

An abstract collage artwork featuring a dense arrangement of overlapping shapes and textures. The color palette is dominated by various shades of pink, red, and gold. The shapes include organic, flowing forms, star-like patterns, and geometric elements. Some areas have a shimmering, metallic texture, while others are matte. Small, round, silver-colored fasteners are visible, securing some of the layers. The overall composition is layered and complex, creating a sense of depth and movement.

CREATIVE RESPONSES

Gallery SPECTA

16 May – 21 June 2025

Akureyri Art Museum

27 November 2025 – 8 February 2026

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Creative Response: A Defining Aspect of Life

Skúli Skúlason, biologist & Ole Martin Sandberg, philosopher

The term “creative response” describes some of the fundamental aspects of life itself. Every form of life involves creativity and responsivity. Life itself is the ability to creatively respond to elements in the environment and in the living organism itself, whether it be a multicellular organism, a single cell, a superorganism or a society. In responding, organisms create themselves; life is a process of self-creation.

This crucial element is missing in the way we – biologists, scientists, philosophers and others – generally think about living beings. In the modern Western world, we have told ourselves a story about the world as one composed of atomistic units that follow strict universal laws of cause and effect. The task of science is then to reduce the world to the fundamental units and uncover the mechanisms that govern them. This will allow us to not only understand the world but also predict and control it. Or so we think.

But life is not predictable and does not follow mechanistic laws. Biology is the study of life but, ironically, biologists do not know what life is or how it came to be. We

know that it is something more than mere mechanical reproduction of preexisting patterns, and that it cannot be reduced to the chemical or atomic compounds. By that, we do not mean that life is an *extra element* that you add to organic material – as the vitalists in the past believed – but that at some point in the interactions of assemblages of moving matter something new emerges: something that has the ability to sense its environment and respond to it. This event, when matter becomes sentient, is what we call *life*. As it makes something new from the interactive processes of already existing materials, it is itself a creative act. It is not created by an outside force but somehow comes from the organic processes themselves. It is an act of immanent creativity: matter interacting with itself.

From the moment life emerged, however that happened, it was inherently creative and responsive. There is no singular definition of life, but all life involves metabolism and self-regulation: the processes by which lifeforms transform material from their environment to energy that is used to maintain themselves. This means that all lifeforms are always in interaction with their environment



Þórdís Aðalsteinsdóttir
Some of It May Have Started at the River, 2023
Acrylic on canvas 130 x 89 cm
PHOTO / MARTIN SECK AND NUNU FINE ART



– the organism and the environment are not distinct entities but dynamic intra-active systems. It also means that this body-environment assemblage is both sentient and self-sentient: it perceives itself simultaneously from the inside and the outside, as it needs to know which elements in the outside environment to metabolize and turn into its inside and which to avoid.

We are not saying that single-celled lifeforms like bacteria and other microorganisms are sentient in the same way that we are, just that they sense their outside and inside environments and respond to them. Even microbes sense the chemical compositions of their environments and adapt their movement to whether it is supportive or destructive for their self-regulating processes. This ability to feel, respond and adapt is a central aspect of all life.

If our environment was completely homogenous – if everything around us was the same – there would be no need for this sentient responsiveness. It is because of *diversity* in the environment – differences like hot and cold, acidic and alkaline, light and dark, and the differences they make for our internal self-regulation – that living beings need the ability to sense and respond to their environment. Life and sentience thus emerge as a response to *difference*. Diversity is a critical element in the emergence and maintenance of life.

Sigrún Inga Hrólfsdóttir
Uterus (2025)
Crochet copper wire
70 x 45 x 45 mm

Difference is also a necessary condition for creativity. When a living being senses a difference in its environment, for example when environments change and stop being supportive of its self-regulation and -creation, it needs to respond by doing something new. If it keeps following the same patterns as before it risks self-destruction. Thus, a mechanistic reproduction of pre-established behaviours and movements would not support the development of life in changing environments – and in nature change is inevitable. A difference or a change that we sense in our environment is an occasion for creativity: something that has not been encountered before needs a response, a decision must be made, a new behaviour or a new movement must be tried. New patterns are established whenever we respond to differences, and if we are truly sensible then we will establish patterns that are conducive to further self-regulation, development and creativity, so that we are ready to meet new differences and have new responses.

Sometimes we talk as if living beings are just chemical compounds and that their movements and actions are nothing but chemical reactions. We even talk about “chemical signals” in the brain or between an organism and its environment as if we know exactly what that means. But chemical reactions are pre-established patterns: it is built into a carbon molecule how it is going to react when it encounters another molecule at a given atmospheric pressure and temperature etc. But for living beings this is not what the word “signal” means. A signal

is a *sign* to the living organism about processes in the environment, and signs need to be *interpreted* and given *meaning*. Interpretation is not a mechanistic cause-and-effect that can be predicted with accuracy. Two living beings of the same type can perceive the same sign and make different interpretations of what it means and respond differently. A response is not predetermined but rather an act of creation.

Signs and interpretations are thus moments of uncertainty, unpredictability and instability. We don't pay attention to our environment all the time – as long as it is supportive of our metabolism, we can continue with the behavioural patterns we have established. But when something new happens, when there is a difference in our outer environment that makes a difference for our inner environment, something new needs to happen. The situation needs to be perceived, interpreted, and responded to by adaptive and creative behaviours. Such a situation is always a crisis, not in the sense of a situation that has gone wrong, but in the original sense of the word: an unstable turning point where a decision must be made. Crises call for creativity: that we explore new movements, new behaviours and new patterns.

To continue repeating the same patterns is also an option, but when these patterns are not conducive to our development, our metabolism, or to the environment we depend on and are part of (and which is part of us), then the lack of creativity is not only harmful to life –

here a critical aspect of life itself is missing: the ability to respond to crises creatively by adapting one's behaviour to changes in the environment. All living beings change their environment. We are shaped by our environment, we adapt to our environment, the environment becomes part of us, but we also change our environment, and we become part of it. This is perfectly natural and an unavoidable aspect of the process of life. The question is thus not whether we *should* change our environment – we cannot *not* do that – but whether we have the sentience to perceive the changes in our environment, give them meaning and creatively respond to the crisis by finding new behavioural patterns.

Another word for this is *agency*. All life depends on its creative responses, and thus all life has agency. But at this moment, when the changes we humans are causing in the global environment have reached an unprecedented scale, living beings of all kinds – our own species as well as the more-than-human – depend on *our* ability to respond creatively to the environmental crises. Do we have this defining aspect of life?

