



ELEMENTAL

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ELEMENTAL

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GREGORY VOLK

el-e-men-tal

adj.

1. Of, relating to, or being an element.
2. • Fundamental or essential; basic.
• Of or relating to fundamentals; elementary.
• Constituting an integral part; inborn.
3. Of such character as to resemble a force of nature in power or effect: elemental violence.

— The Free Online Dictionary

1.

I'd like to begin this essay by reprising a section of a text I wrote way back in 2001, fresh off my first two visits to Iceland. Back then, Olafur Eliasson (whose parents are Icelandic, but who was born and raised in Copenhagen, and who is now participating in Elemental), learned of my passionate interest in Iceland. He invited me to contribute a text about the country for the book *Olafur Eliasson: Surroundings Surrounded, Essays on Space and Science*, which also includes diverse texts by many other writers. That book is not really about Eliasson's work; instead it addresses many of the issues surrounding his work,



including Iceland. Here is how my text starts:

“Iceland, famously, is the world’s oldest democracy, dating back to 930 AD when the ancient parliament —the Althingi— was established at Thingvellir. For two weeks every summer, people from all over Iceland gathered there to hash out disputes, make plans, make laws, and provide cohesion for a society scattered loosely about a particularly inhospitable part of the world. Uncommonly homogenous, Iceland is also a place where genealogies can be traced way, way back, and where the language itself, relatively unchanged through the ages, serves as a bridge to the distant time 1,000 plus years ago when intrepid Vikings (and some Celts) first settled there—as you often hear in Iceland, if one of those Vikings were to return right now he or she would have no trouble conversing with current residents. It is interesting to note that this old, intact society occurs in what is by far the youngest European country, and the last one to be settled, in 874. The landmass of Iceland, which largely took its present shape 13,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age, is bisected by the Mid-Atlantic Ridge which separates two huge tectonic plates, the Eurasian and North American. Half of Iceland is, in fact, on the North American side of these plates, and half on the European side, which gives it a peculiar in-between status. As an American, I grew up believing that the first European to “discover” my part of the world was Christopher Columbus. In fact, Icelanders had landed in what is now Canada some 500 years before.

I won’t pretend to be an expert about this country, place, and society, having visited there twice (recently) for a total





of just about three weeks. I can say, however, that these were three enormously influential weeks. There is something about this youngest country that insinuates itself into one's mind and even more into one's blood stream, almost as soon as you get off the airplane, when you drive from Keflavik to Reykjavik through bleak yet riveting lava fields that seem altogether otherworldly. There is something that scrambles one's perspective, that rejuvenates one, that baffles one, that makes one unsteady, and that ultimately persuades one to re-examine just how one proceeds through the world. This can happen culturally, but it can also happen physically, and especially in one's relationship with the land and all its forces, which, incidentally, can also happen in the capital city of Reykjavik. I remember going swimming in one of the many warm geothermal pools in the city (there is always an outdoors pool nearby, you go swimming year round) and then taking a sauna, and then lounging around in the hot tubs. After this session, I felt wonderful, and then proceeded to walk down some bleak streets on a gray day in a West Reykjavik residential neighborhood and across the park toward the old town. There was a slanted rain like cold needles, and an impossible, freezing wind that seemed to be occurring on some other planet, on one of Jupiter's moons, perhaps. I remember shaking uncontrollably and thinking I was going to die. Hypothermia in the city park. I also remember thinking, oddly, as I leaned into the wind, how lovely Reykjavik seemed in the distance, like a small harbor town, with the downtown houses blue or russet (they're covered with sheets of colored tin) and the soaring church Hallgrímskirkja rising on the





highest hill. It was raining sideways. Sometimes the rain was raining up, or straight, and the wind seemed to be coming from all directions simultaneously. I remember feeling lonely, but really less in a psychological than in a bone-deep physical way: skin and bones in a raw place. I also remember feeling ridiculously happy, keyed up, exquisitely alive. It was early afternoon and twilight and it was possible, inside Reykjavik, to be connected to, and affected by, the kind of rampant forces that are routine in the interior, or along the windswept coasts.”

2.

I have since been back to Iceland many times and have nurtured an abiding interest in Icelandic artists, including those exhibiting in Elemental. I have curated an exhibition at the wonderful i8 Gallery in Reykjavik, Icelandic artists have participated in numerous other exhibitions I've curated that didn't focus on Iceland at all, and I have written quite a lot about Icelandic artists. I have often been astonished how such a small country (population: 321,857 as of January 1, 2013: there are far more people living in Malmö than in all of Iceland) manages to generate such compelling artists, especially when you consider that visual art is a very recent development in Iceland, basically dating, for a variety of complex reasons, including centuries of crushing poverty and the Danish occupation, to around the turn of the 20th century. I'd also like to stress how comprehensively influential and invigorating Iceland has been for me, not just its artists, but also its culture, literature, music, and remark-





able landscape. Traveling way out to the volcanoes; hiking at Landmannalaugar where the mountains are blue, yellow, pink, green, black, purple, and white; camping among the rugged and looming lava formations at Berserkjahraun on Snafellsnes, as well as in remote and spectacular Hornstrandir, at the north-west tip of Iceland—these have all been formative experiences. In such places you are often alone with powerful elements: with lava and the weather, magnificent cliffs and rivers, heaths and the sea, glaciers and primal geology. Once I was talking with Swiss artist Roman Signer, who is in Elemental and also a frequent visitor to Iceland, and I asked him why he often makes his temporary sculptures, or sculptural actions, far out in nature. He thought for a bit and then replied, in German, that he simply feels best and most free outdoors, and that this is where, for him, “poetry” happens. Iceland is an excellent place for such outdoor poetry.

There is something very elemental about Iceland, and also about Icelandic art, certainly the art included in this exhibition. While this art may, at times, look minimal, it is also important to understand the context. While Minimalism began in the U.S. and Europe in the early 1960s, in Iceland it began as a comprehensive attitude in 874, when Ingólfur Arnarsson, the first settler, arrived in what now is Reykjavik, and chose to make his future in that particular, remote, and especially elemental location: sky, sea, mountains, lava fields stretching in all directions. He had a brother-in-law named Hjörleifur Hróðmarsson, his de facto neighbor, who settled a hundred or so miles down the coast at Myrdalssandur (and was, alas, murdered by his Irish slaves, who felt mistreated). At Myrdalssandur there is a huge





black beach, the ocean, a high plateau surrounded by cliffs and, nearby, the Myrdalsjökull glacier, which you can see from the beach and which sometimes releases tons of glacial debris in an instant downhill flood that obliterates everything in its path: this is a profoundly elemental site. Living close to and with the elements has characterized Icelandic culture since its inception, and has deeply influenced Icelandic art. Moreover, while this art may not be “about” Iceland, Iceland in some measure is in the work, and in the consciousness that produced the work: a homeland on the mind that informs and energizes each artist’s deep inquiry.

