of the Cold War ideology where photographs of geothermal energy,

very much a dominant image in Icelandic media, especially in publicity addressed to foreign markets and investors as well as in current national branding.[643]

Conservation policies had not been a source of public debate in Iceland since the late 1960s when theories of wilderness were discussed in connection to the construction of the hydroelectric Power Station, Laxá River, in Skútustaðahreppur, north Iceland and the hydroelectric power plant Búrfellsvirkjun were constructed in order to fuel the aluminium smelter in Straumsvík launched in 1969. This (belated) industrialization of Iceland became the source for an intense public debate. In 1969, the NGO Landvernd (Icelandic Environment Association) was established. Conservation of the natural environment was no longer considered to be a temporary local phenomenon, but was politically understood as a global issue, as argued by environmentalist and politician Hjörleifur Guttormsson.[644] Several intellectuals and artists joined the environmental cause, including the Nobel Prize author Halldór Laxness.[645]

Gylfi Gíslason, a member of the SÚM group, caricaturised the destruction of nature in favour of global aluminium industry in a series of drawings, such as in the *Fjallasúrmjólk* (Mountain Sour Milk,1971) [Fig. 2] and *Áning* (Repose), exhibited in his solo-show at the SÚM gallery in 1971.[646] In these works, Gíslason, quotes two celebrated paintings, *Fjallamjólk* (1941) by Kjarval and *Áning* (1910) by Þórarinn B. Þorláksson, both considered to be cornerstones in Icelandic art history.[647] What these works have in common is a discursive and topographic reference to Þingvellir, the former site of Alþing, the annual parliament created in 980. As an exceptional geographical site, it has a strong nationalistic association as the place where the nation was forged. Historian Guðmundur Hálfdanarson has argued that Þingvellir could be defined as a *lieu de mémoire*, a well-

water and sublime landscapes establish a political 'truth,' visually twining the production of electricity and nature with economic growth. Hjálmar R. Bárðarson, *Ísland farsælda frón: Billeder fra Island: Iceland Illustrated: Images d'Islande: Island im Bild: Vistas de Islandia* (Reykjavík: Lithoprent and Hjálmar R. Bárðarson, 1953).

643 Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "Sustaining Economic Development or Preserving Nature? Environmental Politics in Iceland." In *The Challenge of the Baltic Sea Region. Culture, Ecosystems, Democracy*, eds. Göran Bolin, Monica Hammer, Frank-Michael Kirsch, and Wojciech Szrubka (Göteborg: Södertörn University College, 2005), 189–200.

644 Hjörleifur Guttormsson, *Vistkreppa eða náttúruvernd* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1974), 7.

645 Halldór Laxness, "Hernaðurinn gegn landinu," in Halldór Laxness, *Yfirskyggðir staðir*. *Ýmsar athuganir* (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1971), 125–40.

646 Discussed in Dagný Heiðdal, "Listin sem loftvog mannlegra hræringa," in *Íslensk listasaga: frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*, vol. IV, 88–165, p. 147.

647 Þórarinn B. Þorláksson, *Áning* (Repose), 1910, oil on canvas, 84 x 150 cm. National Gallery of Iceland. It was the first painting by an Icelandic artist to be acquired for the National Gallery in 1911.

known notion defined by the French historian Pierre Nora: "If the expression *lieu de mémoire* must have an official definition, it should be this: a *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community."[648]

Gíslason's topicality could therefore be identified with two different types of memory sites: the topographical and the non-tangible. It also has environmental and nationalist connotations insofar as its visual rhetoric refers to social tensions in the time of Cold War politics. Similar standpoints, expressed from a more explicit anti-capitalist and anti-consumerist point of view, are manifested in a series of photo-collages by photographer and later film maker Valdís Óskarsdóttir in a bookwork created with writer Ólafur Haukur Símonarson, *Rauði svifnökkvinn* (The Red Hovercraft), 1975, discussed in chapter five. [Fig. 9].

Several other artists created dystopian visions referring to human activities and anthropocentric greed, such as Sigurður Örlygsson, Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir, Ríkharður Valtingojer, Rúrí, Þorbjörg Höskuldsdóttir.[649] These critiques have been taken further by a later generation of artists such as Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, Ólafur Ólafsson and Libia Castro, Ólöf Nordal, and Magnús Sigurðarson. In order to examine further this turn towards a more global, postnational vision of the natural environment in contemporary Icelandic art after 2000, I want to consider several art works growing out of this socio-environmental conflict triggered off by the Kárahnjúka construction.

When the NGO Landvernd (Icelandic Environment Association) and other environmentalists, began their campaign against the Kárahnúka project in 2001, one of the first tasks was to visualise the place, make it visible to the public, as few Icelanders were familiar with these remote landscapes. The environmental movements relied heavily on the imaginary of the endangered landscapes to raise people's consciousness about the importance of protection of these sites, even though the aesthetic value of terrain is usually not taken seriously in environmental conservation. This is conceived as too

[648] Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "Þingvellir: An Icelandic '*Lieu de Mémoire'*," *History and Memory* 12, no. 1 (2000), 4–29; Pierre Nora, "From Lieux de mémoire to Realms of Memory. Preface to the English-Language Edition," in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, Vol. III, eds. Pierre Nora and L. D. Kritzman. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xv–xxiv, p. xvii.
[649] Dagný Heiðdal, "Listin sem loftvog mannlegra hræringa."

subjective to serve as the bases of a strong argument. The scientific or economic value of land is typically prioritized and considered as more objective than aesthetic appreciation. However, visual representations of landscape are so dominant and omnipresent in contemporary Western culture that its visualization seems to be a necessary condition for environmental issues to attract public attention. Consequently, photography became the most vital medium to reveal what was claimed to be an intrinsic aesthetic value of the land north of Vatnajökull. As a largely unknown landscape, a wilderness, it had curiously escaped photographic representation; even though it had been photographed and filmed extensively in the late 1930s and 40s by well-known photographers of that period.[650] However, their photographs and texts were mostly forgotten.

As previously discussed, since the early 19th century, the land was a source of patriotic feelings in the context of Romantic nationalism.[651] As a cultural imaginary (as opposed to an empty geographic space), the highlands have a long tradition in Icelandic literature considering it as a place of darkness and death, a space dangerous to humans, hosting outlaws, monsters, ghosts and wild animals.[652] The fear of the wilderness was overcome through the development of tourism and as well as by the young urban citizens who longed for a direct experience of wilderness, organizing hikes into these unknown landscapes. Björn Ólafsson, one of these hikers, published a description of a highland trip made in summer 1921 in the daily *Vísir*, that he organised with a group of young male mountaineers: "Wilderness, desert, glaciers and distant mountains. In the ears of those who have never seen these things, the words have a strange overtone. People have mystical ideas of this part of the country, imagining it as the image of all that is hard, rugged, barren and lonely. They think of innumerable perils, huge difficulties. A mystical ambience, created by distance, imbues the wilderness in these people's minds. They recoil from it as a child from the dark, yet create in their minds, in their own way, all that may exist in that unknown territory. And in that unknown territory is the heart of Iceland. The

[650] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "'Land mitt! Þú ert sem órættur draumur. Óráðin gáta. Fyrirheit!' Um ódauðleika ægifegurðarinnar í Íslandsmyndabókum," in *Fegurðin er ekki skraut. Íslensk samtímaljósmyndun*, eds. Sigrún Alba Sigurðardóttir and Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir (Reykjavík: Fagurskinna, 2020), 11–48.
[651] Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, *Náttúra ljóðsins. Umhverfi íslenskra skálda* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2014).
[652] The making of or the invention of the Icelandic Highlands is discussed in Anna Dóra Sæþórsdóttir, Colin Michael Hall, Jarkko Saarinen, "Making Wilderness. Tourism and the History of the Wilderness Idea in Iceland," *Polar Geography* 34, no. 4 (2011): 249–73.

soul of Icelandic nature is there, bringing out a sense of the familiar in one's own soul, and one feels a kinship with the land."[653]

Visual representations of this land became popular in the 1930s and 1940s, when aesthetic appreciation of the highlands coincided with the construction of national identity and images symbolising *Icelandicity*. These were disseminated through various forms of visual culture, such as postcards, advertising and in travellers accounts. Such patriotic feelings embedded in this modern idea of unspoiled wilderness as an essential element in the construction of Icelandic identity are discussed by Andri Snær Magnason. In his book *On Time and Water*, Magnason quotes Helgi Valtýsson and discusses his grandiose and forceful literary descriptions within his travelogue *Á hreindýraslóðum* (*In Reindeer Country*). In this work he describes "the pregnant silence of Gods' vast expanse, becoming one with it."[654] Valtýsson was accompanied with the photographer and filmmaker Eðvard Sigurgeirsson (1907–1999), who documented their hikes north of Vatnajökull (1939, 1943 and 1944), while exploring the area and searching for a particular reindeer herd, the descendants of the one that was imported in 1797.[655] As Magnason comments, "the book as a whole is not just a travel narrative but a grandiose declaration of love for this nature."[656] Valtýsson's enthusiastic description of "The wild highlands [as] a wide embrace, mountain blue,"[657] accrues another level of meaning in the current environmental context. Magnason describes how he found himself "overwhelmed by melancholy" facing the destruction looming over the land that was soon to disappear, however using the "prevailing language of liberalism, innovation, utilitarianism, and marketing."[658]

---

[653] "Óbygðir, öræfi, jöklar og fjarlæg fjöll. Í eyrum þeirra sem aldrei hafa séð neitt af þessu, hljóma þessi nöfn með einkennilegum blæ. Menn gera sér dulrænar hugmyndir um þenna hluta landsins og hugsa sér hann sem ímynd alls þess, sem er erfitt, hrikalegt, gróðurlaust og einmanalegt. Þeir hugsa sér hætturnar óteljandi og erfiðleikana gífurlega. Dulkendur blær, sem fjarlægðin skapar, liggur yfir óbygðunum í augum fólksins. Það hrekkur frá þeim eins og börnin frá myrkrinu en móta samt í huga sér á sína vísu alt, sem kann að búa í þessu ókunna landi. Og í þessum ókunnu heimum, er hjarta landsins. Þar er sál hinnar íslensku náttúru, sem dregur fram frændsemismótið í manns eigin sál og skapið finnur til skyldleikans við landið." Björn Ólafsson, "Í óbygðum. Úr dagbók Nafnlausafélagsins," *Vísir*, August 27, 1921, 4. English translation by Anna Yates: Inga Lára Baldvinsdóttir, "The Photography of Ólafur Magnússon," in *Ólafur Magnússon. Konunglegur hirðljósmyndari* (Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2003), 127–47, p. 141.
[654] Andri Snær Magnason, *On Time and Water*, trans. Lytton Smith (London: Serpents Tail, 2020), 50.
[655] Magnason, 49.
[656] Ibid, 50–51.
[657] Ibid, 50.
[658] Ibid, 56.

In 1998, when the new hydroelectric projects were again on the governmental agenda (due to the important economic global shifts that took place after the collapse of the Soviet Union), and despite the general change in public attitudes towards large-scale industry and the pollution that generally accompanies them, most Icelanders thought of these pristine areas as a vast, empty space. Only a few farmers, natural scientists and mountain hikers had had some experience of the area. Naturally, as a piece of land, it was considered to have an intrinsic value, but the place was remote and not yet a mass tourist attraction. Previously inaccessible for the general tourist, but paradoxically, the area was made accessible through the infrastructure put in place for the needs of the hydroelectric project.

Geographically, the construction of the dam changed the course of two of the country's largest glacial rivers and turned various valleys and canyons into reservoirs. The dam's construction was discussed in international media, and in 2003, when Alcoa, the world's largest producer of aluminium, signed an agreement with Iceland's national Landsvirkjun power company and the Icelandic government to build a large smelting plant in the country's eastern fiords, an international activist network *Saving Iceland* was created in order to combat this industrial intervention in an unspoiled terrain through direct actions at the construction site.[659]

On November 14, 2000, the website www.cnn.com diffused a story written by Environmental News Network staff on the Kárahnjúkar project. It was illustrated with a Nasa satellite photograph showing Iceland from a South-Eastern aerial point of view. This diffusion and publication on the web marked the beginning of global media attention depicting the Kárahnjuka project through the eye of the Nasa satellite. As is often noted, the dominating eye of the satellite makes the spectator aware of the fact that the earth is being surveyed from above. The photograph enforced the geographic reality of Iceland – as a land ravaged by volcanic eruptions and home to massive glaciers. But also, it perpetuated a narrative of a margin of the habitable, where NASA astronauts underwent field training in 1965 and 1967 and since. As CNN described the hydroelectric project:

[659] The website Saving Iceland was launched in September 2004 first under the name *Killing Iceland*. https://www.savingiceland.org/about/. The first Saving Iceland conference, 'Global Consequences of Heavy Industry and Large Dams', was held on July 7–8, 2007 with the participation of international protestors.

> Iceland's national power company wants to dam 11 rivers and tributaries to create a 57-kilometer reservoir that portends disaster for wildlife and habitat. Environmentalists envision the usual consequences of dams: flooding in the valleys around the Kárahnákar (sic) plain, the exodus of reindeer and geese, and the burial of waterfalls and vegetation blanketing the accompanying plain. The controversial project thus become the focus for a burgeoning new movement of non-governmental organizations in Iceland. And these NGOs already have made an impression […]. This is the heart of the Icelandic highlands, just north of Vatnajökull, Europe's largest glacier. The entire region is a wilderness, 150 kilometres long and 100 kilometres wide. It is home to the whooper swan, golden plover and ptarmigan, to rare flowers, herbs and moss, and to an abundant hot springs. Few tourists visit the area. There are no houses and barely a farm. Huts in the camp set up by the Icelandic national power company are the only sign of human habitation.[660]

CNN's discussion on its website incited a local environmental conflict, and as such, the publication of the story through this particular form of visual representation -- that is the satellite image -- indicated the début of an important shift away from the local towards a more internationalist' environmental discourse sparking global attention to socioenvironmental conflicts in the Arctic.

9.2. Towards an Environmental Icelandicity

Aesthetic responses are among the most common and accessible ways by which nature is valued. During the conflict around the Kárahnjúka project, artists began to question the official utilitarian approach to the environment and tried to construct an alternative ecological discourse on more political grounds, despite, or possibly because, of the constant marketing of Iceland.

The American artist Roni Horn was among the first artist to speak publicly about the destruction and disappearance of the land submerged as a consequence of the Hálslón dam, a part of the Kárahnjúkar power project. When she first arrived in the country in

[660] Tony Snape. *http://archives.cnn.com/2000/NATURE/11/14/iceland.dams.enn/index.html*. No longer accessible. Tony Snape, "Fighting to Preserve the Magic of Iceland." Retrived from: https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?2163/Fighting-to-preserve-the-magic-of-Iceland

1975, she was impressed by "the sky, the wind, and the light […]. Weather simply hadn't occurred to me by then."[661] Since, Horn has been inspired by the silence and scale of the highlands and in which Iceland became "[…] an open-air studio of unlimited scale and newness."[662] She regularly told interviewers that "One of the biggest reasons for me to be here is the powerful influence of the landscape."[663] Describing how Iceland became "[…] a force, a force that had taken possession of me."[664] Horn sought to integrate this powerful presence of nature and the experience it provided in her numerous drawings, sculpture, and photographic installations and book works, all based on her experience of Iceland as a place. Iceland became "a locus of desire" and facing the potential loss of the highlands as a space previously untouched by humans, Horn reacted strongly against the belated industrialization of Iceland.[665] In a kind of open letter in the daily newspaper *Morgunblaðið* she drew attention to the importance of land conservation and the intrinsic value of nature. The text was, as she claimed: "motivated in particular by [her] fear of the loss of the Highlands."[666] She protested against modern society's "uncontrollable appetite for consumption, well in excess of individual need," and observed that, "Because Iceland has experienced delayed economic development the country is fortuitously out of sync. You are out of sync because your environment, unlike those of other modern societies, is still intact."[667]

Horn did not discuss the highlands as a historical and cultural construct. She experienced Iceland (and particularly the highlands) as "the prime supplier of 'nowhere' in the world" and accordingly, "being nowhere is one of the most rare, vulnerable, precarious but wonderful experiences one can have."[668] She continues: "In my experience the Highlands is one definition of the nothing that is. And the nothing that is the synonymous with the real. The real cannot be mitigated without destroying it. The

[661] Roni Horn, *Island Zombie. Iceland Writings* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press) 2020, 1.
[662] Roni Horn, *Vatnasafn. Library of Water, Stykkisholmur, Iceland*. Retrieved from https://www.artangel.org.uk/library-of-water/journey-to-the-library-of-water/
[663] 'I have always taken the weather personally', *Icelandic Art News*. Printed version, Summer 2007, 27.
[664] Roni Horn, *Island Zombie*, 2.
[665] Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local. Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, 4.
[666] Roni Horn, "The Nothing that is," in *Iceland Zombie*, 181–85, p. 183.
[667] Horn, 182.
[668] Discussed in Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir, "Nature's Otherness and the Limits of Visual Representations of Nature," in *Art, Ethics and Environment. A Free Inquiry Into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature*, eds. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir and Ólafur Páll Jónsson (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), 112–24, p. 122.

Highlands are not for everyone. […] The Highland is a desert, it will take your measure. It cannot be made into a place for the casual visitor."[669]

In order to transmit her Iceland experience, Horn first "imagined compiling an inventory of rocks and geologic debris."[670] This strategy could be interpreted as self-reflexive, that is, through the enactment of the romantic practices of the naturalist and a 19th century traveller. Finally, she presented her relationship with Iceland as an individual and phenomenological experience in a project named *To Place,* a series that includes 401 photographs, published in nine different books.[671] To name just a few, these include a great variety of texts and images of sites, architecture, animals, rock formations, water, and aerial photographs of Snæfellsjökull glacier. This she calls "an encyclopaedia of sorts, based in what would become a lifelong relationship to the island."[672] She began by documenting all the possible nuances and varieties of transparent, fresh water coming from the mountains, the green, purple, geothermal water surging from a natural source, or the mysterious white and opaque glacial melt water originating in of the large glacial rivers. Horn's observations of water rest on her existential, phenomenological approach to repetition and difference, as expressed in the sixth volume of the series *To Place. Haraldsdóttir* (1996). Water as transparent, pure, but ever-changing material, is also the central concern of the numerous photographs of Margrét Blöndal, a young Icelandic artist, who Horn photographed over six weeks in the summer of 1994, always from a similar close-up angle, while she was immersed in thermal water up to her neck, each time in a different pool. The photographs are arranged in the book in six alternating black and white, and colour, sequences. Horn employs the material qualities of the hot water and the steam from the pool as a way of gathering silence around Margrét's face. It shifts from left to right in the frame, sometimes cropped so close that her, almost transparent appearance, fills the frame.[673] The model's paleness, her blue eyes, the moisture coating

[669] Roni Horn, "This Nothing that is," 184. This feeling of the nothing that is, Horn claims being inspired by Wallace Stevens poem The Snowman: "For the listener who listens in the snow/And nothing himself, beholds /Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." Wallace Stevens, "The Snow Man," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1978), 9–10.
[670] Roni Horn, *Island Zombie*, 1.
[671] *To Place* includes *Bluff Life* (1990), *Folds* (1991), *Lava* (1992), *Pooling Waters* (1994), *Verne's Journey* (1995), *Haraldsdóttir* (1996), *Arctic Circles* (1998), *Becoming a Landscape* (2001), *Doubt Box* (2006) and *Haraldsdóttir Part Two* (2011).
[672] Roni Horn, *Island Zombie*, 2.
[673] Mark Godfrey, "Roni Horn's Icelandic Encyclopedia," *Art History* 32, no. 5 (December 2009): 932–53.

her milky skin, expresses erotic emotions, as if Horn was photographing the becoming of the young woman.[674]

Horn was first introduced in Iceland by the local press as just another young American traveller with her Yamaha 250.[675] Her first exhibition in Iceland took place in the Living Art Museum in March 1992. Finally, she exhibited her photographic installation *PI* in the National Gallery of Iceland in 2000.[676] Her public presence in Iceland was driven by her ecological concerns and fear of Iceland's future shift in identity: "Iceland will become a place dominated by human presence. The balance of identity will tip – away from the majestic solitude of the interior- away from a place largely unoccupied, uninhabited, unaltered […] away from a place that expresses vastness and absoluteness, and all that exceeds us […]. These are the things Icelanders have been nurtured on, perhaps unknowingly, that give this culture its remarkable difference, and is utterly unique sense of place."[677]

Her rather private ecological engagement was transformed into a public action when she finally directly addressed Icelandic audiences through her publications in the daily *Morgunblaðið.* Her series *Iceland's Difference*, composed of 23 texts and photographs, were translated and published on the back page of the Sunday literary supplement of *Morgunblaðið* (2002–2003).[678] This greater diffusion of her work in the local newspaper reveals Horn's desire to bring her voice into the public realm, to a larger public usually unconnected with the art world.

Again, in Horn's permanent installation *Vatnasafn/Library of Water,* created in 2007 with the support of the London based organisation Art Angel and the municipality of Stykkishólmur, the intention was to embrace ethical and environmental concerns through a public art installation in an abandoned public library in this small coastal town located on the Snæfellsnes peninsula. The site is where the glacier Snæfellssjökull camouflages its geological and literary mysteries dear to Horn, as described in her

[674] The changing light and the weather reflected in the close-up portraits of Margrét, give name to the installation version of the series, *You are the Weather*.
[675] GAJ, "Bandarísk stúlka á mótorhjóli yfir hálendi Íslands (An American girl on motorbike through the Icelandic Highlands)," *Dagblaðið*, July 7, 1979, 6. Photo: Harry Lieberman.
[675] Hallgrímur Helgason, "Ísland er mitt andlega heimili (Iceland is my spiritual home)," *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins,* April 21 1990, 2.
[676] Carla Schulz-Hoffmann, „Tungumál skynjunarinnar", in *Roni Horn*, ed. Ólafur Kvaran (Reykjavík: National Gallery of Iceland, 2000), 7–14.
[677] Roni Horn, *Island Zombie*, 184.
[678] The texts are published in their original English version in Roni Horn, *Island Zombie. Iceland Writings.*

bookwork *Verne's Journey*. This work includes black and white aerial photographs depicting the melting ice cap, an augury of impending catastrophe.

For the installation *Library of Water*, consisting of 24 glass columns, each containing an example of glacier water, large blocks of ice were gathered from twenty-four of the major glaciers in the island. The collection of melted glacial water, is contained in the transparent columns that line the interior space, evoking giant test tubes and reflecting and refracting the light outside. The installation is accompanied by an oral history archive of weather reports gathered from the inhabitants living in the area. The *Library of Water* corresponds to the current rapid melting of glaciers due to climate changes. In this very same place, regular monitoring of meteorological conditions in Iceland have been undertaken since late 19th century, and thus the work can also be understood as a melancholic memorial of a specific place.[679] According to landscape architect Roxi J. Thoren, Horn's installation also questions "our relationship to place. Who are we, and what role does place have in that identity? What are our ethical obligations to places in an era of global production, exchange and consumption? Who may observe, posit or critique identity?"[680] Horn calls herself "a permanent tourist", in regard to Iceland, acknowledging her own symbolic location.[681] Her contribution to the notion of what I would like to call *environmental Icelandicity*, demonstrates how *Icelandicity* is a flexible, elastic category that runs between one space to another, be it commercial or cultural.

This fine line between contemporary travel writing and an artistic bookwork is also blurred in Roman Singer's book *When you travel in Iceland you see a lot of water. A Travel Book*. I This is a collaborative book by the Swiss artist Roman Signer and the Icelandic artist Tumi Magnússon, with photographs by Barbara Signer and Michael Bodenmann, first published in 2010. Here, Icelandic nature is presented from a touristic viewpoint as "raw material to life" open to the gaze. Their conversation moves as a travelogue, interrupted by sublime and picturesque nature views, some showing abandoned interiors empty of people. Signer, like Horn, experiences Iceland as a place

[679] Discussed in Roxi J. Thoren, "The Deep Grain of the Inquiry: Landscape and Identity in Icelandic Art," *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 5, no. 1 (2010): 38–51, p. 39.
[680] Thoren, 38.
[681] Alison Kubler, "On being alone, not Lonely: The Solitude of Roni Horn," *Vaultmagazine* (February 2021). Retrieved from https://vaultmagazine.com/ISS33/features/horn_feature.php

that involves performative elements – an interactive viewing experience. Signer is astonished and impressed by the landscape, the ever changing weather, and the marvels they encounter during their journey through the highlands, and its remote regions in the north east of the island. The prosaic yet different experience of water during the journey brings Signer to analyse the interconnection between his aesthetic experiences and language. Water spurts and squirts and sprouts from everywhere, "And then suddenly, from out of nowhere there is a wild river gushing with water. A lot of water from everywhere. I don't know where it comes from, maybe from a glacier or from a source."[682]

Signer and his travel companions would get soaked by the spray of a waterfall, submerge in the warm water of a natural pool, while cold rain poured down over their heads. The water is pure, clear, it runs through the green moss and is purified by the sand and the rocks. It tastes of the moss, the iron from the earth, it even has the scent of the sheep nearby. It can also be muddy, or milky, it is green, grey and blue, transparent like the sky. They discuss hydraulic systems and water pumps and the splashes and splatters while pumping water from a natural source in the mountains. Signer is seduced by the otherness of the natural environment, by the excitement and the aesthetic sensations he experiences while perceiving nature as a space: "For example when you're out in nature and surrounded by its harrowing loneliness. It's so quiet and at peace with itself."[683] He senses that "Nature here has such enormous power. And it simply exists for itself. It does not need people."[684]

Engaging with the environment as a subject, such impressions still recall the romantic experience of nature. These draw the spectator not only into a reverie where borders are blurred, but also into phenomenological appreciations or what British anthropologist Tim Ingold described as "a condition of being alive to the world, characterised by a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness, in perception and action, to an environment that is always in flux, never the same from one moment to the next."[685]

---

[682] Roman Singer and Tumi Magnússon, *When You Travel in Iceland You See a Lot of Water. A Travel Book* (Zürich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2011 (2010), 34.
[683] Ibid, 57.
[684] Ibid.
[685] Tim Ingold, "Rethinking the Animate: Re-Animating Thought," *Ethnos* 71, no. 1 (2006): 9–20, p. 10

9.3. Counterculture: Facing the Pristine

This desire for communion with the pristine natural environment of Iceland, expressed in Horn's work, is far from the concerns of all contemporary Icelandic artists, many of whom take this romantic vision of their so-called unspoiled homeland with a grain of salt. When the myth of the Icelandic creativity was explored by foreign design researchers and social scientists, they concluded that:

> When visiting Iceland and exploring creative hubs, such as Reykjavík, we saw how nature might have inspired the creative spark; however, through interviews with Icelanders we discovered that natives did not feel a strong inspirational tie between artist, work produced, and nature. This view differed for migrant innovators and artists, who expressed more influence from the natural environment. For centuries, travellers to Iceland have felt that the wilderness of Iceland was an artistic inspiration to them. Native Icelanders experience the rugged and bi-polar natural environment differently. Research has shown that native Icelanders do not necessarily classify themselves, as Westerners do, as living in the wilderness. We found a similar divide between natives and immigrants in our interviews, with the natives (12 interviewees) less likely to credit the natural environment with inspiration."[686]

Daníel Þorkell Magnússon (b. 1957) approached the marketing of Iceland and the branding of *Icelandicity* (expressed in the specific political and economic climate of the late 1990s), from a rhetorical point of view. He juxtaposed image and text in his photographic series of 1999–2003. The work *OK* (1999), is addressing both symbolic landscape and language. *OK* shows his photograph of the waterfall Gullfoss (the most celebrated waterfall in Iceland), taken from the most popular viewpoint and over the image he printed the word OK.

The artist describes the background story to the image *OK* as a moment when he watched an interview broadcasted on TV with the (Icelandic) Minister of Industry discussing hydroelectric projects and the waterfall Gullfoss. She stated unequivocally that Gullfoss would never be harnessed to generate electricity. That is why the waterfall is

[686] Barbara A. Kerr, Maxwell Birdnow, Jenelle Hallaert, Keely Alexander, Robyn Malmsten, Olivia Stull, J. D. Wright, Brittany Lucas, Rachel Swanson & Grace J. Claiborn, ″Creativity and Innovation in Iceland: Individual, Environmental, and Cultural Variables," *Gifted and Talented International* 32, no. 1 (2017): 27–43, p. 31.

ironically given the international exclamation of approval, *OK*, proclaiming its excellence.[687] Another of his critical works incorporates the phrase *So Fucking Peaceful*, pasted over a dull yellowish green pastorale landscape, and *North,* pasted over a blue horizon [Fig. 18]. The text-image combination is provocative, posing poignant and ironic questions about identity, the Icelandic language and the use of national symbols in art and advertising.