The creative processes of life do not only reside in individual organisms; they involve the connections among organisms and their diverse relations to their environments. As organisms sense each other and adapt their behaviour, other organisms respond to those changes. We are each other's dynamic environments. Life is not an act of individual self-creation but a sympoietic

process of co-creation. Thus, the creative process also resides in the diversity of and within ecosystems – lakes and rivers, oceans, cities, societies and the Earth as a whole. Agency is both individual and collective.

Art is a form of enquiry about the world, but it is not a mere representation of patterns. It does not just reproduce the world but responds to it. It is an act of interpretation and thus of creation. In this sense, artistic creativity is an expression of life itself. By interpreting and responding to the world, creative art opens it up to new

possibilities: it enables us to see the world differently, interpret it in a new light and expand our imagination and our ability to act in different ways. Art can deepen our agency. It might not tell us what to do, but it can draw attention to the crisis and create uncertainty that calls for our attention and response. This act of interpretation creates a moment of instability and disrupts the sense of predetermined patterns. Artistic expressions can also highlight the urgency of the situation, the need and responsibility to respond: our response-ability.

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About the project

Creative Responses is a project that sprang from collaboration between Nordic ecocritics and artists, and it is now steadily growing. It started with the anthology *Creative Responses to Environmental Crises in Nordic Art and Literature* (2025), which sheds light on the complex and important role of art, literature and other creative activities in a world of climate change. The aim was to draw attention to artistic responses to ecological crises as a vital factor in ensuring human survival.

This has inspired the creation of group exhibitions and related symposiums in different countries, with common environmental themes such as interconnections, complex systems, the value of diversity, and the deconstruction of hierarchies. Each event and publication results in new transformations involving new participants and adaptations to local environments. In the spirit of ecological thinking, the expanding circle of participants – academics, artists, poets, activists and others interested in creative solutions to global issues – will ensure that new possibilities for collaboration and creation will keep emerging.

One of the unexpected outcomes of the first anthology was a heavy emphasis on emotions related to environmental crises and changes: feelings of despair, melancholia and sorrow, but also more positive reactions like hope, resilience and joy. This affected the group exhibitions presented in this catalogue, which are taking place in Copenhagen and Akureyri. The curators, Þórdís Aðalsteinsdóttir and Auður Aðalsteinsdóttir, along with many of the artists, have worked deliberately with this theme of emotional responses, and in the process, new topics have demanded attention: particularly those relating to respect and nurturing. Motherhood, femininity and radical feminism are prominent subjects, as is an emphasis on the importance of nurturing respect for laws that protect both humans and non-humans, for traditions and heritage, as well as for other beings and the material world.

Due to the mutable nature of the project, the artists represented do not make a final list of participants, and some will only join in one exhibitions. Their different cultural backgrounds are important in their works and emphases, even though here we have chosen to focus

more on the threads that unite them, the relationships that are forming, and the movement this involves. We want to encourage an awareness of the various ways we respond to environmental crisis as well as reflection on them, so that we – armed with the resulting insight – will feel empowered to act. Through a multidisciplinary and non-hierarchical approach, we hope to forge a sense of community and inclusion, as opposed to isolation and hopelessness. Given the seriousness of our predicament, we want to inspire a sense of community, inclusion, joy and beauty.

Complex Creations

Auður Aðalsteinsdóttir

Art is an ecological force shaped by the material world, and it in turn also shapes that world. The various ways the artists in this exhibition respond to climate change, plastic pollution, the loss of biological diversity and other environmental crises reflect the complexities of the ecological and social systems we are part of and in whose evolution we participate. As mentioned above, complex systems are neither predictable nor stable, and this recognition can be strongly mediated through artistic expression, which not only allows for but is often driven by indeterminacies, unpredictable interconnections, paradox and inconsistencies.

SAFE
HARASSMENTS
CLEAN
THREATS

Jóna Hlíf Halldórsdóttir has for the past few years experimented with text as texture, as the expression of thoughts, and as an inspiration for shaping society. In *Environmental Escapes* (2019) she uses unexpected connections to create a disruption of public and governmental environmental discourse, thereby disclosing both the unsettling aspects of the causes of present environmental crises and the countermeasures taken. The work features concepts from the United Nations' *Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment* (2018). On the one hand, she uses general adjectives that describe desirable goals for the environment, and on the other, nouns that describe the undesirable effects on the environment. These adjectives and nouns are continuously repeated in various articles of the framework principles but are of course never paired together. However, when juxtaposed, they create a tension, a paradox, and provide an even clearer idea of the principles behind our present state of affairs with regard to environmental reforms and governance.

The brutality of the resulting phrases, as well as their presentation, open the official document up for new connotations. Cutting terms such as “sustainable violence” and “clean threats” out of a delicate material in deep and soft pink hues often associated with (feminine) love and care, hints at environmental injustice. Not only with regard to the consequences of power abused, where minorities and the poor must face the ecological repercussions of the extravagance and exploitation by the rich and powerful, but also when it comes to mitigating responses in the form of legal measures, governance and intervention from above. In many cases, these actions have led to new problems, such as greenwashing, carbon-trading schemes and even the systematic persecution of environmental activists by corporations and extractive industries. We are faced with the growing conviction that in the Anthropocene, environmental issues require a radical rethinking of dominant power structures and social hierarchies.

*Knowledge in one field can become
a tool in an entirely different context
– provided creative thinking is applied.¹*

***Environmental Escapes* (2018)**
Text work, paper
2 x 50 x 50 cm
PHOTO / VIGFÚS BIRGISSON

Hildur Hákonardóttir is, in the context of this exhibition, a representative of a late twentieth-century tradition that has heavily influenced contemporary activism: the radical feminist environmental uprising against a hierarchical, capitalist and exploitive world order. Hildur has worked primarily with textiles and weaving: materials and methods that are traditionally associated with women and have long been positioned low in the hierarchy of art history. She frequently addresses environmental issues, gender politics and social issues, contributing a special awareness of intersectionality: the way various social aspects such as race, gender, class and sexuality interact to create unique experiences of privilege or oppression.