With the Icelandic artists in the exhibition, you see how this elemental approach plays out, in fascinating ways. Ragna Róbertsdóttir’s two wall works are made from lava and red earth; Kristján Guðmundsson’s drawings-as-sculptures, mounted on the wall, are made from pure graphite, or pencil lead; Tumi Magnússon’s video monochromes are made by the simple action of pouring paint, while Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir’s colorful sculpture is made almost solely from artificial hair. Margrét Blöndal typically uses scraps and pieces of plastic, cloth, string, rubber, and other sundry materials in her sculptures, while three of Ívar Valgárdsson’s sculptures are made from nothing more than hand-painted paper crumpled into big balls, but in a way that also suggests boulders and lava chunks. Birgir Andrésson’s two wall works, with their interplay between colors and words, include these amazingly short texts: “pouring rain” and “blackest night,” which succinctly suggest the powerful weather, environment, and history of Iceland. Hildur Bjarnadóttir’s works, which resemble minimal paintings, are made from hand-woven





Icelandic wool, hand-dyed with pigments from Icelandic plants by the artist herself.

Elemental also recognizes the impact Iceland has had on important international artists, who have been visiting, and at times residing in, the country for years. Roni Horn has been involved with Iceland for basically her whole career, including living in the country part time and exhibiting her work there, as has Olafur Eliasson. Roman Signer, who is especially attuned to the volcanic environment, has made numerous of his signature temporary sculptures, or sculptures-as-events, far out in the landscape. Lawrence Weiner has also visited numerous times, and has exhibited in Reykjavik as well as up north in Akureyri. Karin Sander has also exhibited in Reykjavik and has travelled throughout the country. Joan Jonas's involvement dates back to her *Volcano Saga* (1985-1989), filmed in Iceland and based in part on the famous 13th century *Laxdaela Saga*, while Swedish photographer Maria Friberg counts her experience studying for one year in Reykjavik at the Iceland Academy of the Arts as an important influence.

The works in the exhibition are diverse, including sculptures, photographs, conceptual paintings, videos, text-based pieces, textiles, sound and performance. All are elemental, in the multiple meanings of the word; they are involved with essences as well as forces of nature. Throughout the exhibition, Iceland, that volcanic island nation in the North Atlantic, is a powerful and presiding influence, both on Icelandic artists and those from elsewhere who have experienced and reveled in the country's magnetic allure.

I would like to acknowledge the profound contribution of






Birta Gudjonsdottir, an Icelandic curator and artist, and assistant curator of Elemental. She brings her own broad and acute knowledge of both Icelandic and international art to this exhibition, as well as her deep feeling for and knowledge of her home country. She is a major figure when it comes to understanding contemporary Icelandic art and its relationship to the world, and her involvement with Elemental has been invaluable.

BIRGIR ANDRÉSSON

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Had he left his small home country to make his career in a more visible location, it is likely that Birgir Andrésson (Iceland, 1955-2007), one of the top and most exceptional Icelandic artists of the past several decades, would be much better known internationally, yet his decision to stay makes perfect sense. Iceland was much more than his home. It was also his muse; the subject of much of his work; an endless source of inquiry and inspiration; a culture, history, and special landscape that he absorbed and responded to in eclectic works spanning paintings, sculptures, drawings, texts, and photographs. At once deeply felt and coolly ironic, playful and formally exquisite, Andrésson's works constitute a remarkable engagement with Iceland per se, including its present and deep past, as well as with its relationship with the world. Found photographs of obscure 19th century vagabonds and eccentrics, accompanied by short texts; magnified and distorted paintings of 1930s stamps celebrating representa-



tive Icelandic things like geysers and waterfalls; “portraits” of anonymous Icelandic individuals and animals involving short, descriptive texts, and subtly altered maps of Iceland are all part of Andr sson’s oeuvre.

Andr sson’s two wall paintings in Elemental are from his Icelandic Colors series, for which, with his characteristic deadpan humor, he claimed various colors as uniquely Icelandic, although they could exist anywhere. Made with house paint, one is a subdued grayish green, precisely the kind of matte color that you often see in Iceland on the corrugated metal exteriors of houses. Near the top are the words “pouring rain” in muted orange, while a brief list at the bottom identifies the colors used: Icelandic 0560-Y20R and Icelandic 4010-890G. The other painting is a deep, lustrous black with the words “blackest night” in the same green used in the other painting.

Straightforward and empirical, like giant size color swatches at the hardware store or online, these austere paintings prove surprisingly evocative and poetic. “Pouring rain” and “blackest night” are intentional clich s that nevertheless suggest the powerful weather, environment, and history of Iceland: long, long winter nights; buffeting rain that comes from every which way, ancestors hunkered down in leaking turf houses. Together, these two terms also seem like a snippet of some story or ancient Icelandic saga, from which all other information has been deleted.



HRAFNHILDUR ARNARDOTTIR

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Hrafnhildur Arnardottir (Iceland, b. 1969, lives in New York) is most known for sculptures involving artificial hair, which deal with issues of adornment, vanity, transformation, and enticement, and which have brought her considerable acclaim, including the Nordic Award in Textiles (2011) and the Prince Eugen Medal for outstanding artistic achievement (2011) bestowed by the king of Sweden. Artificial hair was the chief material in Arnardottir's spectacular Nervescape, presented at New York City's Clocktower Gallery in 2012. Deep blue, brown, green, and vibrant yellow predominated in this towering soft wall made of cascading fake hair. Hair "growing" from and taking over the architecture seemed weird and excessive, like some hybrid life form run amok, but made for a work that was inviting and surprisingly meditative, and that also had a mysterious, enveloping power. Arnardottir's supple work seemed organic, despite its synthetic materials, and also geologic; she refers to it as a "landscape," even a landscape painting, albeit one made without paint. This work was also marvelously evocative, suggesting caves, grottoes, fairy tale lairs where magical creatures live, cliff walls, glaciers, and volcanic eruptions. Arnardottir's interior work resonated with big news of the outside, and this big news may involve, however obliquely, her homeland: its wind and flowing water, glaciers and lava formations.

Nervescape also doubled as an inspired collaboration with renowned Icelandic musician and singer Kría Brekkan (aka Kristín Anna Valtýsdóttir), an Icelandic vocalist with an enchanting soprano



voice; a virtuoso multi-instrumentalist, and former mainstay of the band *múm*. Arnardóttir invited Brekkan to create a live sound piece and performance in response to the work. With no fanfare or announcement, Brekkan suddenly emerged, or rather slithered, from the work, dressed in garb made from the same material as the sculpture, and clutching a microphone: she was a creature at one with the sculpture. As she crouched, crawled, reclined, climbed up the sculpture, and sometimes disappeared into it, she improvised vocal music (without words) for several hours, using a special keyboard linked to a hidden computer to mix sounds and send them through eight hidden loudspeakers. What resulted was an ever-shifting sonic environment, in turn trilling, mournful, whimsical, airy, and severe, that exquisitely blended with Arnardóttir's sculpture.


