

BOLUNGARVÍK

Examining the sense of place through artistic practice



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Bolungarvik – Examining the sense of place through artistic practice

The sense of place has been in the focus of attention of artists for longer time now. Places affect people and people shape the characteristics of places with their actions. Some places are particularly charged. The exceptional nature and landscape of Iceland, the dramatic volcanoes, glaciers and its unique history and mythology are specially intervened together. Yet places are not static but in a constant change. One can also learn from the places. The basis and the birth for this exhibition is the small, remote village of Bolungarvik, located in the northwest corner of Iceland, and the deliverer for it is the intensive course arranged there by the Arctic Sustainable Arts and Design (ASAD) Network of the University of Arctic.

The ASAD Network and the University of Lapland (UoL) share the same interest in the research on the change of the Arctic and the North. According the study of Nordic Council of Ministers (2011)¹ there are certain megatrends going on in the region. Global warming is happening faster in the Arctic than in any other place on earth with serious consequences for local communities. Another important driver is globalization, which is connected with neoliberalist exploitation of nature resources like oil, gas, minerals and ecosystem services by tourism. The consequences will have significant implications for Arctic cultures.

Globalization leads the process where communities are transformed from rural characteristics in terms of economy, culture and lifestyle, to one, which can be characterized as urban. It leads to concentration of the population on larger places. It entails a complex set of processes, not only in where people live, but in who they are, how they live in terms of culture, economic well-being, political organization, communication and the distribution of power, demographic structure and social and cultural relations.

The intensive course arranged in Bolungarvik was done in collaboration with UoL, the University of the Highlands and Islands and Iceland Academy of the Arts August 2016 and it can be seen as place-based education and art-based research. Place-based education promotes learning that is rooted in what is local – its unique history, environment, culture, economy, literature and art of a particular place. Place-based education is always related to something in the real world. The now exhibited art projects can be regarded as place-based education through art.

Firstly, the experience of place formed through the changing Icelandic landscapes served as a starting point for a shift towards sensitive participation, and a personal in-depth understanding meanings and aesthetical values of the place. Creation of art requires observing the place from several different points of view. The place manifests itself as a physical, emotional, narrative and socio-cultural entity. A physical place refers to the material qualities of a place, i.e. its dimensions, forms and landscape. The most effective way of observing a place is to stay and move around there.

The emotional place was formed through the experiences and multi-sensory perceptions in Bolungarvik. An absolute prerequisite for this was being in the place and experiencing it through senses. A narrated place, for its part, is an entity that consists of texts, stories, myths and beliefs associated with a place. It can be felt through literature, and by interviewing locals and becoming familiar with their stories.

A socio-cultural place refers to the present social situation and cultural activities in a place as a whole. Certain situational factors are always connected to a place, and it is possible to become familiar with these only by inspecting the atmosphere of the place through the senses, by discussing with the locals, listening to them and participating in their lives. Moreover, there is a so-called silent knowledge that cannot necessarily be expressed through speech or writing.

This multidimensional experience of place provides a starting point for art and is concretized in different ways of artworks. Essentially, this very process transforms an environment that might have been unfamiliar and difficult to grasp at first, into a significant, living experience of a location. In the process, the sensory and metaphorical dimensions of environment join hands through artistic expression.

By taking the time and slowly examining Bolungarvik through artistic practice, helped in comprehending and valuing the true sense of place. Each of the artwork displayed in the exhibition is on its own way a respectful research of place and its various dimensions. In one way the journey to Bolungarvik was an experiment of slow travelling, stopping to a place and looking around without hurry, sensing and learning what the place has to offer and considering what could be offered to it in return. The exhibition is an appreciation towards the village of Bolungarvik and its valuable insights to the richness of life in remoteness in the northern region.