Hildur was one of the founders and frontline women of the Red Stocking movement in Iceland, where she advocated for a non-hierarchical structure. In the tapestry *Ráðherrastólarnir* (1974), social hierarchies and governmental power are called into question. The work shows empty cabinet ministers' chairs, and the subtitle, *14 July 1971 between noon and afternoon*, refers to a specific moment in Icelandic history: "When a government

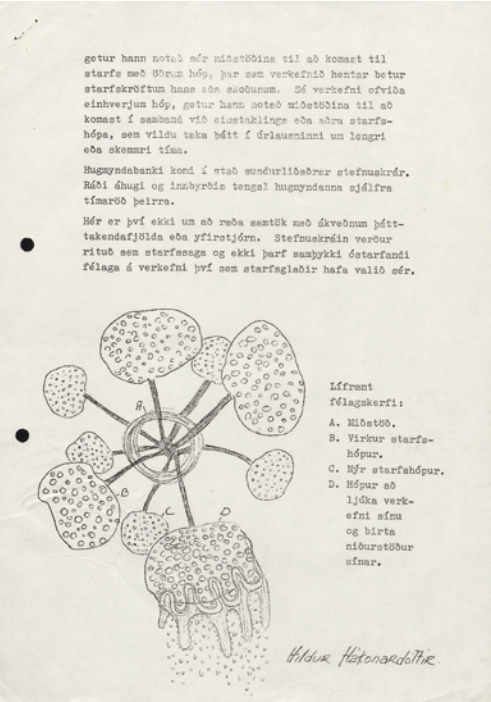
loses a majority in elections, it must hand in its resignation at the presidential residence as soon as a new government has been formed. When the outgoing ministers are safely back in town, the new ones set out in their cars and drive out to the residence to be officially installed. For practical reasons, at least two hours must pass between those events. In 1971, I was keenly aware of those hours when we had no government, but life still went on: the birds were singing and the grass was growing, and I wondered if it really mattered who was vacating these chairs and who was now taking possession of them – and how long it would take before their election promises were forgotten."

In the twenty-first century, when totalitarianism and tyranny are on the rise, this absence of authority has immense implications in the context of environmental justice and activism. The empty governmental seats can inspire hopeful feelings: a new beginning or a clean slate; but they can also suggest a moment of lawlessness or lead to a reconsideration of the power of symbols and rituals.

Hildur's art is enmeshed, quite literally, with her work in the field of women's rights, education, museums and cultivation of the earth.¹



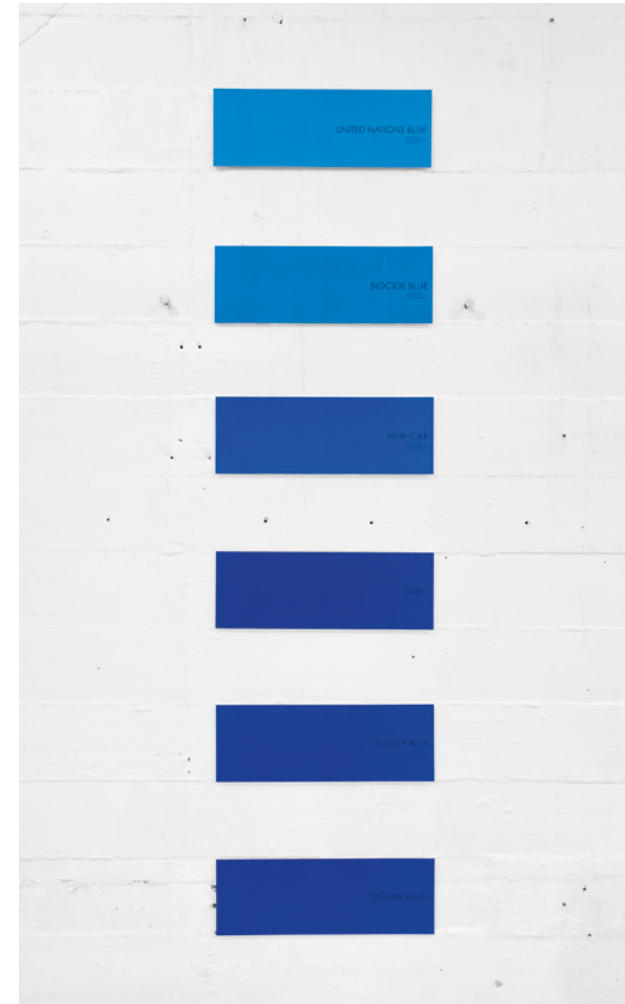
Ráðherrastólarnir (14. júlí 1971 milli hádegs og nóns) (1974)
Tapestry, 65 x 132,5 cm
Collection of The Living Art Museum
PHOTO / VIGFÚS BIRGISSON



A diagram of the organizational structure of the Icelandic Red Stockings (1970).
The Women's History Archives, Iceland

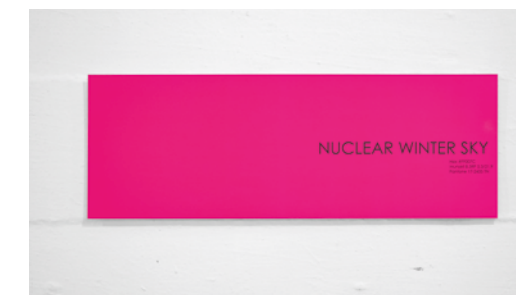
angela Snæfellsjökuls rawlings' installation *Motion to Change Colour Names to Reflect Planetary Boundary Tipping Points* (2025) draws on the power of rituals in a way that both calls attention to the urgency of the climate crisis and the need to respond to its complexities by engaging all aspects of our existence. The new colour names suggested, with "Bleached Coral" and "Silent Spring Green" among them, lay bare an emerging reality whose horrors are exacerbated by the contrasting sensory pleasure that colours evoke in us – here made almost overwhelming by the sheer numbers of colour samples. The renaming nevertheless harbours hope for "a refreshment of relationship between humans and the planetary systems on which we interdepend".²

angela frequently focuses on the interconnections and processes at work in nature, art, and science. They have lately drawn attention to the legal aspects of environmental issues, more specifically to the rights of nature, as became apparent in their 2024 campaign to nominate the glacier Snæfellsjökull as the president of Iceland. Their *Motion to Change Colour Names* accentuates language as one of the ways we engage with the ecosystems we live in and expresses hope that changing the way we humans "describe our eco-relations can fuel the urgency to act".²



Motion to Change Colour Names to Reflect Planetary Boundary Tipping Points (2025)
Paper, installation
PHOTOS / PATRIK ONTKOVIC