For *Elemental*, Arnardóttir, once again collaborating with Brekkan, has made the second version of this remarkable work, responding to and transforming the special context of *Havregasinet's* basement. The sculpture, with sound and performance, seems like an excursion: outward to distant landscapes, inward to depths of the psyche, deep into mysteries.

HILDUR BJARNADÓTTIR

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With a background in textiles dating back to her early childhood, Hildur Bjarnadóttir (Iceland, b. 1969) is adept at, and knowledgeable about, traditional Icelandic handcrafts, including knitting, sewing, weaving, crocheting and embroidery, in a







country where such handcrafts have a deep history. This is most unusual for an accomplished contemporary artist. Bjarnadóttir works with many of the same materials and employs many of the same techniques that were familiar to her mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and other relatives through the ages. The startling and compelling thing with Bjarnadóttir is how she radically updates this tradition, investing Icelandic crafts with unconventional ideas and intentions, while creating decidedly non-traditional works. In 2012 Bjarnadóttir was nominated for the Carnegie Art Award, annually given to outstanding Nordic artists, and her textile-based art has also been widely exhibited, in Iceland and internationally.

Among the highlights of Bjarnadóttir's work is *Re-present*, 2007-09, featuring several pairs of conceptual mittens that she made for her grandmother, reversing years during which her grandmother gave her mittens as Christmas presents. The mittens are very specific, incorporating aspects of the grandmother's life into the design, while Bjarnadóttir made one made pair via a pre-knitting, and now mostly forgotten, technique once used by the Vikings, the original settlers in Iceland. Her *Untitled (skulls)*, 1999, is an extraordinary version of a crocheted cotton doily. Quite large, so that it covers much of a table, this intricate, white work displays crocheted skulls at its fringe, with the skulls introducing a dire note of mortality and, possibly, violence into an object that is otherwise delicate and lovely.



For *Elemental*, Bjarnadóttir exhibits works that at first glance appear to be monochrome paintings in different colors. They are actually made from hand-woven Icelandic wool hand-dyed with pigments from Icelandic plants by the artist herself. Bjar-



nadóttir thus uses two elements central to Iceland, sheep's wool, which has been a huge part of the culture since the earliest Viking settlers, and native plants. Iceland is profoundly in these works, while Bjarnadóttir also juxtaposes and conflates two different spheres: handcrafts and fine art, woven objects and minimal paintings.

MARGRÉT BLÖNDAL

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Margrét Blöndal (Iceland, b. 1970) has an unusual way of working. Rather than bringing artworks to an exhibition space and installing them, she typically spends a lot of time in the space, thinking of its possibilities and absorbing its spirit. Only when she senses that things are right, when she is properly attuned to the space, does she make works directly for and in relation to the site, including sculptures so slight and unobtrusive that at first glance you sometimes barely notice them, as well as subtle, yet absolutely lovely, drawings. Blöndal's materials are often markedly mundane: scraps that she finds and sees potential in, throwaway things that suddenly take on new life and poetic meaning in her hands. Pieces of rubber, thread, blue foam, plastic, cloth, sticks, plastic rings, wrapping paper and balloons are just some of the materials she has worked with. When you encounter small sculptures by Blöndal, they may, at first, seem like next to nothing, accidents even. Stay with them longer, really looking at and absorbing them, and they disclose comprehensive allure and almost vibrational intensity: captivating



forms, at once ragged and exquisite, that are sheer visual poetry, and that are also suffused with a great deal of emotional energy. Sometimes Blöndal's sculptures are on the floor, sometimes attached to the walls, and sometimes they are suspended overhead. They engage the whole space and while often minimal, understated and decidedly non-monumental, they have a maximal impact.

Blöndal's oftentimes modest drawings (which are a major part of her oeuvre) are likewise enthralling. Partly abstract and partly representational, at times referencing just parts of family photographs and memories, these drawings have an almost magical ability to induce complex psychological states: reverie mixed with longing and loss, exuberance mixed with solemnity and contemplation. Bursts of vibrant color, similar to how color functions in Blöndal's sculptures, are especially resplendent. As with Blöndal's sculptures, you surmise that these drawings arise from a deep and questing psychological place, from soulful depths where the mysteries are.


For *Elemental*, Blöndal will engage, in her particular way, with Havremagasinet, transforming much of the second floor into her very particular environment, while using found materials to do so.

KRÍA BREKKAN

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Musician, singer, sound artist, and visual artist Kría Brekkan, aka Kristín Anna Valtýsdóttir (Iceland, b. 1982), is a virtuoso multi-instrumentalist, a riveting vocalist with an enchanting soprano voice, and, together with her twin sister Gyda, a former





mainstay of the renowned Icelandic band múm. After leaving the band in 2006, Brekkan has pursued an eclectic career including solo performances; collaboration with her former husband David Portner of Animal Collective, including the 2007 album Pullhair Rubeye (billed as Avey Tare and Kría Brekkan); performances with Animal Collective; participation in Stórsveit Nix Noltes, a group of largely Icelandic musicians who focus on Bulgarian folk music; and performances with the excellent Icelandic duo Slowblow. She is also one of the performers, playing guitar, accordion, and singing, in Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson's highly acclaimed nine-screen video work The Visitors (2012).

Brekkan infuses her music with extraordinary spirit and emotion, and in her remarkable solo concerts absolutely everything matters: her ethereal voice, musicianship, physical movements, expressions, and connection with the audience. She lives, rather than merely performs, her music which is why her concerts tend to be so transportive and cathartic, traversing and combining multiple psychological states, including whimsy, agitation, delight, and beatific repose. However implicit, there is a profound connection between Brekkan and the severe, yet wonderful, Icelandic landscape, and a connection as well to Icelandic poems, sagas, and song reaching way back into history. Improvisation is of fundamental importance for Brekkan, who sometimes performs recognizable songs, but often goes on improvisational sonic journeys, taking her rapt audience with her. For Elemental, Brekkan will use her various techniques to improvise a sound performance in conjunction with Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir's colorful sculpture made from artificial hair. She will also perform a solo concert at Havremagasinet.



OLAFUR ELIASSON

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With its stark beauty, raw geologic power, and captivating natural phenomena, volcanic Iceland has long been both subject and muse for Olafur Eliasson, whose parents are Icelandic, although he was born and raised in Copenhagen. Eliasson (b.1967, lives in Berlin and Copenhagen) began exhibiting in the early to mid-1990s and was quickly acclaimed for his sculptures, installations, and photographs focusing on nature, light, color, perception, reflection, architecture, and optical effects. A staple of his work is what one could call mediated nature; meticulous, rigorously constructed works that nevertheless access elemental natural forces like sunlight, mist and fog, rainbows, ice, and waterfalls. His wildly popular *The New York Waterfalls* (2008), involving four monumental, man-made waterfalls off New York City's shoreline, was perhaps linked to Iceland's powerful, awe-inspiring waterfalls, including Dettifoss in the Northeast and Gullfoss in the Southwest.

