

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Things that Happened
(in random order)



This is the hardest thing.

How am I to describe the work and character of a big fish called Brynjar?

How is it possible to capture in a few words the immense talent that is dormant in the belly of this gentle giant? How can I resume a short period of creation that seems constantly called by dreams and has embraced multiple disciplines but is still only in the process of eclosion? I am humbled by the impossibility to rationalise his character.

So I will try but cannot promise to reach conclusions and might be derailed by the inner processes his totemic design evokes in me. My relationship with his work is visceral and personal. My heart opens and swallows the purposes of his expressions. It touches something very deep, as if mending my soul.

From the first moment I witnessed a design of Brynjar I was captivated and transformed by the experience. A simple flashlight was mounted on a long stick so it became a primitive and quite masculine device to be carried on the shoulder like an axe; the young designer managed to change human behaviour through design. How transcending.

Even without meeting the individual I felt a very strong and instinctive bond with this person and argued with the other jury members to get this proof of talent acknowledged. When he spoke to us it became evident that this designer is in a league of his own, not to be compared with anybody else.

A year later, again in villa Noailles, we witnessed the great leap he had made in one year, cooking up random organic forms in glass and ceramics, somehow unearthing objects from their traditional constraints. A series of contemplation reveries that indicated his skills to transform matter and to transcend meaning. Proof of an alchemic interest in materials.

Yet nothing prepared me for the discovery of his major work that was projected in a simple wooden cabin, sitting on the same benches as pictured in the film, surrounded by the same objects, becoming one with the moving image. A documentary was shown

of a lonely stranger trying to catch a big and never seen dangerous fish. Only gradually one understands it is a masterwork of fiction, where everything is designed, all elements are drawn, all texts are daydreamed and scripted.

Mesmerising the audiences.

A work of unbelievable beauty and intensity, an instinct for a future where all disciplines merge and become one, the performing arts, writing, designing, anthropology and strategic vision.

With this work his name was established.

He seems to be often in an altered state of consciousness, initiating fieldworks in forlorn villages and forgotten regions with titles such as *Silent Village Collection* and *Fishing for Furniture*.

He uses animal images as good omens, guiding people on the road of their own mental map.

Drawing from his turf and remembering his ancestors he sets out to create objects and furniture with fetishistic verve, preserving the tradition of folktales. Stones, ropes, feathers, furs, stuff as he calls it, is collected and distributed to the different amulets, tables, chairs. In his hands a rope, becomes a braid, becomes braids, becomes multiple breads, becomes untangled, becomes a fetish. His ritual sticks read like fishing rods from an unknown tribe, adorned with hoops and braided laces.

Leather transforms in an obscure abstract alphabet conceived for the grammar of the mind of some undiscovered island in the northern seas. His work is islandic and Icelandic; there is an invisible bond between him and his place of birth, the strength of his roots makes him untouchable. The creative spirit of Iceland permeates his vision quests wherever he chooses to travel. Strong like a boulder yet pliable like a gentle giant, a whale lodges within his mind. He is like a fisherman searching for content with stoic calm and a nordic sense of humour. Still afraid for the sharks of society our big fish navigates in the peripheries of art, craft and design.

He makes objects so people call him a designer yet his designs are highly ceremonial and even at times tribal, so he is more likely a shaman, designing stuff to remember and incantate, drawing to give meaning to human existence, recording to archive ritual experiences.

Preserving knowledge for the future.













Visual Vault (Óxarfjörður, Iceland), Brynjar Sigurðarson, 2009—onwards.

A nice looking sewing line

In the project *Like Animals* (2011), I started with a character description; as a consequence, I had to make the objects the character would do. So, in a way, I had to become bipolar. I would do something that I found intriguing, and then I would need to step back, become the character, and ask: “Is this something I did? No, I didn’t do this, but this is maybe how I would do it.” It became a tool for me to free myself from my restrictions, my preconceived ideas of what is nice and what is not nice.