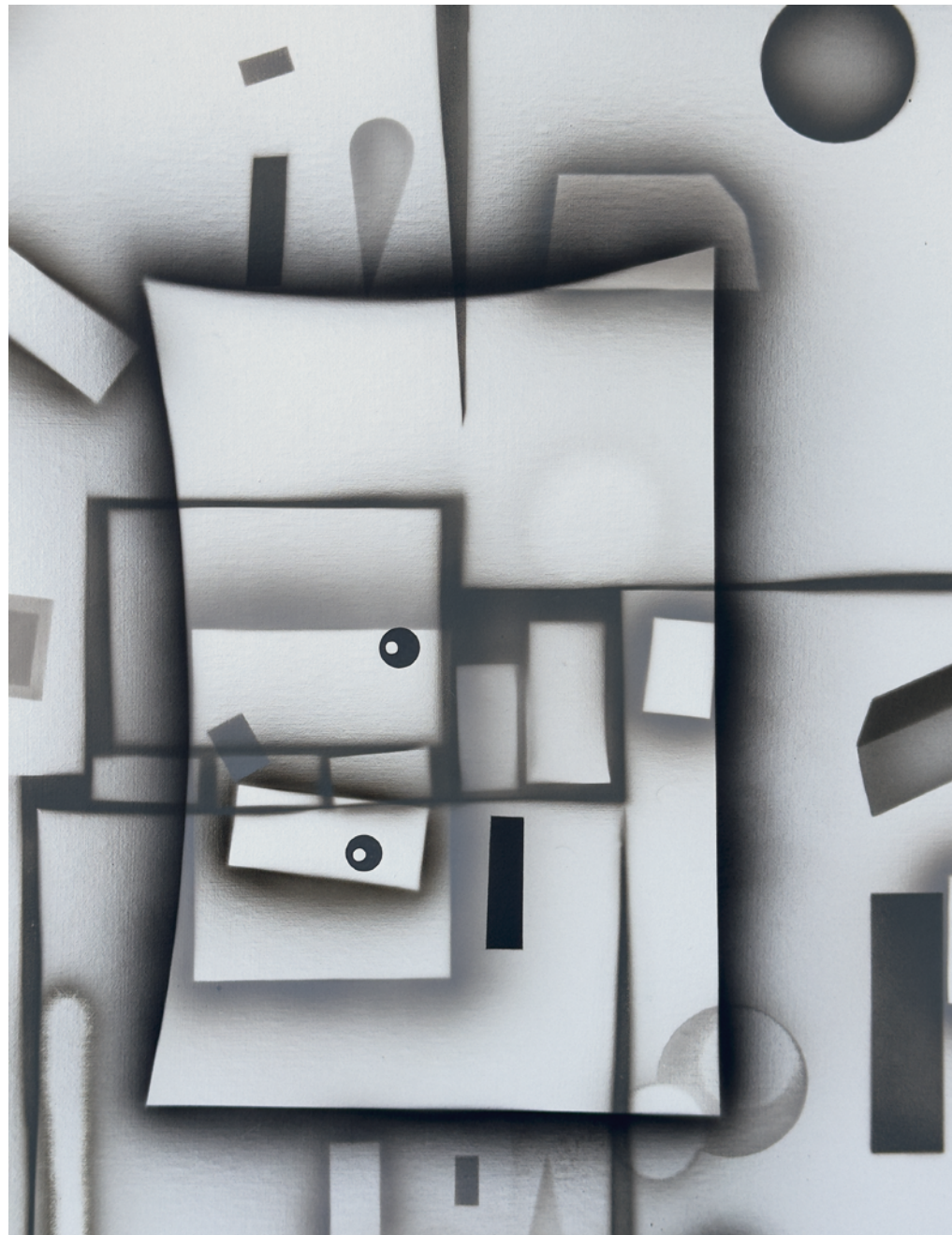
The deliberate wording of the Motion, with footnotes confirming an extensive knowledge of contemporary ecological discourse and Earth Systems Science, shows respect for and an awareness of the importance of legal procedures, an urgent message in our time as we witness world leaders actively working to undermine them. This is emphasized by an affirmation that the suggested changes are "not intended for fraudulent purposes and serve a legitimate interest",² a reference to the problem of governments and corporations exploiting and corrupting official green goals and measures. This is reiterated in the advocacy "for a non-proprietary assertion of colour – and colour names – as cultural heritage and thereby within the public domain,"² instead of a capitalistic emphasis on copyright. The spiritual undertones of legal rituals are highlighted, as the Motion is printed on giant scrolls and begins with a ritualistic invocation of a Deliberative Assembly, as if addressing higher deities or nature spirits as well as all human society and multispecies assemblages, arguing for a worldview where "an ecocentric framework ... situates societal, educational, economic, legal, relational, and cultural drivers as interdependent with ecosystems and more-than-human entities".²



*Posthumanism involves not only thinking differently about the human and viewing it as embedded but also thinking differently about thinking and acknowledging the strangeness of consciousness.*³

*The notion of ecocentric aesthetics pertains to such theories and to feelings that are, in the spirit of ecology and a post-humanist worldview, characterized by engagement, unstable boundaries, continuous processes, and non-hierarchical interconnections.*⁴

Inverted Mausoleum (2025), detail
Acrylics on canvas and wall
110 x 90 cm



Kristinn Már Pálmason has in recent years used stencils to spray-paint assemblages of shapes bearing a semblance to all kinds of seemingly unrelated symbols and items floating around on the canvas, sometimes one inside the other, sometimes one on top of the other, without any explicit connection between them, thereby forming obscure patterns. His paintings convey an abstract relation to ecocentric thought, where the human is not considered the center of all existence.

The objects in the paintings vibrate with autonomy, thing-power, and gain an extra dimension when viewed from an ecocentric standpoint which, in line with post-humanist rejection of anthropocentrism, allows for agency of the non-human, be it organisms or inanimate objects. Their disproportionate sizes, where the shape of a planet can be the same size as one of a perfume bottle, creates a sense of equality among things. He often uses the stencils over and over again, although new ones are also added. They have become such an essential part of the creative process that he feels they have taken on a life of their own, and he has started regarding them as works of art in their own right. The stencils have various origins, but he has become increasingly open to using what he finds, whether it be a playing card or a pattern on a roll of tape. As he has said himself: "I like to bring these things together, so that something completely absurd emerges. You could call it visual recycling."⁵

Although it is not always easy to decipher the patterns in his works, the objects depicted are more than their individual parts. "There's a visual structure there,"⁵ he has stated, but it is hard to put your finger on it. The mysterious overtones demand that the viewer accept that not everything is easily comprehensible or predictable. Instead, there is an emphasis on process: "The way I work is very much based on the painting being realised in the process, hence the process determining an "idea" or sensations in the outcome. The fragmented thinking of influences relative to the theme stimulates my mind, allowing for growth in organic thought in the working process, in a way like creative responses."

Details from process



Sigrún Inga Hrólfsdóttir accentuates the role of emotions in the complex engagement and interaction of living beings with the world around them. Natural chemicals like endorphins, oxytocin and oestrogen affect our feelings, and so much else in our existence. Sigrún perceives these subjective effects as colours. This visual manifestation of invisible forces such as conflict, desire, love, and well-being reveals a complex web of emotions, politics, science, money and power relations, gender and racial hierarchies, and the subjugation of non-human species.