15 January 2017

in Rovaniemi

Elina Härkönen & Timo Jokela







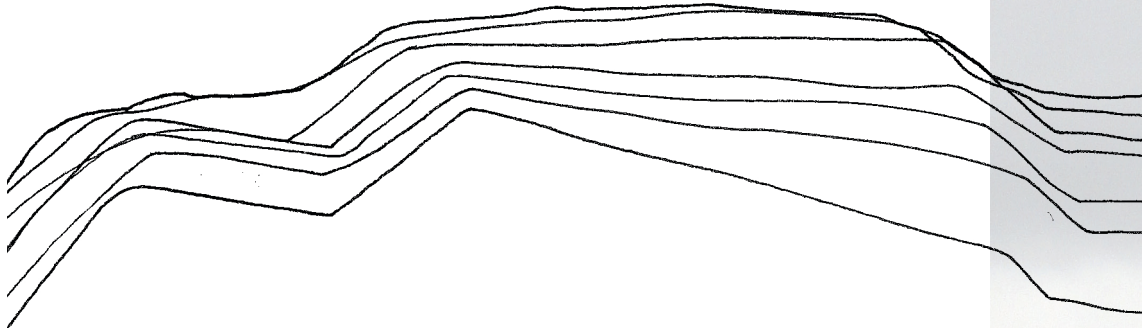
UNTITLED

Venni Ahlberg

Iceland is a rocky island. Whether you make your way to the top of the hills or down to the waterfront, Stones are always present. Because of the low vegetation on this island, Stones are in the spotlight.

The main focus in my work are the stones of Bolungarvík. Close to the water they are round, soft and polished. In the valley there are boulders with vivid green moss growing on them. I wanted to photograph the Stones with long exposure time and grainy film. When the shutter is open for a long time, the landscape as a whole tends to have a sense of movement, but Stones stay still. I use a plastic pinhole camera, for it is simple and raw, like Stones. For me Stones represent presence and permanence and the thought about Their age is fascinating. Next to Stones and the infinite horizon I feel very small and it gives me a sense of tranquility.

ON THE ROAD









PRESENCE AND ABSENCE

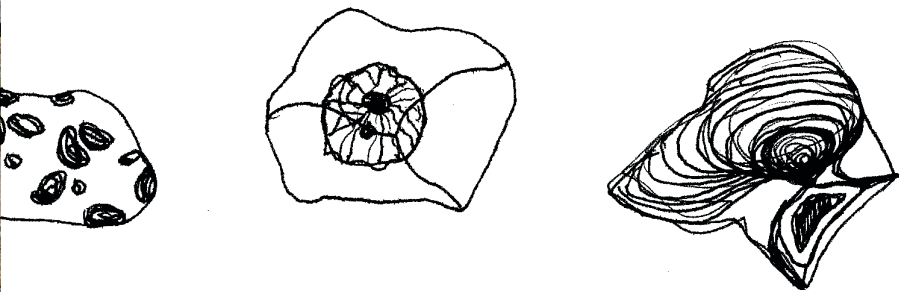
Photo series by Anu Corin

The series of photographs explores narrative photography as a place-research method and investigates possibilities of applying the method in different contexts. Through focusing on different layers of presence and emptiness, the series tells a story about Bolungarvik – what was there and what was missing. It questions the artist's role and objectivity and tries to open a discussion about the development and atmosphere of a place. Without adding or taking anything away, it explores inclusion and exclusion through framing and selection. The series is not trying to represent the whole village or tell the truth about the journey, but rather create a dialogue between the place and the viewer.





BERRY PICKING

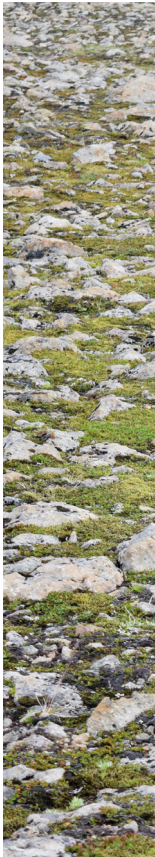


BOLAFJALL VEGETATION

Valerie Gemkow

It was my very first time in Iceland and the landscape which welcomed me there, suprised me in many ways. I did not exactly like the place at first, even though I was sure I would. There were hardly any trees, endless fields of lava stone and strange mountain formations. One place however - helping me understand and now admiring Iceland - was the mountain Bolafjall, rising behind the village Bolungarvík. The top of Bolafjall was flat and wide. A huge platform from where I could see parts of the Westfjord region and the deep blue sea.

After a long time of gazing into the distance I started looking down to the ground. On first sight it seemed to be only made of stones and moss but suddenly I discovered a variety of plants. Every now and then I picked up plants or flowers which I liked the most. I wondered how they could survive in such a cold and rough place. The ground became even more astonishing than the panoramic and dreamlike view surrounding me. The collection and conservation I did with those plants symbolises for me the power of evolution and that even in the most remote places, life can become valuable and start blooming in various beautiful ways.