Eliasson, who often collaborates with scientists and engineers, has a remarkable and perhaps even unprecedented ability to generate rapt audience response. It is estimated that his sublime, and also enormously popular, *The weather project* (2003) in the Turbine Hall at London's Tate Modern generated two million viewers over six months, with many returning for repeat visits. In the cavernous space, hundreds of mono-frequency lamps formed an orange-yellow, semi-circular disc high up at one end of the hall. The ceiling was covered with mirrors,



reflecting the glowing, semi-circular light so that it seemed like the sun; these mirrors also reflected the space itself as well as visitors. With humidifiers pumping a mixture of water and sugar to form drifting mist, Eliasson's interior version of the sun, clouds, fog, and weather is one of the signature and most iconic works of this era.


Eliasson's two photographs in *Elemental* are from his *The large Iceland series* (2012), for which he visited Iceland, taking photographs of the singular landscape from different perspectives, some from high up in an airplane, others from the ground. Differently hued mountains, moss-covered lava fields, waterfalls, the sky, rivers, rocky outcroppings, and rising steam all figure prominently. Subdued yet abundant colors, and almost abstract shapes in nature, are also downright painterly; Eliasson's photographs function as landscapes composed by the artist as well as by nature. While Eliasson's photographs are scientific, clinical and indexical, dealing in information and facts, they are also enthralling and sublime, conjuring intense encounters with a nature that is both wondrous and scary.

MARIA FRIBERG

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Maria Friberg (Sweden, b. 1966) is a prominent photographer and video artist who has exhibited extensively in Sweden and internationally. She is especially known for her photographs of men, involving an investigation and transformation of what constitutes





masculinity, while she also often explores our complex relationship to nature and landscape. Friberg's color photographs are vivid, lush, and flat out gorgeous, yet they are also unsettling and coolly provocative. Reversing centuries of what has often been called a "male gaze" (men looking at women), Friberg's female gaze captures smartly attired men, for instance wearing business suits, in unexpectedly vulnerable and also sensual contexts. One of the photographs in her series *Still Lives* (2003-2007) shows a man reclining on his side while inexplicably nestled among a towering stack of books, which seem at once sheltering and threatening; another shows a man in a white suit and black trousers lying on his back atop a pile of crumpled automobiles, a perfect symbol for upended power. Both works subvert codes of masculine authority, while they function as riveting and entrancing visual forces. In 1992, while still a student, Friberg spent much of one year studying in Reykjavik at the Iceland Academy of the Arts, during which Iceland, in her terms, made a "strong impression, visually and emotionally." Many of her subsequent works have placed her investigation of gender in relation to a nature that seems at once sublime and ominous, for instance the photographs in *Alongside Us*, 2007, in which men in white suits lie, like resting animals, high up in tree limbs and branches.

For *Elemental*, Friberg exhibits three photographs from her excellent *The Painting Series*, 2011, for which she photographed, from below, people lying on a glass pane covered with ink and water. The flowing, colorful ink looks like wet paint, and indeed these works are very painterly (Friberg's background is in painting), with actions and gestures, for instance abstract swirls and smears creating blue, orange, brown, and red shapes. Working with really basic elements—bodies,



colored ink, water, light, and glass—Friberg created remarkable photographs that seem at once biological, with suggestions of the body’s interior, and cosmic, alluding to nebulae and galaxies.

KRISTJÁN GUÐMUNDSSON

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Kristján Guðmundsson (Iceland, b. 1941) was one of the principal figures in the short-lived, but deeply influential, movement of progressive artists called SÚM, which radically challenged and ultimately renewed Icelandic art in the late 1960s and early 1970s, opening it to fresh, international ideas. A renowned and, at the time, controversial work by Guðmundsson from 1969 involved, among other things, an ironing board covered with chicken shit; he took the ironing board out to the chicken coop and let the birds make the composition. This work— one of the first and perhaps the very first installation in Iceland—was widely panned by the cultural powers that were and was considered either a laughingstock or a national shame. Much later, it was belatedly acquired by Iceland’s National Gallery, while Guðmundsson has been duly recognized as a major figure, not only in Iceland. He was the first prize winner of the prestigious Carnegie Art Award 2010, annually bestowed on a distinguished Nordic artist, and also the first Icelandic artist to win the top prize.

Guðmundsson couples concrete materials and spare, pared-down forms with acute philosophical and esthetic investigations into what constitute art objects now. Among Guðmundsson’s most acclaimed works are what he bills as “drawings”, which exist in different sizes





and configurations. Instead of applying pencil to paper to make an image, as one would with a normal drawing, these sculptural works consist of pure graphite as a physical material, sometimes juxtaposed with rolls of white paper; others of Gudmundsson's unorthodox drawings are made solely of pencil leads. Always inventive, inclusive, and willing to incorporate mundane objects into his austere and geometric, yet often humorous and eccentric esthetic, Gudmundsson has enlisted levels from the tool shop, window glass, and a plastic decoy goose along with a golden egg for his work, and he has also created a series of "sound absorbing paintings," monochrome acrylic paintings covered by mass-produced perforated grids typically used for sound-absorbing walls inside buildings.

For *Elemental*, Gudmundsson exhibits a selection of his wonderful drawings-as-objects on the walls, made from graphite or pencil lead. Distilling drawing down to its absolute essence, namely the pure material from which most drawings are produced, Gudmundsson's works have an expansive impact on the space, interacting with the white walls, windows, and the whole, surrounding space.


RONI HORN

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With sculptures, photographs, various works incorporating texts, site-specific installations, books, and exquisite drawings, Roni Horn (U.S., b. 1955) is among the foremost artists of her generation, and a major force both in the U.S. and internationally. Horn's typically spare yet gorgeous works, includ-





ing rectangular sculptures made of cast blue glass, enthralling photographs of the surface of water (notably the River Thames for her series *Some Thames*, 2000), and photographs of taxidermied Icelandic waterfowl seen from behind against stark white backgrounds, are visually stunning, as well as evocative and poetic. Horn is involved with a profound investigation of place, weather, change, water, clouds, our relationship to the natural world, identity, and psychological depths. Her many elemental photographs of the surface of water, for instance, focus attention on structure and patterns but also evoke hidden depths, both in the water and ourselves, while suggesting complexities: water as a gentle and supple substance that can wear away rock and shape continents, as a changeable (yet also eternal) thing that can easily move from placidity to awesome power.

Right from the beginning of her career Horn has been visiting, and at times residing at length, in Iceland, to the point where Icelandic culture and, importantly, Iceland's special landscape and climate have had a formative impact on her art. Horn's long-term *Library of Water*, 2004, in coastal Stykkishólmur, Iceland, features 24 transparent columns filled with water from Iceland's glaciers, which are gradually disappearing because of global warming. In this "library" you look at clear water but also through and beyond it to much more water outside: the North Atlantic on one side of the building, and the harbor on the other. There is something very lovely, contemplative and, sublime about the experience, while you are disturbingly forced to consider that massive glaciers really are disappearing, and that the weather and climate really are changing, with ominous and likely dangerous results.