In contemporary art, one can find attempts to emotionally and intellectually process the complex transformations that take place as the environment we know disappears from view and a frightening reality takes over. In addition to the specific forms of grief this evokes, sometimes labelled with terms such as eco-mourning and climate melancholia, the climate crisis is causing anxiety and stress, and those who have been trying to raise awareness of the problems are experiencing symptoms of burnout. Because art, like our ecosystems, is complex

It is not a matter of favouring pessimism over optimism ... It is about maintaining the capacity for political action aimed at minimizing harm while also retaining a skepticism toward political structures and humanistic notions of the future and happiness.³

and sometimes unpredictable, it offers an opportunity to express and explore the emotional responses: guilt, fear, denial and hopelessness – but also more positive responses such as resilience, social responsibility and caring.

Sigrún's recent paintings explore various abstract combinations of impressionism, mysticism and geometry. Their colours, form, and material carry strong symbolism and psychological and spiritual references. The works in this exhibition portray her feminist exploration of the idea that life is based on cooperation and conductivity between elements. One of the works is a uterus crocheted from copper thread. The form symbolises feminine life energy, the physical ability of females to keep a new individual alive – and themselves at the same time – but the material is also significant. Copper is an important metal in various kinds of electrical equipment because it is conductive, and this adds another layer to the symbolic representation of nurturing/conducting of connections/empathy.



Sacred Geometry (2025)
Acrylics on canvas
85 x 65 cm

Bolatta Silis-Høegh connects the personal with the familial, communal and social, as well as the more-than-human. Her works have had a psychological basis, with a focus on generational and collective traumas, and the common thread has been a cycle of (self)knowledge, (self)understanding and (self) care. In *Kaaviarneq* (2025), Bolatta continues to work with cycles: life cycles, women's cycles and generational cycles. The work grew out of a previous exhibition she held with her mother, but the mussel shape first appeared when the drum singer Nuka Alice sang for Bolatta in her atelier as she was illustrating Nuka Alice's book on drum singing: "One follows the singer's heart rhythm, which gave me enormous security, it was a voice that made me feel at home."

Bolatta associates the spiral-like form of the mussel with the feminine. She describes its hard shell as a space you can imagine crawling into when you need comfort or a place to hide for a moment – temporally returning to a mother's womb. In this installation, however, the shell is soft, has pink tones, and is just big enough for a grown person to crawl into.

The womb is never disconnected from the world; it is in symbiosis with it through the host, the mother. And the softness and the pink colour, traditionally connected with the feminine, take on eerie connotations through the visualisation of cross-species transgression. The possibility of entering the non-human, not to use it as a



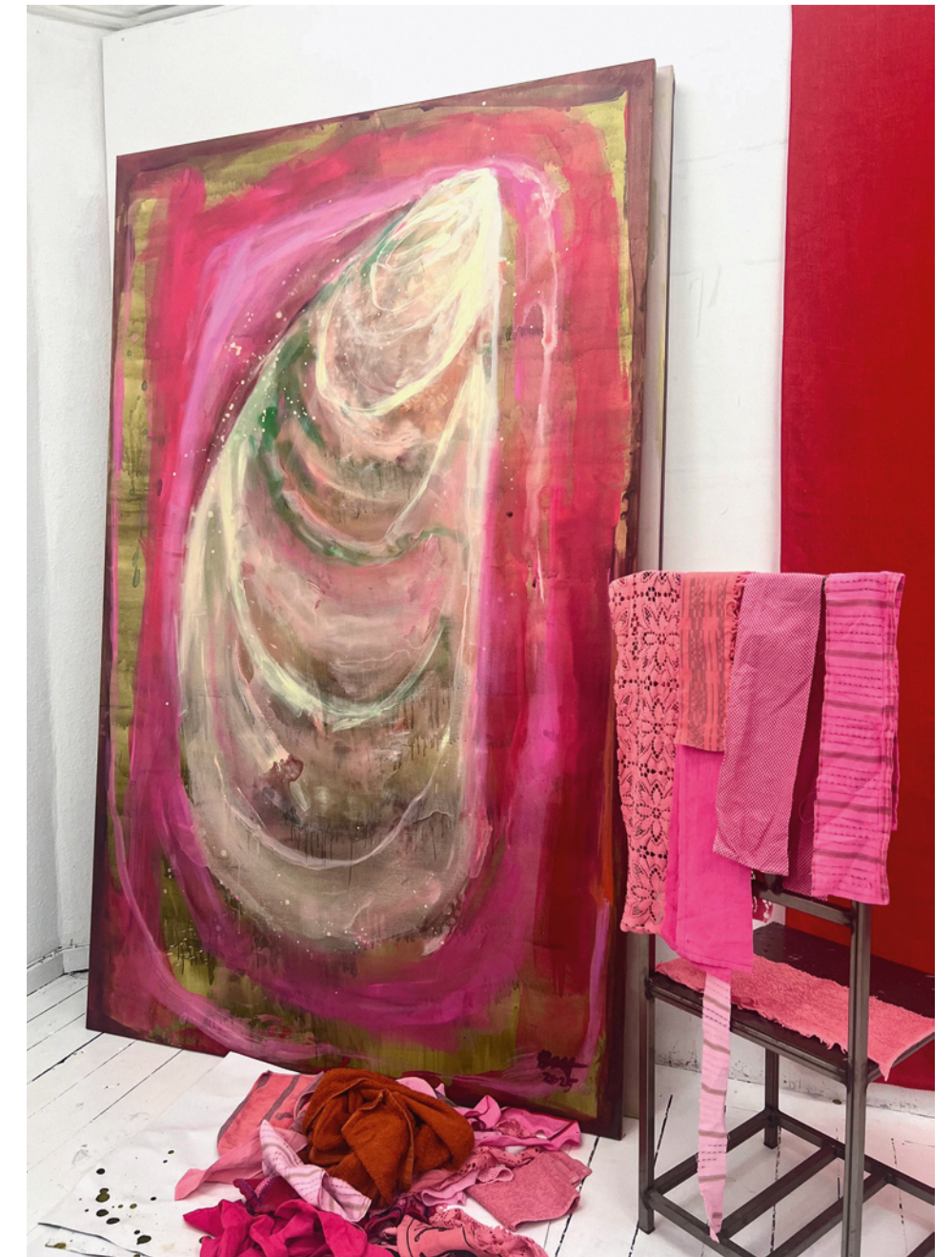
Kaaviarneq / Cycle (2025)
Textile sculpture

shield against a perceivably hostile environment but to be softly enveloped by it – by a fabric that allows for stimulation and disturbance from the outside – hints at the psychological implications of seeking resonance with the more-than-human. It indicates, on all sides, a willingness to engage, to yield, to be affected.

The personal engagement with both culture and nature, with the natural-cultural, is underlined by the fabrics used. They are Bolatta's foremothers' and mother's sheets, tea towels, tablecloths, and towels. These fabrics, so valuable that women inherited them from their foremothers with pride, bear witness to all the effort put into them, and all the women's work that has surrounded it. Moreover, these are leftover textiles from another installation. This continuous recycling indicates a commitment to engage with one's heritage and the material world in a respectful way.