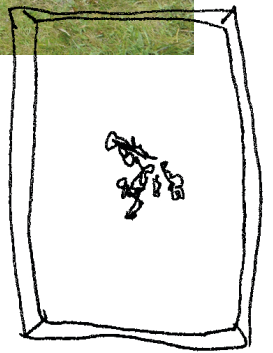
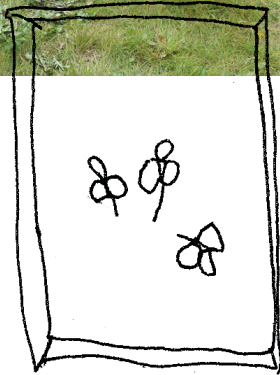
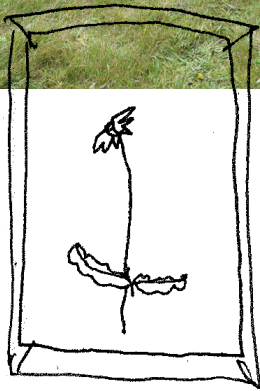






BUILDING THE DOME





WOOLLEN SCENERIES

Mittens by Elina Härkönen

During our journey to Bolungarvík I tried to understand the breath-taking landscapes of Iceland through the various color layers on land, water and sky. By looking through these layers, absorbing and memorizing the magnificent sceneries became possible.

When I looked and walked around, I also found the same colors in various Icelandic yarn stores. Shelves filled with local wool had the exact colours I'd seen in the nature. I carefully picked the colour yarn that represented the landscapes etched into my mind.

Knitting connected me to the place. I have found knitting a shared tradition in all the remote northern locations I've visited. By knitting the sceneries to my mittens helped me to process the journey and warm my hands as well as mind.

I knitted to understand.

I knitted to be connected.

I knitted because I forgot my gloves home and my fingers were freezing.