For *Elemental*, Horn exhibits a single sculpture, an As-



phere (1986-1995), in an otherwise almost empty room. Made of stainless steel, glass shot peened to create a small, barely perceptible indentation, Horn has described her slightly non-spherical sphere like this: “So it’s not a sphere and it’s nothing else. To me it’s like an homage to androgyny. Androgyny is the integration of difference as a source of identity.”

Horn is also exhibiting two photographic diptychs, both titled *Becoming a Landscape*, in which Icelandic hot springs look primal, somewhat frightening, and also deeply alluring.

JOAN JONAS

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Leading back to crucial earlier works such as her influential video *Vertical Roll* (1972) and her likewise acclaimed mixed media performance *Organic Honey’s Visual Telepathy* (1972), Joan Jonas (U.S., b. 1936) has long been and remains one of the foremost practitioners of video and performance art. Among the most innovative, visionary, and meaningful artists of a spectacular generation that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Jonas has also pioneered an especially combinatory art that melds video, live performance, sculpture, drawing, and music, and that is often launched by a particular text, or rather Jonas’s special meditation on that text.

Volcano Saga, 1985-89, is inspired by Jonas’s visit to, and experience of, Iceland, which has one of the most volatile and powerful landscapes on earth (at one point Jonas’s car was suddenly blown off the road by a powerful wind). Based on





excerpts from the 13th century Laxdaela Saga (which many scholars attribute to a female author, although this has not been proved), this work reenacts a fraught encounter between Gudrun, a legendary Icelandic heroine, and her cousin Gestur, a chieftain and seer. This encounter between cousins is mesmerizing and erotically charged, and it occurs against a backdrop of video images and photographs of contemporary Iceland: lava floes, craggy mountains, jagged lava fields, turf houses, and steaming waters. Present and deep past, ancient journeys in Iceland and Jonas's own journey to the country, all intertwine.

Jonas's two videos in *Elemental*, which were part of her much-lauded installation at *DOCUMENTA 13* (2012) in Kassel, Germany, continue her engagement with Iceland. They are inspired in part by the books of Nobel prize-winning Icelandic author Halldór Laxness. Shot in northern Norway, riveting images of mountains, rock formations, and the sky conjure an excursion into a place that is at once foreboding and wondrous, gorgeous and bleak. With spoken words (some of them direct quotes from Laxness) and Jonas's signature actions with various props, both videos are enthralling meditations on the North.

TUMI MAGNÚSSON

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Tumi Magnússon (Iceland, b. 1957) has been extolled for his vivid, intelligent, oftentimes refreshingly eccentric paintings, and more recently for his painting-like photographs and videos. Magnússon's spare aesthetic, which involves prominent single





colors as well as a subtle interplay between different colors, is linked to various forms of reductionism practiced elsewhere, including monochromes and Color Field painting. However, he is probably just as, and perhaps even more so, connected to a longstanding Icelandic affinity for evocative austerities, including the country's severe yet enthralling landscape, and the acute qualities of light in that landscape, as well as to a national interest in understatement, humility, and reserve, as opposed to flamboyance and excess.

Magnússon also couples close, dispassionate, almost scientific observation of visual phenomena with goofy humor and a rich sense of the absurd. Among Magnússon's memorable past works are six abstract paintings, ranging from dark brown to tawny, which effectively capture and memorialize the different hues of Coca-Cola, from a full bottle to a slight drop, and a suite of eight paintings, from light yellow at the left, through yellowish white, and then mostly white on the right, which all chart the hues and tones of an actual egg white in the process of turning from raw to cooked.

Magnússon's spare approach and vibrational colors remain essential, even as he has increasingly explored a kind of expanded painting, which includes temporary wall paintings, large scale photographs, and videos. For *Elemental*, he presents his two-channel video installation *Seven Leftover Monochromes*, 2009. At first glance, seven monochromatic fields seem static, fixed in that way and no other. Suddenly everything changes. Rapidly poured paint hits one monochrome with a slap, turning it into a different color, while bubbles make the surface irregular. As the paint dries (Magnusson condensed time for this









work, turning lengthy procedures into relatively short ones), the bubbles vanish, and a new, even monochrome assembles, but that will change in due time. Slowly, every monochrome panel turns a different color in a sequence, making for a rhythmic, ever-changing work. Magnússon's doctored version of the most basic painterly act—the application of wet paint to a surface—is hilarious, but this work is also captivating and nuanced. Just when you are used to something, it gets interrupted, startled by a sudden jolt. Perhaps there are inane suggestions of action painters (like Jackson Pollock) dripping and flinging wet paint onto canvas, but perhaps there are also suggestions of rainstorms and floods, high tides and lava flows. This work is a compelling meditation on colors, perception, stasis, and change.

RAGNA RÓBERTSDÓTTIR

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Rather than making works about the Icelandic landscape, Ragna Róbertsdóttir (Iceland, b. 1945) quite literally ushers that landscape, including lava—a prime element of her volcanic homeland—directly into her work. Many of Róbertsdóttir renowned wall works, including one of her two works in *Elemental*, are made from lava chips that she gathers at Iceland's volcanoes. These works are swirling and pulsating, yet also quiescent and meditative. To make them, Róbertsdóttir prepares a section of the wall with glue, and then deftly flings handfuls of lava at it, much of which sticks; later she carefully and meticulously





teases out the finished structure by attaching more lava, including tiny, single stones, or by scraping parts away. Look at her lava wall work from the sides and it's a near monochrome, but in a way that also suggests vast expanses of lava seen from afar. Move around toward the middle and it opens up, loosens, becomes active, ever-changing. Swirls and patterns appear, chance and plan, chaos and order. There are rhythms of light and dark, fullness and emptiness, convulsion and serenity, and what's remarkable is how Róbertsdóttir achieves all of this via a technique that is so spare and elemental—just some unadulterated stones on the wall, with all their jagged tactility and earthy presence. These works are also signs of place: of the great volcanoes Hekla, once understood to be the site where luckless souls descended to Hell, and Katla, both of which figure prominently in Icelandic history, consciousness, myth, literature, and art. They are also signs of Iceland and home, and when Róbertsdóttir travels to exhibitions to install her work, she quite literally bestows traces of Iceland on far-flung locales.

Róbertsdóttir also uses other materials for her wall works, including crushed glass, to make abstracted versions of glaciers, seashells, and earth. For *Elemental*, her other wall work is made from red, Icelandic earth. Using the sparest of means, Róbertsdóttir makes gorgeous works that also indicate a complex interface between self, geology, landscape, and the whopping impact landscape can have on culture, for instance in Iceland.





KARIN SANDER

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Rather than introducing autonomous artworks into a space, Karin Sander (Germany, b. 1957) often utilizes, re-imagines and decisively transforms quotidian things which are already there, including basic elements like walls, wallpaper, floors, and windows, as well as routine activities associated with the space. For her renowned wall-polishings, which have been accomplished at many different sites throughout the world, Sander sands and polishes rectangular forms directly into the surface of a wall. These polished forms refer to paintings on museum or gallery walls, but they're more like paintings in reverse, paintings that jettison pretty much all of what has traditionally constituted a painting, including canvas, brush strokes, and ultimately paint. What results are fantastically smooth fields with a mirrory sheen that, depending on one's perspective, withdraw altogether into a near-invisibility or are startlingly reflective and shimmering. Rather than presenting self-contained visual events to the viewer, they are intensely active fields that are hyper alert to their environments, concentrating light on their surfaces, catching and displaying external space and events as fleeting imagery, serving as screens upon which the site itself is both projected and distorted.