A similarly provocative questioning of the future of Icelandic identity was performed as a photographic work by Ólafur Ólafsson and Libia Castro, wearing two different versions of the female national costume designed by Sigurður Guðmundsson in the 1860s.[688] [Fig. 19].The artists are standing in front of Straumsvík, the first aluminium plant constructed in Iceland in 1969, its characteristic red and white silos visible from the route nr 1 when driving from the Keflavík International airport towards the capital. Art historian Halldór B. Runólfsson likens their stubborn resistance to the protests made by elves in in Icelandic folklore: "(T)hey look like an apparition from the past, resembling the "hidden people" so frequent in Icelandic folktales, invisible but endowed with magic power, ready to cruelly harm those who disturb their natural habitat […]. Castro and Ólafsson must look like vexed spirits ready to take action against the alien elements which fill the background of the photograph."[689]

Artists' political resistance to the belated industrialisation of Iceland was (before the financial crises in 2008) mainly aimed at the construction of the Kárahjúkar Hydropower Plant. Art photographer Pétur Thomsen (b. 1967) started documenting its construction in 2003. Confronting the viewer with the monumentality of this human intervention in the landscape, his documentary work became the series *Aðflutt landslag* (Imported Landscape) first exhibited in 2005 at the height of the controversy surrounding the construction of the Hálslón Reservoir and the Kárahnjúkastífla Dam.[690] [Fig. 20].

---

[687] Rúrí has also addressed the protection of Gullfoss (and other waterfalls) in her work *Þann dag*...(That Day…, 2001. Installation. Reykjavík Art Museum). In the work she celebrates the action of Sigríður Tómasdóttir í Brattholti (1871-1957) who saved the waterfall from exploitation.

[688] Libia Castro and Ólafur Á. Ólafsson, *Untitled*, printed colour photograph, 100 x 150 cm, National Gallery of Iceland, 2000.

[689] Halldór B. Runólfsson, "Burlesque," in *Under Deconstruction. Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson,* ed. Ellen Blumenstein (Sternberg Press, 2012), 116.

[690] Thomsen's documentation was selected as a part of the exhibition and publication *reGeneration 50 Photographers of Tomorrow*, that showcased "the creativity, ingenuity and inspiration of young up-and-coming photographic artists." William A. Ewing, Nathalie Herschdorfer, Jean-Christophe Blaser, *ReGeneration. 50 Photographers of Tomorrow 2005*–2025 (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2005).

Thomsen followed the construction of the dam to the finalisation of the project, regularly travelling to the area and remaining there one to three weeks at a time, creating the body of work. He explains that "the objective of monitoring these gigantic changes that were taking place, and thus commemorating nature by showing a contemporary Icelandic landscape."[691]

As a medium, photography has been of great importance to explorations of the heroic, masculine and colonial dialectic between man and nature, representation and reality.[692] However, Thomsen's photographs revealing how nature is transformed into an "imported landscape" by belated industrialization are not photographs of a crime scene, as might be said of Rúrí's documentation mentioned above. By visualizing the gigantic intervention into the land from a monumental point of view by using large view camera, Thomsen reenacted the historical documentation of wilderness as it was practiced in the early days of photography, especially in the US. His series is therefore a double-edged sublimation of a landscape, conceptually based on an approach that refers back to Walker Evans, who stressed the necessary element of poetic transcendence in any art photograph of consequence.[693] In his large-scale images, revealing all the surface details of the land, Thomsen documented the "scraping off" the layers of soil, thus raising environmental questions about the intrinsic qualities of nature, and how to value the land that was being industrialized on a massive scale, hitherto unknown in Iceland. Addressing the photographic landscape genre directly, he remarks that:

> Landscape has been on my mind for a long time. […] for me it is […] a cultural vision of the land, subjective and personal. […] I thought about it a lot when I was studying in France. Often you distinguish things better from a distance. During my French exile, the debate about the hydroelectric central at Kárahnjúkar took off. I started seriously thinking about where we are heading. I asked myself urgent questions trying to understand and take directions in the contemporary Icelandic society. The Kárahnjúka hydroelectric central is a typical modern Icelandic construction. Consequently, it is a landscape that is an example of Icelandic

[691] Pétur Thomsen, e-mail correspondence with the author.
[692] Abigail Solomon Godeau, "Framing Landscape Photography (2010)," in *Photography after Photography*: *Gender, Genre, History*, ed. Sarah Parsons (Duke University Press, 2017), 107–40.
[693] Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," in *The Contest of Meaning. Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Boston: MIT 1992), 343–88, p. 376.

> contemporary landscape. This is what I wanted to transmit. I felt great urgency to treat the subject and represent it as landscape […]. My own story probably interferes somehow, as I worked on an aluminium plant for five years. I came across the poem *Aðflutt landslag* (Imported Landscape) by Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson. When I read the poem, the puzzle took shape in my head and the poem functioned as a trigger, so I borrowed the title.[694]

Thomsen claims to be openly concerned in his approach: "Images should have a purpose other than being seductive. The role of photography is to confront something, to address something that matters. To ask questions about critical matters."[695] The work *Aðflutt landslag* (Imported Landscape) could been valued as a contribution to the political debate on nature conservation and interpreted as a depiction of philosophical debates around the notion of the contemporary environmental sublime.[696] These landscapes are *imported*, as they no longer conform to the belief in purity of the national landscape. In other words, the national landscape has become a dead-end category and picturing the industrial landscape therefore refers to a dystopian view, a landscape genre represented by photographers such as Edward Burtynsky.

Thomsen's formalised visual world is characterised by monumental heavily textured weighty *shapes* of landscape, in contrast with the surrounding manmade chaos. However, such an approach is a double-edged sword: aestheticizing such industrial sites of environmental degradation is problematic, but difficult to escape, when using the photographic medium, inevitably associated with colonialism and the white masculine gaze. His documentation of the destruction of the land versus the construction of the power plant is ambivalent and it is not always clear if the images are celebratory or critical -- taking some distance from the technologic sublime celebrated through the constructions of bridges and railroads – or referring to the more critical postnational environmental sublime?

---

[694] E-mail correspondence from Pétur Thomsen to the author, dated May 26, 2006.
[695] "Mér finnst að myndir eigi að hafa einhvern tilgang annan en að vera bara til skrauts. Tilgangurinn með ljósmynduninni er að takast á við eitthvað, fjalla um eitthvað sem skiptir máli, og í besta falli fá fólk til að spyrja sig gagnrýninna spurninga." Sigrún Alba Sigurðardóttir, "Tímabundið landslag," *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, September 29, 2007, 8–9, p. 8.
[696] Emily Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*. *Aesthetics, Ethics and Nature* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

In order to escape the concept of the sublime often embedded in environmental debates, artists such as Hlynur Hallsson and Ósk Vilhjálmsdóttir address the conflict around the Kárahnjúka dam through activism, where political engagement and critiques of capitalism were performed through direct actions and texts often in the form of street graffiti. Vilhjálmsdóttir directed her actions toward the tourist industry and questioned the energy policy in Iceland versus nature conservation. As an environmental activist, Vilhjálmsdóttir informed the public (not only the art world) about what she called the endangered area of the highlands. Instead of visualising the disappearing land through photographs and exhibitions in galleries and museums, she organised guided hiking tours to the land about to disappear under water [697]

Her highland project *Kárahnjúkar* (2002-2006), exemplifies such a political commitment. Grounded in participation and dialogue, it directly engaged with environmental discourse, as debate raged over questions of the future direction of energy production versus nature conservation. In her *Kárahnjúkar* work, she steered clear of art's exhibition value, instead adopting business methods, such as creating the travel agency Augnablik (Moment) with Ásta Arnardóttir. Stepping into the world of travel publicity, she published a promotional booklet, marketing hiking tours. In the booklet, the strong connection between the national identity and the highland's image is evident.

> "For years I have guided different groups in different tours into the Icelandic highlands. […] We founded our own travel club AUGNABLIK (Moment) out of our activism fighting for the area in the north of Vatnajökull glacier. We found out that the travel companies we had been working for do not bother to organize travels into an area that will be destroyed in few years. So, we decided to do it ourselves. And for the last years we have been hiking in the future reservoir bottom of Kárahnjúkar Dam. It is a seven-day hike […] I have observed: everybody avoids stepping on delicate flowers on the banks of the river, although we all know that […] the whole area will be the bottom of huge and almost 200-meter-deep reservoir. It is really a very strange feeling walking on land that will disappear We always emphasize that our tours are for everybody whether they are for or against the building of the power plant […] we believe that nature has a

[697] Discussed in Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir, "Nature's Otherness and the Limits of Visual Representations of Nature."

> great value in itself, but also, we believe that we will destroy our identity, ourselves. We see it even as cultural suicide. Organising hiking in the area is part of the campaign."[698]

One might hazard that the hikes constitute an aesthetic education through a first-hand experience where each participant perceives the landscape through his or her personal camera and individual experience. In addition to informing the public of the changes in store for the land, its vegetation and wildlife, Vilhjálmsdóttir identifies with the land and is conscious of a sense of loss of place with the future disappearance of the land under water. Incorporating hikes as a liberating experience through participatory actions is not only an example of Vilhjálmsdóttir's practice but expresses her belief that nature needs to be physically encountered to be perceived. The highland project, presented as enlightened eco-tourism taking the form of walking tours, could thus be categorized both as participatory and as environmental art. This obliteration of the distinction between travel services and art involves a transgression of borders between the artworld and its marketing. However, not all the participants may have realized that their participation was a form of artmaking. The methods employed by Vilhjálmsdóttir in this context were inspired by the German artist Joseph Beuys who positioned the artist as an educator, constantly activating the social and political function of art. For that matter, the treks could also be characterized as social events since the artist's intent was to create a space during the hikes for discussion and exchange.

Vilhjálmsdóttir's direct protest against the construction of the dam and her critique of the future industrial exploitation of the Icelandic highlands was expanded in a number of ways. These included performances and participatory actions both in art spaces in Reykjavík and a cultural festival in Cologne, organised by the Icelandic government. The project *Eitthvað annað* (Something Else) was a social encounter at Gallerí Hlemmur, Reykjavík, in February 2003, a kind of idea lab responding to the arguments of politicians who maintained that in a globalized world, government policies were the only alternative. Participants were encouraged to imagine alternative lifestyles to those offered by politicians claiming them as the only viable options in the globalization process and the country's changing economic position in the world.

---

[698] Ósk Vilhjálmsdóttir. Unpublished talk given at the conference *Nature in the Kingdom of Ends*, Selfoss Iceland, June 11–12, 2005.

For the festival *Islandbilder* – [Bildende Kunst, Fotografie, Literatur, Musik, Mode & Design aus Island] a culture festival held in Cologne, organized by the Deutsch-Isländische Gesellschaft in November 2005, Vilhjálmsdóttir satirized German clichés about Iceland in her performance *Shitland*. Her action consisted of painting the following text in red letters on the white galley wall in front of the TV cameras that broadcasted the event:

> "In Shitland, everything is going to shit. The Shit Germans love Shitland. They think the Shitlanders live in harmony with Shit Nature. The Shit Germans see a shitelf or a shittroll in every last Shitlander. In the highlands of Shitland a giant shitreservoir will appear so that an American shitcorporation can buy cheap shitenergy to run a giant shitaluminum smelter. This giant shitproject will ruin the highlands of Shitland. The Shitlanders think they'll make a bunch of shitmoney. Now Shitgerman art curators have put on an exhibition of shitart from Shitland."[699] [Fig. 21].

As the philosopher Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir commented, the performance quietly fell by the German wayside.[700] Indeed, the giant hydroelectric projects received scant attention in the land of environmentalists and was barely discussed in German media, while global news agencies such as CNN, as we have seen, reported on the project in 2000. A year later, in 2006, at the height of the Icelandic investment adventure, Vilhjálmsdóttir published the following statement: "Vast areas of untouched nature—the last remaining wildernesses of Europe—was [sic] drowned September 2006. It was a sacrifice the government decided to make for the American aluminium smelter company, Alcoa."[701]

Although many of Vilhjálmsdóttir's projects rely on public participation and media communication, her work primarily employs on the open forum, rather than on those practices that have been termed relational aesthetics. Her actions clearly fall within the category of social art and a belief in art's political power to bring about social change.

---

[699] "Í Skítlandi er allt að fara í skít. Skítþjóðverjarnir elska Skítland. Þeir halda að Skítlendingarnir lifi í sátt við náttúruna. Skítþjóðverjarnir sjá skítálf eða skíttröll í hverjum einasta Skítlendingi. Á hálendi Skítlands mun verða til risastórt skítlón svo að amerískt skítfyrirtæki geti keypt ódýra skítorku til þess að reka stóra skítálbræðslu. Þetta risavaxna skítverkefni mun eyðileggja hálendi Skítlands. Skítlendingarnir halda að þeir muni græða fullt af skítpeningum. Nú hafa skítþýskir listasafnstjórar sett upp sýningu á skítlist frá Skítlandi." Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir, Klisjur og draumsýnir um Ísland," *Morgunblaðið*, December 18, 2005, 46.

[700] Þorgeirsdóttir, "Klisjur og draumsýnir um Ísland."

[701] Retrieved from: Ósk Vilhjálmsdóttir. http://wanderlust.is/about-us/the-story-of-wanderlust/

Vilhjálmsdóttir's work always relates to specific debates and serves the public democratic function of encouraging conversations on what matters to everyone. Since her actions rely on the participants' common experience, their reach exceeds local institutions, seeking to integrate Iceland into the global climate discourse and the sustainability of the wilderness. In this respect, her work thus engages in many of the most significant environmental issues of the first decades of this century.

9.4. Archiving Disappearing Landscapes

The idea of documenting and archiving the disappearance of nature is present, as we have seen present in Roni Horn's *Vatnasafn / Library of Water*, in Stykkishólmur, where Horn created her water archive in an abandoned public library. Here, the concept of place is related to her aesthetic, geological, geographical and environmental concerns by incorporating the physical material of the glaciers, emphasizing their cultural importance as markers of Icelandic identity and as proxies for global warming.[702]

Ólafur Elíasson approached the highlands and the construction of the Kárahnjúkar dam from a geographic point of view. Taking as his point of departure technological observations employed by cartographers, his documentation of river flows and the melting icecaps began in the late 1990s. He began creating typological categories of Iceland, such as glaciers, moss, ice, rivers, rocks, and waterfalls. This cartographic investigation of nature based on looking at the earth from a distance, challenges the limits of human perception. His observation is exemplified in the aerial photographic views of *The glacier series* (1999) where the surface of the land reveals the environmental consequences of global warming. These photographs later became his point of departure for a documentation of changing landscapes as consequences of climate change in *The glacier melt series* (1999/2019). When exhibited as a series, each individual image registers geographic and geological activity, exposing different phases of natural phenomena, such as the circulation between fluids and solids, glaciers melting and rivers flowing.

This investigation of nature as a living phenomenon is further exemplified in the views of the *Jökla series* (2004). [703] Consisting of 48 aerial photographs tracing the glacial

[702] Roxi J. Thoren, "The Deep Grain of the Inquiry," 39.
[703] Ólafur Elíasson, *Jökla series*, 2004, 48 c-prints, each photo 36 cm x 54 cm. National Gallery of Iceland.

river Jökulsá from its source to its way to the sea, he shows the riverbed as a fragile surface, a thin skin that will disappear. In 2005 Elíasson published a series of works showing the flow of the river (Jökulsá á Dal) in the Sunday supplement *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*. Produced specifically for the newspaper, he also made large prints that were distributed internationally.

In *Jökulsvelgir* (*The glacier mill series*, 2007),[704] Elíasson emulates scientific observation, prolongating the perception of the human body through the means of a complex technical installations, using the camera to record the melting processes inside the glacier, normally invisible to the human eye; "You never see the bottom, you only hear the sound […] The water that runs through the melting glaciers is ancient - in a way you are watching time."[705]

Here, he uses a neutral but all embracing "scientific" vantage point, experienced through a technological extension of the human eye mediating optical and scientific distances. Borders between art and science are deliberately blurred, the frame of visual landscape aesthetics is erased, as if the existence of a place could only be appreciated through technology and science. Or, as if Elíasson was insisting on the fact that nature becomes essentially knowable, only through the intermediary of the culture of science.

Similarly, in his temporary installation *Ice Pavilion*, a simple iron structure covered with frozen water formations that melted slowly on the ground, outside Kjarvalsstaðir Reykjavík Art Museum in 1998, this phenomenological experience was later combined with more institutional climate awareness that Elíasson articulated in the work *Ice Watch*, a serial public artwork comprised of monumental melting ice blocks. There, 100 tonnes of inland ice collected from the Nuup Kangerlua fjord outside Nuuk, Greenland, was placed in front of the City Hall in Copenhagen, calling the attention to the climate crises.[706] The twelve large ice blocks were displayed in the form of a clock, serving as a wake-up call to the melting glaciers and rising sea levels. The action was repeated in an installation in front of Place du Panthéon, Paris for UN Climate

[704] Ólafur Elíasson, *Jökulsvelgir* (*The glacier mill series*), 2007, 36 c-prints, each 36,5 x 54 cm – all 253,4 x 352,2 cm, 2007. https://olafureliasson.net/artwork/the-glacier-mill-series-2007/
[705] Fríða Björk Ingvarsdóttir, "Jökulsvelgjaserían: Niður árþúsundanna í gegnum linsu Ólafs Elíassonar myndlistarmanns," *Morgunblaðið–Menningarblað/Lesbók*, August 25, 2007, 3–5.
[706] A project by Olafur Elíasson and Minik Rosing marking the UN IPCC's 5th Assessment Report on Climate Change 26–29 October 2014. City Hall Square, Copenhagen. Retrieved from: https://olafureliasson.net/icewatchcopenhagen.

Conference, and in 2018, when 24 blocks arranged in a circular formation in front of Tate Modern, and six chunks of ice placed outside Bloomberg's HQ in the City of London. These strategic placements provided the installations with a kind of global authority.

In order to examine this category of what she calls the environmental sublime, philosopher Emily Brady considers the role of the sublime by linking aesthetic and moral values to environmental ethics. Brady defends the historical notion of the sublime against several counterarguments, namely, that the sublime is outmoded, metaphysically suspect, and anthropocentric. She argues that a different political form of aesthetic appreciation of nature has led to new forms of self-knowledge and could potentially fuel moral attitudes toward nature in the context of environmental politics. "The admiration we feel in the sublime, […] can […] potentially ground respect for nature, not in spite of, but very much because of nature's irresistible scale and power."[707]

Admiration of these disappearing landscapes (glaciers, rivers, riverbeds, waterfalls, rocks, ice), in the highlands has fuelled Elíasson's topological documentation of these phenomenon. During a road trip with *Hans Ulrich Obrist*, Elíasson discusses his relation to the land and the micro and macro aspects of landscapes.[708] Wishing to distance himself from traditional landscape photography, and the intrinsic hegemonic and colonial signifiers historically embedded in photography, in his images Elíasson avoids the monumentality and the grandeur of landscape photography:

> "I think that large-scale photography, rooted in a discourse of "vastness", "grandiosity" and "endlessness", has to a great extent colonized the photographic medium. In contrast to this, a fantastic setting like the one we are presently looking at forms a typology of space which is completely relevant for the body, for immediate physical experience."[709]

His approach is therefore aesthetically and conceptually distinguished from the landscape photography so present in the photographic representation of Iceland. Instead, he creates topographic series of different natural elements that have often the quality of snapshots or professional documentation, usually displayed as grids.

---

[707] Emily Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 8.
[708] Ólafur Elíasson and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *The Goose Lake Trail (Southern Ro*ute), published on the occasion of the Eiðar Art Centre Gathering in Iceland, August 2006 (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2006), 16.
[709] Ibid, 25.

Documenting those elements of the terrain that disappeared during the construction of the dam was a way of calling public attention to the danger facing the Icelandic highlands. Already in September 1999, Rúrí organised with a group of activists the performance *Eyjabakkagjörningur* in the endangered area north-east of Eyjabakkajökull.[710] In her photographic series *Útrýming II*, (Extinction II) she shows waterfalls that either disappeared into the Hálslón dam or were modified by its construction.[711] For the 2003 Venice Biennale, Rúrí created a large interactive multimedia installation *Archive-endangered waters* where the sound and the image of 52 Icelandic waterfalls were compartmentalised and archived in a documentary file, "produced for a future in which they have ceased to exist." The photographs, each showing a different waterfall, are mounted between two sheets of glass and arranged as slides in slots placed inside a cube-like steel frame structure, literally forming a cabinet archive. When a picture is pulled out, the rushing sound of the particular waterfall can be heard. "From gentle gurgling to deafening roar, each waterfall has its own unique voice."[712]

In her environmental works, Rúrí denounced the way that hydropower development in Iceland was propelled by a relentless quest for profit constituting a long-term threat to water resources in the world. She personifies and individualizes nature reminiscent of a tradition in Icelandic poetry that places nature as a constructor of national identity. In *Archive-endangered waters* and several others monumental, multi-media installations composed of images and sound of water, Rúrí addresses the future of global water governance and the increasing pressures on the world's water supplies. This is also the topos of her installation *Vocal-VI*, a multi - channel video with audio and voice performance created for Deep Space in Ars Electronica Centre in Linz, 2012.[713] An image of a large waterfall projected onto a wall occupied the space, while another projection, placed on the ground depicted the surface of the reservoir in Hálslón. Words literally flowed over the floor. The scientific and political texts, written by several authors, offer

[710] The performance *Eyjabakkagjörningur* is an example of Rúrí's important engagement against the construction of a dam. Retrieved from: https://ruri.is/is/2011/10/18/eyjabakkagjorningur/. See also Anne Brydon, "Náttúran, mótmæli og nútíminn," *TMM* 62, no. 2 (2001): 45–49.
[711] Rúrí, *Útrýming II* (Extinction II), 28 digital prints on paper, 185 x 275, 2011. Retrived from https://ruri.is/is/2011/10/17/utryming-ii/
[712] Laufey Helgadóttir (ed.), Rúrí, *Archive-endangered waters* (Reykjavík: Ministry of Education, 2003); *Archive-endangered waters*, exhibition in Passage du Désir, Paris, 2004. Part of the festival Isalnde de glace et de feu, une Quinzaine Islandaise en France. Retrived from: https://artfacts.net/exhibition/ruri-archive-endangered-waters/870343
[713] Retrieved from: https://ruri.is/2014/09/25/vocal-vi-2/

a critical view on the environmental consequences of mega-dam projects, rarely acknowledged in public media. The work is a form of radical ecology, where the artist extends the local towards the global, raising questions about the exploitation of natural sources for industrial use and stressing the importance of sustainable water supplies for humanity in a global scope.

9.5. The Postnational Image

In order to approach the construction of a postnational identity in the Icelandic context from a critical viewpoint, I will discuss the project *Roots of the Rúntur*, a thoughtful book by Dutch photographer Rob Hornstra, published in 2006 by the National Museum of Iceland.[714] In a number of ways, Hornstra's work could be seen as a pointed rejection of the conventions, cliches and iconography of the national imagery that has been discussed in previous chapters. When the project's commissioners selected him to document the changing economic and social situation in Iceland in 2005, the traditional forms of the photobook were already in decline and no photographer had directly addressed the topic of national identity since the 1950s. By focusing on economic actualities (rather than nature), including the social construction of labour, social relations and leisure in small Icelandic villages, Hornstra produced a critical (as opposed to celebratory) visual documentation. He uses as his anchoring device the idiosyncratic performance of the local tradition of the *rúntur* – a well-known pastime whereby teenagers drive their cars for hours while drinking and flirting during the long summer nights. He thus evokes current social realities in which the automobile figures as both a social marker and a status symbol in these rural spaces. Gas stations, abandoned factories and dilapidated private houses are other significant objects of his attention. These places are ghostly remnants of an era when the American empire shaped geopolitics, flight traffic, fishing industries, and even urban and rural landscapes.

Hornstra documents the degradation of these modernist tropes celebrated in so many earlier photobooks. He thus puts pressure on dominant social narratives through the

[714] Rob Hornstra, *Roots of the Rúntur* (Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2006). Designed by De Russen, the book features 119 colour photographs across 114 pages. It was created as a part of *Changing Faces*, a project funded by the EU's Culture 2000 program, led by the University of Sunderland from 2005 to 2008. It included eighteen international fellowships for photographers, three major international conferences, several exhibitions across Europe and the publication of ten books about photography.

critical principles of photographic documentation, as exemplified in photographer and filmmaker Allan Sekula's theoretical framing of documentary photography as a tool for sociopolitical context and analysis.[715] In his multimedia project *Fish Story* (1995), Sekula noted that "fishing is the last large-scale human enterprise that still gathers wild food, and is thus connected not only to pre-industrial, but also pre-agricultural practices".[716] Fishing was the raison d'*être* in these villages in Iceland, but neither fish nor boats are seen in Hornstra's images. We are, instead, shown only the desolation of the landscape, the alienation of the young Icelanders and the presence of the foreign workforce that sustains the fishing industry. As Hornstra explains in his text, transferable individual fishing quotas contributed to both a further industrialisation and delocalisation of the fishing fleet so that Iceland could compete in the world market and survive the advent of quota speculation.[717] A job in the fishing industry, by late 1990s, was no longer celebrated among Icelandic youth. As they moved away from their villages, immigrants from Eastern Europe and Asia filled the gap the Icelanders left behind, taking up residence in these remote villages.

Hornstra shot his photographs during the summer of 2005, and many of them during the long summer night, when the sun hardly sets. He uses as his anchoring device the idiosyncratic performance of the local tradition of the *rúntur* – a well-known pastime whereby teenagers drive their cars for hours while drinking and flirting during the bright summer nights. He thus evokes current social realities in which the automobile figures as both a social marker and a status symbol in these rural spaces. Gas stations, abandoned factories and dilapidated private houses are other significant objects of his attention. These places figure as ghostly remnants of an era when the American empire shaped geopolitics, flight traffic, fishing industries and even urban and rural landscapes in post war Iceland.

Darkness and light, representative of inside and outside, play an important role not only in terms of his aesthetic and formal choices but also as cultural signifiers

---

[715] Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," *Massachusetts Review* 19, no.4 (Winter 1978), 859–83.
[716] Steve Edwards, "Allan Sekula's Chronotopes: Uneven & Combined Capitalism," in Hilde Van Gelder (ed.), *Ships of Fools / The Docker's Museum* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2015), 31–43, p. 38.
[717] See discussion on the system of fishing quotas: Evelyn Pinkerton, "Groundtruthing Individual Transferable Quotas," in *Gambling Debt*. *Iceland's Rise and Fall in the Global Economy,* eds. Paul Durrenberger and Gísli Pálsson (Iowa: University Press of Colorado, 2015), 109–20.

expressing sadness rather than nostalgia in these architectural remains of human dwellings. Hornstra seeks to render visible damaged gender and generational relations, as well as existing economic pressures, including its economic and social hierarchies. His approach to these conflicting situations includes images of adolescents hanging out in the Nordic summer night, contrasting them with ageing baby boomers playing minigolf inside a clubhouse. These are counterpointed with Icelandic girls posing casually in front of the camera, while female immigrant workers stand strong as they work in the fish factories. When I asked the students in my photography class at the University of Iceland to react to Hornstra's book, one Polish-born student who immigrated to Iceland as a teenager identified strongly with the photographs:

> "Me (emigrant) (immigrant) match to both these words. The travel in time goes on with every page or photo. Every single picture reminds me of my adolescent years. Me as a 17 year old boy came to a place, one just like the places Rob Hornstra documents in his album. I think I could be in these pictures. I can almost smell (scent?) the surroundings in the pictures. We see ordinary, everyday life and vivid emotions i.e., happy, sad, tired, energy, sorrow, longing and more, awakening more questions about the people in my memories. Where are they? What are they doing? Are they dead or alive? Do they remember me? How do they remember me? Do I cross their minds every now and then?"

The captivating, underlying narrative of Hornstra's book – and the topic of his critique – is presented through non-rhetorical, decidedly non-scenic and deadpan points of view. This approach acknowledges the broader determinations of global capitalism as it shapes the social life of young rural populations, as well as labour and industry and its impact on the physical environment. Consequently, the book raises questions about the free market's triumph over Iceland's earlier, more egalitarian values and social aspirations. It demonstrates how new forms of segregation and exclusion are producing alienation and identity politics that are generally obscured in cultural narratives in Iceland. *Roots of the Rúntur* seems to ask what we are to make of these encounters framed by the fragile economic infrastructure that connects European populations and regions, such as remote Icelandic fishing villages with the presence of immigrant workers from Poland, Latvia and Lithuania. Now, more than 15 years later, when the migrant workforce constitutes 20% to 30% of the total population, and fishing industries have been delocalised in favour

for global tourism, Hornstra's sharp-eyed documentation attest to an ongoing postindustrial situation.