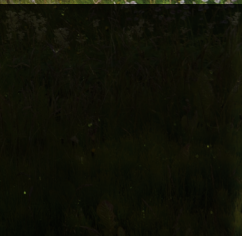






OUR LOVELY YELLOW HOME







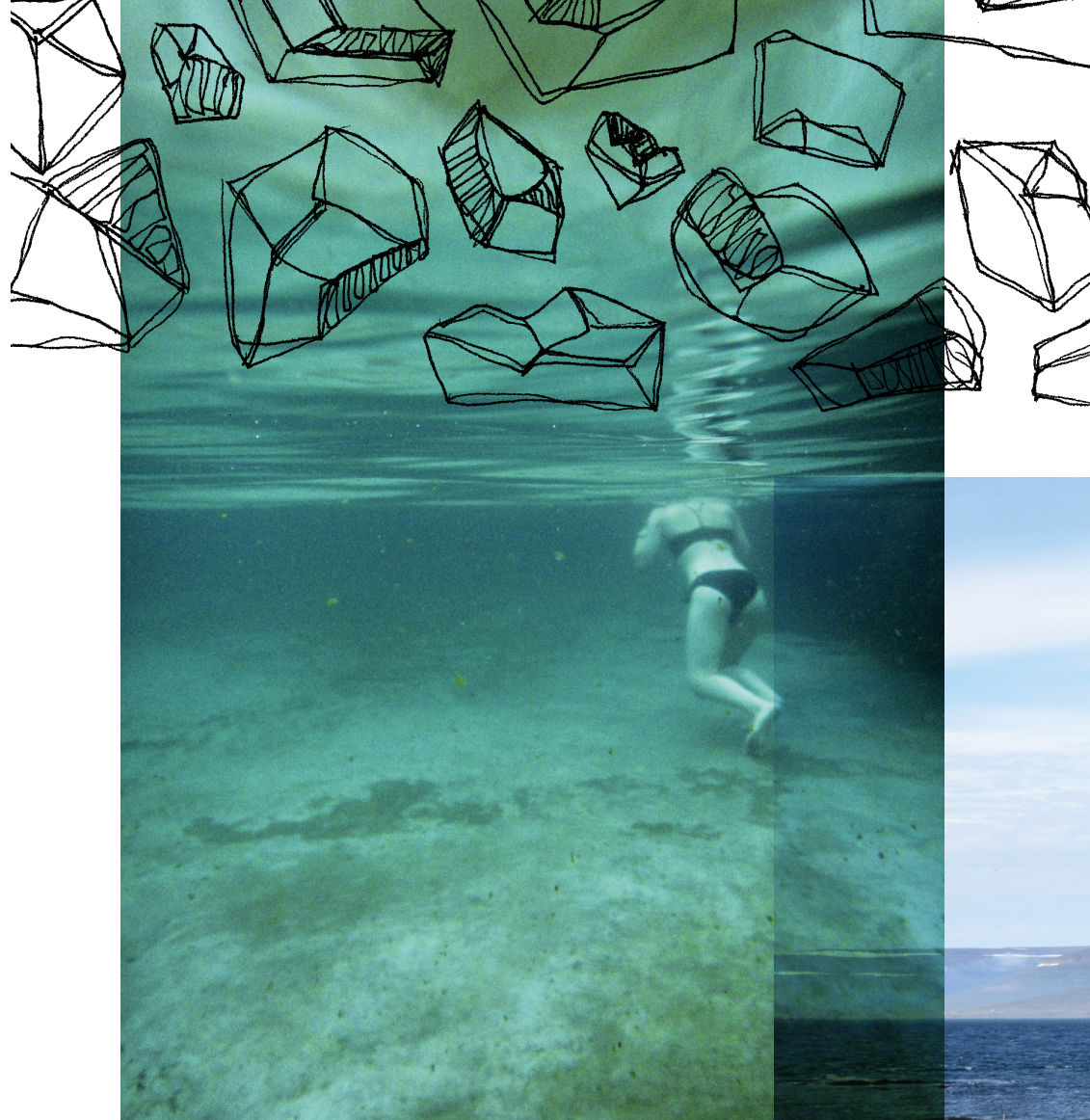
ON THE SHORE AND THE FELL; IN THE PAST AND NOW

Timo Jokela

Installation, found objects, mixed media

Places have always affected me perhaps even more than people. When I am in new places, a collector, fisherman and hunter awaken in me. My way of acting in the landscape is derived from the routines in my home region, where I created my first relationship to nature, landscape and places. Maybe something is also absorbed from my ethnographic studies, as I am interested in the history of places and life lived in them, the characteristics of places shaped over time.

However, my installation is not a documentary or a research of place. Rather, it is about sensing, proposing, perhaps a conversation between the observations I made during the few days in Bolungarvik and its surroundings. Hardoll Laxnes starts his well-known book *Salka Valka*, a story of life in a small fishing village similar to Bolungarvik, with the word *love*. Maybe my artwork is about love for northern places and people who, under pressure of change by globalization, urbanization and neoliberalism, are searching for their own paths of life.



SWIMMING IN A GEYSIR POOL





NOTES FROM THE SEA

Iiris Perkkiö

I worked at the shore in Bolungarvik in cooperation with the nature. My work was about considering space and time in a proper place. I tried to do the documentation of the sea and the natural landscape which were typical to Bolungarvik. I call my work as prints because the sea added its lines and notes to them. The track of the sea is uncontrolled and monotypic.



Working itself connected me with the environment where I was present. My observations of the place with different senses helped me to create the image and the experience of the view. By touching it with bare feet, smelling, hearing and seeing I created my perception of the place. The place where the sea, waves and sound of them, the sand, the shrieking of terns, the cold wind, the rain, the smell of salt and passing thoughts are all connected to each other.