For her 2011 exhibition in Berlin at Neue Berliner Kunstverein, Sander left the main gallery spaces empty, at least initially. One floor above, in the institutional, business part of the n.b.k. which is normally hidden to most visitors, she removed waste-



paper baskets next to desks, and cut perfect, circular holes in the floor at the exact places where the bottoms of the wastepaper baskets would normally rest. At each hole a small metal railing was installed to prevent people from injuring themselves. For the duration of the exhibition, gallery employees, including the director, were instructed to throw away paper trash, just as they normally did, but it no longer filled receptacles and instead drifted down to the floor below: a slow rain of paper from on high, that gradually formed five scruffy and inelegant, but also oddly alluring and gorgeous, sculptures, all made from simple trash.


For *Elemental*, instead of exhibiting paintings inside Havremagasinet, where they would normally be, Sander has installed blank, white canvases on the building's façade, leaving them entirely open and exposed. During the course of the exhibition, these will become paintings made not by the artist, but instead, quite literally, by the environment and elements of Boden.

ROMAN SIGNER

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Since the mid-1970s, Roman Signer (Switzerland, b. 1938) has been engaged in a radical and idiosyncratic variation on sculptures per se. While he uses sundry materials to make fixed or permanent sculptures, some also evidence of a cathartic process





or event, Signer is most known for transitory sculptures-as-events, which happen, then vanish, and only come to the audience as photographic or video documentation. These temporary sculptures, which sometimes last only a few seconds, makes good use of impermanence, surprises, and flash points of either crisis, catharsis, or both. Many mix an air of quasi-scientific research (although of a decidedly homemade variety) with an impish humor. While doing so, they reveal an uncanny ability to directly incorporate elemental and even world-shaping forces, such as speed, time, friction, gravity, momentum, explosions, erosion, and flowing water, and they can also be inordinately touching, with peculiar combinations of ungainliness and grace, claustrophobic restriction and ecstatic exhilaration. Moreover, Signer himself is often fundamental for these works; his slightly rumpled appearance, deadpan expression, and deliberate motions are an important part of his esthetic. He is an inscrutable Everyman going about his odd business in lonely places, usually outdoors, for instance the rural Appenzell region of Switzerland around the city of St. Gallen, where Signer lives; volcanoes in Sicily, a snowy field in Poland, or remote sites in Iceland.

Roman Signer has been visiting Iceland for years, attuned to this remote, volcanic country in the North Atlantic, and he has made many temporary sculptures-as-events far out in the Icelandic landscape. Three of these works are in *Elemental*, including *Zwei Schirme (Two Umbrellas)*, 2009, for which Signer went to a lonely site in Iceland on a rainy, exceedingly windy day. There, he tied two umbrellas together, opened them, and released them to the elements, an action recorded on video. Catching the wind, the umbrellas rise up, cavort in the air,



dance, tumble and bound across the landscape, and ultimately collapse. Long an “artist’s artist” operating far from the lime-light, over the last 15 years or so Signer has emerged as one of the very top artists of the era.


ÍVAR VALGARÐSSON

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In 2011 I curated the exhibition Three Parts Whole at i8 Gallery in Reykjavik, which featured sculptures by Ívar Valgardsson (Iceland, b. 1954), including a large, ungainly, yet oddly elegant paper ball, painted deep blue, that suggested a big rock, lava chunk, and magnified version of a crumpled piece of paper. With its vibrant color, pronounced surface tactility, numerous indentations and depths, and conflation of inside and outside, including intimations of water and sky, Valgardsson’s sculpture had a peculiar power and mysterious presence. For *Elemental*, he presents four such sculptures, each a different color, three made out of hand-painted paper, and one a drawing on paper. Conflating sculptures with paintings and, in one case, a drawing, Valgardsson’s spare, largely monochromatic works (although nuances and gradations of color factor in) connect with the rugged and volcanic Icelandic landscape: they are sculptures that double as highly mediated geology, and they are also extremely idiosyncratic and innovative versions of landscape painting and drawing.

Valgardsson typically uses utilitarian and commonplace




materials in his work, indeed materials so familiar that under normal conditions we would hardly give them a second thought. He has, for instance, used a common building material—sections of aluminum used for metal edge roofing—for several minimal, gray and blue sculptures mounted on the wall. Diverting this common material into a new context, these concrete works seem curiously vast: rigid pieces of metal suggest distant horizons, rolling waves, the gray weather that often buffets Iceland, a deep blue sky, the reverie one sometimes feels looking up at the heavens. For his 2012 solo exhibition at i8 Gallery in Reykjavik, Valgardsson strung a section of conductive cable, such as is normally used for outdoor telephone or electric wires, through the gallery from wall to wall, making for an aerial sculpture that brought the outside into the gallery. Valgardsson's austere and indeed elemental works in different mediums are at once straightforward and quietly poetic, and they resonate with multiple connotations.

LAWRENCE WEINER

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“Art is about material objects,” Lawrence Weiner (U.S., b. 1942) once declared in a 1989 interview, which is an interesting assertion from an artist who has largely been working with language since the late 1960s, and who is widely known as the foremost figure of Conceptual art. In Weiner’s case, material objects are represented by general nouns and straightforward descriptions



devoid of embellishments or any trace of subjectivity (A WALL BUILT TO FACE THE LAND & THE WATER AT THE LEVEL OF THE SEA, 2009), as well as by equally straightforward actions (ONE QUART EXTERIOR GREEN INDUSTRIAL ENAMEL THROWN ON A BRICK WALL, 1968.) Substituting language for actual objects, physical materials, and physical procedures, Weiner's works are radically open-ended, while they stick to empirical facts. It is likely, for instance, that every alert viewer will form a different mental image of Weiner's two works in *Elemental*, one having to do with "ICELAND SPAR" (a transparent variety of calcite) and the other with falling "MAGMA" (molten rock that becomes lava in volcanic eruptions, and a prime characteristic of Iceland.) With their spare yet vivid colors, and with how their constituent words in capital letters are positioned on the wall, Weiner's works are also wonderful to look at, and establish an entirely fresh and compelling relationship between ideas and words.