Roots of the Rúntur could be interpreted, then, as a challenge to the traditional national photobook. It functions simultaneously as a documentation of consequences, as a reality check, and even as an announcement of future crises. But Hornstra's photographs are not illustrations of critical concepts. For him, books are more significant than exhibitions, and publication and self-marketing are important aspects of his practice. Within this framework, photography's "truth" in *Roots of the Rúntur* is located in the rhetorical capacity of narratives as relayed through images and texts (the photographed individuals' statements describing their relations in terms of place), which is further emphasised in the deadpan aesthetics of the images and their topographic realism. However, despite the neutrality of Hornstra's version of an anti-aesthetic photography rooted are found in the New Topographics photography of the 1970s, his images do not entirely escape the inherent "romantic subjectification" produced by the camera. This can be identified in its modernist aesthetics, expressed through geometric compositions and saturated colour. The book does, however, capture the social tension that previous photobooks on Iceland have collectively avoided, insofar as he intuits an uncertain future for the teenagers and the foreign workforce who (somehow) desperately seek to inhabit these enigmatic landscapes.

In retrospect, Hornstra's book is more topical than he possibly meant it to be. The social relations he was documenting in the small villages have since been radically transformed with the arrival of another capitalist form: mass tourism, also supported by labour migration. These cultural and social disappearances and blind spots featured in Hornstra's documentation have also been the topic of several installations, videos and photographic works by Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson. *The Noise of Money*, was an installation at ASÍ Art Museum in Reykjavík in 2005, whose audience could listen to different individuals from Iceland, Philippines, Serbia, Poland, and Cape Verde, discuss their personal and professional experience in the fishing industry.[718]

Similarly, the photographic work *La Vida Es Un Contratiempo*, also exposes the social blindness of Icelandic society, but the title refers to a Spanish popular saying

[718] The title of the work refers to a popular saying in Icelandic that smell of fish is the smell of money. Markús Þór Andrésson, "Invisible Fish," in Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson, *Under Deconstruction* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 92.

meaning “Life is an inconvenience”. In the work the artists play the roles of a fishworker and a businessman, wearing their emblematic outfits: Castro in the role of the worker, wearing a light blue blouse, white trousers, white rubber boots, blue plastic gloves, hair-net and earmuffs. Ólafsson is dressed in a woman’s black power suit, white shirt and high heels. The work points to the theatricality and the artificiality of the social and economic contracts (and contacts) occurring in Iceland during the years of privatization of banks, quota speculation, and the introduction of global finance.

Like Ásmundur Ásmundsson’s installation and performance piece *Into the Firmament* (2005), their work speaks globally, but also locally, insofar as they address the situations of small communities dependent on global economies. Ásmundsson’s installation *Into the Firmament* consisted of empty oil barrels from the Skeljungur (Shell) corporation that were mounted like a champagne glass pyramid, but instead of nectar they were filled with solidifying cement.[719] A video portraying the action was projected on the walls of the Suðsuðvestur (Southsouthwest) Art Gallery in Keflavík, close to the international airport. The work would seem to allude to the relationships established between contemporary Icelandic artists and the corporate world that sponsored the National Gallery of Iceland and most of the festivals and art events internationally organised in the first decade of the 21st century. Or was it referring to the community’s economic dependency on the international airport, a former zone of the American military base close by?[720]

9.6. *Reality Check* After the Economic Meltdown

Despite the actions conducted by artists and environmental activists, the Kárahnjúkar hydropower plant, and a 57 km2 artificial lake reservoir (Hálslón) was completed in late 2006. Electricity was first generated for the aluminium smelter in April of 2007. Even though the Icelandic government was relying on financial banking and raising exports of aluminium, Iceland was the first victim of the global financial collapse. Many artists reacted to the crises with civil disobedience and activism in the centre of Reykjavík in

[719] Jón B. K. Ransu, “Partípíramítinn,” *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, April 2, 2005, 15.
[720] A topic also addressed in *Base* (2003) by Spessi and Erik Pauser. A video installation based on documentary material they shot at the American military base in Keflavík, Iceland during several weeks from September to October 2003. Karlis Verpe and Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir (eds.), *(Re)construction of Friendship* (Riga: Art Space, 2014), 14–15.

front of the parliament house, actively participating in the *Pots and Pans Revolution* (Búsáhaldabyltingin), the name given to the public protests that took place in autumn 2008 and winter 2009, as protesters used kitchenware to symbolize their "ordinariness" and to make noise in front of the Icelandic parliament.

During the aftermath of these crises, participatory activism and non-permanent anti-monuments reflected on the economic catastrophe that not only marked the country socially, but also reflected on the negative consequences of global capitalism. The exhibition *Reality Check* created for the 2010 Reykjavík Arts Festival, tackled the multiple correlations between history, memory and political events related to the economic meltdown. The title of the exhibition registered the fact that the economic crash was still recent for Icelanders who were still struggling with its consequences. The exhibition emphasized the medium of photography and its function in the public arena.[721] An attempt was made to mediate artists' interpretation of economic collapse, when the city centre became a space of conflict in the Pots and Pans Revolution, sparking a series of anti-government protests and riots.[722]

Exploring the narrative possibilities of the public space by applying the rhetorical function of photographs, the exhibition sought to create an association in the minds of the viewer between the events, historical past and sites in the centre of Reykjavík. The city centre was transformed into an exhibition space by selecting the walls of houses that borrowed certain well-known routes that preserved in Icelander's memory aiming to question conventional views and habits.

Artists were asked to produce new works reflecting their experience of the crash and the events that followed in its wake. For example, number of press photographs were also chosen as documentation of the events, such as a news photograph by photographer Eggert Jóhannesson, *Börnin borga* (The Children Pay, 2009), one of his many photographs of protestors published in *Morgunblaðið* and other media.

Juxtaposing art and press images was meant to erase the division between press news photographs and images taken by the artists, breaking away from obsolete

[721] The thematic emphasis was on photography as a medium, the diverse visual and cultural role of photography. The title of the exhibition was then used as a common title for all the photography exhibitions of the festival.
[722] The riots are discussed in Jón Gunnar Bernburg, *Economic Crisis and Mass Protest: The Pots and Pans Revolution in Iceland* (New York: Routledge, 2016.)

definitions of cultural frontiers that mould viewers' habitual perspectives, distinguishing those of art photography versus documentary. Since the aim of the exhibition was to create a dialogue about the public space as a battleground and the issues tackled in the Pots and Pans Revolution, emphasis was placed on scrutinizing the gap in meaning occasioned by the time that when picture was taken and its context of when and where it was displayed. The questions that were asked included:

> What happens when images are transferred from art spaces to the walls of the city? Do they become more accessible, do they trigger stranger responses or would passers-by simply ignore them? This raises issues regarding function and ethics, and about the protection of privacy, intervention and the impact of images. What can be shown and where? What can be shown and what needs to be hidden? The public space may seem neutral, but in actual fact is just as sensitive as the viewer himself. Where are the border lines: the distinction that makes images disturbing when they switch context? How can a snapshot become a piece of art? When does a news photograph cease to be news and transform itself into a statement about a social situation? Where lies the distinction between aesthetics, narrative and criticism?[723]

The distinction between advertising and art is blurred when images appear on big outdoor walls in a bus shelter displays.[724] The exhibition therefore tested viewers responses to images in public space. The photographs fluctuated between different domains: visual arts, advertising and historical documentation. The locations were chosen in order to give the pictures a coherent context and the relations between their contents and the surrounding buildings or areas such as the House of Parliament, Íslandsbanki, the Reykjavík Art Museum and the harbour district. The chosen places were not *neutral walls,* but rather buildings that were part of the political, economic and cultural history of the city.

---

[723] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Reality Check," in *Reality Check*: *Focus on Photography*, ed. Jóhanna Vigdís Guðmundsdóttir (Reykjavík: Reykjavík Arts Festival, 2010), 14–15, p. 14.

[724] The *Reality Check* program also included the work of David Byrne, *Moral Dilemmas* (1998–2010), displayed on billboards in Reykjavík at the 2010 Arts Festival. Byrne's work included texts such as: "Your brother is a banker who has profited from the economic collapse. He offers to share his profits with you. Do you: A) Turn him in; B) Give your share to charity; C) Refuse the gift but remain silent." David Byrne, "Moral Dilemmas & Inside Out," in *Reality Check: Focus on Photography*, 12–13. Also discussed in Lilly Wei, "Reykjavik Report. Under the Volcano," *Art in America* 99, no. 10 (October 2010): 99–104.

The artists Haraldur Jónsson (b. 1961), Hlynur Hallsson (b. 1968), Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson (b. 1981), Kristleifur Björnsson (b. 1973), Silja Sallé (b. 1970), and Spessi (Sigurþór Hallbjörnsson f. 1956), all created works specifically for the exhibition. Haraldur Jónsson's tryptic *Vöktun (Watch)* (2009), evoked the tension between aesthetics and monitoring, how since the medium has evolved around watching the other. Jónsson was also referring to recent events, including a growing insecurity and the increased number of security cameras in the city centre.

Since 2002, Hlynur Hallsson has been using texts as rhetorical mechanisms to comment on political realities in local and international contexts. Focusing on the social force of language, he appropriates the homemade slogans that people invent within public spheres to comment or act around political issues. Hallsson collecting slogans and phrases he finds on chat forums and in internet, and he sprays them like graffiti on walls. He maintains constantly the rule that the phrases are written as a sequence in which each language is marked with a specific colour, that recalling the symbolism of national flags. In his early works, the sequence was Icelandic, German, and English. Icelandic is his native mother tongue; historically, German was the language of European culture; and English is the language of world politics, consumption, capitalism and global communication.

TAKK FYRIR ALLT ÁLIÐ – VIELEN DANK FUR DANS GANZE ALUMINIUM – THANKS FOR ALL THE ALUMINIUM

was Hallsson's message to the Icelandic government that signed a declaration of intent with Alcoa Inc. that led to the building of the Kárahnjúkar dam and the construction of an aluminium smelter in East Iceland. The message was a part of his work *Drulla – Scheisse – Mud* performed in Akureyri, north Iceland in 2007 for the exhibition *Bye Bye Iceland* curated by Hannes Sigurðsson for the Akureyri Art Museum. The press release for the exhibition stated: "Iceland has been revolutionized and the revolution's keywords are privatization, quota system [fishing], inequality, "outvasion" [foreign acquisitions], greed, obsequiousness, immigrants, and heavy industry, to name a few. This is all very well, but it means three nations now inhabit this country, that is, billionaires, ordinary Icelanders, and immigrants."[725]

[725] Guðmundur Oddsson, "Neoliberal Globalization and Heightened Perceptions of Class Division in Iceland," *The Sociological Quarterly* 57, no. 3, (2016): 462–490, p. 465.

This was just immediately prior to the economic collapse of the Icelandic banks, prompting artists to question the local impact of global capitalism. But also, this means, to quote Boris Groys, calling upon "the ability of art to function as an arena and medium for political protest and social activism."[726]

Can art be useful in social conflicts? The Pots and Pans Revolution became a rich source for popular slogans and actions in the public space, and reactivated art activism amongst Icelandic artists. Hallsson captured some of these new slogans and collected fragmented sentences from various protests and superposed them on photographs his young son had made of the protesters in their hometown of Akureyri. These images now act both as documents and as an archive of collective memory such as: *Einkennisorð mótmælanna urðu: Helvítis fokking fokk – Schlagwörter der Demonstration wurden: Verdammte verfickte Scheiße – Keywords of the demonstration became: Damn fucking fuck.* In one of the photographs, a group of middle-aged Icelanders protesting peacefully, and one man holds a sign that reads "Helvítis fokking einkavæðing" (Bloody fucking privatisation). [Fig. 22].

Through these interventions, Hallsson engages important questions about the power of the written word in public space and its contemporary uses in social media. He investigates critical impact such interventions can have when the difference between public information, fake news and advertising has become blurred in the public mind. In his multilingual spray-painted murals *Seven Works for Seven Locations* (2019), produced for the Oslo biennale, Hallsson enlarges the written texts to Norwegian, English, Icelandic, Swedish, Sami, Lithuanian, Polish, and Somali, as all these languages represent the multicultural population of Norway and its global concerns: immigration, migration, identity.

The architectural documentation by Ingvar Högni Ragnarsson, *Status* (2009–2010) was displayed on the walls of the Nasa club, in the old centre of Reykjavík. There has long been considerable controversy about the demolition and reconstruction of this historical site in the expanding urban politics of the city council. At first glance, Ragnarsson's photographs look like a visual diary of the rapidly changing appearance of downtown Reykjavík, visible in the demolition of old houses built in the early 20th century with modest means. His sharp criticism of real estate trading and the tensions

[726] Boris Groys, "On Art Activism," *e-flux Journal* 56 (2014).

between politicians, contractors, and residents in the city's town planning are apparent, but these artistic interventions have not managed to influence the aggressive real estate market in the city, but they do take on the role of an aesthetic documentation of what has been destroyed.

In a series he called *Bankrupt,* Spessi photographed newborn Icelanders and one image from that series was printed as a giant poster and mounted on a wall of the (now destroyed) building of the first State Telephone Company in Austurvöll. The screaming babe-in-arms directly faced the windows of the House of Parliament. A very different narrative was produced within domestic spaces, in the series *I Would Like to Be…* (2006) by Latvian artist Ieva Epnere (b. 1977). Documenting Icelandic society from within before the crises, she photographed adolescents in their bedrooms asking them about their dreams and hopes for the future. The pictures pasted on the empty windows of an old abandoned house in Tryggvagata, which has since been torn down. Like in Spessi's photographs of migrant Polish workers, he seeks to restore visibility on invisible subjects, who have no right to vote and therefore no public voice.

Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson similarly make visible the social and economic impact of globalization. In their work, they reveal the capitalist context that infuses everyday life, especially the discrepancy between what can be seen and what is hidden. The work *Ferdinand playing Guitar,* installed on the gable of the Íslandsbanki building (one of the failed banks) on the corner of Lækjargata and Vonarstræti (now demolished), appropriating a cultural cliché, the unemployed Spanish migrant Ferdinand, happily playing the guitar in the street in front of his dispersed belongings.[727]

[727] The work was originally made for the series *Demolitions and Excavations*, Malaga, 2002.

10. DEAD OR ALIVE: POLAR BEARS ADRIFT

Since the 1990s, there has been a new wave of interest in the social function of art, including collaborative practices, and live encounters, most often taking place in museums or other public contexts, with the aim of prompting environmental and social solutions to given problems. Art historian Claire Bishop calls this tendency an "expanded field of post-studio practices" categorized by various labels. Among them, she lists "socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, […] participatory art, collaborative art, contextual art and […] social practice."[728] Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson position their work within these terms; "as collaborative, relational, and research-based […] and it is in these networks of relations that a space is created for a production of knowledge existing outside of the self."[729] They have been observing, recording, documenting, and tackling animal - human relationships in different geographical territories and institutional contexts for years. Their research is typically completed through collaborative work and has resulted in long-term projects, such as *Visitations. Polar Bears Out of Place* (2019–2022), an interdisciplinary collaboration with diverse experts in animal and environmental studies, folklore, and the visual arts.

Furthermore, Sæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson have explained the importance of negotiations and the inclusion of researchers (and other participants) as itself a working method. Through this inclusiveness, the artists give voice to the scientists and others involved in their research processes. In a conversation with Steve Baker and Ross Birrell, Wilson explained that "In many ways it is fundamental to the practice, that inclusion and inclusiveness and also the acknowledgement not only of the power that people have to enable the smooth running of the project, but also the specific knowledge that specialists or indeed others involved in the project have, that we just absolutely need. So, it's actually the necessity for the inclusion of those other people that drives or gives the projects – in

[728] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 1.
[729] Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir, "Understandings of Artistic Research," in *Doing Research. Writings from the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts* — Nº3, eds. Jan Kaila and Henk Slager (Helsinki: The Finnish Academy of Fine Arts in collaboration with MaHKU (Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design), EARN (European Artistic Research Network) and dOCUMENTA 13, 2012), 10–15, p. 14.

terms both of concept and far more in specific detail – their shape, in terms of the knowledge and the access that they can provide."[730]

By sharing current understandings of art as knowledge production and art making as research, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson, put forward a certain belief in the power of art to bring about change, to raise awareness, to trigger discussions about ecological issues, and to reconsider the animal beyond the Anthropocene. However, in order to go beyond the dialogical and relational art of today and its sometimes-exhausted discourses, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson's practice can be understood as a form of resistance, and a re-engagement with earlier ecological activism outside and within the museum.[731] As Rosi Braidotti has argued: "Once the centrality of *Anthropos* is challenged, a number of new boundaries between 'Man' and the others are exposed and challenged […] Animals, insects, plants, […] in fact the planet and the cosmos as a whole, are called into play in a planetary political arena."[732]

The *Visitations* exhibition at the Akureyri Art Museum, on view from 25 September 2021 to 16 January 2022, was part of the research project *Visitations: Polar Bears Out of Place.* [733] Initiated by Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson, the overall aim of the project was to contribute to a growing body of knowledge concerning human/non-human relations and habitat in a time of global warming and rising sea levels.

The polar bear is an endangered species, and the public's growing awareness of its precarity has been linked to its symbolic role in relation to environmental threat to the Arctic ecosystem. Historically, the bear is a totemic animal, celebrated for its strength, and was used as a valuable gift to kings and emperors. As with many other wild animals, their representation in popular culture has been shaped by hunting mythologies and it still serves as a living commodity for cultural consumption in zoos, arctic excursions and other spectacles.

---

[730] Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson. In conversation with Steve Baker and Ross Birrell, "On Animals, Death and Derrida's Cat," *Art & Research*. *A Journal of Ideas, Contexts, and Methods* 1. no. 2 (Summer 2007). Retrieved from: http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/baker.html. The quote is slightly modified.

[731] I am referring to the artistic collaboration of Newton (1932–2022) and Helen Mayer Harrison (1927–2018) that started in the late 1960s.

[732] Rosi Braidotti, "The Contested Posthumanities," in *Conflicting Humanities*, eds. R. Braidotti and P. Gilroy (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 20.

[733] *Visitations. Polar Bears Out of Place*, was a three-year collaborative research project (2019–2022), funded by the Rannís (Icelandic Centre for Research) and run by the Iceland Art Academy, University of Iceland, University of Cumbria, Akureyri Art Museum and Anchorage Museum, Alaska. Retrieved from: http://visitations.lhi.is/

The exhibition was informed by the artists' research-based practice, grounded in their long-term environmental engagement and research into the Arctic as a kind of laboratory of climate change. By drawing on actual events, in this case, the killing of two isolated polar bears in Skagafjörður, north Iceland in early and mid- June 2008, the artists examine the bears' individuality and their (political) afterlife as biological specimens in the Icelandic Institute of Natural History, including the public debate launched by their killing.[734] The research was subsequently structured within the broader context of the history of polar bear migrations to Iceland's coasts from 1880 to 2016 and the "myths" these arrivals have engendered. Unlike other animal migrations, who travel in flocks or herds, these were singular, random events. Polar bears travel alone, irrespective of gender or age, they swim long distances, even hundreds of kilometres. Their trajectories are mysterious; no one knows from where they come. Their arrivals are dramatic, as they often approach isolated farms; the habitants are taken by surprise, and their slaughter is precipitated by fear when this solitary animal appears.

Mounted in the large white rooms of the Akureyri Art Museum, a contemporary art space located only a few kilometres south of the Arctic circle, the exhibition is situated close to the geographical locations where several polar bears have arrived. The first work in the exhibition, *Ursus Maritimus Islandia 1880-2016*, incorporates graphic presentations indicating the scale of the phenomenon, and its intersection with topographic and folkloric narratives, manifest in the handwritten texts, suggestive of the undulating ocean waves on these rough shores. These arrivals have been mapped over a long period of time and documented by natural scientists through archaeological finds and historical documents. Their presence is recorded in medieval literature and their relations with the human population have been mythologized in folkloric narratives and other literature.

The prioritization of ursine ontology in this work and in the geography and history of Iceland was similarly made accessible to the public through the project's interactive digital database located at the exhibition's entrance. There, visitors can not only locate

[734] *Viðbrögð við landgöngu hvítabjarna á Íslandi. Skýrsla starfshóps sem umhverfisráðherra skipaði í júní 2008 til tillögugerðar um viðbrögð vegna hugsanlegra landtöku hvítabjarna á Íslandi*. (Report of a working group appointed by the Minister for the Environment in June 2008 to propose a response to the possible landing of polar bears in Iceland). Retrived from: https://ust.is/library/Skrar/Einstaklingar/Nattura/Skyrsla_um_komur_hvitabjarna_til_Islands_lokautgafa.pdf

the time and place of different arrivals on the geographical computer map, but can also read a host of descriptions written by those who witnessed the bears' arrivals, be they children, farmers, seamen, or other inhabitants of these remote areas of Iceland. [735] These accounts include those who killed the bears out of fear, the desire for a trophy, or killed them for their fur.

Since 1994, the polar bear is a protected species in Iceland – "unless they pose a threat to humans or livestock" – and the last five visits between 2008 and 2016 stirred up heated public debate about the fragile plight of this powerful animal in the era of global warming; an adult can measure 2.5–3 m and weigh more than 500 kg. Their killings raised ethical questions and disputes around animal rights, and these environmental, legal and ethical issues are expressed in several works in the exhibition. As such, it echoes an earlier project, *nanoq: flat out and bluesome*, carried out by Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson between 2001–2006, for which they located and photographed 33 taxidermied polar bears conserved in private collections and public institutions in the UK. Rather than perceiving these taxidermies only as abandoned museological objects, hunting trophies, or obsolete educational specimens, they traced the actual provenance of each individual animal, prior to their becoming institutional and cultural representations. The act of collecting, preserving, mapping, and tracing has long been a traditional practice in the natural sciences and all these methods were activated in the work. However, the artists' aim exceeded a simple accumulation of information and the construction of an archive. Rather, they sought to investigate a violent colonial past with the additional goal of analysing the bears' symbolic function and "return the individuality of each [specimen] to the idea of its former living self."[736] Similarly, the focus of the *Visitations* exhibition was to further explore not just the afterlife of the individuals involved, but also the former living self of the bear and the multiple interdisciplinary connotations of their being.

In early July 2020, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson set out on a field trip to north Iceland to visit the arrival place of the female polar bear killed at Hraun in Skaga on 17

[735] See also: Ævar Petersen and Þórir Haraldsson, "Komur hvítabjarna til Íslands fyrr og síðar," in *Villt íslensk spendýr*, eds. Páll Hersteinsson and Guttormur Sigbjarnarson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska náttúrufræðifélag Landvernd, 1993), 74–78; Rósa Rut Þórisdóttir, *Hvítabirnir á Íslandi* (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Hólar, 2018).

[736] Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, "Untying the Knots: Relational Art and Interspecies Encounter," in *Animal Encounters: Kontakt, Interaktion Und Relationalität, Cultural Animal Studies 4*, eds. Alexandra Böhm and Jessica Ullrich, (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2019), 187–205, p. 189.

June 2008. Having witnessed the killing on that day, they retraced its steps and located the exact spot where she had arrived on the shore – and this time, they listened to the story of the killing described by the farmers who discovered it nearby.

It was important for the artists to anchor the killing of the two polar bears within the exhibition space. The female and the male skeletons, were borrowed from the Icelandic Institute of Natural History and their entire skeletal remains displayed, heaped at the bottom of two custom-built wooden boxes, both identical in size to those cardboard boxes used for their storage at the Institute. They named the work *Þverárfjall ♂ 3rd June 2008* and *Hraun ♀ 17th June 2008* (2021). This physical presence of the animal is reiterated in another work, entitled *Edge of the World* (2021). Here, scans of the female's bones were traced and arranged as graphic representations in the manner of 18th or 19th century natural history atlases, creating 15 silkscreen prints, mounted vertically on the museum wall. This series not only individualizes and separates the bones of the bear, but the artists turn these clinical displays into poetry by juxtaposing them with an alternate language system. On one hand, the obsolete display of the bear's skeleton, and on the other, at the bottom of each print, a text using words taken from sailing and boat-construction terminology such as "starboard rudder", "compass" and "stern". These two different biological and nautical classification systems reflect with some poignancy the ways that animals have been represented within the historically dominant culture of science that has framed our knowledge, while objectifying and instrumentalizing non-human animals.

Over the last decades, the "animal question" has been addressed in contemporary art from several interdisciplinary perspectives. The resulting and quite substantial bibliography dealing with human and non-human relations is predicated on ecological thought and the recognition that human and non- human lives have always been entwined.[737] Moreover, the postmodern engagement with a variety of issues connected to the animal world has raised significant ethical questions, requiring different and more integrated knowledge, as Ross Birrell has argued. However, as Rachel Poliquin points

[737] A good overview on the development of animal-studies is: Cary Wolfe, "Human, All Too Human: 'Animal Studies' and the Humanities," *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (March 2009): 564–75; Kenneth Shapiro, "Human-Animal Studies: Remembering the Past, Celebrating the Present, Troubling the Future," *Society & Animals* 28 (2020), 797–833; Erika Andersson Cederholm, Amelie Björck, Kristina Jennbert, Ann-Sofie Lönngren (eds.), *Exploring the Animal Turn: Human-Animal Relations in Science, Society and Culture* (Lund: Pufendorfinstitutet, 2014).

out in her book *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing,* the recent interest in animals cannot be fully explained by cultural or political discourse, climate change or environmental concerns. "Animals are not fixed entities fully explained by the hierarchies of natural order, or by recent political and cultural discourse, but rather, are provocative forces, both ruthlessly physical and semantically ambiguous."[738] These ambiguities, addressed by John Berger in his important essay, *Why Look at Animals?* is part of a growing realization of the malign consequences of the anthropocentrism that characterizes most societies, and in which human interests are always prioritized over those of the environment, including those of other animals.

Animal subjectivity and agency, a current topic in human-animal studies and its artistic expressions (from Joseph Beuys to Pierre Huyghe, Mircea Cantor, and many others), are far from new notions in philosophy and contemporary art practice. Thomas Nagel's much-quoted paper, "What is it Like to Be a Bat?",[739] and Wittgenstein's aphorism, "if a lion could talk, we would not understand him" are examples of such thinking.[740] As theorized by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, this "animal turn," is, moreover, one of the responses to the anthropocentric world view. If, for him, this anthropocentrism appears inevitable, this is because human experience is conditioned by its subjectivity and our human perspective. Thus, in his major work *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, he challenges the traditional divisions Western philosophy, science and culture draw between humans and animals, calling for a total abolition of these conventional human-animal borders.[741]

Feminist thought has further contributed to this interrogation of the meaning and consequences of anthropocentrism. For it is indeed "man" who lies at this centre, man who is granted sovereignty by God over earth, animals, and needless to say, woman. The apparent "naturalness" of this arrangement, whose ultimate repercussions are the ecological catastrophe we endure today, as well as the other consequences of this foundational inequality, hardly needs to be argued. Thus, the emergence of what is called

[738] Rachel Poliquin*, The Breathless Zoo. Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvia State University Press, 2012), 140.
[739] Thomas Nagel, "What is it Like to Be a Bat?," *Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974): 435–50.
[740] Cary Wolfe, "In the Shadow of Wittgenstein's Lion: Language, Ethics, and the Question of the Animal," in *Zoontologies*. *The Question of The Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1–57, p. 1.
[741] Jacques Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis* (Paris: éditions Galilées, 2006).

ecological feminism (and other variant terms) is the result of the recognition that patriarchy, anthropocentrism, capitalism and colonialism are mutually reinforcing, intersectional and integrally violent world views and practices.

This disastrous legacy affects all relations between the human and the non-human, creating a state of emergency that has become the main concern of Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson's multifaceted work. They continue to address these crises in *Visitations*, for instance in a 1:20-scale transparent glass maquette, entitled *Matrix*, representing a measured polar bear maternity den found in Svalbard some decades ago. It is one of a series of dens the artists made in 2016 as a result of their long-term research into polar bear habitats in Alaska, Greenland, and Svalbard.[742] By representing each individual den in the material form of blown glass sculpture, the artists transform the negative space of the den into a positive space, creating a transparent object that replicates the organic habitats female bears construct in the snow for their late gestation period, birthing and early raising of cubs. This fragile glass form mirrors the vulnerability of their future lives, their habitat often disturbed or destroyed by drilling and other oil and gas industrial work. Furthermore, climate change, the melting of ice and rising sea levels in these breeding areas impact increasingly on the dens. Simultaneously, the inorganic objectification of the den also translates our own sense of exclusion or alienation from the animal world and their indifference to us.