The character of *Like Animals* is a hunter; he makes everything by himself. One of his objects is a spiral needle. He’s really precise: for example when he sews he needs to have the exact same distance between every single hole. With the spiral needle, he just turns the spiral to make a nice looking sewing line. His backpack is basically an animal that’s translated in a backpack. It has leather straps, which he put around the animal to make the backpack feel functional. When the hunter goes into the forest, he takes the leather straps off the animal, makes it free, and uses it to attract other animals.

Just feel and look

I really like making details. Assembling different materials and textures. It’s such a great exercise for me. I become a child again: I just feel, and look... nothing more. Like this detail here, it’s a leather strap, a little piece of leather that’s bound with nylon string, and then above is a sandpaper tape. And if I touch the nylon binding the sandpaper tape and the leather with three fingers, it feels really weird. Some are really simple. This one just has a really long nylon binding. The nylon strings magnify the structure of the wood, so it brings focus onto the structure of the wood, but the nylon string’s binding distorts the image as well. So the detail makes you see the structure of the wood bigger but not necessarily clearer.

As far away as possible/Vopnafjörður

I wanted to go somewhere else, experience something new, and make something based on that experience. I didn’t have any specific goal or anything. I just wanted to go as far away as possible from Reykjavík, and I ended up in a place called Vopnafjörður. It’s a small

rural area and a fishing village in the North East of Iceland where around seven hundred people live. Around five hundred fifty live in the fishing village, and the rest are farmers in the nearby valleys. So I go there, and I just start to walk around. I’m alone most of the time. I walk around the harbour. I meet fishermen; I play basketball with the local priest, the fire fighter, and the smith, if I remember right. I just try to get a sense of the place: “What is this place about, really? What is the atmosphere here?” Well, it was dark, cold, a lot of snow. Couple of guys at the harbour doing their business, some people in the shop, drinking coffee and gossiping about the farmer in the next valley. Two guys drove by me on their pick-up jeep. They got me to understand with their sharp glare that they knew of me: the new boy in town.

When walking around the harbour, I see these huge piles of nets, net mountains, and I get so fascinated by them, I want to dive into them. They are full of something, there is something dark but beautiful in them. As I see it, these mountains were sort of monuments of that time. The biggest part of the finance of the town is based on fishing, and when there is no fish in the sea, the nets lay on the harbour and no money comes in.

Cat

I heard this story from a guy I shared a studio with once. His girlfriend had this really beautiful cat and when the cat passed away he said: “I can bury it for you”. But instead he decided to stuff the cat, and give it to her as a birthday present. She got completely crazy, and left him for good. He didn’t understand the difference between life and death.

Fake rhino horn

I read about an anthropologist who talks about a type of daggers from somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula, if I’m right. When a boy becomes an adult he should have his own dagger. The tradition is that it should be a rhino horn dagger. The problem today is that it’s illegal to hunt rhinos for their horns. Yet, this tradition is so strongly integrated in their culture, and in their basic values that rhino horn is still used for the handle of knives; with a growing illegal market

as a result. For this reason, the anthropologist in the book works with authorities in Oman to try to propose a new material for these knives. In the end they decide to make a synthetic material that looks more or less like rhino horn. So his idea was to replace the authentic rhino horn with a fake rhino horn. Reading that made me ask myself: “Is that really the right way to do it?” Can we have something to say here? Wouldn’t it be nice that a product designer and an anthropologist would work together, and somehow propose a new alternative to this tradition?

