



Ljósmyndasafn Reykjavíkur  
Reykjavík Museum of Photography



Hallgerður Hallgrímsdóttir, *Untitled*, 2012

# Distance and Intimacy

## Contemporary Icelandic Photography

19.9.2020 – 10.1.2021

About the Exhibitors

# **Agnieszka Sosnowska**

*Dýrin hennar Arneyjar, Húsey/Arney's Pets, Húsey, Iceland, 2013/2020.*

"The girl in the photograph was my student. She ordered these ducks from another farm. They arrived in a box after a long car ride. Sometimes I feel like Arney learning to hold the ducks correctly. Other times I am the ducks.

It takes a long time to arrive at a "story" in my pictures. Setting up the camera, the tripod, metering the light, can take hours. I expose 2 to 3 sheets of film over the course of hours. I use a Graflex 4X5 view camera. We've been together for 30 years. This camera has become an extension of myself. I rarely go anywhere without it. I have been photographing my students for 15 years. I print the work small because they give impression of family photographs. These young people have in a sense become more than just students.

I work primarily in black and white so I can see results quickly. My husband built a darkroom at our farm, so I process my film and print my own work. Using this camera pushes me to think: *What do I want to say today?* "

# Bára Kristinsdóttir

*Heitir reitir. 2004 / Hot Spots. 2004.*

Bára made the project *Hot Spots* for a solo show at the Reykjavík Museum of Photography in 2005. "Greenhouses are fascinating, not least in winter. Inside them is that unique odour of humidity and earth. That world is separated from frost and chilly weather by only five millimetres. Inside the sounds are different – people are working in there in tee-shirts, surrounded by cucumbers, tomatoes or roses, while a blizzard rages outside." The photograph was taken in Hveragerði, south Iceland, in December 2004 inside the Banana House at the Horticultural College. "The light level was low, so the photo was taken with the maximum aperture. It was taken on positive 4 x 5 inch film/slides, and enlarged in darkness on R / reversal paper – in other words, it has never been in a computer. Only one exemplar of each image exists, and no more can be made, except by scanning and printing digitally, as this kind of paper is no longer produced."

# Bjargey Ólafsdóttir,

*Falskar tennur / False Teeth, 1998/2020.*

“My art is not confined to a single medium – I choose the medium most appropriate to my idea on each occasion. I make audio works, performances, films and videos; I draw, write and take photographs. In my work I seek to capture atmosphere and tell stories. I am captivated by the spectrum of feelings, as well as magical realism, surrealism and subtle humour. Beauty and colours are very important to me. Playfulness, willingness to experiment, curiosity and the unexpected are also vital elements of my art. In addition, travel brings me inspiration and the opportunity to work somewhere new. The medium of photography led me to the medium of film. My photographs are invariably staged, and so it made sense to go onto moving pictures.

*False Teeth* was the centrepiece of my first solo show in Iceland, at the Living Art Museum in the autumn of 1998. I shot the film on 16mm colour stock. I wrote the script and drew up a storyboard to explain the development of the story to my colleagues. I make a point of extensive preparation and detail, and I had decided the colour palette: blue, silver and pink. The wallpaper was very expensive. It was wallpaper from an antique wallpaper shop, but we found it too good to miss. I had been watching a lot of French *film noir* and *Nouvelle vague* films when I made the film, and their influence is seen in *False (French) Teeth*. I was living in Finland at that time, so a dry, ironic Finnish humour is also discernible. The film is very short, about three minutes. But it took three or four months to put those three minutes together. The music was composed for the film by the late guitarist Kristján Eldjárn (1972-2002).

In parallel with the filming I shot a series of photographs, which I have also displayed together with the film, or as a separate work.

## **Bragi Þór Jósefsson,**

*Varnarliðið / Iceland Defence Force, 2007.*

The photograph is part of the *Iceland Defence Force* series, shown by Bragi at the Reykjavík Museum of Photography in 2015. All the photos were taken on the site of the former US naval air base at Keflavík, southwest Iceland, after the military left in 2006 following 55 years of operation. The base had its own shops, schools, cinemas, sports facilities, restaurants and nightspots, in addition to the military installations themselves and housing for personnel. At its high point the population of the base totalled about 5,700 people, including military, personnel, other staff and families. "I first saw the site with my own eyes when I went there on a small photographic job. I decided at once that I wanted to make a systematic photographic record of it, before it was all changed by the Icelanders. I felt that it was a historical necessity, and I also saw it as visually intriguing, and interestingly different from the environment we are familiar with here in Iceland."

# Claudia Hausfeld

*Kofi / Hut*, 2017.

“The work, consisting of a rephotographed print that is an enlargement of a small image from a book on the culture of the African continent, aims to decontextualize and deconstruct the intention of the original photograph, namely to describe and explain something that exists. The hut, (for the Western eye) an unusual structure to begin with, is further removed from itself by going through several layers of abstraction, thereby turning into an almost illegible, new object. In Claudia’s work, photography functions as a medium that complicates reality instead of relying on it. Her images, that often take the form of objects, challenge the viewer to contemplate how photography changes the subject it depicts.”