*Resonance is not achieved by agreement, but rather by engagement with someone or something and letting that encounter affect oneself.*⁶

Work in progress



*Joy is ... not primarily about finding amusement and pleasure in a situation, but rather the knowledge that something bad can be changed for the better if we act appropriately.*⁷

The Ostrich Effect (2016/2025)
Coloured copper engraving, framed and perforated.
68 x 57 cm
PHOTO / DAVID STJERNHOLM



Peter Holst Henckel deploys subtle ways of using art as political social commentary, in this case by appropriation. His contribution to the exhibition draws attention to the importance of committing to personal effort in daily life to improve living conditions on this earth. His works demonstrate how recycling and sustainable practices, such as making small changes in already existing objects, thereby creating something new without “consuming” new material, do not mean deprivation, but quite the opposite: they create new meanings. In his works, he processes used everyday items, found objects, and images, including a bookcase, an old copperplate print, a piece of embroidery, or a coat rack in various ways: for example by removing parts of the motif in an embroidery pattern, carving a design into the side of a wooden bookcase, or by drilling small holes into an object so that together they form a pixelated image.

Combining existing parts of familiar objects in new ways and/or removing (by cutting, drilling) something from them, creates an unexpected, even surreal effect. New, meaningful objects are created, widening the horizon for new possibilities. The undertones are serious, as can be seen in the work *The Ostrich Effect* (2025). The title points to the very human tendency to ignore the future consequences of continuing a wasteful and extravagant lifestyle. But instead of an image of an ostrich with its head down in a hole, we get a hole that has been drilled through the image of an ostrich. The reworked material thus incorporates small transformations of the old idiom which do more than just reiterate its traditional and clichéd meaning – that our actions will eventually rebound on us. They also signal that through recycling we can gain new insights and visions.

*Environmental sustainability does not mean deprivation and austerity. It means letting go of the things in our current society that create destruction and disconnection, but it also means increasing and reconnecting with the things that create genuine joy and wellbeing.*⁷

Camilla Thorup gives her ceramic sculptures of nature motifs strong ecopolitical overtones as she invites us to reflect on humanity's role in the cycles of nature and the footprints of waste we are leaving behind for other beings and our own ecosystems to cope with: "As biological beings, we are closely connected to the natural cycle of life, death, and renewal – from the oxygen we breathe to the food we consume. Yet, through our excessive consumption, we generate waste that disrupts nature's ability to restore itself."

Through Camilla's works, the intertwinement of ecosystems is highlighted, and a dialogue between the natural world and human imprints is evident in her ceramic forest floors: "At first glance, the organic shapes of the forest – leaves, mushrooms, pebbles, and soil – are recognizable. However, closer inspection reveals elements like a to-go cup lid, a scrunchie, and other traces of human presence, now woven into the forest floor." In *Nester* (2025), a sculpture of a coot resting on a nest made of sticks mixed with human produced waste, a bird incubating its eggs symbolizes life, renewal, and the beauty of nature, contrasted with the artificial materials of its nest. Although it carries a sombre message about human pollution, the work can also be seen having a humorous side, as the coot's recycling of the human-made objects mirrors the artist's creative use of them in her sculptures. It might even be interpreted as hinting at the creativity of all life, discussed in the introduction to this catalogue, and how even the gravest of threats can also inspire creative responses. Plastic and other waste is now a part of nature, here to stay, and will from now on appear in artistic renderings of nature as well as in the nests of birds.

The dichotomy of nature versus humans is in itself questionable.⁸

Nester (2025)
Ceramic sculpture
PHOTOS / SPECTA



Forest Floor (2025)
Ceramic sculpture



Aurora Robson is known predominantly for her meditative work based on intercepting the plastic waste stream. Her practice revolves around subjugating negativity and shifting trajectories. The works she contributes to this exhibition demonstrate her passion for developing innovative methods for artists and designers to utilize post-consumer and post-industrial plastic as a raw material. Throughout her career, Aurora has developed various techniques, including fastening, weaving, sewing, threading, ultrasonic and injection welding, and most recently, 3-D printing.

Many of Aurora's 3-D printed sculptures made from recycled plastic playfully imitate the organic forms of plants, mushrooms, and animals: forms we tend to associate with nature's beauty. And these objects certainly do have enchanting decorative qualities. But the aesthetic pleasure derived from them takes on a strange aura because of the negative connotations of the material they are made of. Plastic is not only associated with the pollution of nature but also things that are artificial, cheap and kitsch, an association that is enhanced by some of

the art objects' vibrant colours and shiny surfaces. Using upcycled plastic for the artistic imitation of nature gives us the possibility to reconsider dichotomies like natural/artificial, and to review the hierarchies we take for granted in our relationships with objects and materials. Aurora's artworks and techniques advocate respect for this material, which has infiltrated everything on our planet, be it in the form of huge plastic gyres or the invisible microplastics we drink along with our water. Not least because of its longevity, Aurora treats plastic as a viable art medium, which is arguably more appropriate than its current use as material for disposable everyday objects.

Aurora's reactions against the massive threat of plastic pollution to all life on earth could be described as respectful countermeasures. An important aspect of those measures is being able to look at the problem as a connective issue that offers humanity a shared challenge. Her efforts to change self-destructive cultural norms has led her to engage with people and communities where sharing knowledge and techniques is considered more important than amassing property or monetary profit.

Fermi (2012)

Plastic debris, tinted polycrylic, hardware, mica powder
Wall sculpture, 76,2 x 48,26 x 30,48 cm

PHOTO / MARSHALL COLES

Sigga Björg Sigurðardóttir has long created works where hybridity, interconnections, fusion, metamorphoses and movement are the main themes. Her ink drawings simultaneously display signs of animals, plants and people. These surreal creatures, sometimes flowing into each other or dripping over the picture's borders and onto the surfaces around it, simultaneously awaken feelings of amusement and horror. They are the artist's way of expressing extreme emotions, but they also draw attention to the blurred boundaries between the human and non-human.

In recent years, Sigga Björg has added another, biomorphic dimension to her visual world: images of mostly rounded shapes that could be cells or amoebas, sometimes arranged in such a way that they take on the outlines of a person, some kind of animal, or being that also has some human-like features. These forms can thus remind us that we are a combination of countless units: everything from organs down to cells or even molecules. Sigga Björg has herself described these shapes as inflated details from her more familiar imagery: "the space you glimpse out of the corner of your eye and is hard to describe. You don't know exactly what it is, but it reminds you of something."¹¹ Her recent video works show such shapes in transformation. Sometimes they can be perceived as taking on figurative and organic forms, but they are always in the process of becoming something else. In this exhibition she draws them, as she has often done before, on the walls between and around her pictures, adding flow and movement to their representation.