Éric and Marie

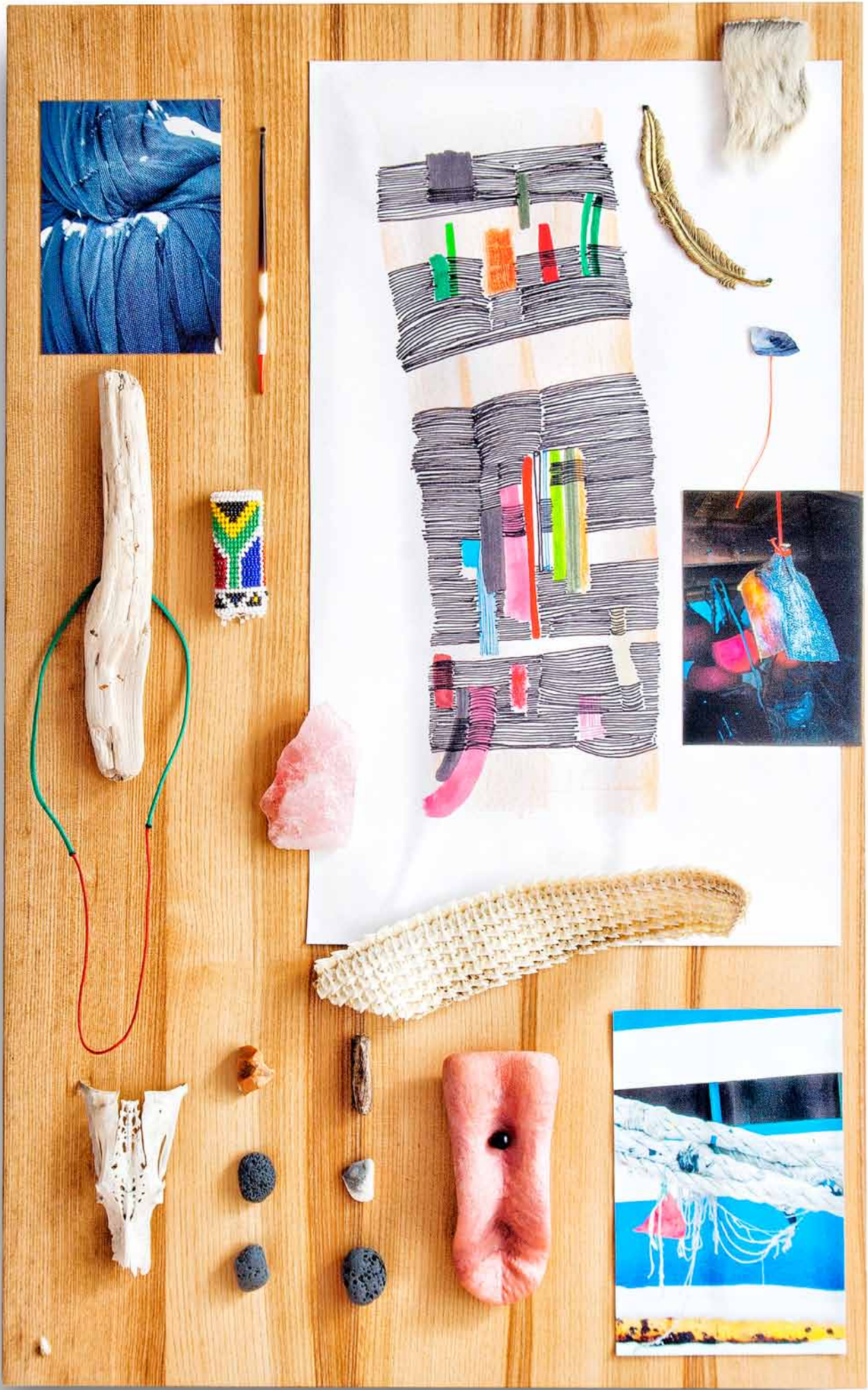
I didn’t know their work when Sophie told me that they would be designing this book. I told a friend, and he had a beautiful book designed by them, putting together drawings and designs by the Bouroullec Brothers [*Objets Dessins Maquettes*, 2008]. When I finally met Éric and Marie in their studio in Paris, it all felt somehow right. They were going through photographs, drawings, and pieces of mine, and it felt as if they were discovering new things in the work, which I had not been aware of.