Starting with his succinct, provocative, and oft-repeated manifesto about the nature of his artworks, their ownership, and modes of realization (1. THE ARTIST MAY CONSTRUCT THE WORK 2. THE WORK MAY BE FABRICATED 3. THE WORK NEED NOT BE BUILT), Weiner has explored myriad ways of presenting his work. Wall works involving different materials such as vinyl lettering and paint coexist with posters, books, drawings, films, stencils on building facades, and many other forms. While it has long been recognized that Weiner is a pioneer of Conceptual art, his works also have a pronounced, and amazingly prescient, visuality. Weiner's graphic presentation of words, begun in the 1960s and continuing until now, an-



ticipated and probably influenced our contemporary orientation toward words and texts altogether, including advertisements, magazine layouts, computer desktop environments, and website designs. Weiner has exhibited throughout the world, including Iceland. His two works for Elemental engage the special Icelandic landscape, including some of its signature elements, like magma and colors that form “ON THE SURFACE OF THE EARTH.”

HAVREMAGASINET
PRESENTERAR:

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8 BODEN
PHOTOGRAPHERS

PHOTOGRAPHER – A NEW
TRADE COMES TO TOWN

CAPTURING A PICTURE

The history of the camera technology is long; however, the world's first photos were taken in the 19th century. Playing an import part in this history were two Frenchmen.

Joseph Nicéphore Niépce who took the oldest preserved photo, with hour-long exposure time, calling the result “Sun writing”, and Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre who discovered how to shorten the exposure time. Daguerre also protected his invention by patent and named it daguerreotype. The date of the patent was also turned into the official date for the world's first



photo being taken – August 19th, 1839.

Little by little the development of photos was simplified by enhanced technology and new chemical discoveries. Once the exposure time had been reduced to a mere few seconds it also became possible to take photos of moving objects. Eventually portray photography became a fad.

PHOTOGRAPHY ARRIVES TO SWEDEN AND NORRBOTTEN

In the 1840's the photography phenomenon reached Sweden and initially Stockholm. Daguerre's manual had been translated to Swedish in 1839 already and a few years later the very first Swedish photo studio was set up. During the following decades the photography trade spread throughout the country and consequently also the possibility to pay to have ones portray taken.

The first photographers reaching Norrbotten were travelling "daguerreotypists" who in summertime, during the 1850's and 60's, undertook long journeys to the towns of Norrland.

The photographers usually assembled their backcloth close to the local church on Sundays, offering people to have their picture taken, after mass, while already wearing their Sunday best.

WOMEN TOOK THEIR CHANCE!

Once technology enabled photocopying on paper - making portrays affordable to the public at large- the photography trade rapidly grew and it became possible to set up stationary photo






studios even in smaller towns. Many women took the chance to have a try at the new profession. Looking at the very first established photographers in Boden, Luleå and Piteå it is clear to see that women were in a vast majority when it came to setting up photo studios. Working as a photographer was a unique opportunity to become self-supporting for those women who had the interest, drive and the economy to set up a studio. Many crafts and trades were usually closed to women in 19th century Sweden, however, photography was new and thus not subject to any such rules. At the turn of the century around a third of all photographers in Sweden were women and the majority of these unmarried.

Maria Hällgren was the name of the photographer who set up Boden's first photo studio. Aged 17 she had moved to Boden, merchant Johan Hällgren was her foster father. In her thirties she studied photography in Stockholm and later set up a studio in 1887 in Boden, in the Bränna area. Her name is renowned as Boden's first established photographer yet only few pictures which, with certainty, have been taken by her can be found in the archives.

BODEN MUNICIPALITY'S PICTURE AND FILM ARCHIVES

Some of the pictures in this exhibition have been preserved thanks to the picture and film archives of Boden municipality. The idea to found a picture and film archive was introduced via a motion in 1963 by Bertil Strandberg. Eventually a decision was taken by the city council and the archives were set up in




1966. The already existing pictures were initially stored in ring binders at the city library. The first large acquisition – around 100 000 photos – were Harnesk's old pictures which Bert Persson had sold to the municipality at the beginning of the 1970's. Prior to this Carl Rudolf Frigghe's collection had been purchased. Old negatives and things alike were stowed away in the basement of the town hall. It was only at the beginning of the 1980's that Harnesk's pictures were ranged.

The archives are growing bit by bit. Amongst other donations from the 21st century are those from Elsie Wikström – containing Vendla Hvitman's photos – as well as Agnes Betzen's collection – containing photos from Walfrid Bernhard Ahnkvist and Ragnar Hansson.

Ten years ago a digitalization project of the archives was initiated. So far a third of the old paper copies, negatives, diapositives and glass plates have been scanned, a good 31 000 pictures.

THE EXHIBITION EIGHT BODEN PHOTOGRAPHERS HAS BEEN POSSIBLE THANKS TO:

We, the staff at Havremagasinet, would like to thank the municipal archives of Boden for lending us the photographs of Jakob Elof Harnesk, Vendla Hvitman, Carl Rudolf Frigghe and Nils Oskar Fahlgren. Furthermore we owe many thanks to Rolf Ericsson and Bert Persson who have lent us their photos. We would also like to thank Svartlå Dialektgrupp via Magnus Bergdahl, both for the loan and the preserving of Ragnar Hansson's photos a, to the world, unknown picture treasure! Thanks to Georg Palmgren in Luleå – who from his vast collection of




his grandparents' portray photos – kindly, lent us those taken by Ellen Ask. Many thanks also to Stig Ahlstrand for the scanning and the digital editing of many of the exhibition's pictures.

JAKOB ELOF HARNESK (1871–1927)

Jakob Harnesk was born in 1871 in Norsjö, Västerbotten. His father and namesake started and ran a photography studio in the local village in the 1870's, inspired by a man from Småland who had tried setting up a business in Norrland, but failed at it. Jakob Elof, the eldest, took over the business in 1893. He had learnt the trade from his father and also studied it for a while in Uppsala. Several of his siblings later worked as photographers in various locations around Sweden.

Like many of the early photographers, Jakob Harnesk came to Boden from another part of Norrland at the end of the 19th century. Harnesk bought a plot at Kungsgatan in Boden from Anna Maria Hällgren, the woman who, by herself, ran Boden's very first photography studio. In 1896 he had a 3-storey house built and installed studios on the top floor.

In 1899 Jakob married Klara Kristina Holm (1868-1947) from Luleå. During the 1910's Jakob had a seat in the municipal board and from 1919 he was part of the city council. Jakob Harnesk also was an esteemed singer and it was a tradition, in Boden in those days, to welcome spring by singing songs from the terrace of his house. In 1927 he fell ill and died of pneumonia.



Jakob Elof Harnesk is sometimes called “the great military photographer”. In Boden’s photo archives there are about 40 000 of Harnesk’s glass negatives. Son Gösta Harnesk (1907-1999) took over the business after his father’s death.

ELLEN DOROTEA ASK (1886–1968)

Ellen Ask was born in Bjurträsk, Norsjö parish, in 1886.

The Ask family bought a house which, according to today’s address system, was situated on Drottninggatan 25 in Boden. A note, dating back to 1913, from the building society’s archive shows that Ellen Ask requested to build sheds for photography studio purposes. In these she ran a photography firm, together with two of her siblings.


A few of her portraits have been preserved. She was active between the years 1912 and 1943.

Ellen stayed in Boden until her death in 1968.