This work, *Matrix*, articulates the storytelling and the consequent knowledge production that emerges through these narratives – all of which were important components in the exhibition. A video installation (*Visitations I, II, III*) consists of interviews made by the artists, respectively with biologist Karl Skírnisson, nature scientist Ævar Pedersen, and taxidermist Þorvaldur Björnsson, all of whom have worked on polar bear research in Iceland for decades. These interviews function as a kind of pulse in the show, elaborating on current research and grounding the critical questions posed by the artists concerning the living being of the polar bear, including the violence involved in these human-animal encounters. Importantly, the scientists are not all male by accident. They remind us that institutional research is still governed and directed by a traditionally patriarchal power structure.

[742] Retrieved from: https://snaebjornsdottirwilson.com/category/projects/matrix/

The title of the project, *Visitations: Polar Bears Out of Place*, similarly constitutes another line of questioning, referring to the polar bear as a popular icon of the Arctic and its important place in the Imaginary in contemporary culture. But it also challenges ideas of Iceland as a "natural" home for polar bears, addressing unstable concepts such as the North and the Arctic itself – *Icelandicness* and *Icelandicity*.

As Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson remark in the interview with the Finnish artist Terike Haapoja: "We believe that the culturally-framed 'out of placeness' suggested in the title suffix, is itself unjust, since polar bears have been coming to Iceland, it is presumed, for millennia before humans themselves arrived. There is an urgency now to consider land, sea and air as spaces we must share as humans and with more-than-humans alike."[743] At the same time, it is clear that polar bears will never thrive in Iceland for a long time due to the lack of ice and therefore, a restricted food supply, in addition to which there are no conditions for bears to breed and produce offspring."[744]

However, even though the polar bear is only an occasional visitor to Iceland, it retains a strong presence in the language and the topographic landscape. In Icelandic, the bears are signified by several words such as *ísbjörn* (ice bear), *hvítabjörn* (white bear), *bjarndýr* (bear animal), *húni* (cub), or *björn* (bear). Many human names, male and female (surnames and first names) refer to the bear in a number of variations, and these names were traditionally believed to have a protective function (*Auðbjörn, Guðbjörn, Sveinbjörn, Björn, Bersi, Birna, Húni*). The bear is similarly present in the name of the artist herself – Snæbjörnsdóttir (Snow-bear's daughter) – sparking her initial interest in the cultural history of the polar bear. The presence of the polar bear is equally embedded in the landscape through a number of topographic place names that refer to bears or their arrivals, such as *Bjarnartangi, Bjarnarþúf*a, *Hvítabjarnarhólmi, Húnafjörður, Húnaflói, Hvítabjarnarflögur, Hvítabjarnarey,* etc.[745] This linguistic presence fuels a continuous cultural fascination prompted by the bear's physical strength and its white fur. When standing upright on its hind legs, it can invoke a physical resemblance to the upright

[743] Terike Haapoja, "Shared Worlds – a Conversation between Terike Haapoja, Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson," in *Debatable Lands. Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir/Mark Wilson*, ed. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir (Kópavogur: Gerðarsafn – Kópavogur Art Museum, 2021), 97–143, p. 142.
[744] "Hvítabjörn," www.ni.is/dyr/spendyr/hvitabjorn
[745] Retrieved from Örnefnasafn Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar, https://arnastofnun.is/is/ornefnasafn

human, reflected here in the vertical installation of the bear's bones in the screen print series, *Edge of the World.*

Likely, this posture of the animal has contributed to its mythological status, insofar as the upright position marks one border of human-animal distinction. In many of the local narratives, the bear is not only represented as a predator – starving after swimming for days from the north and drifting on ice – a source of fear and disturbance in these isolated communities. It has also been invested with mystical superpowers and the power to interfere in human lives. In describing the bear as a "foreign" *other*, the artists study "its multiple guises – such as a being, a cohabitant, visitor, environmental register, remnant and artefact."[746] These different modes can be respectively connected to individual works in the exhibition, as discussed in this text. How is it possible to gain access to an animal's experience of the world, especially if it is culturally categorized as an *other*? How can a human being imagine the sensorial world of a polar bear? Which are the social, psychological, and natural elements directing its trajectory? Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson have tackled these questions in larger scope in several of their earlier works, addressing other non-human animals, but the sensorial world of the polar bear was a constant stimulus in the *Visitation* research process, explored in workshops and other discussions with specialists.

Sabine Fischer, one of two recent MA fine art graduates invited to contribute to the show, composed a sound piece called *32 hours*, conceived as a fictional journey of a polar bear swimming from the coast of Greenland to the coast of Iceland. The distance between the north of Iceland and Greenland is about 300 km. A polar bear swims about 10 km per hour. In between, it floats on ice floes to rest. Fischer estimated a travel time of 32 hours to reach the Icelandic coast, during which time the bear would be surrounded by sounds of the sea, the wind, birds, etc. all of which her work sensorially evokes.

Even though it is the anticipation of the consequences of climate change, with its melting icecaps and meteorological disturbance that fuels the *Visitation* project and the exhibition, it was the ruthlessly physical and semantically ambiguous character of the polar bear visits that inspired and framed the curatorial discussions with the artists during the working process. The desire to portray the inner states of animals and the impossibility of doing so, is usually the driving force in the production of such trans-disciplinary art

[746] Retrieved from: http://visitations.lhi.is/

works.[747] Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson embrace and integrate this paradox and it has guided many of their works, such as the den from the *Matrix* series and the works *Þverárfjall♂ 3rd June 2008* and *Hraun♀ 17th June 2008,* already discussed.

Art historian Steve Baker claims that "There is something wilful, deliberate, and specific about each use of a dead animal body by a contemporary artist". He explains that it is "difficult to hold to any very sharp distinction between the singular art object and the representative museum specimen, or indeed to hold to any very sharp distinction between the deadness of the object and the liveliness of that same object." [748] This tension between the living animal (the registered polar bear arrivals indicated on the maps, the footage showing the animals before they were shot) and their physical remnants (bones, teeth) all make the absence of the [living] bear actively on the viewers' present. *Shooting the Messenger* (2021) is another manifestation of this imperative to individuate the animal through multiple references – in this case, to those shot in Hraun and Þverárfjall in June 2008. Here, the two bears' individual existences and lifespans are commemorated by conflating year-on-year cementum growth layers, revealed through biological research on their teeth, juxtaposed with extracts from legal and environmental Icelandic parliamentary debates, from those same respective years.[749] [Fig. 23]

The deaths of these polar bears were chaotic, random and violent, in keeping with their public representations. Their slaughter reflects not only the fear – but also the excitement of these violent encounters, transformed into spectacle when presented on the screen. María Sjöfn Dupuis Davíðsdóttir, who was also invited from the *Visitations* graduate artist program, amassed a visual public-media archive of polar bear arrivals. She collected this footage from RÚV (The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service) – the earliest extract dating from 1968, the most recent from 2016 – and created an installation of eight screens, strategically located towards the back of the exhibition.[750] The animals are usually photographed and filmed at very specific moments. First, when they are spotted from afar, by the sea or in a field, (sometimes sheep are mistaken for bears). They

[747] Helena Pedersen and Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir, "Art, Artistic Research and the Animal Question," *Art Monitor* 3 (2008), 109–23.
[748] Steve Baker, "Dead, Dead, Dead, Dead, Dead," in *Routledge Handbook of Human-Animal Studies*, eds. Garry Marvin and Susan McHugh (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 290–304, p. 291.
[749] Karl Skírnisson, "Um aldur og ævi hvítabjarna," *Náttúrufræðingurinn* 77. no.1–2 (2009), 39–45.
[750] María Sjöfn Dupuis Davíðsdóttir, *Polar Bear News 1968–2016,* 2020. News footage from RÚV, mixed media.

are most often observed on the shore, searching for food, sometimes following a road or approaching farms. The second representational matrix generally shows the wounded animal, grounded and bleeding. Afterwards, it is filmed and photographed when its dead body is hoisted by machines, usually enveloped in a net, and placed on the platform of a truck. All attempts to save the Hraun bear in 2008, when the government decided to fly in an expert from Copenhagen Zoo and to tranquilize the animal, were unsuccessful.

Representations of polar bear arrivals are known through a variety of visual and textual narratives, newspaper articles and archival photographs. Some images are kept secretly in family albums. These are typically trophy images, with the hunter's foot on the body of the animal or gesturing towards the injury with a rifle. Still other spectacular descriptions of bear hunting are recounted in the press, as in 1963, when fishermen caught a bear swimming close to their ship. They killed this healthy young male animal, 2.4 meters high, weighing 500 kg – and ate its heart.[751]

As described on the wall text accompanying the exhibition, uncertainty characterizes these human and animal encounters, informed and informing as they are with a complex array of emotions. As scholars such as the feminist Kari Weil have argued "[a]nimal studies, in this regard, joins trauma studies both because of the violence done to animals and their habitats (what indeed has been called a genocide), and because of the difficulty of assessing how animals experience that violence."[752] And she continues with the observation that "Like trauma studies, animal studies thus stretch to the limit questions of language, of epistemology, and of ethics that have been raised in various ways by women's studies or postcolonial studies: how to understand and give voice to others or to experiences that seem impervious to our means of understanding; how to attend to difference without appropriating or distorting it; how to hear and acknowledge what it may not be possible to say. "[753]

When brought into the museum as an image, a skeleton, or in the form of a visual or textual narrative, the animal never totally escapes the objectification of display. Traditional representations, such as those in maps, natural history atlases, and their sources, but also more spectacular representations of bears such as those on circus posters

[751] *Morgunblaðið*, June 21, 1963, 24; *Morgunblaðið*, June 26, 1963, 10; *Tíminn*, June 26, 1963, 6.
[752] Kari Weil, "A Report on the Animal Turn," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2010), 1–23, p. 4.
[753] Weil, 4.

and other advertisements for animal spectacles always lurk behind cultural readings. It is very important to Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson not to sensationalise animals' bodies or the violence involved in their treatment – and the killings that the media likes to celebrate. These tensions are articulated in *Visitations* by a series of collages, *When Once Comes Once Again* (2021), inspired by seven of the individual polar bear arrivals registered between 1880-2008.[754] Employing archival material, drawings, photographs and literal narratives from newspapers and annals, the artists recognize and honour each polar bear by providing its brief and violent human narrative in a form suggestive of zoo or circus posters. The repetitive melodrama of these examples further illuminates the problematic representation of animals in contemporary culture. As John Berger remarked, in the modern world, animals have been reduced to signs, symbols, representations, and abstractions.[755] This is the case with all wild animals, whose literal absence is "compensated" in contemporary culture through objects, toys, real and fake taxidermied bears placed in museum and other public spaces.

Breaking away from the metaphoricity of animal imagery, its representational meanings, its *mise en spectacle*, and its symbolic presence is an important part of the curatorial work developed with the artists. This, despite the fact that representation as non-representation is unattainable, as there is no *zero degree writing*, and as impossible as describing the sensorium of an animal.[756]

In her book *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art,* Jill Bennett rethinks affective approaches in contemporary art as a "conjunction of affect and critical awareness [that] may be understood to constitute the basis of an empathy grounded not in affinity (feeling for another insofar as we can imagine being that other) but on a feeling for another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible."[757] This critical empathy (whether in theory or in art) seems, however, inadequate to the issues it addresses. As demonstrated in Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson's work, an ethical relationship between humans and non-humans, cannot be separated from

[754] The titles of each individual collage work all refer to specific polar bear arrivals: *50 miles north of Hornvík, June 1993*; *Kolbeinsey, 1886*; *Raufarhöfn, 1914*; *Rekavík, Barð., 1916*; *Skagafjörður, June 2008*; *Loðmundarfjörður, 1882*;*Mjóifjörður, January 1918.*
[755] John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).
[756] Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970).
[757] Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 10.

a political and ethical stance that rejects the structural givens of both patriarchy and capitalism, the forces that over time have produced the Anthropocene and its environmental crises.

I have earlier described the politically committed background against which Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson construct their research with relational and archivally-based practices.[758] Relationality is, in fact, a key element in all their projects, a method reflected in the research processes through which they gather information and evidence by their contact with concerned specialist, individuals, and organizations. These encounters are often recorded or documented through photography, video or audio, and are often pivotal in influencing the structure and the development of the work.[759] Their approach also "makes a significant contribution to current discourse on the objectification of both human- and animal-others in borderless environments and as such, offers an alternative understanding of environmental ownership and response."[760] The works in the exhibition, as the *Visitation* project, and their work in general, all share a basis in critical animal studies – in what could be termed their theoretical DNA. Their differences in form and methods are mobilized as a destabilizing strategy by which collectively, they are able to stress the urgency – and indeed, the necessity – of rethinking the relationship of the human to the rest of the non-human world.

[758] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Outside and Inside of 'Trout Fishing in America and Other Stories,'" in *You Must Carry Me Now: The Cultural Lives of Endangered Species*, eds. Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson (Billdal: 248 Publishing, 2015), 61–71.
[759] Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, *Feral Attraction: The Museum of Ghost Ruminants /Ómur óbyggðanna: draugasafn jórturdýranna* (Billdal: 248 Publishing, 2019), 34–35.
[760] Retrieved from: http://visitations.lhi.is/

CONCLUSION

I first encountered the racial and cultural distinction between the concepts of *Icelandicness* and I*celandicity* through a chance encounter with an unpublished travel journal in the collection of the Archives Nationales in Paris. Probably written by the writer and journalist Charles Edmond, alias Choiecki (1822–1899), author of the *Voyage dans les Mers du Nord a bord de la Corvette La Reine Hortense* (1857), the journal describes the scientific expedition organized by Prince Napoléon during the summer of 1856. The Prince and his team, including a painter and a photographer, travelled by sea and land to Scotland, Iceland, Greenland, the Faeroe and Shetland Islands, Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The journal documents the search for and identification of racial types and the expedition's findings were documented in casts and photographs, exhibited in Paris later that year, as discussed in chapter six.[761]

Reading this mid-19th century journal, it became clear that the distinction between the geographic, cultural, and historical specificity of what could be described as *Icelandicness*, and the phantasmatic *Icelandicity* was already in place. As discussed in my Introduction, both concepts could be transposed or linked to a notion of a national identity, as Roland Barthes had argued in relation to *Italianicity*, an identity generated by contemporary discourses of tourism, advertising, and consumer culture in general.

The expedition in 1856 was not the first where the French government demonstrated their colonial interests in Iceland and the North. During the summers of 1835 and 1836, another, much larger and expedition was conducted by the naval doctor and naturalist Paul Gaimard (1793–1858), travelling to Greenland and Iceland. Later, they explored Lapland, Spitzbergen and the Faroe Islands (1838 and 1839–1840).[762] It was one of the first major interdisciplinary scientific explorations of the Atlantic North resulting in dozens of scholarly publications and popular travelogues written by Xavier Marmier, the expedition's official chronicler. The lithographs produced for the subsequent publications are exemplary of the French imperial gaze. Open for

[761] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "French photography in nineteenth-century Iceland," *History of Photography*, 23:1(1999): 10–17. The casts and the few surviving photographs are kept in Musée de l´Homme in Paris.
i[762] *Voyage en Islande et au Groenland exécuté pendant les années 1835 et 1836 sur la corvette la Recherche*, is a colossal research project published in Paris under the direction of Paul Gaimard from 1838–1852.

interpretation, they illustate not only a topographic, geologic and geographic vison of these landscapes that had been rarely illustrated, they also provided a cultural and aesthetic view of the habitants and their mores.

All nations are in some sense "imagined communities".[763] In this regard, in my research, I sought to examine the construction of national identities in the photographic archive kept in the National Museum of Iceland, demonstrating how Icelanders constructed their modern and gendered identities through the medium of photography.[764] The quest for both a national identity and independence from Denmark was the dominant goal of Icelandic politics during the first half of the twentieth century. This also served as the *raison d'être* of art and visual production, be it in institutional or non- institutional contexts. The creation in 1908 of a photographic archive at the National Museum of Iceland was in keeping with the institutional politics of the home-rule period (1904–18), as was the importance placed on creating images of nationhood in public space and encouraging notions of national identity through visual culture in general. This specific role of visual art within new nations underpinned the political and symbolic meanings already established 19th century genres: portrait, landscape, town life and urban architecture.

Similarly, the role of the National Gallery of Iceland (created in 1883) was defined in 1916 when it became a part of the National Museum, acquiring art that had a powerful symbolic value in Iceland's nation-building project. For new nations such as Iceland, visual imagery in all media, were thus instrumental in imagining and consolidating modern, national identities. This was further employed as an institutional tool, sustaining official narratives demonstrated, for example, in the organization of the 1939 Icelandic pavilion in New York, discussed earlier.

In 2001, Ólafur Kvaran, then director of the National Gallery of Iceland and curator of the exhibition *Confronting Nature. Icelandic Art of the 20th Century*, argued that "Nature, the countenance of the land, has played a significant role in Icelandic twentieth century art. At the same time, nature has been an important cornerstone of the Icelanders' cultural identity and is therefore not only a visible presence, but a part of the

[763] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
[764] Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, *Til gagns og til fegurðar. Sjálfsmyndir í ljósmyndum og klæðnaði 1860–1960.*

national consciousness."[765] Consequently, landscape was a privileged element in the national project, and "Icelandic nature" thus became an official iconography circulating through art exhibitions, in photographic albums, magazines, postcards and books.

As argued by Edward H. Huijbens "Spaces and places are key to the core brand of nations."[766] The continued manufacture of such images currently addresses cultural consumers no less than they do the global tourist of the twenty-first century longing for a "unique experience". Global luxury brands use Icelandic nature and landscape as signifiers for contemporary aspirations: unpolluted air, blue skies, clear water and, hardly last, the desire for unfettered individual freedom. As such, pure water and white icebergs on a glacial lagoon have become assimilated to a high-end tourism that has been readily appropriated by international luxury brands. Iceland is represented not only as an exotic destination – an "unspoiled" site of wonders primed for consumption – but also, as a space that offers spiritual transcendence, as can be found in various travellers' accounts: "It has distance, space, beauty – a place to be alone, a place to get lost in. Or a place to find yourself", wrote the British photographer John Cowan.[767] Similarly, Louis Vuitton's 2020/21 publicity campaign, previously discussed, *À la poursuite du rêve* (Towards a Dream), represented Icelandic landscapes as a magical escape during the year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Iceland's physical, geological, and geographical components still serve as a discursive subject, a conceptual idea, and a mental space, functioning as a topic in the work of several Icelandic and international artists, such as Ólafur Elíasson, Roni Horn, Rúrí, or Boomoon. However, the desire for communion with unspoiled nature is far from the concerns of all artists taking Iceland as their subject. Indeed, many of them take this romantic vision of a pristine environment with considerable scepticism. In fact, artists' relationship with the island as a homeland, nation state, geographical site, and a conceptual space is becoming increasingly complex as artists react to and engage directly with the changing role of Iceland in the global, ecological and political context.

---

[765] Ólafur Kvaran, "Preface," in *Confronting Nature: Icelandic Art of the 20th Century*, 9.
[766] Edward H. Huijbens, "Nation-Branding: A Critical Evaluation. Assessing the Image Building of Iceland," 571.
[767] John Cowan, American *Vogue*, 15 October 1970, quoted in Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Fashion That Came in from the Cold War: Faces of Colonialism in the Fashion Spread," in *Fashioned in the North: Nordic Histories, Agents, and Images of Fashion Photography*, p. 44.

In contrast to these discursive and romanticized constructions of *Icelandicity*, several artists have grounded their perceptions of Iceland in far grittier realities. In certin instances, as in work by Rob Hornstra, Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson, who define the role of the artist as a political and public figure, Iceland is presented as a banalized locale built on the ruins of Cold War industrialization and postwar neoliberalism. Seeking to develop a counternarrative to that of the nation-state, as discussed earlier, they explore alternative modes of representation. In their work *Your Country Doesn't Exist*, reproduced for the 2011 Venice Biennale, they staged multiple performances within this ongoing project. Representing the nation (be it Iceland or any other country) in a logo stating *Your Country Doesn't Exist*, the work is a provocative, but a thoughtful ongoing action that was first developed in 2003 for Istanbul, a year marked by massive global protests against the invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies. Since then, the project has contined using various formats, such as advertising posters and billboards, television and radio ads, performances, videos, sculptures, postage stamps or neon graffitis, expressed in different languages and contexts.[768]

In the 2011 Venice Biennale, an opera singer and a group of musicians performed their score *Constitution of the Republic of Iceland*, while sailing on a boat through the canals during the opening of the Biennale (also shown as a video work through the Biennale). Curator Simon Sheikh read this work as a nod to Judith Butler's *Who Sings the Nation-State*, arguing that the nation is always constituted in relation with something else, "coupled with another word," be it "a nation-state, an economic state, and a mental state."[769]

What about the artist? When artists are no longer national "state-workers," nor engaged in the production of *Icelandicness* (indeed, sometimes participating in the marketing of Iceland that feeds notions of *Icelandicity*) where should we locate the artist's role in contemporary postnational configurations? Where are the new imagined communities?

[768] Retrieved from: https://psjm.es/en/proyecto/your-country-doesnt-exist-libia-castro-olafur-olafsson/
[769] Simon Sheikh, "Avant–Garde Citizens, Double Agents, and Model Workers," in *Under Deconstruction. Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson*, ed. Ellen Blumenstein (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 27–33, p. 31; Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (Oxford: Seagull Books, 2007).

I have discussed the various ways that artists in the 1970s embraced different forms of political resistance and social activism, later countering the values and practices of early 21st-century neoliberalism. Their aims were generally under the aegis of environmental conservation and preservation. More recently, other critical voices have targeted the juggernaut of neoliberalism, including within their critique its relations to the inequalities of gender, race, and sexuality, as in the art of Magnús Sigurðarson and Ólöf Nordal, discussed in chapter six.

As Simon Sheikh quoting Agamben, observes, the nexus state/nation/territory must be called into question. However, as Sheikh argues "An artist is […] not only involved in acts of representation but is also both represented and a representative."[770] These facets of contemporary artistic identities have diverse expressions. Who is representing whom? In their multifaceted work, Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson express resistance to the idea of the nation state and to global capitalism in general. Rúrí, Ósk Vilhjálmsdóttir, Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson also address social spaces, here too, with particular stress on ecological issues. Even though there is little direct connection between these different forms of resistance, it is clear that all these artists place resistance to neoliberalism at the core of their practices.

But can these forms of critical practice be applied to Ragnar Kjartansson in his recent, but aborted project in Moscow? I refer here to his grandiose commission based on a reenactment of the American TV series *Santa Barbara*, with an all-Russian cast, created for the GES-2 House of Culture in Moscow. Described on the GES-2 website as "a form of a living sculpture" (paraphrasing Joseph Beuys' *Living Sculpture* in Kassel, 1977), Kjartansson's work has also been likened to large-scale history painting.[771] The choice of Santa Barbara, the T.V. series, was not adventitious. It turns out that many Russian neighbourhoods, towns and villages have been re-named in homage to the series. But more significantly, the immense popularity of this soap opera on the television screens of post-Soviet Russia expressed something about the country's imaginary, underpinned by the post 1989 destruction of the entire economic Soviet system. Francesco Manacorda, then artistic director of the V–A–C Foundation, claims that "With this monumental work, Ragnar Kjartansson pays homage to Russian culture and its passion for the ability of art,

[770] Simon Sheikh, 30.
[771] Retrievd from GES2 website: https://v-a-c.org/en/ges2/ragnar-kjartansson-extended-performance-santa-barbara

fiction and theatre to convey emotions."[772] As it happened, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the third month of Kjartansson's residency brought the project to an abrupt halt. Leaving Moscow, Kjartansson stepped into the old role of the *passeur*, helping Maria Alyokhina, a founding member of Pussy Riot, to escape Russia clandestinely for Europe in May 2022. A few months later, he co-curated the show *Velvet Terrorism: Pussy Riot's Russia* (that opened on 24 November 2022), at the Kling & Bang gallery in Reykjavík, inviting "the audience to explore a labyrinth of the group's guerrilla actions and the serious consequences of executing them."[773]

This leads us to the conclusion that when local artists, such as Ragnar Kjartansson, attain the cosmopolitan global artworld at its highest level, be it GES2 or other privately run contemporary mega-art venues throughout the world (including biennial culture and contemporary art nomadism), they encounter another face of the global artworld, namely its violence. Whether incarnated in the toppling of statues and monuments, by activists' exposure of the embedded racism in public art, national museums and their discourses, and the various struggles to reclaim public space, these comprise the other side of art fairs, biennials, and oligachs' exhibition venues. As art historians Caroline A. Jones and Steve Nelson have argued: "The global we want to advocate for in the practice of art history today involves acknowledging such violence – a violence attested by objects (Native American ledgers) as well as concepts (the rigorous questioning of the motives of appropriation and othering found in the work of scholars such as Coomaraswamy, Goldwater, and Said, among others), a violence that figures *in and as* the global."[774]

Iceland can no longer play the innocent.[775] This often violent reality and the metaphor of crossing borders seems to be at stake here. Not in the image of the bohemianism of Dieter Roth as a go-between, crossing cultural borders in the late 1950s and 1960s, or the travelling tricksterism of Robert Fillou in the 1970s, advocating for his *Eternal Network*, east and west of the Iron Curtain, buth rather as in the political approach of Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson who implant and instate a principled postnationalism

[772] Retrieved from GES2 website: https://v-a-c.org/en/ges2/ragnar-kjartansson-extended-performance-santa-barbara
[773] The exhibition was curated by Dorothee Kirch, Ingibjörg Sigurjónsdóttir and Ragnar Kjartansson. Retrieved from the Kling & Bang website: http://this.is/klingogbang/index.php?lang=en&
[774] Caroline A. Jones and Steven Nelson, "Global turns in US art history," *Perspective* [Online], 2 | 2015.
[775] Discussed in Kristín Loftsdóttir and Sanna Magdalena Mörtudóttir, "'Where Are You From?': Racism and the Normalization of Whiteness in Iceland."

in their work, bringing into play, for example, questions of segregation and the right of residence in respect to migrant workforce and refugees.

Jones and Nelson have also noted that "It is a simple fact that our discipline [art history] was fueled by taxonomies organized by language, nation, and place that emerged from the great collector-connoisseurs of the Enlightenment (Pierre-Jean Mariette and Adam Bartsch), and were consolidated by the keepers of the treasure hoards of Europe (from Alois Riegl to André Malraux). In these domains, art history was for the most part ruled by national and linguistic schools, driven by a romance with geographical genius ("Dutch landscape"), and periodized under the sign of nations that had in fact been established long after the artworks in question ("Italian Renaissance"). Not surprisingly, then – with a few exceptions here and there – the discipline has been slow to propose questions on a global, transnational level, especially when compared with the fields of anthropology, sociology, or history in general."[776]

Academic tradition is haunted by a certain fear of interdisciplinarity despite the fact that interdisciplinary methods have been encouraged within university faculties since the late 1990s. Another characteristic of interdisciplinary research is the use of heterogenous sources. Using, as I have, fashion magazines, artworks, as well as public historical archives as equivalent sources obviously goes against the grain of traditional hierarchies (such as that between elite and mass cultural expression). In this regard, I have integrated notions of gender, race, liminality, hybridity, identity, and branding, as conceptual frameworks, enabling a critical take on both the liberal and the neoliberal commodification of culture and their articulations and representations of *Icelandicity*. Similarly, I have employed a critical feminist lens, because, as discussed in chapter five, feminist theory teaches us to attend to what lies outside the frame of patriarchal knowledge. However, feminist and gendered reseach still remains marginal in academic research. My ambition is to integrate this interdisciplinary approach into the study of art and visual culture and question the groundings of national narratives. This study is also my contribution to future recognition and implementation of feminist scholarship in art and visual culture.

[776] Carolina A. Jones and Steven Nelson, "Global Turns in US Art History."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abell, Jeff. “hannahhiggins,” Interview recorded in Chicago, November 2003. Online at: http://mouthtomouthmag.com/higgins.html

“Abigail Solomon-Godeau in a Conversation on Feminism and Art with Katarina Rosengren Falk”. Online at: http://www.truewomance.com/en/abigail-solomon-godeau-in-a-conversation-on-feminism-and-art-with-katarina-rosengren-falk/ (consulted 30 April 2020).

“500 handunnir keramikmunir á sýningu (500 handmade ceramic objects exhibited).” *Morgunblaðið*, June 17, 1960, 11.

Adrichem, Jan van. “Progressive Galleries in the 1960s and 1970s: Riekje Swart, Art & Project and Helen van de Meij. “In *Positioning the Art Gallery. The Amsterdam Gallery World in an International Context*, eds. Noor Mertens and Astrid Vorstermans, 55–93. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2012.

Agamben, Giorgio. “What is the Contemporary?” In *What is an Apparatus? And other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, 39–54. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.