SEEING AND BEING SEALS





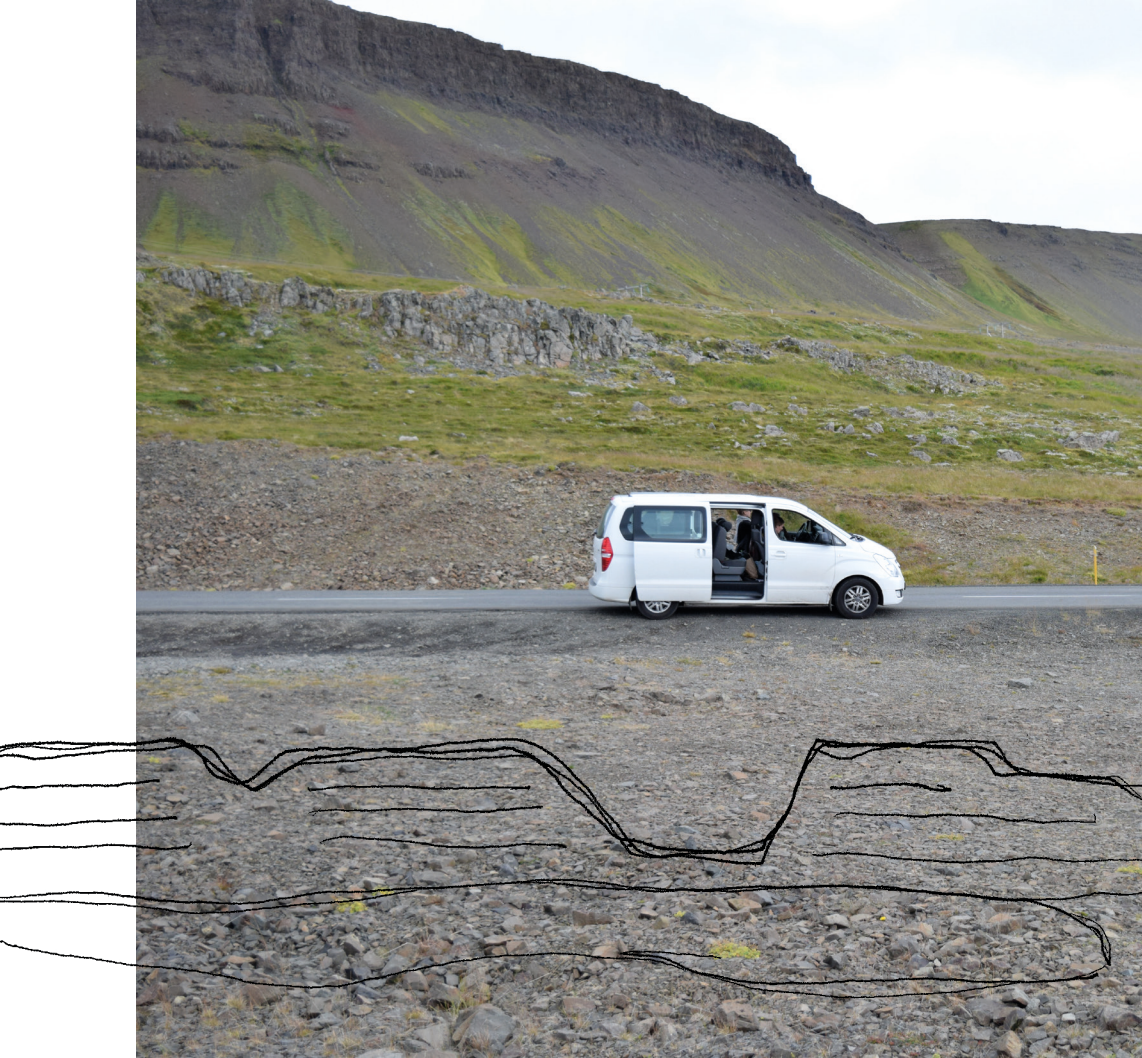
NORTHERN EXCHANGE: ICELAND, SCOTLAND & FINLAND

Roxane Permar & Susan Timmins

Ásthildur Jónsdóttir, Elina Harkonen

Northern Exchange was a collaboration that took place during August 2016 between artists and students from three ASAD partners and with Icelandic communities associated with the Cold War sites at Vestfirðir, Keflavík, Höfn and Þórshafn. Various approaches were used to explore relationships between Cold War installations and local people. In Vestfirðir, participants visited the NATO radar station on the remote Bolafjall, and local in-service teachers took part in a creative workshop. This project links to Permar and Timmins' longer-term work exploring the Cold War with northern communities across the Arctic fringe.

The project was supported by the Carnegie Trust, Shetland Arts Development Agency, Creative Scotland, Iceland Academy of Arts, University of Lapland and University of the Highlands and Islands.



GOODBYE BOLUNGARVÍK, WESTFIRDIR AND ÍSLAND





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