# **Daníel Þorkell Magnússon,**

OK, 1999/2020.

“OK, from 1999, is one of four pieces I made at that time, addressing themes of landscape and language. The background to OK is that on the TV news the Minister of Industry of the time was talking about the waterfall Gullfoss, and the impossibility that it would ever be harnessed to generate electricity. He stated unequivocally that, for instance, Gullfoss would never be harnessed. So he was taking it as an example of a waterfall that would never be harnessed. This is a doctrine that has dire consequences for nature – that other natural monuments are expendable, just because one of them has been reserved for conservation. That is why the waterfall is given the international exclamation of approval, proclaiming its excellence.”

## **Einar Falur Ingólfsson**

*Aftur - Keflavíkurhöfn / Again – Keflavík Harbour, 2007.*

*Aftur - Gagnfræðaskólinn / Again – Lower Secondary School, 2007/2020.*

The series *Again* was first exhibited at the Reykjanesbær Art Museum in 2007: a total of 36 photographs. This was Einar Falur's first scripted project on 4x5 inch film. He returned to the place where he grew up, conceiving the project as a whole – both book and exhibition. "The film format is very important, the medium must make its mark – the great objectivity and detail that the large-format film offers. And I have chosen to have the pictures in frames, yet again to underline the sense of the medium, and to foster a sense of friction between the subjectivity of the subject, the objectivity of the large format, and the object which the framed picture is."



# Guðmundur Ingólfsson

*Skúlagata, 2008.*

*Borgartún, 2008.*

„There is nothing as mysterious as a fact clearly described. I photograph to see what something will look like photographed.“ Garry Winogrand (1928-1984)

“I have long felt that this quotation from US photographer Garry Winogrand sums up my attitude to photography. I examine some subjects carefully and repeatedly before I decide that they will make a photograph, and others I ‘pick up along the way.’ But always with the objective of seeing how the object will look photographed, just like maestro Winogrand.”

# Gunnhildur Hauksdóttir

*Kókómjólk í hendi / Chocolate Milk in Hand, 1999/2020.*

“The photograph dates from my student days, when I was experimenting with various media. At that time I was using photographic and video media in a personal way, as people often do on their artistic quest. The photo was published in the periodical *Andblær*, at around the same time as other series by me. Comparable works from that time are e.g. the series *Drunk Boys*, in which I used found photographs of young men who had passed out in public from drinking, and *Mamas and the Papas*, in which I told my parents’ story via party pictures in family albums. *Chocolate Milk in Hand* originated in a moment when I stood naked and just-awakened in my kitchen, drinking a Chocolate Milk for breakfast, and realised that my period had started. The initial title was *Blood in the Crotch, Cocoa Milk in Hand*. The original print and the 35mm negative are lost; the copy shown here has been scanned from the periodical *Andblær* in the National Library.”

# Hallgerður Hallgrímsdóttir

*Án titils / Untitled, 2012/2020.*

"I ran into the boys in eastern Turkey, where men often walk arm-in-arm, and I asked them not to let go. The photo is from the series *Untitled* (2012); the pictures were accumulated here and there in Iceland and Turkey, during experimental roaming in search of something that can't be found. The photo itself has no title – I generally don't give titles to individual images in my photo series. The horizon is slightly askew, but I decided to keep it that way. Errors and chance are an integral element of photography, and part of what I find so fascinating about the medium. Although it is a key image in the series, the photo is of moderate size, and it has both been nailed naked straight to the wall, and modestly framed. Unframed, it hangs with a cluster of other images on a large, or long, wall; but without the other images it's good for it to have the support of frame and glass. A frame can give a picture added status; then it says more: "Here I am." But that isn't right for all works. Sometimes it better serves the idea or aesthetics of the work not to label them as valuable in that way. I sometimes think of it like lettering fonts: even if the reader doesn't necessarily notice what font is being used, or the reasons for the choice, the font has an impact on the feel of the text – it sends a message to the unconscious."

# Katrín Elvarsdóttir

*Minning um ísbjörn / Memory of a Polar Bear, 2019.*

The photos are printed on acrylic sheets, which are somehow reminiscent of the glass plates used by photographers in the 19th century (and well into the 20th). Here they are displayed on a shelf, which from the perspective of photographic history given an impression of precious ancient artefacts. It is also an allusion to the fact that these animals, along with the ice floes that provide them with nourishment, may soon be consigned to history. The work addressed the climate crisis and animals on the brink of extinction – in recent years polar bears have come to symbolise climate change. The photo series shows a polar bear pelt, paws, claws and other body parts. They belonged to Knut, the famous polar bear born at Berlin Zoo in 2006. He was the first polar bear cub to be born in a zoo and thrive for over thirty years. Knut's life came to a tragic end when he drowned in his pool in front of hundreds of zoo visitors. Images of Knut have often been used to draw public attention to the environment and nature, for instance on a German postage stamp with the message: *Natur weltweit bewahren* (Protect nature worldwide)."