Amirsadeghi, Hossein. ‘‘The Nordic Brand.’’ In *Nordic Contemporary: Art from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden*, ed. Hossein Amirsadeghi, 6–9. London: Thames & Hudson, 2014.

Andrésson, Birgir. *Eyktarmörk séð frá Hækingsdal í Kjós*. Maastricht: Jan Van Eyck Academie, 1977.

Ágústsson, Hörður. “Af minnisblöðum málara.” *Birtingur* 9, no. 1 (1963): 9–25.

–. “Af minnisblöðum málara.” *Birtingur* 9, no. 2 (1963): 20–36.

–. “Fyrirlestrar um torfhús.” *Tíminn*, November 11, 1964, 2.

Aró. “Listahátíð. Ljósmyndir og bókverk.” *Þjóðviljinn* September 28, 1985, 9.

Ahmed, Sara. “A Phenomenology of Whiteness.” *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149–68.

Alberro, Alexander. “Introduction: The Way Out is the Way In.” In *Art After Conceptual Art*, eds. Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann, 13–25. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006.

–. “Periodising Contemporary Art.” In *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence; The Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art*, ed. Jaynie Anderson, 935–39. Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2009.

–. “Periodising Contemporary Art.” *October* 130 (Fall 2009): 55–60.

–. Response to “Questionnaire on the Contemporary.” *October* 130 (Fall 2009): 55–60.

– and Patricia Norvell (eds.). *Recording Conceptual Art.* Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001.

– and Blake Stimson (eds.). *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999.

Aldred, Oscar. “The Idea of Landscape in Icelandic Archaeology,” *Archaeologia Islandica* 5 (2006): 9–26.

Alloway, Laurence. “Women’s Art in the 70s.” *Art in America* 64 (May–June 1976): 64–72.

Aloi, Giovanni. *Speculative Taxidermy: Natural History, Animal Surfaces, and Art in the Anthropocene.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

Alsen, Katharina and Annika Landmann. *Nordische Malerei: im Licht der Moderne.* München: Prestel, 2016.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

Andersson Cederholm, Erika, Amelie Björck, Kristina Jennbert, Ann-Sofie Lönngren (eds.). *Exploring the Animal Turn: Human-Animal Relations in Science, Society and Culture.* Lund: Pufendorfinstitutet, 2014.

Andersson, Patrik. “Rörelse i konsten: The Art of Re-assemblage.” *Konsthistorisk tidskrift* 78, no. 4 (2009): 178–92.

Andreassen, Rikke. *Human Exhibitions: Race, Gender and Sexuality in Etnic Displays.* New York: Routledge, 2016.

Andrésson, Markús Þór. "Invisible Fish." In Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson, *Under Deconstruction*, 92. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012.

Anholt, Simon. *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimension of Globalization.* Minneapolis: Univeristy of Minnesota Press, 1996.

"Argentínsk sýning hjá SÚM." *Morgunblaðið*, May 25, 1974, 19.

Ari and Ásgeir, "SÚM IV í Amsterdam." *Þjóðviljinn*, February 23, 1971, 6.

Arnardóttir, Aldís. *Experimental Environment II. Norræn myndlistarsýning að Korpúlfsstöðum árið 1980.* MA dissertation. Reykjavík: University of Iceland, 2014.

Aronsson, Peter: "Introduction:Uses of the Past – Nordic Historical Cultures in a Comparative Perspective." *Culture Unbound. Journal of Current Cultural Research* 2, no. 5 (2010), 553–563. http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se

Arnórsdóttir, Unnur. "'Bossa-Nova'!!!"*Tíminn*, May 20, 1965, 13.

Aró. "Listahátíð. Ljósmyndir og bókverk." *Þjóðviljinn* September 28, 1985, 9.

Árnadóttir, Arndís and Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir. "Documentation of Vernacular Architecture in Iceland." In *Documentation of Nordic Art*, ed. Charlotte Hanner. 42–57. München: K. G. Saur, 1993.

Árnadóttir, Heiða Björk. "Listasafn Íslands (1884)." In *Saga listasafna á Íslandi*, ed. Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson, 12–61. Reykjavík: Rannsóknasetur í safnafræðum við Háskóla Íslands, 2019.

–. *The Conceptual, the Romantic, and the Nonhuman: The SÚM Group and the Emergence of Contemporary Art in Iceland, 1965–1978*. PhD dissertation. Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2019.

Árnason, Hjörvarður. "Listastefnur í Evrópu og Ameríku I." *Helgafell*, 3, no. 1–4 (1944): 102–12.

–. “Listastefnur í Evrópu og Ameríku II.” *Helgafell* 3, no. 5–10 (1944): 316–26.

–. “Listastefnur í Evrópu og Ameríku III.” *Helgafell* 4, no. 2 (1945): 134–42.

–. “Nútíma byggingarlist.” *Jörð* 4, no. 5 (1943): 383–99.

Árnason, Jón. *Icelandic Legends, Collected by Jón Arnason* (1846–1866), eds. Eiríkur Magnússon and G. E. J. Powell. London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1866.

Ástgeirsdóttir, Kristín (et al).“Feminismi”. *Vera* 6, no. 2 (1987): 12 – 19.

Baker, Steve. “Dead, Dead, Dead, Dead, Dead.” in *Routledge Handbook of Human-Animal Studies*, eds. Garry Marvin and Susan McHugh, 290–304. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Bakker, Douwe Jan. *Een vokabulaire beeldveerzameling in het Ijslandse landschap*. Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 1977. Exhibition catalogue.

–. “Foto’s uit Ijsland /Photos from Iceland.“ *Forum: Voor architecktuur en darmee verbonden Kunsten* 25, no. 2 (November – December 1975), 26–59.

–. “Gallerí tímaritsins,“ *Svart á hvítu* 2, no. 2 (1978), 37–39.

Baldacchino, Godfrey. “The Lure of the Island: A Spatial Analysis of Power Relations.” *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* 1, no. 2 (2012): 55–62.

Baldwin, Andrew, Laura Cameron and Audrey Kobayashi (eds.). “Introduction. Where is the Great White North? Spatializing History, Historicizing Whiteness.” In *Rethinking the Great White North: Race, Nature, and the Historical Geographies of Whiteness in Canada*, 1–18. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011.

Banes, Sally. *Greenwich Village 1963. Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993.

Barbereau, Yoann. “Expérience et performance: Fragments d’un dialogue pragmatiste.” *Revue d’Esthétique* 44 (2003): 24–35.

Barthes, Roland. “Le Bleu est à la mode cette année. Note sur la recherche des unités signifiantes dans le vêtement de la mode.” *Revue française de sociologie* 1 (1960): 147–62.

–. *The Fashion System*, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983. [Original ed.: *Système de la mode*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967].

–. “Myth Today.” In *Mythologies*, ed. and trans. Annette Lavers, 107–64. New York: The Noonday Press, 1991(1972) [Original ed.: *Mythologies*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957].

–. “Rhetoric of the Image.” In *Image, Music, Text,* trans. Stephen Heath, 32–51. London: Fontana Press, 1977. [Original ed.: “Rhétorique de l'image.” *Communications* 4, no. 1 (1964): 40–51].

–. *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. New York: Hill and Wang, 1970. [Original ed.: *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1953].

Bárðarson, Hjálmar R. *Ísland farsælda frón: Billeder fra Island: Iceland Illustrated: Images d'Islande: Island im Bild: Vistas de Islandia.* Reykjavík: Lithoprent og Hjálmar R. Bárðarson, 1953.

Becker, Howard S. *Art Worlds.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

Beech, Dave and Mel Jordan. “Toppling Statues, Affective Publics and the Lessons of the Black Lives Matter Movement.” *APS (Art & the Public Sphere)* 10, no. 1 (2021): 3–15.

Benediktsson, Karl. “A Stroll through Landscapes of Sheep and Humans.” In *Conversations with Landscape*, eds. Karl Benediktsson and Katrín Anna Lund, 173–91. London: Routledge, 2011.

Bennett, Jill. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Berg van den, Hubert and Walter Fähnders (eds.). “Die *künstlerische* Avantgarde im 20. Jahrhundert – Einleitung.” In *Metzler Lexikon Avantgarde,* 1–19. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2009.

Berger, John. *About Looking.* New York: Pantheon, 1980.

Bergsson, Guðbergur. “Andinn sem ríkti í SÚM.” In *SÚM 1965–1972*, ed. G. Kvaran, 105–14. Reykjavík: Listasafn Reykjavíkur – Kjarvalsstaðir, 1989.

–. “In our times the primal source can’t be known from the water that springs from it,” in *Udstillingen H_2O,* ed. Hildur Hákonardóttir. Nikolaj Kirke in Copenhagen March 20 – Dec. 1, 1974. Reykjavík: Súm, 1974. Exhibition catalogue.

–. “Þetta á ekki að vera nein sparifatasýning,” *Þjóðviljinn*, March 14, 1974, 4.

Bernburg, Jón Gunnar. *Economic Crisis and Mass Protest: The Pots and Pans Revolution in Iceland*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

Biddle, Ian. *Music, Masculinity and the Claims of History: The Austro-German Tradition from Hegel to Freud*. London, Ashgate, 2016 (2011).

Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso, 2012.

Bjarni Jónsson, “Einar frá Galtafelli og Ingólfur. Erindi flutt á Ingólfskvöldi 31. janúar.” *Huginn*, February 7, 1908, 1.

Björnsson, Björn Th. *Íslenzk myndlist á 19. og 20. öld. Drög að sögulegu yfirliti*, Vol. I–II. Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1964 and 1973.

Björnsson, Björn Th. "Staða og stefna íslenskrar myndlistar.” *Tímarit Máls og menningar*, 24, no. 1 (1963): 27–35.

Blanck, Dag. "Scholars across the Seas: The American-Scandinavian Foundation and the Sweden-America Foundation in the Trans-Atlantic Exchange of Knowledge," *American Studies in Scandinavia* 40, no. 1–2 (2008): 110–25.

Blöndal, Kristín.“Listahátíð” (Interview with Guðrún Erla Geirsdóttir). *Vera* 4:6 (1985): 8–10.

Bonnemaison, Joël. ″Vivre dans l'île. Une approche de l'îléité océanienne,″ *L'Espace géographique* 2 (1990): 119–25.

Bonnet, Marie-Josèphe. "L'avant-garde, un concept masculin?" *Itinéraires* 1 (2012): 173–84. http://itineraires.revues.org/1336; doi: 10.4000/itineraires.1336.

Borgarskipulag Reykjavíkur: *Umhverfi og útivist (Urban planning of Reykjavík: environment and outdoor living).* Reykjavík: City Plan, 1998.

Borysovych, O. V., T. A. Chaiuk, and K. S. Karpova, "Black Lives Matter: Race Discourse and the Semiotics of History Reconstruction." *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* 9, no. 3 (2020): 325–40.

Bossé, Laurence and Hans Ulrich Obrist (eds.). *Nuit Blånche: Scènes Nørdiques: les années 90*. Paris: Musée de l'Art de la Ville de Paris, 1998. Exhibition catalogue.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Le Nord et le Midi: Contribution à une analyse de l'effet Montesquieu." *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. *L'identité* 35 (November 1980): 21–25.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics,* trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland. Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002.

Bracke, Maud Anne. "Between the Transnational and the Local: Mapping the Trajectories and Contexts of the Wages for Housework Campaign in 1970s Italian Feminism." *Women's History Review* 22, no. 4 (2013): 625–42.

Brady, Emily. *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*. *Aesthetics, Ethics and Nature*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Brah, Avtar, and Annie Coombes (eds.). *Hybridity and its Discontents*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Braidotti, Rosi. "The Contested Posthumanities." In *Conflicting Humanities*, eds. R. Braidotti and P. Gilroy. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Brandt Corstius, Liesbeth. *Feministische kunst internationaal. Performances, video, film, documentatie.* Amsterdam / Den Haag: Stichting De Appel / Stichting Vrouwen in de Beeldende Kunst, 1978. Exhibition catalogue.

Bret, Cyrille. “Les performances pédagogiques de Robert Filliou. Pour une histoire de la ‘création permanente’ comme science de l’éducation.” In *Transmettre l’art. Figures et méthodes – Quelle histoire?*, eds. Christophe Kihm and Valérie Mavridorakis, 111–28. Dijon: Les presses du reél, 2014.

Breton, André. “Manifesto of Surrealism (1924).” In *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane. 1– 48. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969.

Briem, Helgi P. *Iceland and the Icelanders*. Color Photography by Vigfús Sigurgeirsson. Maplewood: John Francis McKenna Company, 1945.

Brinton, Christian, Karl Madsen, Jens Thiis and Carl G. Laurin, *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art*. New York: Redfield Brothers, Inc., 1912. Exhibition catalogue.

Brown, Elspeth H. “De Meyer at *Vogue*: Commercializing Queer Affect in First World War-era Fashion Photography.” *Photography & Culture* 2, no. 3 (November 2009): 253–74.

Bruun, Andreas. *Illustreret Vejledning over dansk Koloniudstilling, Grønland og dansk Vestindien samt Udstilling fra Island og Færøerne, aut. Udg. med 45 Billeder ved F. Hendriksen 31. maj til den 24. september 1905*. https://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/den-danske-koloniudstilling-i-tivoli-1905/

Bruun, Daniel. *Færøerne, Island og Grønland paa Verdensudstillingen i Paris 1900*. Kjøbenhavn: Nielsen & Lydiche, 1901.

Brydon, Anne. “Inscriptions of Self: The Construction of Icelandic Landscape in Nineteenth-Century British Travel Writings.” *Ethnos* 60, no. 3–4 (1995): 243–63.

–. “Náttúran, mótmæli og nútíminn,” *TMM* 62, no. 2 (2001): 45–49.

–. “The Predicament of Nature. Keiko the Whale and the Cultural Politics of Whaling in Iceland.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2006): 225–60.

–. “Whale-Siting. Spatiality in Icelandic Nationalism.” In *Images of Contemporary Iceland. Everyday Lives and Global Contexts*, eds. Gísli Pálsson and E. Paul Durrenberger, 25–45. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1996.

Bryman, Alan. *The Disneyization of Society*. London: Sage Publishers, 2004.

Brzyski, Anna W. “By Whose Rules? Contemporary Art and Geography of Art Historic Significance.” *Artl@s Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 46–51.

Buchloh, Benjamin H. D. “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of the Administration to the Critique of Institutions.” *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 105–43.

Bunford Samuel, J. *A Word Sketch of Fairmount Park*. Philadelphia: 1917.

Burch, Stuart. “Noetic Norden: Assembling and Dissembling the Art of ‘the North.’” In *Linköping Electronic Conference Proceedings: Kultur–Natur: Konferens för kulturstudier i Sverige*, 333–38. Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2009. https://ep.liu.se/ecp/040/029/ecp0904029.pdf

Burch, Stuart. “Norden Reframed.” *Culture Unbound. Journal of Current Cultural Research.* Thematic Section: Uses of the Past – Nordic Historical Cultures in a Comparative Perspective, 2, no. 5 (2010): 565–581. Retrieved from http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. London: J. Dodsley, 1757.

Butler, Judith. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitutions: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31.

Bydler, Charlotte. “Revisiting the Past: A Brief Introduction to Nordic Art.” In *Nordic Contemporary: Art from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden*, ed. Hossein Amirsadeghi, 10–19. London: Thames & Hudson, 2014.

Byrne, David. “Moral Dilemmas & Inside Out.” In *Reality Check: Focus on Photography*, ed. Jóhanna Vigdís Guðmundsdóttir, 12–13. Reykjavík: Reykjavík Arts Festival, 2010.

Canarezza, Rita. “Interview with Christian Schoen, Director of CIA – Center for Icelandic Art, Reykjavík, Iceland.” In *Little Constellation.Contemporary Art in Geocultural*

Micro-areas and Small States of Europe, ed. Chiara Leoni, 178–82. Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2010. Exhibition catalogue.

Canclini, Néstor García. *Art beyond Itself: Anthropology for a Society without a Story Line*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

–. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving* Modernity. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2005.

Carmignani, Paul. ″Introduction.” In *Figures du passeur*, ed. P. Carmignani, 17–18. Perpignan: Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 2002.

Cherix, Christophe. “Greetings from Amsterdam.” In *In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960–1976*, ed. Christophe Cherix, 13–22. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009. Exhibition catalogue.

–. “Preface.” *In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960–1976*, ed. Christophe Cherix, 9–12. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009. Exhibition catalogue.

Childers, Jodie. “The Toppling of Þorfinnur: Vandalism as Dialogue and Direct Action,” December 21, 2020. *U.S. Studies Online*. Retrieved from https://usso.uk/the-toppling-of-thorfinnur-vandalism-as-dialogue-and-direct-action/

Christiansen, Svein (ed.), *Borealis 2: Posisjon: Nord*. Helsinki and Hovikodden: Nordic Arts Center and Henie-Onstad Art Centre, 1985. Exhibition catalogue.

Clavez, Bertrand. “Fluxus: Reference or Paradigm for Young Contemporary Artists?” *Visible Language* 39, no. 3 (2005): 236–47.

Clément, Guillaume. “De Britpop à Cool Britannia : une identité britannique revue et corrigée par le New Labour.” *Observatoire de la société britannique* 5/2008, 195–209.

Cooper Richet, Diana. *Passeurs culturels dans le monde des médias et de l’édition en Europe (XIxe et XXe siècles)*. Lyon: Presses de l’ENSSIB, 2005.

Cooper, Sarah and Nina Gorfer (eds.). *These are the Weather Diaries*. Reykjavík: Nordic House, 2014.

Collingwood, W. G. *W. G. Collingwood's Letters from Iceland. Travels in Iceland 1897 by W.G. Collingwood and Jón Stefánsson*, eds. Mike and Kate Lea. Cardiff: R. G. Collingwood Society, 2013.

Corbetta, Caroline. "Everyone is Decadent These Days." *Mousse Magazine* 15 (Oct–Nov 2008): 32–35.

Cowan, John. "Flash: The Arctic." *Vogue*, November, 1, 1964, 127–41.

–. "The Landfarers. Racy New Looks." American *Vogue*, October 15, 1970.

–. "Vogue's Spotlight Travel." American *Vogue*, October 15, 1970.

Cras, Sophie. "Global Conceptualism? Cartographies of Conceptual Art in Pursuit of Decentering." In *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, eds. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux–Prunel, 167–82. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015.

Cubitt, Geoffrey. *History and Memory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.

d'Aubigne, Agrippa. *Les Tragiques*, ed. Jean-Raymond Fanlo. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1995 (1616).

DaCosta Kaufmann, Thomas, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel. "Introduction. Reintroducing Circulations: Historiography and the Project of Global Art History." In *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, eds T. D. Kaufmann, C. Dossin and B. Joyeux-Prunel, 1–22. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015.

DaCosta Kaufmann, Thomas, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (eds.). *Circulations in the Global History of Art*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015.

Daðason, Sigfús. "Sjálfstæð nútímamenning eða sníkjumenning." *Tímarit Máls og menningar*, 21, no. 4 (1960): 252–57.

–. "Veruleiki og yfirskin (I)," *Tímarit máls og menningar* 24, no. 1 (1963): 12–26.

–. "Veruleiki og yfirskin (II)," *Tímarit máls og menningar* 24, no. 2 (1963): 99–112.

Daniel Buren. Staðsetning/Vörpun/Tilfærsla – Staðbundin verk (Placed/Projected/Displaced – Situated Works), ed. Hannes Lárusson. Reykjavík: Reykjavík Arts Festival, National Gallery of Iceland and Gallerí 11, 1992.

Daniel, Marion. “Dieter Roth, Processing the World.” In *Dieter Roth, Processing the World* (Frac Bretagne 14 December 2013 – 9 March 2014), ed. Marion Daniel, 17–31. Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2014. Exhibition catalogue.

Danto, Arthur C. “Impressions of Iceland.” In *Confronting Nature: Icelandic Art of the 20th Century*, eds. Ólafur Kvaran and Karla Kristjánsdóttir, 11–13. Reykjavík: National Gallery of Iceland, 2001. Exhibition catalogue.

–. *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

David, Robert G. *The Arctic in the British Imagination 1818–1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.

Davíðsdóttir, Brynhildur. “The Price is Right?” In *Art, Ethics and Environment. A Free Enquiry Into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature*, eds. Ólafur Páll Jónsson and Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, 125–41. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar Press, 2006.

Davidson, Peter. *The Idea of North*. London: Reaktion Books, 2005.

de Saint-Simon, Henri. “L’Artiste, le savant et l’industriel.” In *Œuvres complètes de Saint-Simon et d’Enfantin*, vol. 10, 201–58. Paris: E. Dentu, 1875.

de Teneuille, Marie-Dominique (ed.), *A fleur de peau. Le moulage sur nature au XIXe siècle*. Paris: Musée d’Orsay/RMN, 2001. Exhibition catalogue.

Debord, Guy and Gil J. Wolman, “A User's Guide to Détournement” (1956). In *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb, 14–21. Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006 [1981]).

Delhaye, Christine. “Immigrants’ Artistic Practices in Amsterdam, 1970–2007: A Political Issue of Inclusion and Exclusion.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34, no. 8 (2008): 1301–21.

Derrida, Jacques. *L’animal que donc je suis*. Paris: éditions Galilées, 2006.

Dibben, Nicola. *Björk*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.

–. “Nature and Nation: National Identity and Environmentalism in Icelandic Popular Music Video and Music Documentary.” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 18, no. 1 (June 2009): 131–51.

Dinnie, Keith. *Nation Branding. Concepts, Issues, Practice*. London/ New York: Routledge, 2014.

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger*. New York: Routledge, 1966.

Drake, Cathryn. "Diary. Amazing Race." *Artforum*, May 25, 2008. https://www.artforum.com/diary/cathryn-drake-around-the-reykjavik-arts-festival-20273

Drayton, Richard. "Rhodes Must Not Fall?" *Third Text* 33, no. 4–5 (2019): 651–66.

Dyer, Richard. *White*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Eagles, Julian. "The Spectacle and Détournement: The Situationists Critique of Modern Capitalist Society." *Critique* 40, no. 2 (2012): 179–98.

Eco, Umberto. *The Open Work*, trans. by Anna Cancogni with an introduction by David Robey. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989 (1962).

Edelson, Mary-Beth. "Two Photographs." *A Journal of Women Studies* 14, no. 1 (1993): 131–33.

Edensor, Tim. *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg, 2002.

Edwards, Steve. "Allan Sekula's Chronotopes: Uneven & Combined Capitalism." In Hilde Van Gelder(ed.), *Ships of Fools / The Docker's Museum*, ed. Hilde Van Gelder, 31–43. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2015.

Egilsson, Sveinn Yngvi. *Arfur og umbylting*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1999.

–. "Iceland as an Imaginary Place in a European Context – Some Literary Representations." *Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek* 36, no. 2 (2018/19): 34–43.

–. *Náttúra ljóðsins. Umhverfi íslenskra skálda*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2014.

–. "Ways of Addressing Nature in a Northern Context. Romantic Poet and Natural Scientist Jónas Hallgrímsson." In *Conversations with Landscape*, eds. Karl Benediktsson and Katrín A. Lund. Farnham, 157–71. Surrey, & Burlington, Vermont: Routledge, 2010.

Eisner, Will. *Comics and Sequential Art*. Tamarac, Flor.: Poorhouse Press, 1985.

Ekeberg, Jonas. *Postnordisk. Den nordiske kunstscenens vekst og fall 1976-2016*. Oslo: Torpedo Press, 2019.

Eldjárn, Kristján. *Hundrað ár í Þjóðminjasafni*. Reykjavík: Menningarsjóður, 1962.

Eliassen, Knut Ove. ″The Archives of Michel Foucault.″ In *The Archive in Motion: New Conceptions of the Archive in Contemporary Thought and New Media Practices*, ed. Eivind Rosaak, 29–53. Oslo: Novus, 2010.

Elíasson, Ólafur and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *The Goose Lake Trail (Southern Ro*ute), published on the occasion of the Eiðar Art Center Gathering in Iceland, August 2006. Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2006.

Elkins, James. "Art History as a Global Discipline." In *Is Art History Global*?, ed. James Elkins, 3–23. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Ellenberger, Íris. "Íslendingar í heimi framtíðarinnar: Kvikmyndir Vigfúsar Sigurgeirssonar og landkynningarvakningin 1935–40." In *Þjóðin, landið og lýðveldið: Vigfús Sigurgeirsson ljósmyndari og kvikmyndagerðarmaður*, ed. Inga Lára Baldvinsdóttir, 27–48. Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2008.

–. "Somewhere Between 'Self' and 'Other': Colonialism in Icelandic Historical Research." In *Nordic Perspectives on Encountering Foreignness,* eds. Anne Folke Henningsen, Leila Koivunen and Taina Syrjämaa, 99–114. Turku: University of Turku, 2009.

Elleström, Lars. "The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations." In *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström, 11–48. London, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020 (2010).

Enwezor, Okwui. *Archive Fever – Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*. New York: International Center of Photography, 2008.

–. "Documentary/Verité: Biopolitics, Human Rights, and the Figure of 'Truth' in Contemporary Art." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 5, no. 1 (2004): 11–42.

Dorsch, Tyler Emerson. "Icelandic Parrotry." Retrieved from http://www.cycle.is/magns-sigurdarson

Espagne, Michel. “La notion de transfert culturel.” *Revue Sciences/Lettres* 1 (2013). https://journals.openedition.org/rsl/219

– and Michael Werner, eds., *Transferts: Les relations interculturelles dans l’espace franco-allemand (XVIII et XIXème siècle)*. Paris: Éditions recherche sur les civilisations, 1988.

Ewing, William A., Nathalie Herschdorfer and Jean-Christophe Blaser. *ReGeneration. 50 Photographers of Tomorrow 2005*–2025. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2005.

Filliou, Robert. *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*. Cologne/New York: Kasper König, 1970.

Finnbogason, Guðmundur. “Íslenzkt myndasafn.“ *Fjallkonan*, January 4, 1907, 1–2.

Folke Hennigsen, Anne. “Performance and Politics of Authenticity in Live Ethnographic Exhibitions,” *Bodyworks. Nordisk Museologi* 2017, no. 1: 21–36.

–. “Producing and Consuming Foreignness. ‘Anthropologicalzoological’ Exhibitions in Copenhagen.” In *Nordic Perspective on Encountering Foreignness*, eds. Anne Folke Henningsen, Leila Koivunen and Taina Syrjämaa, 55–70. Turku: University of Turku, 2009.

Forceville, Charles, Tony Veale, and Kurt Feyaerts, “Balloonics: The Visuals of Balloons in Comics.” In *The Rise and Reason of Comics and Graphic Literature: Critical Essays on the Form*, eds. Joyce Goggin and Dan Hassler-Forest, 56–73. Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2010.

Foster, Hal. “An Archival Impulse.” *October* 110 (Autumn 2004): 3–22.

–. “The Artist as Ethnographer?” In *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, eds. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers, 203–309. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

–. “Creaturely Cobra.” *October* 141 (Summer 2012): 4–21.

–. *The Fist Pop Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

–. “Questionnaire on ‘The Contemporary,’” *October*, vol. 130 (Fall 2009): 3–124.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language. Translated by* Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

–. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Friðbjörnsdóttir, Ingibjörg. "Draumaraunsæi. Sagt frá danskri bók um myndlist kvenna þar í landi." *Þjóðviljinn*, October 28, 1978, 8 and 18.

Friðfinnsson, Hreinn. *House Project. First House. Second House. Third House*. Hafnarfjörður: Hafnarborg, 2012.

Friðfinnsson, Hreinn, Kristján Guðmundsson, Sigurður Guðmundsson, [Þórður] Ben Sveinsson. *Ça va ? Ça va. 4 constats islandais,* 31 janvier – 7 March 1977. Musée National d'Art Moderne. Paris: Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou,1977.

Friðjónsson, Helgi Þorgils, "Erlendir gestir (Foreign Visitors)." In *Nýlistasafnið 10 ára. Sýnishorn eldri verka*. Reykjavík: Listasafn Íslands and Nýlistasafnið, 1988), 75–78.

Fuss, Diana, "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification." *Diacritics* 24, no. 2–3 (1994):20–42.

Gaget, Florian. "Modèles artificiels en plâtre polychromé, étude et restauration. Préparations anatomiques de chimpanzé et d'orang-outang moulées sur nature." In CeROArt, 2013. Accessed 10 March 2015 on URL: http://ceroart.revues.org/3121.

GAJ, "Bandarísk stúlka á mótorhjóli yfir hálendi Íslands (An American girl on motorbike through the Icelandic Highlands)." *Dagblaðið,* July 7, 1979, 6. Photo: Harry Lieberman.

Gambioni, Dario. *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism Since the French Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Garner, Philippe. "Antonioni's *Blow Up* and Swinging 1960s London." Interview with Jill Kennington, *Vanity Fair,* April 2011. Retrieved from:

http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2011/04/the-making-of-blow-up-201104.