Friends

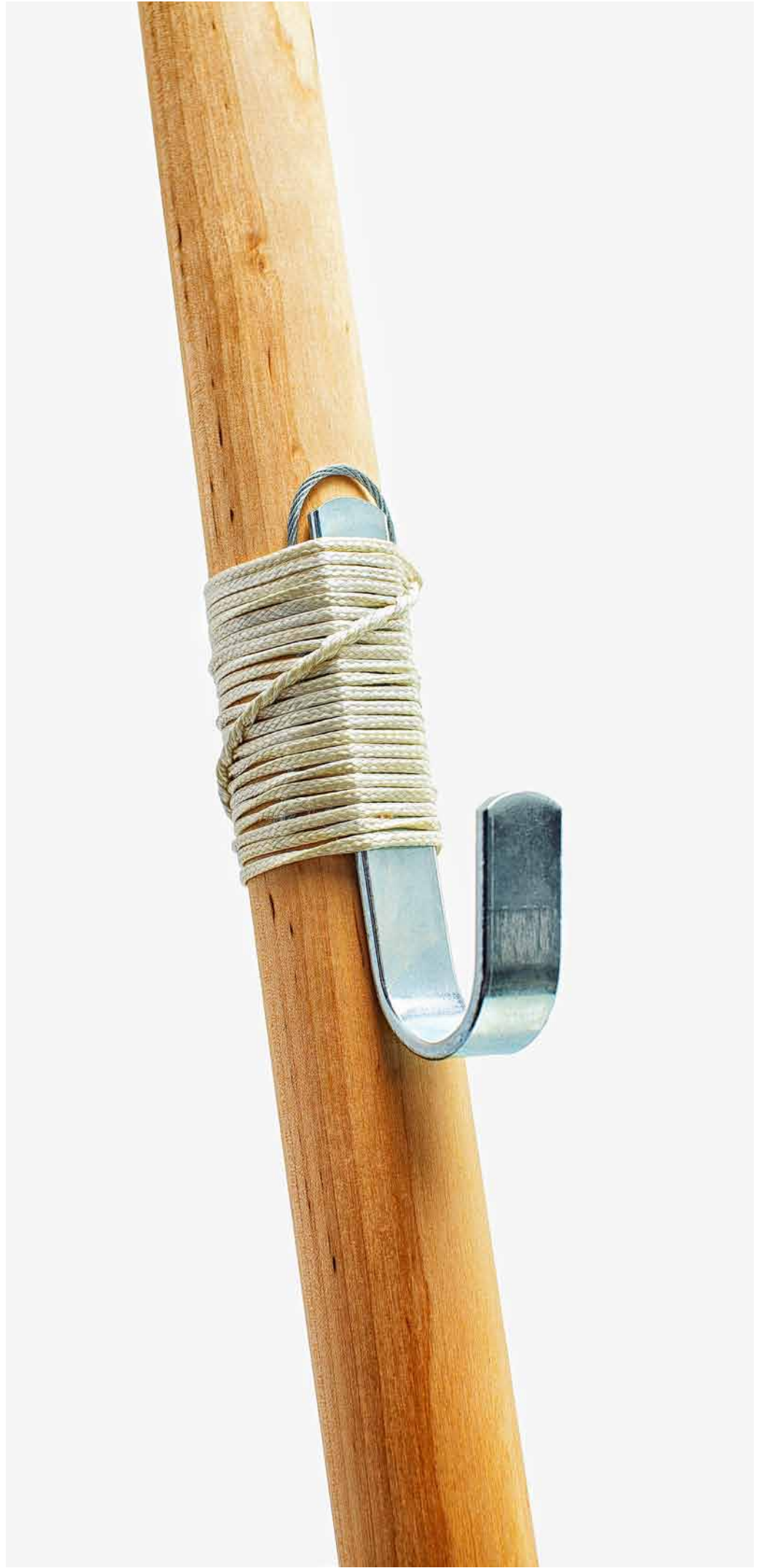
I owe a fur head to the friendliest guy that did models for me, I feel very bad for still owing it to him. Most of my friends are from primary school, and became truckdrivers, cooks, sociologists, car sellers, hustlers etc. I have one good friend from university.