# Kristleifur Björnsson

*This Would Suit Her. Rooftop # 1, 2007.*

What do photographs want of us? Have they gained the upper hand, made the observer into the subject – now, when they give spurious promise of a life that lies in wait in the world of simulacra, in cyberspace or on social-media. Kristleifur Björnsson's work focusses on such questions. It may be characterised as a study of how commercial photographs demand an intimate share of every person's private life, while also directly shaping our sense of reality, and engender countless desires.

In *This Would Suit Her* Kristleifur steps right into photographic history, reminding us how reality became a stage for performance in front of the lens, and photographs became an inexhaustible source of narratives in the early days of photography. *This Would Suit Her. Rooftop #1*, which is one of a series of seven images, may thus be read as a melancholic metatext about photography itself as a phenomenon, its beginnings and its possible end – as Kristleifur demonstrates the hold it has gained over our innermost selves.

# Kristinn Ingvarsson

*Elías Mar, 2000 /2020.*

“The picture of writer Elías Mar (1924-2007) was taken at Café Mokka in 2000 for *Sköpunarsögur* (Creation Stories), my book with Pétur Blöndal, published by Forlagið in 2007. This is one of many photos I took of Elías Mar. I also photographed him at home – and always with his cigarette in its holder.

The idea of *Creation Stories* was to present an image of the relevant individuals, in both text and photography. The picture was also included in 2005 in my exhibition *Skuggaföll* (Shadowfall) in the photo gallery at the National Museum of Iceland. It was said to be an eloquent image of the writer. The photo was taken on TR-X medium format film. The film was scanned for printing in the book. The copy seen here is a digital print.”

# Orri

*Porri. Toronto 2015, 2018.*

*Ísland 2011, 2018.*

Time is one of the fundamental themes of the photographic medium; but Orri's works are not concerned as such with documenting the passing of time, but rather the lifetime of the individual as a phenomenon which is difficult to address adequately. The photographs shown here are from a larger collection which Orri has been working on in a spontaneous way in recent decades. The work is both an archive and a family album – as his wife and children appear in the pictures, generally as silent observers. Orri is a musician, who saw photography as personal expression, a kind of exaltation of the everyday. He chooses to use analogue technology, because the relationship with time is different, and perhaps more immediate than in digital forms. "I have, at best, an unclear idea of why I take photographs, but when I examine the developed negatives I sometimes have a better understanding of something I didn't know I didn't know."

## **Pétur Thomsen,**

*Aðflutt landslag AL9\_8d / Imported Landscape AL9\_8d, 2006/2008.*

Pétur Thomsen started work on *Imported Landscape* in 2003, at the height of a national debate and controversy surrounding the new hydro-electric plant at Kárahnjúkar. "I regularly went east to Kárahnjúkar and stayed one to three weeks at a time, with the objective of monitoring nature in these gigantic changes that were taking place, and thus commemorating nature by showing a contemporary Icelandic landscape." Pétur took the title of the work from a poem by Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, in which the poet describes his uncomfortable feelings when he came across "Icelandic" mountains in Scotland. But what is *Imported Landscape* about? The work has been interpreted as a contribution to the discourse on nature conservation, or a depiction of man's struggle with the sublime in the present day. What is certain is that in the work Pétur creates a formalised visual world characterised by heavily-textured weighty shapes of nature, in contrast with manmade chaos. By using a narrowly-framed perspective and bringing various colourful details into the picture plane, Pétur disorients the observer – as pictures "should serve some purpose other than purely decorative. The purpose of photography is to confront something, to address something that matters."

Pétur remarks of this image, *AL9\_8d*: "The picture was taken in 2006 and printed in 2008 at Grieger in Düsseldorf for a show at the BOZAR Centre for fine arts in Brussels. I had the opportunity to have the piece made in Germany, so I decided to print it bigger than I had done before, and have it mounted under matte Diasec. The size of pictures has a big impact on how the observer experiences the work – it's as if some images gain more potency by enlargement, while others become diluted when they are greatly enlarged, and lose their vigour.



## Spessi

*Bensín – Reykjavík / Petrol – Reykjavík, 1998.*

*Bensín – Starmýri / Petrol – Starmýri, 1998.*

*111, 2018.*

*Petrol – Starmýri* is one of a series of more than a hundred photographs of petrol stations in Iceland, taken by Spessi in 1996-98. The entire work was shown at Reykjavík Art Museum – Kjarvalsstaðir in 1999 and Spessi published his first photographic book, *Bensín* (Petrol). Spessi has long maintained that ordinary things are the most interesting, and that petrol stations attracted him simply because they are beautiful, strong, commonplace structures, that are illuminated like monuments when darkness falls. In *111*, made in 2015-18 in the Breiðholt suburb of Reykjavík, Spessi wanted, on the other hand, to approach the subject from within. He got to know the residents of district number 111 with the objective of giving them a voice and making them visible, in a society that no longer observes its immediate surroundings.