–. *John Cowan. Through the Light Barrier*. Munich, Paris and London: Schirmer Mosel, 1999.

Geirsdóttir, Guðrún Erla. “Ritstjórnargrein.” *Vera* 4:6 (1985): 2.

Gestsson, Magnús. “Gallerí Suðurgata 7. ” *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, July 12, 1997, 6.

Gildea, Robert et al. *Europe’s 1968: Voices of Revolt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Gindt, Dirk. ″Performative Processes: Björk’s Creative Collaborations with the World of Fashion.″ *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 15, no. 4 (December 2011): 425–49.

Gíslason, Ólafur. “Ísland er eyja í alþjóðlegri menningarsúpu.” *Þjóðviljinn*, May 9, 1987, 8–9.

Gismondi, Chris J. “Why is the Arctic Always White? Circumpolar Indigenous Artists in the Age of the Anthropocene.” *Esse arts + opinions* 97 (Autumn 2019): 92–95.

“Glæsilegur sigur Ásmundar Sveinssonar myndhöggvara. Viðtal við listamanninn.” *Alþýðublaðið*, March 30, 1939, front page and p. 4.

Godfrey, Mark. “Roni Horn’s Icelandic Encyclopedia.“ *Art History* 32, no. 5 (December 2009): 932–53.

Goodrum, Alison L. *The National Fabric: Fashion, Britishness, Globalization*. London: Berg Publishers, 2005.

Gormley, Kevin. “Neoliberalism and the Discursive Construction of ‘Creativity’.” *Critical Studies in Education* 61, no. 3 (2020): 313–28.

Gottschalk, Molly. ″As Björk Opens at MoMA, Behind the Scenes of Her Most Iconic Images.″ March 2, 2005. Retrived from https://www.artsy.net/article/editorial-as-bjork-opens-at-moma-behind-the

Gottskálksdóttir, Júlíana. “Listvakning á 19. öld.” In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*, vol. I, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 14–43. Reykjavík: Listasafn Íslands / Forlagið, 2011.

–. “Monuments to Settlers of the North: A Means to Strengthen National Identity.” In *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson with the collaboration of Daniel Chartier, 205–27. Québec: Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2011.

Greaves, Kerry. *Mobilizing the Collective: Helhesten and the Danish Avant-Garde 1934–1946*. PhD dissertation. New York: The City University of New York, 2015.

Gremaud, Ann- Sofie Nilsen. "From within the Porous Body. Modes of Engagement in Björk's Biophilia Album." In *Artistic Visions of the Anthropocene North*. *Climate Change and Nature in Art*, eds. *Gry Hedin and Ann-Sofie N. Gremaud*, 128–153. New York: Routledge, 2018.

–. "Icelandic Futures: Arctic Dreams and Geographies of Crisis." In *Arctic Environmental Modernities: From the Age of Polar Exploration to the Era of the Anthropocene*, eds. Lill-Ann Körber, Scott MacKenzie, and Anna Westerståhl Stenport, 197–213. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

–. "Power and Purity: Nature as a Resource in a Troubled Society." *Environmental Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2014): 77–100.

– and Salvör Aradóttir. "Ísland sem rými annarleikans: Myndir frá Bókasýningunni í Frankfurt árið 2011 í ljósi kenninga um dul-lendur og heterótópíur." *Ritið* 12, no. 1 (2012): 7–29.

Grétarsdóttir, Tinna. "Á milli safna: útrás í (lista)verki." *Ritið* 10, no. 1 (2010): 83–103.

– Ásmundur Ásmundsson and Hannes Lárusson, "The Cultural Worker." In *Þjóðarspegillinn*, eds. Ása B. Ásgeirsdóttir, Helga Björnsdóttir and Helga Ólafsdóttir, 606–15. Reykjavík: The Social Science Research Institute, University of Iceland, 2011.

– Ásmundur Ásmundsson, and Hannes Lárusson, "Creativity and Crises." In *Gambling Debt. Iceland's Rise and Fall in the Global Economy,* eds. Paul Durrenberger and Gísli Pálsson, 93–105. Iowa: University Press of Colorado, 2015.

Gretor, Georg. *Islands Kultur und seine junge Malerei.* Jena: Nordische Gesellschaft, E. Diederichs, 1928.

Gröndal, Benedikt, and Charles Gl. Behrens (eds.). *Einar Jónsson*. Stockholm: KF:s Bokforlag /Bókaútgáfan Norðri, 1954.

Grönfeldt, Svafa et al., *Ímynd Íslands. Styrkur, stefna og staða*. Reykjavík: Forsætisráðuneytið, 2008. https://rafhladan.is/handle/10802/4328

Groys, Boris. “On Art Activism.” *e-flux Journal* 56 (2014). Available from http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-art-activism/

Gruzinski, Serge. *Passeurs culturels*. *Mécanismes de métissage*. Paris: Éditions de la MSH, 2001.

GÞE, “Hætt við útgáfu 28 binda bókaflokks um norræna alþýðulist.” *Tíminn*, August 7, 1966, 1 and 4.

Guasco, Anna. “‘As Dead as a Dodo’: Extinction Narratives and Multispecies Justice in the Museum.” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 4 no. 3 (2021): 1055–76.

Guðjónsson, Hlynur. “Nation Branding.” *Place Branding* 1, no. 3 (2005): 283–98.

Guðjónsson, Kjartan. “Rótækir listamenn – eða óróttækir.” *Þjóðviljinn*, September 26, 1969, 5.

Guðmundsdóttir, Tinna, ed. *Nýlistasafnið / The Living Art Museum 1978-2018*. Reykjavík: The Living Art Museum, 2010.

Guðmundsson, Ari Trausti. “Leirmunir Guðmundar frá Miðdal.” *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, August 7, 1999.

Guðmundsson, Einar. “Barist gegn afturhaldi og tregðu.” *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, March 11, 1989, 8–10.

Guðmundsson, Guðbjörn. “Iðnsýningin 1952.” *Tímarit Iðnaðarmanna* 25, no. 3 (1952): 48–51.

Guðmundsson, Magnús. *Ull verður gull. Ullariðnaður Íslendinga á síðari hluta 19. aldar og á 20. öld*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1988.

Guðmundsson, Sigurður. *Tabúlarasa*. Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1993.

Guðmundsson, Sigurður. “Um kvenbúninga á Íslandi að fornu og nýju.“ *Ný félagsrit* 17 (1857): 1–53.

Guess, Teresa J. “The Social Construction of Whiteness: Racism by Intent, Racism by Consequence.” *Critical Sociology* 32, no. 4 (2006): 649–73.

Gunnarsson, Gunnar Á. “Ísland og Marshalláætlunin. Atvinnustefna og stjórnmálahagsmunir.” *Saga – Tímarit Sögufélagsins* 34 (1996): 85–130.

Gunnlaugsson, Gylfi. “Old Norse Poetry and New Beginnings in Late 18th- and Early 19th-Century Literature.” In *Iceland and Images of the North,* eds. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson and Daniel Chartier, 115–56. Québec: Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2011.

Guttormsson, Hjörleifur. *Vistkreppa eða náttúruvernd*. Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1974.

Haapoja, Terike. “Shared Worlds – a Conversation between Terike Haapoja, Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson.” In *Debatable Lands. Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir/Mark Wilson,* ed. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, 97–143. Kópavogur: Gerðarsafn – Kópavogur Art Museum, 2021.

Hálfdanarson, Guðmundur. “Iceland Perceived: Nordic, European or a Colonial Other?” In *Postcolonial North Atlantic: Perspectives on Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands*, eds. Lill-Ann Körber og Ebbes Volquardsens, 39–66. Berlin: Nordeuropa-Institut der Humboldt Universität, 2014.

–. ”Icelandic Nationalism: A Non Violent Paradigm?” In *Nations and Nationalities in Historical Perspective*, eds. Guðmundur Hálfdanarson and Ann Katherine Isaacs, 1–13. Pisa: Edizioni Plus, 2001.

–. “Sustaining Economic Development or Preserving Nature? Environmental Politics in Iceland.” In *The Challenge of the Baltic Sea Region. Culture, Ecosystems, Democracy*, eds. Göran Bolin, Monica Hammer, Frank-Michael Kirsch, and Wojciech Szrubka, 189–200. Göteborg: Södertörn University College, 2005.

–. “Var Ísland nýlenda?” *Saga* 52, no. 1 (2014): 42-75.

–. “Þingvellir: An Icelandic ‘*Lieu de Mémoire’*.” *History and Memory* 12, no. 1 (2000): 4–29.

– and Ólafur Rastrick, “Culture and the Constitution of the Icelandic in the 19th and 20th Centuries.“ In *Culture, Empire and Nation*, eds. A. Cimdina and J. Osmond, 87–102. Pisa: Edizioni Plus – Pisa University Press, 2006.

Halink, Simon. *Asgard Revisited: Old Norse Mythology and Icelandic National Culture 1820–1918*. Groningen: The University of Groningen, 2017.

–. "The Good Sense to Lose America. Vinland as Remembered by Icelanders." In *From Iceland to the Americas. Vinland and Historical Imagination*, eds. Tim William Machan and Jón Karl Helgason, 160–78. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020.

–. "The Icelandic Mythscape: Sagas, Landscapes and National Identity." In *National Identities, Special Issue: The Making of Landscape in Modernity* 16, no. 3 (September 2014): 209–23.

–. "Noble Heathens: Jón Jónsson Aðils and the Problem of Iceland's Pagan Past." *Nation and Nationalism* 23, no. 3 (2017): 463–83.

Halink, Simon (ed.), *Northern Myths, Modern Identities. The Nationalisation of Northern Mythologies Since 1800*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019.

Halldórsson, Jón Már. "Hvað varð Keikó gamall?" *Vísindavefurinn*, October 31, 2002. Accessed 2 November 2019:https://www.visindavefur.is/svar.php?id=2828.

Hallgrímsson, Jónas. "*Ísland* (Iceland)." *Fjölnir* 1 (1835): 21–22.

Hamilton, Richard. *Exteriors, Interiors, Objects, People*, ed. Dieter Schwartz. Kunstumuseum Winterthur, Kestner-Gesellschaft Hannover, IVAM, Centre Julio Gonzalez, Valencia, Stuttgart: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1990.

Hansson, Heidi and Anka Ryall (eds.). *Arctic Modernities: The Environmental, the Exotic and the Everyday*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017.

Hansson, Heidi and Cathrine Norberg. *Cold Matters: Cultural Perceptions of Snow, Ice and Cold*. Umeå: Umeå University, 2009.

Haraway, Donna J. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Natur*e, 149–81. London: Free Association Books, 1991.

Harðardóttir, Guðrún. *Ljósmyndun á Íslandi 1950–1970*. Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 1999.

Hassan, Salah and Iftikhar Dadi, “Introduction. Unpacking Europe.” In *Unpacking Europe. Towards a Critical Reading*, eds. Salah Hassan and Dadi Iftikhar, 12–22. Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2002.

Hassan, Salah and Dadi Iftikhar (eds.). *Unpacking Europe. Towards a Critical Reading*. Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2002.

Hastrup, Kirsten. “Icelandic Topography and the Sense of Identity.” In *Nordic Landscapes: Region and Belonging on the Northern Edge of Europe*, eds. Michael Jones and Kenneth Olwig, 53–76. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Heiðdal, Dagný. “Listin sem loftvog mannlegra hræringa.” In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*, vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 88–165. Reykjavík: Listasafn Íslands/Forlagið, 2011.

Heininen, Lassi and Matthias Finger, “The ‘Global Arctic’ as a New Geopolitical Context and Method.” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 33, no. 2 (2018): 199–202.

Heisler, Eva. “Hugmyndir, hlutir og rými.” In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*, vol. V, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 216–301. Reykjavík: Listasafn Íslands / Forlagið, 2011.

–. “Soulful Mathematics: Poetry and Icelandic Conceptualism.” *Mosaic* 49, no. 2 (June 2016): 51–73.

Helgadóttir, Laufey (ed.). Rúrí, *Archive-endangered waters*. Reykjavík: Ministry of Education, 2003.

Helgason, Hallgrímur. “Ísland er mitt andlega heimili” (Iceland is my spiritual home). *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, April 21, 1990, 2.

–. “This Island.” *Siksi* 3 (1994): 3.

–. *Tales of Grim. Paris 1995–1996*. Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2004.

Helgason, Þröstur. *Birgir Andrésson. Í íslenskum litum.* Reykjavík: Crymogea, 2010.

–. *Tímaritið Birtingur og íslenskur módernismi. Lítil tímarit, landafræði, menningarsaga.* PhD dissertation. Reykjavík: University of Iceland, 2015.

Henning, Reinhard. “Postcolonial Ecology: An Ecocritical Reading of Andri Snær Magnason’s Dreamland: A Self-Help Manual for a Frightened Nation (2006).” In *The Postcolonial North Atlantic. Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands*, eds. Lill-Ann Körber and Ebbe Volquardsen, 105–26. Berlin: Nordeuropa-Institut der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2014 /2020.

“Henri de Saint-Simon. *L’Artiste, le Savant et l’Industriel,* 1824.” In *L’Art social de la Révolution à la Grande Guerre. Anthologie de textes sources*, eds. Neil McWilliam, Catherine Méneux and Julie Ramos. Paris: INHA, 2014.

Hesmondhalgh, David, and Sarah Baker. *Creative Labour. Media Work in Three Cultural Industries*. London: Routledge, 2011.

Heymann, Matthias, Henrik Knudsen, Maiken L. Lolck, Henry Nielsen, Kristian H. Nielsen and Christopher J. Ries. “Exploring Greenland: Science and Technology in Cold War Settings.” *Scientia Canadensis* 33, no. 2 (2010): 11–42.

Higgins, Dick, and Hannah Higgins. Intermedia.” In *Something Else Newsletter* (1965): Reprinted with an Appendix by Hannah Higgins in *Leonardo*, 34, no. 1, February (2001): 49–54.

Higgins, Hannah. *Fluxus Experience*. Berkeley, Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2002.

Hillings, Valerie Lynn. *Experimental Artists’ Groups in Europe, 1951–1968. Abstraction, Interaction and Internationalism.* New York University: Institute of Fine Arts, 2002.

Hjartarson, Benedikt. “‘A Furious Girl from Rome’ – Róska and the Mythography of Avant-Garde Bohemianism.” In *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950–1975*, eds. Tania Ørum and J. Olsson, 804–17. Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 2016.

Hjartarson, Benedikt, and Ólafur Rastrick, “Cleansing the Domestic Evil – On the Degenerate Art Exhibition in Reykjavík, 1942.” In *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1925–1950*, eds. Benedikt Hjartarson, Andrea Kollnitz, Per Stounbjerg and Tania Ørum, 879–902. Leiden: Brill, 2019.

Hjort, Øystein. “Making Art. Making a Living. The Artist’s Role in Scandinavia.” In *Sleeping Beauty – Art Now*, ed. Björn Springfeldt, 11–16. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1982. Exhibition catalogue.

Hjorthén, Adam. “Global Histories and Cross-Border Commemoration.” In *Commemoration: The American Association for State and Local History Guide*, ed. Seth C. Bruggeman, 59–67. Lanham, M.D.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017.

–. “Transatlantic Monuments: On Memories and Ethics of Settler Histories.” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 53, no. 1 (2021): 95–120.

Hobbs, Robert. *Birgir Andrésson: In Icelandic Colours*. Berlin: Distanz Verlag GmbH, 2022.

Hobsbawm, Eric J. *Nations and Nationalisms since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

– and Terence Ranger (eds.). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Horn, Roni. *Island Zombie. Iceland Writings*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020.

Hornstra, Rob. *Roots of the Rúntur*. Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2006.

Hovgaard, William. “The American Scandinavian Movement.” *American Scandinavian Review* 3, no. 5 (September–October 1915): 290–295.

Hrólfsdóttir, Sigrún. “Red Thread. Hildur Hákonardóttir Weaver.” In *Hildur Hákonardóttir. Rauður þráður/Red Thread*, eds. Ólöf K. Sigurðardóttir and Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, 173–223. Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum, 2023.

“Hugmyndalist í SÚM.” *Þjóðviljinn*, May 18, 1974, 3.

Huijbens, Edward H. “Nation-Branding: A Critical Evaluation. Assessing the Image Building of Iceland.” In *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson with the collaboration of Daniel Chartier, 553–82. Québec: Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2011.

Huldt, Åke H. (ed.). *Formes scandinaves: Danemark, Finlande, Islande, Norvège, Suède* [exposition, Musée des arts décoratifs, Palais du Louvre, Pavillon de Marsan, 7

novembre 1958–31 janvier 1959]. Paris: Les Presses artistiques, 1958. Exhibition catalogue.

Hultén, Pontus. “Little History & Explanation.” In *Sleeping Beauty – Art Now*, ed. Björn Springfeldt, 11–16. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1982. Exhibition catalogue.

Hultén, Pontus (ed.). *Bewogen Beweging. Rörelse i konsten*. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum / Stockholm: Moderna museet, 1961. Exhibition catalogue.

Hutcheon, Linda. *Irony’s Edge. The Theory and Politics of Irony.* London/New York: Routledge, 2005 (1994).

Huyssen, Andreas. “Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia.” *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 21–38.

Ingold, Tim. “Rethinking the Animate: Re-Animating Thought.” *Ethnos* 71, no. 1 (2006): 9–20.

Ingólfsson, Aðalsteinn. “Andinn, landið og brandið.” *Morgunblaðið – Menningarblað Lesbók*, November 22, 2008, 8–9.

–. “Bók um bók, frá bók … Bókverk Diters Rot á Íslandi, 1957–1961,” *Skírnir* 162 (Spring 1988): 51–82.

–. “Through SÚM to Suðurgata 7. Some Recent Trends in Icelandic Art.” In *Iceland*, exhibition in Zona, Via San Nicoló, Florence, Desember 1979 – January 1980. Reykjavík: Gallerí Suðurgata 7, 1979. Exhibition catalogue.

Ingólfsson, Árni Heimir. “‘Follow My Voice’: Structure and Improvisation in Björk’s ‘Mouth’s Cradle’.” *European Journal of Musicology* 18, no. 1 (2019): 84–98.

Ingólfsson, Einar Falur. “Listhatur eða náttúrudýrkun? (Abomination of art or nature worship?).” *Morgunblaðið*, December 7, 2003, 34.

–. “Út úr íróníunni kemur oft hrein og tær einlægni.” *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, May 30, 2009, 6–7.

Ingvarsdóttir, Fríða Björk. “Andstaðan var okkur innblástur.” *Morgunblaðið*, October 26, 2002, 8–9.

–. ”Jökulsvelgjaserían: Niður árþúsundanna í gegnum linsu Ólafs Elíassonar myndlistarmanns.” *Morgunblaðið– Menningarblað/Lesbók,* August 25, 2007, 3–5.

Isaak, Jo Anna. *Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

"Ísland í hausthefti Vogue: Tízkufólkið klífur jaka og sígur í björg á Íslandi." *Morgunblaðið,* August 12, 1970, 10 and 13.

Ísleifsson, Sumarliði R. "Imaginations of National Identity and the North." In *Iceland and Images of the North,* ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson with the collaboration of Daniel Chartier, 3–22. Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2011.

–. "Islands on the Edge: Medieval and Early Modern National Images of Iceland and Greenland." In *Iceland and Images of the North*, 41–66. Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2011.

–. *Í fjarska Norðursins. Ísland og Grænland. Viðhorfssaga í þúsund ár*. Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 2020.

"Íslenzk nútímalist – Súm 4 stórsýning í Amsterdam." *Þjóðviljinn*, February 10, 1971, 12.

Jakobsson, Sverrir. "'Black Men and Malignant-looking': The Place of the Indigenous People of North America in the Icelandic World View." In *Approaches to Vínland: A Conference on the Written and Archaeological Sources for the Norse Settlement in the North-Atlantic Region and Exploration of America,* eds. Andrew Wawn and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, 88–104. Reykjavík: Sigurður Nordal Institute, 2001.

– (ed.), *Images of the North*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." In *Postmodern Culture,* ed. Hal Foster, 111–25. London: Pluto Press, 1985.

Jamet, Raphaelle. "Asger Jorn et l'Institut Scandinave de Vandalisme Comparé. La création d'un *boréalisme* endogène." *Études germaniques* 73, no. 2 (2018): 233–53.

Jasper, Adam. "Hreinn Friðfinnsson." *Artforum* 58 no.1 (September 2019): 278.

Jeanson, Francis. *La révolution algérienne. Problèmes et perspectives.* Milano: Feltrinelli, 1962.

Jehel, Pierre-Jérôme. “Une illusion photographique. Esquisse des relations entre la photographie et l’anthropologie en France au XIX^e siècle.” *Journal des anthropologues* 80–81 (2000): 47–70.

Jóhannsdóttir, Anna. “Exile, Correspondence, Rebellion – Tracing the Interactive Relationship between Iceland and Dieter Roth.” In *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975*, eds. Tania Ørum and Jesper Olsson, 239–250. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Jóelsdóttir, Ásdís. *Íslenska lopapeysan: Uppruni, saga og hönnun*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2017.

Jóhannesson, Alexander.“Síðustu listaverk Einars Jónssonar.” *Eimreiðin* 1, no. 1 (1915): 1–7.

Jóhannsson, Jón Yngvi. “Af reiðum Íslendingum: deilur um Nýlendusýninguna 1905.” In *Þjóðerni í þúsund ár?*, eds. J. Y. Jóhannsson, Karl Ó. Proppé and Sverrir Jakobsson, 135–59. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2003.

Jones, Amelia. “The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts 1970/2009.” In *Feminism is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiograhy and Curatorial Practices*, eds. Malin Hedlin Heyden and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe, 11–56. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.

Jones**,** Caroline A. and Steven Nelson,“Global turns in US art history,” *Perspective*: actualité en histoire de l’art, 2015– 2, 95–110.

Jones, Siân. “Negotiating Authentic Objects and Authentic Selves. Beyond the Deconstruction of Authenticity.” *Journal of Material Culture* 15, no. 2 (2010): 181–203.

Jónsson Aðils, Jón. *Íslenzkt þjóðerni. Alþýðufyrirlestrar*. Reykjavík, 1903.

Jónsson, Ólafur Páll and Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir (eds.). *Art, Ethics and Environment. A Free Enquiry Into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar Press, 2006.

Joyeux-Prunel, Béatrice. *Naissance de l’art contemporain. Une histoire mondiale 1945–1970*. Paris: CNRS éditions, 2021.

–. “Les transferts culturels. Un discours de la méthode.” *Hypothèses* 1, no. 6 (2003): 149–62.

Júlíusdóttir, Katrín. “You Are in Control” [speech]. September 23, 2009. Accessed December 20, 2020. http://eng.idnadarraduneyti.is/minister/speeches/nr/2766

Kalyva, Eve. “Some Reflections on International Exchanges and the Avant-garde after Conceptual Art.” In *Modernidad y vanguardia: rutas de intercambio entre España y Latinoamérica*, 351–61. Madrid: Reina Sofía, 2015. Exhibition catalogue.

Kelley, Jeff (ed.). *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life.* Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2003.

Kerr, Barbara A., Maxwell Birdnow, Jenelle Hallaert, Keely Alexander, Robyn Malmsten, Olivia Stull, J. D. Wright, Brittany Lucas, Rachel Swanson and Grace J. Claiborn. “Creativity and Innovation in Iceland: Individual, Environmental, and Cultural Variables.” *Gifted and Talented International* 32, no. 1 (2017): 27–43.

Kirsch, Isabel. “Wild & Woolly: The Creative Mind of Shoplifter Arnardottir.” *NY ART BEAT*, August 25, 2008. http://www.nyartbeat.com/nyablog/2008/08/wild-woolly-the-creative-mind-of-Shoplifter-arnardottir/

Kjartansdóttir, Katla. “The Changing Symbolic Meaning of the Extinct Great Auk and Its Afterlife as a Museum Object at the Natural History Museum of Denmark.” *Nordisk Museologi* 26, no. 2 (2019): 41–56.

Kjartansson, Ragnar. *The End*, ed. Christian Schoen. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009.

“Kling & Bang at Sirkus Bar at Frieze Art Fair, London 16th October to 19th October 2008.” http://this.is/klingogbang/archive_view.php?id=168

“KlingBang export the Reykjavík Sirkús-bar at Frieze Art Fair, London.” Stjórnarráð Íslands, 30 September 2008. https://www.stjornarradid.is/efst-a-baugi/frettir/stok-frett/?NewsId=6da8d17b-e3e1-11e6-9c23-e4a47104df25

Koester, David. “Gender Ideology and Nationalism in the Culture and Politics of Iceland.” *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 3 (August 1995): 572–88.

Kompatsiaris, Panos. “Curators, Words and Values: The Branding Economies of Curatorial Statements in Art Biennials.” *Journal of Cultural Economy* 13, no. 6 (2020): 758–71.

Kosuth, Joseph. “The Artist as Anthropologist.” *The Fox Magazine* 1 (1975). Reprinted in ibid., *Art After Philosophy and After. Collected Writings, I966–I990*, 107–28. London and Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.

Kristensen, Julia. “Do We Have Contemporary Nordic Art?” *Kiasma magazine* 10, no. 36 (2007): 9–10.

Kristeva, Julia. *La Révolution du langage poétique*. Paris: Seuil, 2018 (1974).

Kristmundsson, Steingrímur Eyfjörð and Kristinn G. Harðarson. “Viðtal við Magnús Pálsson.” *Svart á Hvítu*, 2, no. 1 (1978): 2–13.

Kubler, Alison. “On being alone, not Lonely: The Solitude of Roni Horn.” *Vaultmagazine* (February 2021). https://vaultmagazine.com/ISS33/features/horn_feature.php

Kunzig, Robert (photographs: Orsolya and Erlend Haaberg). “Islande. La beauté à l’état pur.” *National Geographic France* (May 2012): 28–47.

Kuspit, Donald. “Northern Visions.” *Artforum* 21, no. 4 (December 1982): 77.

“Kúlan – ný húsgagnaverzlun fyrir vandláta og félitla.” *Frjáls þjóð*, April 14, 1962, 8.

Küchler, Carl. *Island*. Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, 1905.

–. *Unter der Mitternachtssonne durch die Vulkan- und Gletscherwelt Islands*. Leipzig: Abel & Müller, 1906.

–. “Við aðalfossana á sunnanverðu Íslandi.” *Eimreiðin* 12, no. 3 (1906): 202–9.

Kvaran, Gunnar (ed.), *SÚM 1965–1972*. Reykjavík: Listasafn Reykjavíkur – Kjarvalsstaðir, 1989. Exhibition catalogue.

Kvaran, Ólafur. “Brautryðjendur í upphafi aldar.” In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*, vol. I, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 46–75 (Reykjavík: Listasafn Íslands / Forlagið, 2011).

–. *Einar Jónsson myndhöggvari. Verk, táknheimur og menningarsögulegt samhengi*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2018.

–. “Listmyndin sem baráttutæki.” *Þjóðviljinn*, October 17, 1976, 10–11.

–. “Preface.” In *Confronting Nature: Icelandic Art of the 20th Century*, eds. Ólafur Kvaran and Karla Kristjánsdóttir, 9. Reykjavík: National Gallery of Iceland, 2001. Exhibition catalogue.

“Kvikmyndir og þátttaka Íslendinga í Heimssýningunni í New York 1939. Viðtal við Vigfús Sigurgeirsson,“ *Tímarit máls og menningar* 1, no. 1 (1938): 23–24.

Langford, Martha. “Introduction.” In *Narratives Unfolding*: *National Art Histories in an Unfinished World*, ed. Martha Langford, 3–41. Montreal & Kingston, London, Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017.

Lassen, Hellen (ed.). *Billedet som kampmiddel: kvindebilleder mellem 1968 og 1977*. Copenhagen: Information, 1977.

Laumé, M. “Expédition scientifique du prince Napoléon dans les mers du nord.” *L’Illustration. Journal universel,* January 10, 1857, 21–22.

Laxness, Halldór. “Hernaðurinn gegn landinu.” In *Yfirskyggðir staðir*. *Ýmsar athuganir*, 125–40. Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1971.

–. *Innansveitarkrónika*. Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1970.

Lebeer-Hossmann, Irmelin. “Dieter Roth Interview von Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann. Hamburg, 28.–30. September 1976, und Stuttgart, 20.–22. Juni 1979.” In *Dieter Roth: Gesammelte Interviews*, ed. Barbara Wien, 9–142. Köln: Hansjörg Mayer, 2002.

Lebovici, Elisabeth. “Dans l'envers du nord. La jeune scène nordique de l'art contemporain est au musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris.” *Libération*, February 16, 1998. https://www.liberation.fr/culture/1998/02/16/dans–l–envers–du–nord–la–jeune–scene–nordique–de–l–art–contemporain–est–au–musee–d–art–moderne–de–la_227268

Leerssen, Joep. “Nationalism and the Cultivation of Culture.” *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 4 (2006): 559–78.