Bird in a Tree (2024)
Ink on watercolour paper, 56 x 76 cm
PHOTO / SIGGA BJÖRG

*Walking in a forest,
we peer into its green and
shadowed depths, listening
to the silence of the leaves,
tasting the cool and
fragrant air. Yet such is the
transitivity of perception,
the reversibility of the
flesh, that we may
suddenly feel that the
trees are looking at us
– we feel ourselves exposed,
watched, observed
from all sides.⁹*



Grow Up (2024)
Ink on watercolour paper, 56 x 76 cm
PHOTO / SIGGA BJÖRG



Owl, mushrooms and sexy guys running (2023)
30 x 40 cm, acrylic on paper
PHOTO / MARTIN SECK & NUNU FINE ART

Pórdís Adalsteinsdóttir's paintings call for active engagement on the part of viewers, as the meaning of her surreal imagery, with its whimsically coded social commentary, personal symbols, and images from her private life, is kept deliberately vague and open to various coexistent interpretations. Relationships are a prominent theme. Always depicted within the context of the more-than-human, they frequently draw attention to humans' relations to animals. The nature of these relationships ranges from exploitation and violence to emotional bonding, nurturing, and care – with lactation and milking being two of the many ambivalent symbols. The absurdity of those relations is often highlighted, with humorous anthropomorphized animals, reversions of traditional roles, weird proportions, surprising combinations, and a playful fluctuation between human and animal perspectives. But this does not detract from the social criticism. In the Polar Bear Series, polar bears on melting icebergs struggle with their literally existential crisis, being either melancholic, drunk or angry. The bears' human behaviour is like a satire on our species' incompetence when facing the consequences of our own actions, here in the form of global warming and rising sea levels. But at the same time, the luckless bears remind us of all the other animal species we are guilty of dragging into our vicious circle.

"Surprise" has been seen as a key characteristic of complex ecological and social systems, and it is also one of the key elements in Pórdís' paintings. Mushrooms are one of many repeated motifs in her works, and along with various other objects – including people – they tend to appear inside plastic bottles. As potential hallucinogens and having a phallic shape, the mushrooms certainly invite tongue-in-cheek interpretations. In the context of this exhibition, however, they are more interesting as references to contemporary environmental discourse. Research on fungi has shed light on the interdependence and unclear boundaries of species. It has also revealed that fungi often play a key role in ecosystems by enabling connections and even communication. A mushroom lying isolated in a man-made bottle can in this respect refer to the human disruption of the interactive processes at work in Earth's ecosystems, as well as to an obsession with the classification of individual elements, rather than paying attention to the connections between them.

Laura Ortman is a soloist musician, composer and vibrant collaborator, who creates across multiple platforms, including recorded albums, live performances, and film soundtracks. She has a strong connection to visual art, as she started her career by producing paintings and installations before deciding to focus on sound as her main medium. She describes her artistic practice as “sculpting sound”.

The video *My Soul Remainer* (2019) is the second of three video collaborations between Laura Ortman, director Nanobah Becker, and choreographer Jock Soto, a former New York City Ballet dancer. It features the artist playing an amplified violin against a landscape in the Southwestern United States, where Ortman (White Mountain Apache), Soto (Navajo) and Becker (Navajo) originate. The score she is playing comes from her album *My Soul Remainer* (2017); it starts off by sampling a classical piece by Mendelssohn, but then radically departs from it.

The landscape plays a key role in the video, with trees, lake, river, mountains, sky and campfire representing the elements of Fire, Water, Earth and Air. In between, we get glimpses from interactions between Laura and her collaborator Jock Soto, symbolizing deep caring relationship and seeing each other from different perspectives. In some scenes, Laura stands by a river and a waterfall, playing her violin, with Soto kneeling in front of her, watching and listening while assuming reverential postures, in the end sinking lower and lower until he is almost lying flat, on the brink of merging with the running water beside him.



Still from the video *My Soul Remainer* (2019)
5:44 min.

*Being attentive is not simply an act of listening
to something external but can also entail
listening as an imaginative encounter.⁶*

Hekla Dögg Jónsdóttir often directs our focus toward applied boundaries: those between the public and the private, the inside and the outside, or the invisible line where two oceans meet. Her use of the windows in the exhibition space reflects that interest, and the fact that rising sea levels are also a problem “out there” which is threatening to disrupt our day-to-day existence.

For the work *Ocean View* (2024), Hekla used the windows of a small shed, so that looking in from the outside, the interior seemed filled with the ocean. As if an effort had been made to keep it safe inside the four walls of the home, secure from threats like human-induced global warming, acidification and deep-sea mining.

In this exhibition, Hekla does the opposite. Using a printed, transparent film with a photograph of the ocean surface, she plays with the colour scheme by separating the colours, reminding us of the printmaking process. The subject itself becomes part of the method: by shifting each layer of colour according to the movement of the average global rise in sea level in one year, the image changes and transforms the view from the window. The placement of the exhibition space, the time of the work, and the methods used all become part of the work, as Hekla fills the outside with water and frames the gallery with an ocean undergoing dramatic changes.

***Margins* (2015)**
Photographic print, 70 x 30 cm



***Beitningaskúrin* Ocean View (2024)**
Still from a video (40 min)

*... important aspects of
Hekla Dögg Jónsdóttir's artistic
methodology and approach:
conversation and cooperation,
dissolution of the art object,
and joy ...¹⁰*

***Ocean View* (2024)**
Site-specific installation
Beitningaskúrin Eyrbakka, Iceland
PHOTOS / CHRISTINE GÍSLADÓTTIR

Björg Eiríksdóttir uses the methods of layering, pattern and proximity as she focuses on bodies, perception and the sensation of being in nature – and of being nature. In the video work *Senses fill up Consciousness* (2024), a deeper understanding of existing in an ecosystem is sought by erasing boundaries and referencing the sensations of a fetus in a womb. The fetus floats in the amniotic fluid, not separate from its environment, but rather an integral part of it. How did we perceive ourselves and our environment during this existence in our mother's womb, not outside or above it, but rather inside this enclosure?

The video is projected onto linen, giving the visual mediation a textile-like appearance which, like the layered images of a human fetus and of plants and animals, emphasizes the materiality of the world sensed.



Recently, in an effort to express the multi-layered sensation of being a bodily being in communication with its environment, Björg has been working in paintings with the same concept of intertwined layers, experimenting here with motifs from different animal phylums. As she steps into the context of this exhibition, when it moves to her home environment in North Iceland, her ongoing development will contribute to the theme of transformation and movement.