VENDLA HVITMAN (1886–1979)

Vendla Hvitman (née Sundqvist) was born in 1886 in Heden, outside Boden, where she also lived for the most part of her life. In her twenties she married painter Signar Hvitman. The couple had a foster daughter.

Vendla took up photography in her youth and continued into her 50’s. She taught herself how to develop photos and set up a



dark room in her attic. The camera became her constant companion and in addition to her own photography she also took on commissioned work in her home area.

She was engaged in Blåbandsföreningen, from its very start, a Christian sobriety organization in Boden. In 2003 daughter Elsie Wikström donated what was left of her mother's glass plates and negatives to the municipal photo archives.


CARL RUDOLF FRIGGHE (1893–1969)

Rudolf Frigghe was born in 1893 in Fors parish, Södermanland. In 1919 he moved to Boden and two years later he married Nanna Matilda Kemi from Haparanda.

For the most part of his professional life he worked as a guard for SJ's - the national railway – storage, both in Boden and Notviken. Frigghe took a lot of photos, his most common motive being buildings threatened to be demolished. More than 500 of his photos are preserved in Boden's municipal photo archives.

RAGNAR HANSSON (1903–1979)

Ragnar Hansson was born in 1903 in Nedre Svartlå. He was a self-taught photographer and was frequently commissioned by the local villages. As a photographer he was active mainly in



the 1920's and 30's. His preserved photos, a documentation of a village during an era, are of clearly artistic nature.

After Ragnar Hansson's death, the about 1000 remaining glass plates of his collection were taken over by Svartlå Dialektgrupp. That way his pictures were handed down to posterity.

NILS OSKAR FAHLGREN (1905–1992)



Nils Oskar Fahlgren was born in 1905 in Boden. He mainly worked as a school photographer.

Together with Anders Andersson, he started the company Fotocentralen which he later took over and ran by himself. About 200 glass negatives, of his photos, are left in the municipal photo archives.

BERT PERSSON (BORN 1928)

Bert Persson was born in 1928 in Skellefteå. After doing his military service in Boden he took up photography on a freelance basis, at the age of 20. In the early 1950's he took over Harnesk's photography studio in Boden. A good ten years later he sold the large collection of negatives, left by Harnesk, to the municipality of Boden.

In 1953 Bert Persson shot a photo reportage about a Sami family's living conditions – the Päiviö family in Karesuando –



which gained much attention. The reactions from the majority society were so strong - they considered the Sami families to be living in misery - that the reportage even led to political reforms. "Lex Karesuando" made the Swedish State earmark money for the construction of dwellings for Sami families. Bert Persson has continued to follow the Päiviös and is, as a photographer, deeply engaged in the Sami culture.

Bert Persson has travelled, taking photos for a number of Swedish and foreign magazines and newspapers. As a photographer and entrepreneur, he put Arctic Scandinavia on the map as a place to visit from very early on. During his long professional life he has gathered a unique cultural documentation.



ROLF ERICSON (BORN 1929)

Rolf Ericson was born in 1929 in Luleå. Already as a child he had an interest for art and music and in his youth he attended Isaac Grünewald's art school in Stockholm for a year. After that he studied art for André Lothe in Paris and thereafter he studied photography in Saarbrücken in Germany.

Once back in Sweden he started freelancing for Åhlén & Åkerlund, a corporate group owning weekly magazines such as SE, Vecko-Journalen and Året Runt. He took pictures for these magazines and was after a while employed as a photographer by the tabloid newspaper Expressen. However for 34 years, the most part of his professional life, Rolf Ericsson worked in the editorial office of the national daily newspaper DN. All of Arc-



tic Scandinavia was his work field which meant quite a lot of travelling. He retired as late as in 1993.

Rolf Ericsson's first ever published picture, depicting the celebration of the Children's day in Boden, was printed in the regional newspaper NSD in 1948. In 2005 the around 800 000 pictures in his collection, from a very long professional life, were donated by Rolf Ericsson to the Museum of Norrbotten.

THE BODEN SCHOOL

STIG SANDBERG





Stig Sandberg (1925-1961) was born in Boden and became, despite his short life, one of the most influential artists of Bodenskolan. He was given the opportunity to study for Isaac Grünewald, for two years, in Stockholm and then went on to work as a drawing teacher in Boden and Piteå.

Sandberg was later influenced by Västerbotten painter Helge Linden and his purist, detail scarce paintings in subdued colour range.


In order to further explore and learn more he went on field trips to France and Spain during the 1940's and 50's. Sandberg then, in his turn, influenced the young Boden artists who took his evening painting classes.

Having found his characteristic for his painting at an early stage already, Sandberg's motives though were of a more vary-



ing kind. He enjoyed painting humans in interior or landscape settings but also portrays (including self portraits), still lifes and mere landscapes. In addition he produced ceramic work and drawings. Stig Sandberg is, amongst others, represented at Nationalmuseum in Stockholm.

THE NEED FOR OATS WAREHOUSES



Today military vehicles are driven by gas or by diesel. That has not always been the case. For at least 5 000 years man has been using horses in war. Horses need fuel. Oats. Keeping large numbers of horses going demanded large amounts of oats. That's why four oats warehouse were built in Sweden, among them this one in Boden. The oats warehouse in Boden was during 1913 – 1950 the central warehouse of the military command of the northern region (Övre Norrlands Militärömråde).

When eventually the units were fully motorized the warehouse was used for corn storage. In 1978 the warehouse was rebuilt into a storeroom. All the machines were removed, except in one hall, where a few of them are kept for antiquarian reasons.

When storing oats, it is important to be watchful of tem-




perature and humidity. If the temperature exceeded 20 degrees Celsius the oats had to be transported around in the building. Ingenious machinery made this possible and the oats were transported both horizontally and vertically in the warehouse; from 7:th floor down to 2:nd floor and then up again. The oats travelled round in this way until temperature had gone down. The procedure took place at night and all the windows were open. When damp, the oats were dried in the same way.

A total amount of 1,920 tons of oats could be kept in the warehouse. In time of crises, like during the Second World War, it was always filled to capacity.

In 2001 the government decided to designate the oats warehouse a historic building.





We would like to thank Gregory Volk and his assistant curator Birta Gudjonsdottir who not only put together the international theme of the exhibition and the artists, but planned it in detail. A big thank you to the gallery Hauser & Wirth in Zurich and London, Gallery Neugerriemschneider in Berlin, Galleri Charlotte Lund in Stockholm, Collection of Pétur Arason and Ragna Róbertsdóttir, SAFN Collection in Reykjavik (www.safn.is) and i8 Gallery in Reykjavík to we lent works to the Elemental. We also want to thank those who lent photographs of the exhibition 8 Boden Photographers and those who have lent paintings to the exhibition by Stig Sandberg. Thanks to the volunteers who helped to realize exhibitions. Thanks to Boden Municipality, Norrbotten County Council, County Administrative Board of Norrbotten and the Swedish Arts Council which funds operations. But most of all, we want to thank the artists and photographers who display their art in these three exhibitions.

HAVREMAGASINET MAY 2013

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