–. “The North: A Cultural Stereotype between Metaphor and Racial Essentialism.” In *Northern Myths, Modern Identities. The Nationalisation of Northern Mythologies since* 1800, ed. Simon Halink, 13–32. Leiden: Brill, 2019.

–. “Trademarking the Nation: World Fairs, Spectacles, and the Banalization of Nationalism.” In *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities. International Exhibitions as Cultural Platforms, 1851–1958*, eds. Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm, 31–52. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

“Leifur heppni,” *Tíminn,* August 1, 1931, 1.

Leydier, Richard. “Un autre monde. Découverte de l’art contemporain islandais.” *Art Press* 304 (August 2004): 28–33.

Líndal, Anna. *Leiðangur,* ed. Ólöf K. Sigurðardóttir. Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum, 2017.

Linke, Uli. “Formations of White Public Space: Racial Aesthetics, Body Politics and the Nation.” *Transforming Anthropology* 8, no. 1–2 (1999): 129–61.

Lippard, Lucy R.. *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*. New York: New Press, 1997.

–. “Projecting a Feminist Criticism.” *Art Journal* 35, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 337–39.

–. *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art*, 128–38. New York: New York Press, 1995.

Loftsdóttir, Kristín. “Belonging and the Icelandic Others: Situating Iceland Identity in a Postcolonial Context.” In *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region: Exceptionalism, Migrant Others and National Identities*, eds. Kristín Loftsdóttir and L. Jensen, 57–71. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012.

–. “The Colonial Exhibition in Tivoli. Racism and the Colonial Others,” in *Crisis and Colonial Reality at Europe’s Margins*, 30-45. London and New York: Routledge, 2019.

–. “The Exotic North: Gender, Nation Branding and Post-colonialism in Iceland.” *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 23, no. 24 (2015): 246–60.

–. “Negotiating White Icelandic Identity: Multiculturalism and Colonial Identity Formations.” *Social Identities* 17, no. 1 (2011): 11–25.

–. “’Pure Manliness’: The Colonial Project and Africa’s Image in Nineteenth Century Iceland.” *Global Studies in Culture and Power* 16, no. 3 (2009): 271–93.

–. “Racist Caricatures in Iceland in the Early 20th Century.” In *Iceland and Images of the North*, ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson with the collaboration of Daniel Chartier, 187–204. Québec: Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2011.

–, Katla Kjartansdóttir and Katrín Anna Lund, “Trapped in Clichés: Masculinity, Films and Tourism in Iceland.” *Gender, Place & Culture. A Journal of Feminist Geography* 24, no. 9 (2017): 1125–1242.

– and Sanna Magdalena Mörtudóttir, “‘Where Are You From?’: Racism and the Normalization of Whiteness in Iceland.” *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* 1, no. 2, Mixed Race in Nordic Europe (2022): 215–32.

López, Sebastián. “Identity: Reality or Fiction?” In *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory*, eds. A. Rasheed, C. Sean, and S. Ziauddin, 137–45. London: Continuum, 2002.

Lorimer, Jamie. “On Auks and Awkwardness.” *Environmental Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2014): 195–205.

Lovering, John. “The Relationship Between Urban Regeneration and Neoliberalism: Two Presumptuous Theories and a Research Agenda.” *International Planning Studies* 12, no. 4 (2007): 343–66.

Lozano, Jorge Sebastián. “Mapping Art History in the Digital Era.” *The Art Bulletin* 103, no. 3 (2021): 6–16.

Lucas, Gavin, and Angelos Parigoris, “Icelandic Archaeology and the Ambiguities of Colonialism.” In *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*, eds. Magdalena Naum and Jonas M. Nordin, 89–104. New York, N.Y.: Springer, 2013.

Lund, Katrín Anna, Katla Kjartansdóttir and Kristín Loftsdóttir. “‘Puffin Love’: Performing and Creating Artic Landscapes in Iceland through Souvenirs.” *Tourist Studies* 18, no. 2 (2018): 142–58.

Lundström, Catrin, and Benjamin R. Teitelbaum. “Nordic Whiteness: An Introduction.” *Scandinavian Studies* 89, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 151–58.

Lundström, Anna. “Movement in Art. The Layers of an Exhibition.” In *Pontus Hultén and the Moderna Museet. The Formative Years,* ed. Anna Tellgren, 67–93. London/ Stockholm: Koenig Books and Moderna Museet, 2017.

McWilliam, Neil, Catherine Méneux and Julie Ramos (eds.). *L’Art social de la Révolution à la Grande Guerre. Anthologie de textes sources*, Paris: INHA, 2014. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.inha.4825.

Magnason, Andri Snær. *On Time and Water,* trans. Lytton Smith. London: Serpents Tail, 2020.

Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi and Davíð Ólafsson. *Minor Knowledge and Microhistory. Manuscript Culture in the Nineteenth Century* . New York and London: Routledge, 2017.

Malraux, André. *Les Voix du silence*. Paris: Gallimard, 1951.

Marchart, Oliver. “The Globalization of Art and the ‘Biennials of Resistance’: A History of the Biennials from the Periphery.” *World Art* 4, no. 2 (2014): 263–76.

Marmier, Xavier. “*Lettres sur* l’Islande.” *Revue des Deux Mondes* 7, no. 3 (1er August 1836): 342–51.

McWilliam, Neil. *Dreams of Happiness. Social Art and the French Left, 1830–1850*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Mears, Patricia et al. *Expedition: Fashion from the Extreme.* New York: Fashion Institute of Technology, 2017. Exhibition catalogue.

Medina, Cuauhtémoc. “Contemp(t)orary: Eleven Theses.” In *e-flux journal* # 12, January 2010. http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_8888103.pdf

Meijden, Peter Alexander. “The Festum Fluxorum in Copehagen 23–28 November 1961.” In *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950–1975*, eds. Tania Ørum and Jesper Olsson, 492–507. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Menning og menntun: Forsenda framtíðar. Reykjavík: Menntamálaráðuneytið, 1996.

Merewether, Charles. “Introduction. Art and the Archive.” In The *Archive. Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Charles Merewether, 10–17. London/Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel /MIT Press, 2006.

Meskimmon, Marsha. “Chronology through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally.” In *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Lisa Gabrielle Mark, 322–35. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007. Exhibition catalogue.

Meyer, Richard. *What was Contemporary Art?* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013.

Michael Lee, John. “Interpreting the ‘Rebranding of Britain’.” *The Round Table* 90, no. 362 (2001): 679–89.

Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *White Sight. Visual Politics and Practices of Whiteness*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2023.

Mitchell, W.J.T. “Imperial Landscape.” In *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, 5–34. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002 (1994).

–. “Introduction.” In *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, 1–4. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002 (1994).

Moholy-Nagy, László. *Vision in Motion*. Chicago: Paul Theoblad, 1961 (1947).

Montesquieu, [Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de]. *The Spirit of the Laws*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 (*L’Esprit des lois* (1748)).

Morgan, Jessica and Björn Roth (eds.). *Material Time, Work Time, Life Time*. Frankfurt am Main: Eiðar Art Centre and Revolver, 2005. Exhibition catalogue.

Morgan, Susan. “America: Creating the Impromptu Attitude.” *Aperture* 128 (1992). Special issue on Martin Munkacsi: 46–61.

Morton, Timothy. *Realist Magic. Objects, Ontology, Causality*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Open Humanities Press, 2013.

Myles, Eileen. *The Importance of Being Iceland*. Los Angeles:Semiotext(e)/MIT Press, 2009.

Nagel, Thomas. “What is it Like to Be a Bat?” *Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974): 435–50.

Nobles, Melissa. *Shades of Citizenship: Race and Census in Modern Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Nochlin, Linda. "The Invention of the Avant-Garde: France, 1830–1880." In *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society*, 11–18. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.

Nochlin, Linda. *Women, Art, and Power: and Other Essays*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

Nora, Pierre. "From Lieux de mémoire to Realms of Memory." Preface to the English-Language Edition. In *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, Vol. III, eds. Pierre Nora and L. D. Kritzman. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer, xv–xxiv. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Nordgren, Sunne. "'Ten Nordic Artists' – But What is The North?" *Terskel / Threshold* 2 (1990): 6–7.

Nordiskt 60-tal: uppbrott och konfrontation. *The Nordic '60s. Upheaval and Confrontation 1960–1972*. Curator Maaretta Jaukkuri. Helsinki: Nordiskt Konstcentrum, 1991. Exhibition catalogue.

"Norræna listiðnaðarsýningin í París (The Nordic Decorative Arts Exhibition in Paris)." *Þjóðviljinn*, February 27, 1959, 3.

Obrist, Hans Ulrich. "Hans Ulrich Obrist interview with Hreinn Friðfinnsson." In *Hreinn Friðfinnsson*, London: Serpentine Gallery 17 July-2 September 2007/ Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum 10 November 2007- 27 January 2008, 51–62. Exhibition catalogue.

Obrist, Hans Ulrich (ed.). *do it*. Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum, 1996. Exhibition catalogue.

Oddsson, Guðmundur. "Neoliberal Globalization and Heightened Perceptions of Class Division in Iceland." *The Sociological Quarterly* 57, no. 3, (2016): 462-490.

"Og margir taka þetta hátíðlega." (And many take this seriously) *Tíminn*, January 6, 1963, 9 and 13.

Öhrner, Annika (ed.). *Art in Transfer in the Era of Pop. Curatorial Practices and Transnational Strategies*. Södertörn: Södertörn Academic Studies, 2017.

Ólafsdóttir, Auður A. "Hið upphafna norður." *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, October 13, 2001, 4–5.

–. "Ímynd Íslands, sagan, menningararfurinn og hin ýmsu sjálf Íslendingsins." *Saga – Tímarit Sögufélagsins* 46, no. 2 (2008): 56–85.

–. "Nútímaafsteypur táknmynda: Um myndlist Ólafar Nordal." *Skírnir* 177 (Autumn 2003): 515–25.

–. "Visions of Nature in Icelandic Art." In *Confronting nature: Icelandic Art of the 20th Century,* eds. Ólafur Kvaran and Karla Kristjánsdóttir, 23–38. Reykjavík: National Gallery of Iceland, 2001. Exhibition catalogue.

Ólafsdóttir, Sigríður. "Sagan mótuð í leir." *Andblær: Tímarit um bókmenntir og listir* 9 (1999): 68–75.

Ólafsson, Björn."Í óbygðum. Úr dagbók Nafnlausafélagsins," *Vísir*, August 27, 1921, 4. English translation by Anna Yates: Inga Lára Baldvinsdóttir, "The Photography of Ólafur Magnússon." In *Ólafur Magnússon. Konunglegur hirðljósmyndari,* ed. Inga Lára Baldvinsdóttir, 127–47. Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2003.

Ólafsson, Tryggvi. "Frásögn af SÚM IV í Amsterdam (ekki algildur gæðadómur)." *Þjóðviljinn,* April 28, 1971, 6–7, 9.

Ólafsson, Tryggvi. "Íslensk list H_2O," *Þjóðviljinn,* May 28, 1974, 8–9.

Olwig, Kenneth Robert. *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic. From Britain's Renaissance to America's New World*. Madison, Wisc.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to 1990s*. New York: Routledge, 2015 (1994).

Osborne, Peter. "The Postconceptual Condition: Or, The Cultural Logic of High Capitalism Today." *Radical Philosophy* 184 (March/April 2014), 19–27.

Oslund, Karen. *Iceland Imagined: Nature, Culture, and Storytelling in the North Atlantic*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011.

Oxaal, Astrid. “Et norsk strikkemønster fra Grønland.” *Kunst og kultur* 3 (2003): 158–71.

Óskarsdóttir, Valdís and Ólafur Haukur Símonarson, *Rauði svifnökkvinn.* Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1975.

Pálsson, Gísli. *Fuglinn sem gat ekki flogið*. Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2020.

–. ″Genomic Anthropology Coming in from the Cold?” *Current Anthropology* 49, no. 4 (2008): 545–68.

– and Sigurður Örn Guðbjörnsson. “Homo Islandicus – inn að beini.” *Tímarit Máls og Menningar* 73, no. 2 (2012): 4–24.

– and Sigurður Örn Guðbjörnsson. “Musée Islandique: An Encounter between Physical Anthropology and Art.” In *Musée Islandique. Ólöf Nordal*, ed. Halldór B. Runólfsson, 41–55. Reykjavík: National Gallery of Iceland, 2012).

Pálsson, Jens. “Das Experiment Island. Entstehung, Entwicklung und Erhaltung des Islandischen Volkes.” At a conference in Greece in 1983. In *Árbók Háskóla Íslands* 1982–1984, ed. Þórir Kr. Þórðarson, 223. Reykjavík: Háskóli Íslands, 1986.

Pálsson, Magnús. “List og kennsluList.” *Teningur* 3 (1987): 19–21.

Pedersen, Helena and Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir. “Art, Artistic Research and the Animal Question.” *Art Monitor* 3 (2008): 109–23.

Petersen, Ævar. “Brot úr sögu Geirfuglsins.“ *Náttúrufræðingurinn* 65, no. 1–2 (1995): 53–66.

– and Þórir Haraldsson. “Komur hvítabjarna til Íslands fyrr og síðar.” In *Villt íslensk spendýr*, eds. Páll Hersteinsson and Guttormur Sigbjarnarson, 74–78. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska náttúrufræðifélag Landvernd, 1993.

Pétursson, Árni G., Sveinn Hallgrímsson and Egill Bjarnason. “Afkvæmasýningar á sauðfé 1970.” *Búnaðarritið* 84, no. 2 (1971): 379–407.

Pétursson, Eggert. “Douwe Jan Bakker.” *Teningur* 6 (1989): 48–64.

–. “Jan Voss á Hjalteyri í júlí 1988.” *Teningur* 7 (1989): 37–41.

Phelan, Peggy. “Survey.” In *Art and Feminism*, eds. Helena Reckitt and Peggy Phelan, 14–49, London: Phaidon Press, 2001.

Piene, Otto and Heinz Mack. *Zero*. Cambridge: MIT, 1973.

Pinkerton, Evelyn. “Groundtruthing Individual Transferable Quotas.” In *Gambling Debt*. *Iceland’s Rise and Fall in the Global Economy,* eds. Paul Durrenberger and Gísli Pálsson, 109–20. Iowa: University Press of Colorado, 2015.

Poliquin, Rachel. *The Breathless Zoo. Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing.* Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvia State University Press, 2012.

Pollock, Sheldon, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty. “Cosmopolitanisms.” *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 577–89.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London/New York: Routledge, 2005 (1992).

Preziosi, Donald. “Narrativity and the Museological Myths of Nationality.” *Museum History Journal* 2, no. 1 (2009): 37–50.

Pytlik, Mark. *Björk. Wow and Flutter*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2003.

Raaberg, Gwen. “Beyond Fragmentation: Collage as Feminist Strategy in the Arts.” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 31, no. 3, THE INTERARTS PROJECT: Part Three: Representing Women (September 1998): 153–71.

Ragnarsdóttir, Inga S. and Kristín G. Guðnadóttir. *Útisýningar á Skólavörðuholti 1967–1972*. Reykjavík: Minningarsjóður Ragnars Kjartanssonar, 2018.

Rampley, Matthew. “The Construction of National Art Histories and the ‘New’ Europe.” In *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe*, 231–46. Amsterdam: Brill, 2012.

Ransu, Jón B. K.“Partípíramítinn.” *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, April 2, 2005, 15.

Read, Herbert and Nikos Stangos. *Thames and Hudson Dictionary of Art and Artists*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1994/2012.

Reckitt, Helena and Peggy Phelan (eds.). *Art and Feminism*. London: Phaidon Press, 2001.

Reijnders, Tineke. “Ephemeral and Consistent: The Artists’ Initiative in Amsterdam.” In *Positioning the Art Gallery: The Amsterdam Gallery World in an International Context,* eds. Noor Mertens and Astrid Vorstermans, 151–69. Amstedam: Valiz, 2012.

Reynaud-Paligot, Carole. *La République raciale. Paradigme racial et idéologie républicaine 1860–1930*, préface de Christophe Charle. Paris: PUF, 2006.

Richards, Greg. “The European Cultural Capital Event: Strategic Weapon in the Cultural Arms Race?” *Cultural Policy* 6, no. 2 (2000): 159–81.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative,* Vol. III., trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago / London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Ridgway, Emma (ed.). *Experiment Marathon: Hans Ulrich Obrist & Ólafur Elíasson*. London and Reykjavík: Koening Books and Reykjavík Art Museum, 2009.

Ringler, Dick. *Bard of Iceland: Jónas Hallgrímsson, Poet and Scientist*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.

Robins, Kevin. “Prisoners of the City: Whatever Could a Postmodern City Be?” In *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*, eds. Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires, 303–30. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993.

Rocamora, Agnes and Anneke Smelik (eds.). *Thinking through Fashion. A Guide to Key Theorists*, 97–114. London: I.B.Tauris, 2016.

Rosenbach, Ulrike. “Statement (1975).” In *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, eds. Peter Selz and Kristine Stiles (2nd ed.), 885–86. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Rosenblum, Robert. *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

Rossini, Manuela and Michael Toggweiler. “Cultural Transfer: An Introduction.” In *Word and Text. A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* 4, no. 2 (December 2014): 5–9.

Roth Zeit. Eine Dieter Roth Retrospective, eds. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter with text by Dirk Dobke and Bernadette Walter. Basel: Schaulager/Lars Müller Publishers, 2003. Exhibition catalogue.

Roth Time. A Dieter Roth Retrospective, eds. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter with text by Dirk Dobke and Bernadette Walter. Basel: Schaulager/Lars Müller Publishers, 2003. Exhibition catalogue.

Roth, Dieter and Richard Hamilton. *Collaborations: Relations – Confrontations*. London & Porto: Hansjörg Mayer & Fundação de Serralves, 2003.

Runólfsson, Halldór B. "Burlesque." In *Under Deconstruction. Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson,* ed. Ellen Blumenstein, 116. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012.

–. "The Kitchen: An Offspring of Steina and Woody Vasulka." In *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950–1975*, eds. Tania Ørum and Jesper Olsson, 88–95. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

–. "Reflections on Icelandic Art." in *Landscapes from a High Latitude*, ed. Julian Freeman, 21–92. London: Lund Humphries, 1989. Exhibition catalogue.

–. "Symbolische Landschaft: Die verschiedenen Ausdrucksweisen in der islandischen Malerei von 1900 bis 1910." In *Landschaft als Kosmos der Seele: Malerei des nordischen Symbolismus bis Munch 1880–1910*, ed. Götz Czymmek, 47–50. Köln: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, 1998. Exhibition catalogue.

–. "Times of Continuous Transition." In *Icelandic Art Today*, eds. Christian Schoen and Halld́ór B. Runólfsson, 10–26. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009.

Russell Taylor, John. "Symbolism: The Constant Strain in Icelandic Art." In *Landscapes from a High Latitude*, ed. Julian Freeman, 93–105. London: Lund Humphries, 1989. Exhibition catalogue.

Russell, John. "Did Pollock Derive from Blake?; Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition." *The New York Times*, October 19, 1975, 269.

Ryall, Anka et al. *Arctic Discourses*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.

Sæþórsdóttir, Anna Dóra, Colin Michael Hall, Jarkko Saarinen. “Making Wilderness. Tourism and the History of the Wilderness Idea in Iceland.” *Polar Geography* 34, no. 4 (2011): 249–73.

Saïd, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: Henley, 1978.

Salo, Merja. “On Location. Proper and Not so Proper Places of Fashion in Finnish Fashion Photography.” In *Images in Time. Flashing Forward, Backward, in Front and Behind Photography in Fashion, Advertising and the Press*, eds. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir and Michael A. Langkjær, 61–74. Bath: Wunderkammer Press and Bath Spa University, 2011.

Sanderson, Marie. “The Classification of Climates from Pythagoras to Koeppen.” *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 80, no. 4 (April 1999): 669–73.

Santner, Eric. *On Creaturely Life: Rilke /Benjamin /Sebald.* Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006.

Sawin, Martica. “Updating the Nordic Sublime.” In *Confronting Nature: Icelandic Art of the 20th Century*, eds. Ólafur Kvaran and Karla Kristjánsdóttir, 15–20. Reykjavík: National Gallery of Iceland, 2001. Exhibition catalogue.

SB, “Súmmarar opna í Stedelijk í Amsterdam: Koma í kjölfarið á Matisse og Picasso.” *Vísir*, March 24, 1971, 1.

Schaffer, Simon et al. *The Brokered World. Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence 1770–1820.* Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications, 2009.

Schneider, Arnd. “On Appropriation. A Critical Reappraisal of the Concept and its Application in Global Art Practices.” *Social Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (2003): 215–29.

Schoen, Christian. “Observation from Inside and Out.” *List – Icelandic Art News* (Summer 2007): 4–7.

–. “Preface.” In *Icelandic Art Today*, eds. Christian Schoen and Hallḍór B. Runólfsson, 7. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009.

–. “Preface.” In *Rúrí*, ed. Christian Schoen, 6–7. Ostfieldern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011.

Schor, Gabriele. “The Feminist Avant-Garde: A Radical Transvaluation of Values.” In *Woman. The Feminist Avant-Garde of the 1970s. Works from the Sammlung Verbund*, ed. Gabriele Schor, 10–16. Brussels: Bozar, 2014. Exhibition catalogue.

Schulz-Hoffmann, Carla. “Tungumál skynjunarinnar.” In *Roni Horn*, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 7–14. Reykjavík: National Gallery of Iceland, 2000.

Schwarz, Dieter. “Zum frühen Werk von Diter Rot.” In *ZERO aus Deutchland 1957–1966. Und heute*, ed. Renate Wiehager. 210–212. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2000.

Seitz, William. *The Art of Assemblage*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961. Exhibition catalogue.

Sekula, Allan. “The Body and the Archive.“ In *The Contest of Meaning, Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton, 343–88. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999 (1989). Originally published in *October* 39 (1986): 3–64.

–. “Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation).” *Massachusetts Review* 19, no.4 (Winter 1978): 859–83.

Serra, Richard. *Writings: Interviews*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1994.

Shapiro, Kenneth. “Human-Animal Studies: Remembering the Past, Celebrating the Present, Troubling the Future.” *Society & Animals* 28 (2020): 797–833.

Sharp, Sarah Rose. “How a Racist Statue in Iceland Ended up Inside-a-rocket-ship.” May 5, 2022. Available from: https://hyperallergic.com/728392/how-a-racist-statue-in-iceland-ended-up-inside-a-rocket-ship/

Sharp, Willoughby.“An Interview with Joseph Beuys,” *Artforum* vol. 8, no. 4 (December 1969): 40–47.

Sheikh, Simon. “Avant–Garde Citizens, Double Agents, and Model Workers.” In *Under Deconstruction. Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson*, ed. Ellen Blumenstein, 27–33. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012. Exhibition catalogue.

–. “Marks of Distinction, Vectors of Possibility. Questions for the Biennial.” *Open. Cahier on Art and the Public Domain. Issue The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon* 16 (2009): 68–79.

Shklovsky, Victor. “Art as Device.” Trans. and introduced by Alexandra Berlina. *Poetics Today* 36, no. 3 (September 2015): 151–74. DOI 10.1215/03335372-3160709

Sigmundsson, Svavar. “Var Leifur heppni lánsamur eða frækinn?” In *Orð og tunga*, ed. Helga Hilmisdóttir, 153–57. Reykjavík: Árnastofnun, 2019.

Sigurðardóttir, Sigrún Alba. “Tímabundið landslag.” *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins*, September 29, 2007, 8–9.

Sigurðsson, Helgi Snær. ”Manstu eftir…Don Cano,” *Morgunblaðið*, November 9, 2009, 28.

Sigurjónsdóttir, Æsa. “Attraction of Origins.” In *Ólöf Nordal. Úngl*, ed. Ólöf K. Sigurðardóttir, 135–63. Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum, 2019.

–. “The Attraction of Physical Anthropology in Ólöf Nordal’s *Musée Islandique*.” In *Musée Islandique: Ólöf Nordal*, ed. Halldór B. Runólfsson, 5–16. Reykjavík: National Gallery of Iceland, 2012. Exhibition catalogue.

–. “Avons-nous encore besoin de héros nordiques ? Une analyse des généalogies artistiques et des filiations masculines entre Dieter Roth et Ragnar Kjartansson.” *Perspective* : actualité en histoire de l’art, 2019–1, 227–38.

–. “Fashion That Came in from the Cold War: Faces of Colonialism in the Fashion Spread.” In *Fashioned in the North: Nordic Histories, Agents, and Images of Fashion Photography*, ed. Anna Dahlgren, 31–48. Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 2020.

–. “Formáli” (Introduction). In *Myndhöggvarafélagið í Reykjavík 40 ára. Verk og hugmyndir að verkum í almannarými*, 6–12. Reykjavík: Myndhöggvarafélagið í Reykjavík, 2012.

–. “French Photography in Nineteenth-Century Iceland.” *History of Photography* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 10–17.

–. “The Guerrilla Paradigm or “Feminist-Avant-Garde” – Towards an Alternative Feminist Canon.” In *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries Since 1975*, Vol. 41, eds. Benedikt Hjartarson, Tania Ørum, Camilla Skovbjerg Paldam, and Laura Luise Schultz, 447–74. Leiden: Brill, 2022.

–. *Ísland í sjónmáli. Franskir ljósmyndarar á Íslandi 1845–1900 / Islande en vue. Photographes français en Islande 1845–1900*. Reykjavík: JPV forlag, 2000.

–. "'Land mitt! Þú ert sem órættur draumur. Óráðin gáta. Fyrirheit!' Um ódauðleika ægifegurðarinnar í Íslandsmyndabókum." In *Fegurðin er ekki skraut. Íslensk samtímaljósmyndun*, eds. Sigrún Alba Sigurðardóttir and Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, 11–48. Reykjavík: Fagurskinna, 2020.

–. "Magnús Pálsson et le département New Art à Reykjavík, 1975–1984: 'Teaching: The Maddest Artform'." In *Transmettre l'art. Figures et méthodes – Quelle histoire?*, eds. Christophe Kihm and Valérie Mavridorakis, 129–51. Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2014.

–. "New Maps for Networks: Reykjavík–Fluxus – A Case of Connections." In *Narratives Unfolding*: *National Art Histories in an Unfinished World*, ed. Martha Langford, 189–208. Montreal & Kingston, London, Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017.

–. "Nýr sjónarheimur," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*, vol. II, ed. Ólafur Kvaran (Reykjavík: Listasafn Íslands / Forlagið, 2011), 8–84.

–. "The New Nordic Cool: Björk, Icelandic Fashion, and Art Today." *Fashion Theory* 15, no. 2 (2011): 239–58.

–. "Outside and Inside of 'Trout Fishing in America and Other Stories'." In *You Must Carry Me Now: The Cultural Lives of Endangered Species*, eds. Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, 61–71. Billdal: 248 Publishing, 2015.

–. "Óræð inngrip og pólitísk orðræða í borginni: Listaverkið í almannarými og áhrif útisýninga í Reykjavík," *Ritið* 18, no. 2 (2018): 78–103

–. "Reality Check." In *Reality Check*: *Focus on Photography*, ed. Jóhanna Vigdís Guðmundsdóttir, 14–15. Reykjavík: Reykjavík Arts Festival, 2010.

–. "Sigríður Zoëga: Icelandic Studio Photographer." *History of Photography* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 28–35.

–. *Sigríður Zoëga. Ljósmyndari í Reykjavík*. Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2000.

–. *Til gagns og til fegurðar. Sjálfsmyndir í ljósmyndum og klæðnaði 1860–1960*. Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2008.

–. "'List er ekki hátíðleiki, heldur lífið sjálft'." In *Tracks in Sand*. *Sigurjón* Ólafsson, eds. *Æ*sa Sigurjónsdóttir and Birgitta Spur, 3-48. Reykjavík: Listasafn Íslands, 2014. Exhibition catalogue.

– (ed.). *Debatable Lands. Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir/Mark Wilson*. Kópavogur: Gerðarsafn – Kópavogur Art Museum, 2021.

– (ed.). *Dreams of the Sublime in Contemporary Art in Iceland*. Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum, 2008.

Sigurleifsdóttir, Svala. "Atlaga gegn feðraveldinu." *Vísir*, April 29, 1978, 4–5.

–. "Framúrstefna 7. áratugarins er kvennalist." *Helgarpósturinn*, May 18, 1979, 19.

–. "Hver er Cindy Sherman eiginlega?" *NT*, February 17, 1985, 12.–13.

–. "Kvennalist í Köben. Að glíma við frumstæð öfl." *Þjóðviljinn*, July 31, 1980, 8–9.