*Ultimately, to acknowledge
the life of the body, and to
affirm our solidarity with
this physical form,
is to acknowledge our
existence as one of the
earth's animals ...⁹*

***Senses fill up Consciousness* (2024)**
Video projected on linen



Work in process

Curators

Auður Aðalsteinsdóttir (b. 1972) graduated with a PhD in literary studies from the University of Iceland in 2016. She has written and edited numerous academic articles and books on contemporary art and literature from the perspective of ecocriticism. Her latest publication is the anthology *Creative Responses to Environmental Crises in Nordic Art and Literature* (2025), which she co-edited with Katarina Leppänen.

Þórdís Aðalsteinsdóttir (b. 1975) has a BFA from the Icelandic School of Arts and Crafts and Universidad de Barcelona. She graduated with an MFA from SVA in 2003. She was artist in residence and guest lecturer at Chiang Mai University, at Art Omi and at Luzhunan Residency, recipient of the NYFA fellowship award, the Socrates Sculpture Park fellowship, and finalist for the Carnegie award. She has held exhibitions in museums and galleries worldwide.

Artists

angela Snæfellsjökuls rawlings (b. 1978), a Canadian-Icelandic interdisciplinary artist-researcher, graduated with a PhD from the University of Glasgow in 2020 where they researched how to perform geochronology in the Anthropocene. angela has an extensive background in solo and group performance, as well as participation in numerous exhibitions. They teach at the Iceland University of the Arts. In 2024, they founded “Snæfellsjökul fyrir forseta”, Iceland’s first rights of nature movement.

Aurora Robson (1972), a Canadian-American artist, graduated with a BA in visual art and art history from Columbia University in 2000. She works predominantly with post-consumer and post-industrial plastic, making sculptures, installations, paintings and collage. In 2011, Aurora founded Project Vortex, an international collective of artists, designers, and architects who also work with non-virgin plastic. Robson has exhibited her work internationally since 2004, and in 2024, she curated her first exhibition of artists from the Project Vortex, *Plasticulture: The Rise of Sustainable Practices with Polymers*.

Bolatta Silis-Høegh (b. 1981) is a Kalaaleq/Latvian artist working out of Kalaallit Nunaat, Denmark and Sweden. Bolatta graduated from Aarhus Academy of Art in 2006, and since then, she has had numerous solo and group exhibitions in both Denmark, Kalaallit Nunaat, and other countries. Bolatta primarily works with painting and installations. She is also the author of three children’s books.

Björg Eiríksdóttir (b. 1967) graduated with an MA in art education from the University of Akureyri, Iceland, in 2017, after earning a diploma in visual arts from the Akureyri School of Visual Arts in 2003, and a B.Ed. degree from the Iceland College of Education in 1991. She works as an artist as well as teaching art at the Akureyri Comprehensive College. Björg has held 15 private exhibitions and participated in numerous group exhibitions.

Camilla Thorup (b. 1976) graduated in 2008 from The Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen with an MFA degree. Over the last few years, she has started working three-dimensionally and she is now producing sculptures in ceramics, bronze, and concrete. Camilla has also curated and co-curated gallery shows and museums exhibitions. Her work has been shown in museums, galleries and art institutions in Denmark and abroad.

Hekla Dögg Jónsdóttir (b. 1969) graduated from The Icelandic College of Art and Crafts in 1994. She received a BFA 1997 and an MFA in 1999 from the California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles. In 1998 she received a Fellowship to attend Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, US. Since 1999, Hekla has exhibited her works both nationally and internationally. She has been a curator for several exhibitions and given lectures and seminars at the Iceland Academy of the Arts. Hekla is one of the founders of Kling & Bang gallery.

Artists

Hildur Hákonardóttir (b. 1938) studied tapestry at The Icelandic College of Art and Crafts from 1964–1968 and the Edinburgh College of Art in 1969. She is known for her works in various media: textiles, graphics, installations, photography and video, and is the author of several books. Hildur was principal of the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts from 1975–1978 and was also active in the Red Stocking movement and in SÚM, a group of experimental artists aligned with Fluxus and conceptual art from 1965–1978.

Jóna Hlíf Halldórsdóttir (b. 1978) graduated from the Fine Arts Department of the Academy of Fine Arts in Akureyri, Iceland, in 2005, completed an MFA degree from Glasgow School of Art in Scotland in 2007 and an MA degree in art education from the Iceland Academy of the Arts in 2013. She has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions in museums and exhibition spaces in Iceland and abroad. Her work is represented in the collection of all the major museums in Iceland.

Kristinn Már Pálmason (b. 1967) graduated with an MFA degree from the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London (1998), and he also studied at the Icelandic College of Art and Crafts (1990-1994). His works have been exhibited widely abroad and in most major art museums and art spaces in Iceland. He has engaged in various art-related projects and was co-founder of art galleries in Reykjavík, including Anima (2006–2008) and Kling & Bang (from 2003).

Laura Ortman (b. 1973) (Mountain White Apache) graduated with a BA in Fine Arts from the University of Kansas, where she studied drawing, painting, sculpture and performance art. Laura now works as a soloist musician and composer and is versed in the Apache violin, piano, electric guitar, keyboards, and amplified violin. In 2008, Ortman founded the Coast Orchestra, an all-Indigenous orchestral ensemble. She has performed at countless venues across the US, Canada and Europe.

Peter Holst Henckel (b. 1966) graduated from The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1992. Peter's artistic practice explores areas in which aesthetics, politics and poetry intersect. He has worked primarily with objects, photography and installations. He has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions in museums, exhibition spaces and galleries in Denmark and abroad. His work is represented in the collections of all the major museums in Denmark.

Sigga Björg Sigurðardóttir (b. 1977) graduated with a BA in fine art-painting from the Icelandic Academy of Art and Design in 2001, and in 2004 she finished an MFA at The Glasgow School of Art. Sigga Björg works with drawing, painting, sculpture and animation. She has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Iceland and abroad.

Sigrún Inga Hrólfsdóttir (b. 1973), visual artist, researcher and curator, works with paintings, performance and other mediums, focusing on visible and invisible forces at play in the world. She graduated from the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts in 1996 and the Pratt Institute in New York in 1997. She completed an MA degree in philosophy from the University of Iceland in 2016. She is one of three founders of The Icelandic Love Corporation (1996-2016) and a former Dean of the Department of Fine Art at the Iceland University of the Arts.

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Creative Responses

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ARTWORK ON COVER

Aurora Robson
Eternal Crush (2025)

Injection welded post-consumer plastic, and hardware on panel
21,59 x 25,4 x 8,25 cm
PHOTO / MARSHALL COLES

Sigga Björg
Hiding Place (2024)

Ink on watercolour paper
56 x 76 cm