–. "Kvennalist í Köben. Kvennabarátta í orðum og myndum." *Þjóðviljinn*, July 25, 1980, 8.

–. "Kvennalist í Köben. Saga myndlistarkvenna." *Þjóðviljinn*, August 1, 1980, 7.

–. "Róttæk myndlist í gylltum römmum." *Þjóðviljinn*, March 23, 1979, 8.

–. "Tvær listakonur kynntar." *19. júní* 29 (1979): 50–51.

–."Ljósmyndaraliðskönnun." *Vera* 4, no. 6 (1985): 24–26.

– and Guðrún Erla Geirsdóttir. "Að vera kona." *Helgarpósturinn*, June 8, 1979, 20.

Simon, Cheryl. "Introduction: Following the Archival Turn." *Visual Resources* 18, no. 2 (2002): 101–7.

Singer, Roman and Tumi Magnússon. *When You Travel in Iceland You See a Lot of Water. A Travel Book.* Zürich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2011 (2010).

Sjåstad, Øystein and Elizabeth Doe Stone. "Le modernisme nordique: nouvelles orientations d'étude." *Perspective*: *actualité en histoire de l'art*, 2019– 1: 199–210.

Skaptadóttir, Unnur Dís and Kristín Loftsdóttir. "Cultivating Culture? Images of Iceland, Globalization and Multicultural Society." In *Images of the North: Histories* –

Identities – Ideas, ed. Sverrir Jakobsson, 205–16. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009.

Skene Catling, Patrick. "Greenland: The Ice-Bound Giant." *Weekend Telegraph*, December 10, 1965, 16–23.

Skovbjerg Paldam, Camilla. "The Icelandic Love Corporation spreads love at ARoS." In *Love Conquers All!: The Icelandic Love Corporation,* 20–29. Aarhus: ARoS Publishing, 2016. Exhibition catalogue.

Skírnisson, Karl. "Um aldur og ævi hvítabjarna." *Náttúrufræðingurinn* 77. no. 1–2 (2009): 39–45.

"Skrípalæti trúða í Lindarbæ." *Morgunblaðið*, May 19, 1965, 27.

Smith, Terry. "Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity." *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (2006): 681–707.

–. "Defining Contemporaneity: Imagining Planetarity." *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 24, no. 49–50 (2015): 156–74.

–. "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question." In *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, eds. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee, 1–19. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.

–. "The State of Art History: Contemporary Art." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (December 2010): 366–83.

–. *What is Contemporary Art?* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

–, Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee (eds.). *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, and Contemporaneity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

Snæbjörnsdóttir, Bryndís. "Understandings of Artistic Research." In *Doing Research. Writings from the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts* — Nº3, eds. Jan Kaila and Henk Slager, 10–15. Helsinki: The Finnish Academy of Fine Arts in collaboration with MaHKU (Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design), EARN (European Artistic Research Network) and dOCUMENTA 13, 2012.

– and Mark Wilson. *Feral Attraction: The Museum of Ghost Ruminants /Ómur óbyggðanna: draugasafn jórturdýranna*. Billdal: 248 Publishing, 2019.

– and Mark Wilson, in conversation with Steve Baker and Ross Birrell. "On Animals, Death and Derrida's Cat." *Art & Research. A Journal of Ideas, Contexts, and Methods* 1. no. 2 (Summer 2007).

– and Mark Wilson. "Untying the Knots: Relational Art and Interspecies Encounter." In *Animal Encounters: Kontakt, Interaktion Und Relationalität, Cultural Animal Studies 4*, eds. Alexandra Böhm and Jessica Ullrich, 187–205. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2019.

Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. "Framing Landscape Photography (2010)." In *Photography after Photography*: *Gender, Genre, History*, ed. Sarah Parsons, 107–40. Duke University Press, 2017.

–. "Modern Style. Dressing Down." *Artforum* 42, no. 9 (May 2004): 192–96.

Springate, Matt. *Promote Iceland: Inspired by Iceland*. London: IPA, Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, 2001.

Springfeldt, Björn (ed.), *Sleeping Beauty Art Now / Scandinavia Today* –. New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1982. Exhibition catalogue.

Ssorin-Chaikov, Nikolai. "Ethnographic conceptualism. An Introduction." *Laboratorium* 5, no. 2 (2013): 5–18.

Stavning Thomsen, Bodil Marie, and Kristen Ørjasæter (eds.). *Globalizing Art: Negotiating Place, Identity and Nation in Contemporary Nordic Art*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2011.

Stevens, Wallace. "The Snow Man." In *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, 9–10. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1978.

Stougaard-Nielsen, Jakob. "Nordic Nature: From Romantic Nationalism to the Anthropocene." In *Introduction to Nordic Cultures*, eds. Annika Lindskog and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, 165–180. London: University College, 2020.

SÚM III, Reykjavík: Gallerí SÚM, 1969. Exhibition catalogue.

*SÚM IV, 20 maart t/m 25 april 1971, eds.*Sigurður Guðmundsson, Frits Keers and Gijs van Tuyl. Amsterdam: Museum Fodor, 1971. Exhibition catalogue.

SÚM á Listahátíð í Reykjavík. Reykjavík: Galerie SÚM, 1972, 24. júní /21. júlí. Exhibition catalogue.

Svæðisskipulag höfuðborgarsvæðisins 2001–2024. https://reykjavik.is/sites/default/files/skjol_thjonustulysingar/greinarg-12-vefur2-lett.pdf

Sveinsson, Gísli. "Sýningin í Kaupmannahöfn frá hjáleigum Danaveldir." *Fjallkonan*, December 16, 1904, 197–98.

Sveinsson, Hjálmar (ed.). *Róska.* Reykjavík: Nýlistasafnið and Mál og menning, 2000.

Sverrisdóttir, Baldvina Sigrún. "'Í listinni felast lykilsamskipti fólks.' Mob Shop, alþjóðlegar sumarvinnustofur listamanna í ljósi kenninga John Deweys og heimspekilegrar verkhyggju." Master's dissertation. Reykjavík: University of Iceland, 2014.

Talyor, Diana. "Transculturating Transculturation." *Performing Arts Journal* 13, no. 2 (May 1991): 99–104.

"Think While You Shoot." *Harper's Bazaar*, November 1935, 92–152. Quoted in Gretchen Gardner. *Disappearing Witness: Change in Twentieth-Century American Photography*, 84–85. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Thoren, Roxi J. "The Deep Grain of the Inquiry: Landscape and Identity in Icelandic Art." *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 5, no. 1 (2010): 38–51.

Udstillingen H_2O organiseret af SÚM. Nikolajkirke in Copenhagen March 20–Dec. 1, 1974. Ed. Hildur Hákonardóttir. Reykjavík: Súm, 1974. Exhibition catalog.

Udstilling af islandsk kunst 10–23 december Charlottenborg 1927. Copenhagen: Charlottenborg, 1927. Exhibition catalog.

"Umdeilt listaverk í Grafarvogi." *Morgunblaðið,* December 4, 2003, 20.

Valtýsson, Bjarki. *Íslensk menningarpólitík.* Reykjavík: Nýhil, 2011.

Van Meter, William. "Head Case. Case: Meet Björk's Favorite Hair Sculptor." *The New York Times Style Magazine*, February 20, 2005, 164.

Varnedoe, Kirk. “Nationalism, Internationalism, and the Progress of Scandinavian Art.” In *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting 1880–1910*, ed. Kirk Varnedoe, 12–33. New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1983. Exhibition catalogue.

Vatsella, Katerina. *Edition MAT. Daniel Spoerri, Karl Gerstner und das Multiple: Die Entstehung einer Kunstform*. Bremen: H.M. Hauschild, 1998.

Verma, Harsh V. *Brand Management. Text and Cases*. New Delhi: Excel Books, 2006.

Vermeulen, Ingelies. “Feminist Art: an (un)Achievable Ideal? A Consideration of the Exhibition *Feministische kunst international*.” In *Rebelle: Art & Feminism, 1969–2009*, ed. Mirjam Westen, 57–68. Arnhem: mmka, 2009. Exhibiton catalogue.

Vermeulen, Timotheus and Robin Van den Akker. “Utopia, Sort of: A Case Study in Metamodernism.” *Studia Neophilologica* 87, sup. 1 (2015): 55–67.

Verpe, Karlis and Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir (eds.). *(Re)construction of Friendship*. Riga: Art Space, 2014. Exhibition catalogue.

Viðbrögð við landgöngu hvítabjarna á Íslandi. Skýrsla starfshóps sem umhverfisráðherra skipaði í júní 2008 til tillögugerðar um viðbrögð vegan hugsanlegra landtöku hvítabjarna á Íslandi. (Report of a working group appointed by the Minister for the Environment in June 2008 to propose a response to the possible landing of polar bears in Iceland). Retrieved from:

https://ust.is/library/Skrar/Einstaklingar/Nattura/Skyrsla_um_komur_hvitabjarna_til_Islands_lokautgafa.pdf

Volk, Gregory. “Report from Reykjavik: Art on Ice.” *Art in America* 88, no. 9 (September 2000): 40–45.

Webb, Peter and John Lynch. “‘Utopian Punk’: The Concept of the Utopian in the Creative Practice of Björk.” *Utopian Studies* 21, no. 2 (2010): 313–30.

Wei, Lilly. “Reykjavik Report. Under the Volcano.” *Art in America* 99, no. 10 (October 2010): 99–104.

Weil, Kari. “A Report on the Animal Turn.” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2010), 1–23.

Weiss, Eva L. “Italianicity Goes Global. National and Transcultural Strategies in Advertising Discourse.” In *Contrastive Media Analysis: Approaches to Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Mass Media Communication*, eds. Stefan Hauser and Martin Luginbühl, 179–200. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012.

Wentrack, Kathleen. “What's So Feminist about the *Feministische Kunst Internationaal*? Critical Directions in 1970s Feminist Art.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 33, no. 2 (2012). Special Issue: *Feminist Art and Social Movements: Beyond NY/LA*: 76–110.

While, Aidan. “Locating Art Worlds: London and the Making of Young British Art.” *Area* 35, no. 3 (September 2003): 251–63.

Winkel, Camiel van et al. *Conceptual Art in The Netherlands and Belgium 1965–1975. Artists, Collectors, Galleries, Documents, Exhibitions, Events*. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2002. Exhibition catalogue.

Wolfe, Cary. “Human, All Too Human: ‘Animal Studies’ and the Humanities.” *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (March 2009): 564–75.

–. “In the Shadow of Wittgenstein’s Lion: Language, Ethics, and the Question of the Animal.” In *Zoontologies*. *The Question of The Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe, 1–57. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Young, La Monte (ed.). *An Anthology of Chance Operations, Concept art, Anti-art, Indeterminacy, Improvisation, Meaningless work, Natural disasters, Plans of action, Stories, Diagrams, Music, Poetry, Essays, Dance, Constructions, Mathematics, Compositions*. New York: La Monte Young & Jackson Mac Low, 1963.

Zacharasiewicz, Waldemar. “The Theory of Climate and the North in Anglophone Literatures.” In *Images of the North: Histories– Identities– Ideas*, ed. Sverrir Jakobsson, 25–49. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009.

Zemon Davis, Natalie. “Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossings in a Global World.” *History and Theory* 50, no. 2 (May 2011): 188–202.

Þorgeirsdóttir, Sigríður. “Klisjur og draumsýnir um Ísland.” *Morgunblaðið*, December 18, 2005, 46.

–. “Nature’s Otherness and the Limits of Visual Representations of Nature.” In *Art, Ethics and Environment. A Free Inquiry Into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature*, eds. Ólafur Páll Jónsson and Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, 112–24. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006.

Þórisdóttir, Rósa Rut. *Hvítabirnir á Íslandi*. Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Hólar, 2018.

Þráinn. “Jú, víst er hægt að lifa á myndlist – ef maður er nógu lélegur.” *Morgunblaðið*, June 28, 1967, 10 and 20.

Archival Documents

John Cowan. Photographs and negatives. The John Cowan Family Estate, London.

The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. Nýlistasafnið (The Living Art Museum), Reykjavík.

Online resources and digital libraries

Bibliothèque nationale de France. https://gallica.bnf.fr/

National and University Library of Iceland:

https://baekur.is/
https://rafhladan.is/

https://timarit.is/

https://www.stjornarradid.is

MoMA. The Collection. https://www.moma.org/collection/

Reykjavík Art Museum. The Collection. https://safneign.listasafnreykjavikur.is/

Sarpur. Cultural Archive. https://sarpur.is/

Yale University Art Gallery. https://artgallery.yale.edu/collection

FIGURES



Fig. 1. Vivian Sassen, *À la poursuite du rêve* (Towards a Dream). Place de la Concorde, Paris, January 25, 2021. Photo: Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir.

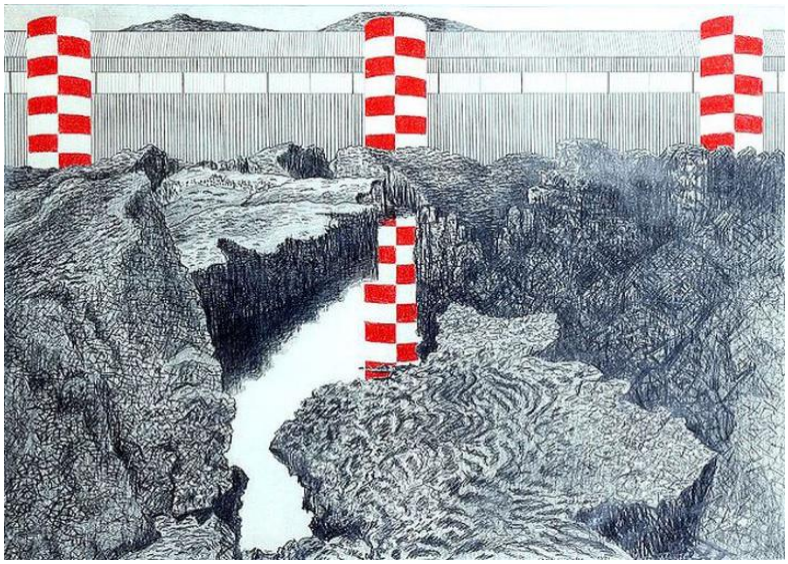


Fig. 2. Gylfi Gíslason, *Fjallasúrmjólk* (Mountain Sour Milk), 1971. Pen and watercolour on paper, 72.5 x 96.5 cm. National Gallery of Iceland.


Laugardagur 16. sept. 1961 MORGUNBLAÐIÐ

„Á þetta nú að koma upp líka“

Við Ásmundarsalinn rís Vindharpa

INNI í Ásmundarsalnum við Freyjugötu getur að líta hina furðulegustu hluti. Þar er brot úr Vilkupá í rónsteini fellda í abstraktmálverk, fuglar gerð úr ör sjávarkonu eldhúsáhöld um, samansoðnar skrúfur, naglrekin borð á veggjum með tryggingunum steingdum á milli naglanna, og þar getur hver skapað sitt listverk með því að flytja tryggingar á milli nagla. Fyrir dyrum úti hefur fjörverðar simastaur verið rekinn niður í jörðina og kranahlíf frá Héðni hefur hvern furðuhlutinn af öðrum

Dieter Rot við Vindhörpuna. — Vænandi listverk líka.

Hlutar úr listaverkinu eru nú horfnir að mestum.

— Á þetta nú að koma upp líka, segir Ásmundarsalurinn og dæsir.

Hún ég setji að leka staurinn

— þetta er Vindharpa, segir um við.

— Er það já. Þetta getur þá orðið listaverk með tímanum.

— Hvað heldur að þú ætlir að gera hér?

— Hefði ekki hugmynd um það. Hún að ég setji að hlíta einhvað. Mér var sagt að hún ég þá hvort ég ætti að hlíta hann upp.

— Hefurðu sett upp listaverk áður?

— Nei.

— Hvað finnst þér að setji að hafa þetta?

— Ja, það voru settir upp vindhanar á staura svona hing að og þangað í gamla daga.

— Finnst þér hanalag á hörpunni?

— Það er ekki þar með sagt. Það var ekki hanalag á vindhönunum. Það voru settir vind hanar á hús og staura, en að gefa þeim hafa, ja það er annað mál.

— Þú sert nem sagt sáttur hrjóstverður?

— Af þessu? Eg skil það ekki.

Má ekki þvinga hugmyndaflug

Inni á Kjarvalsstaði sjálfri hlíðum við fyrir Ásmundi frumsýnum myndhöggvara, sem verið hefur kennari við Myndlistarskólann frá stofnun hans.

— Hvað finnst þér um ástæðuna?

— Eg hefi gaman að henni. Eg lít að hlíta og ekki hann ar að fyrst og fremst fólgin í því að þvinga skilyrði hugmyndaflug manninn, þannig að menn hafi frjálsar hendur, en hangt er að kenna þeim nærri. Þetta hefur verið mín stefna frá því að ég byrjaði að kenna hér fyrir 18 árum.

— Hvað finnst þér hæst hér?

— Eg get ekki sagt um það. Þegar ég er spurður um mínar eigin myndir, þá er erfitt að svara. Það er eins hér. Eg á vitið vegin, að það sína, sem ég vildi sýna í framtíðinni, er að þessi skúli fái meira fé til umráða.

— Hvað finnst þér t.d. um þetta? spyrjum við, og bónd- Framhald á bls. 13.

Fig. 3. Dieter Roth, *Vindharpa* (Wind-Harp), 1961. Wood, iron and telephone wires. Skólavörðuholt, Reykjavík. Destroyed. Press photographs published in *Morgunblaðið*, September 16, 1961, p. 3.

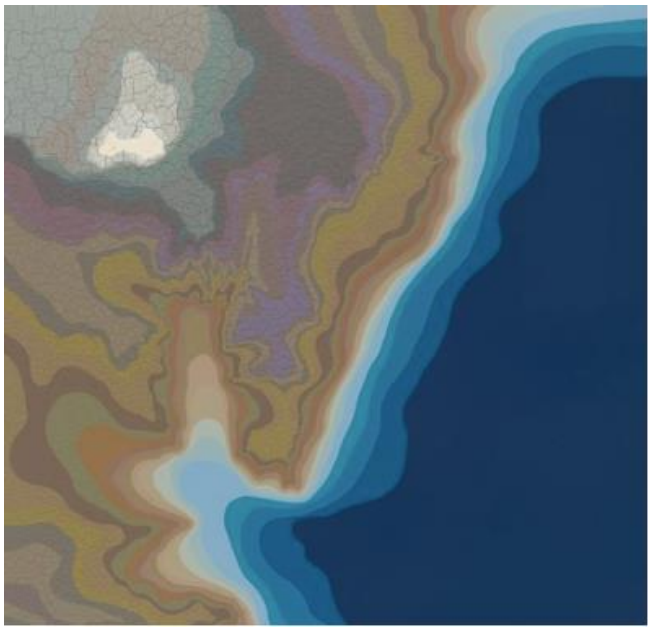


Fig. 4. Dieter Roth, *Iceland from the Air*, 1970. Screen print on masonite, 70 x 70 cm. Yale University Art Gallery. https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/31570.



Fig. 5. Hildur Hákonardóttir, *Úr sögu mannsins* (*From the History of Man*), 1971. Knitted wool and wood, 6 units. Various sizes. The Living Art Museum.

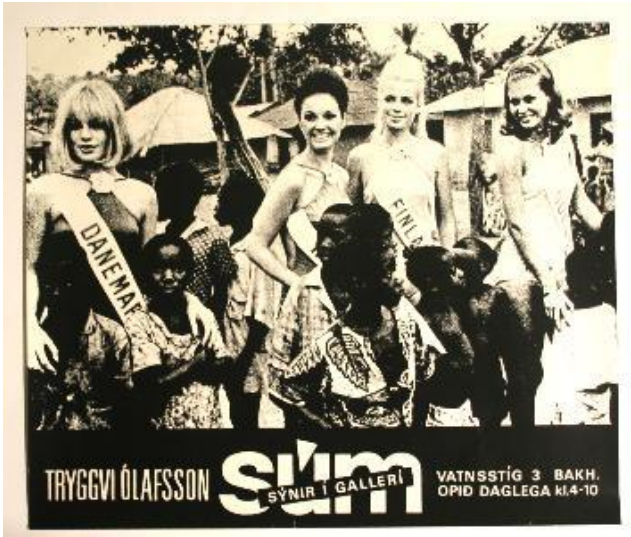


Fig. 6. Tryggvi Ólafsson, Untitled wall poster, SÚM, Reykjavík, 1972. Print, 58 x 68cm. The Living Art Museum.

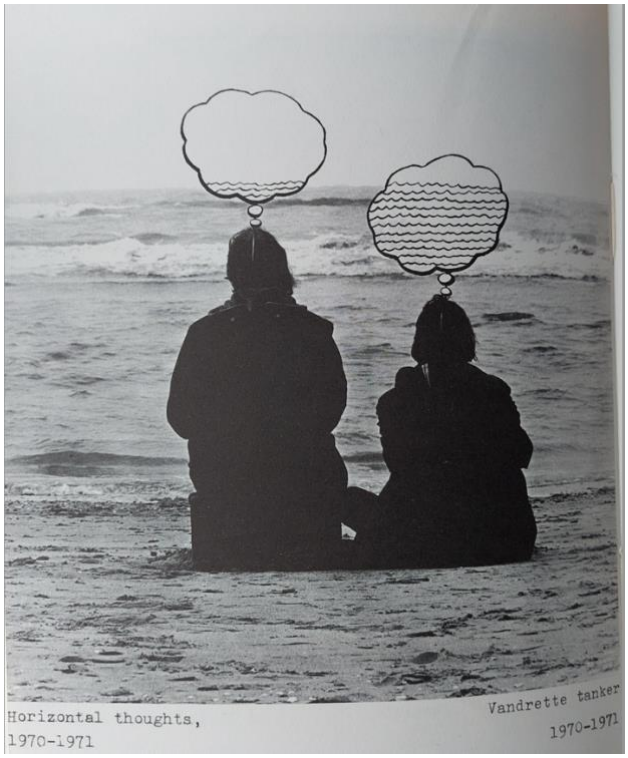


Fig 7. Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Horizontal Thoughts*, 1970-1971. *Udstillingen H_2O*. Exhibition catalogue.

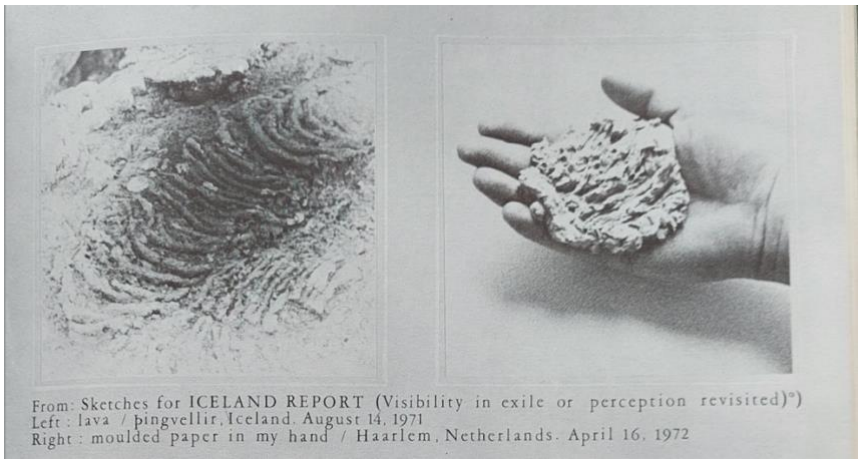


Fig 8. Douwe Jan Bakker. *Sketches for Iceland Report* (Visibility in exile or perception revisited). Left: Lava / Þingvellir, Iceland, August 14, 1971. Right: Moulded paper in my hand / Haarlem, Netherlands. April 16, 1972. From *SÚM á Listahátíð í Reykjavík 1972*, Reykjavík: Gallerie SÚM, 1972. Exhibition catalogue.



Fig. 9. Valdís Óskarsdóttir, *Rauði svifnökkvinn* (The Red Hovercraft), 1975. Photography and collage. Various sizes. Courtesy of the artist.

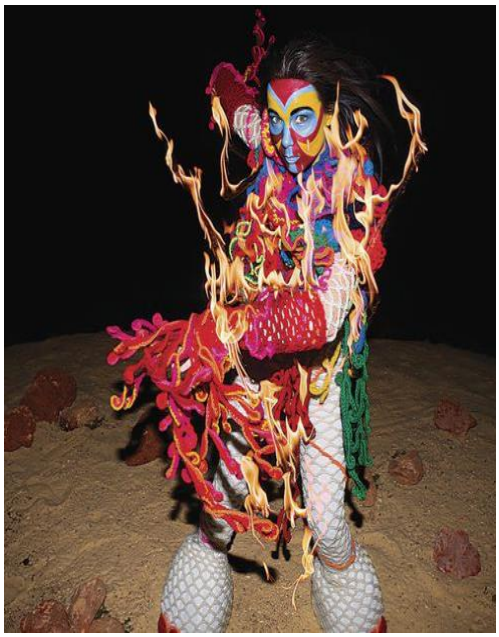


Fig. 10. The Icelandic Love Corporation, Björk wearing *TheWildWomanWoodooGrannyDoilyCrochet*, 2007. Photo: Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinohd Matadin. Courtesy of ILC.



Fig. 11. Einar Jónsson, *Þorfinnur Karlsefni*, 1916. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Einar Jónsson Museum.



Fig. 12. Ásmundur Sveinsson, *Fyrsta hvíta móðirin í Ameríku* (The First White Mother in America), 1938. Concrete, H. 3 m. New York World Fair, 1939. Photographer unknow. Private collection.



Fig. 13. Ólöf Nordal, *Hvítir hrafnar* (White Ravens), 1996. Plaster, steel. 200 x 100 x 50 cm. National Gallery of Iceland. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 14. Ólöf Nordal, *Musée Islandique*, 2010. Photographic print 70 x 90 cm. Courtesy of the Artist.



Fig. 15. Ólöf Nordal, *Das Experiment Island*, 2012. Photographic print 35 x 50 cm. Courtesy of the Artist.



Fig. 16. Hallgrímur Helgason, *Can I Be With You?*, 2005. Digital print on canvas, 110 x 160 cm. University of Iceland Art Collection.



Fig. 17. Magnús Sigurðarson, *Sá stóri hvíti* (The Great White One), 1997. C-print, 152 x 152. Photo: Jennifer Karady. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 18. Daníel Þorkell Magnússon, *So Fucking Peaceful*, 2003. Photographic print, 77 x 90 cm. Reykjavík Art Museum.



Fig. 19. Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson, *Untitled (Portrait of the artists wearing the Icelandic women´s costume; Peysuföt and Upphlutur)*, 2000. Photographic print, 100 x 150 cm. National Gallery of Iceland.



Fig. 20. Pétur Thomsen, *Aðflutt landslag AL3_9a* (Imported Landscape), 2003. Photographic c-print. Various sizes. Courtesy of the artist.

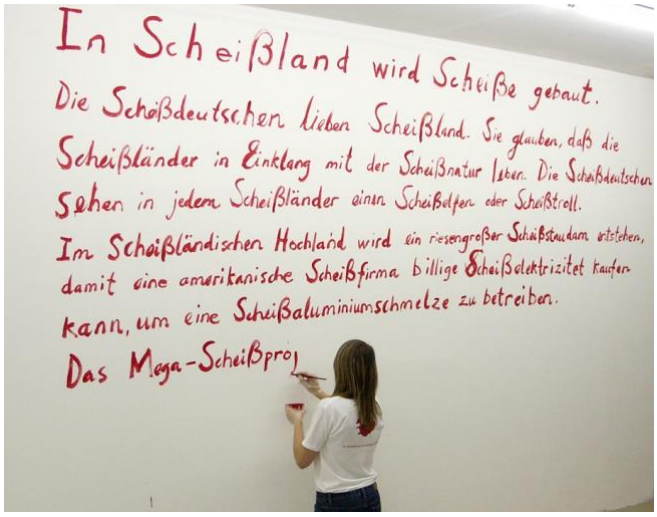


Fig. 21. Ósk Viljálmsdóttir, *Scheissland* (Shitland). Performance in Island Bilder Festival in Cologne, Germany, November 2005. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 22. Hlynur Hallsson, *Einkennisorð mótælanna urðu: Helvítis fokking fokk – Schlagwörter der Demonstration wurden: Verdammte verfickte Scheiße – Keywords of the demonstration became: Damn fucking fuck*, 2010. Photographic print. Various sizes. Courtesy of the Artist.



Fig. 23. Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and MarkWilson**,** *Shooting the Messenger* ♂ and ♀, 2021. Digital collage, text, pins, paper, ink, each 195 x 115 cm. University of Iceland Art Collection.