Li Edelkoort

Li was in the jury of villa Noailles during *Design Parade 6*, when I won the prize along with Jean-Baptiste Fastrez. I remember meeting her a year later in Cape Town during the Design Indaba Conference, and she yelled at me: “You’re everywhere!” I found that funny. Li is one of the persons that has supported and shown my work all around. It’s special to have someone that believes in your work. I always meet her in random places, at an exhibition, conference etc. But we still haven’t had a good chat, over a cup of coffee with no hurries involved.









Núna er bara soldið mikilvægt að halda rétt á spöðunum, hvar á fókusinn að liggja og hvenær.

Ongoing:

steinar fyrir sevres
skipuleggja tíma fyrir það og standa við það

stick með jean-baptiste fyrir sevres taka eitt gott kvöld í það; þess vegna í næstu viku
sem sagt ekki mikilvægt núna

gler verkefni með GIRVA
senda þeim email bráðlegavopnafjörður ég
pdf - skrifa sögur

vopnafjörður fyrir spark
vopnafjörður fyrir kreó
mig vantar ca.6 hluti
Start to digest what kind of objects it should be, and than take one object at a time, just very basic
- look at the insporation and think, sketch etc.
- I already have more or less one object

kollur fyrir kreó
sketch the stool and the bench in rhino
eftir það get ég pælt í því hvernig ég geti komist að niðurstöðum varðandi það
einn möguleiki væri að fá hjálp við renderingu frá einhverjum
einnig ætti ekki að vera neitt vandamál að henda í nokkur mockup
það væri jafnvel góð hugmynd að gera það núna áður en skólinn lokar
movie skipulag bara byrja þreyfingar

gler research vinna bara þegar ég veit meira um það

Mexíkó vinna?
minnast á það við skólastjóran
líka Tíló

Gera tónlist pæla í því seinna

íbúðin
meðleigendur; pirringur, af hverju
ánægja
tiltekt og borð það er erfitt að taka of mikið mark á því - það virðist ekki vera góð skipulagning
Emailar og samskipti við annað fólk I don't have to hurry too much unnecessary to change my
plans because of emails... on the other hand I can practice to reply quickly, and not be too precise
writing viðræður við nemendur um ritgerðir ég pæli í því þegar þess þarf, en alls ekki mikilvægt núna

Fjölskylda heima á Íslandi ekki eitthvað sem ég á að hafa hugann við
- ég heyri samt í afa fljótlega

lesa og fylla út skjöl um búferlaflutninga í kvöld eða á morgun eða um helgina

kaupa hjálm og ljós á hjólið laugardagur stress og streyta í mér
I have to tackle that
spurning hvernig
partur af því fer með því að komast almennilega inn í efnið og verkefnin
annar partur er að hreyfa mig meira

Priorities:
vopnafjörður fyrir kreó

kollur fyrir kreó

stress og streyta í mér

Stones fyrir sevres







Stuff

Feathers, ropes, chains, and strings: I really don't see them as feathers, chains, or strings. It's just stuff. Things that I collect without thinking.

Field Essays

Sophie first contacted me after she saw a clip from my documentary Borgþór Sveinsson [*Borgþór Sveinsson Bullfish*, 2012], which Li Edelkoort screened on Dutch national television in summer 2012. Later, Sophie told me that she wanted to feature my work in *Field Essays* simply because she didn't quite understand it. So I guess all that time we spent together looking at the content, having recorded talks and interviews was a way to gain a better understanding. But then again, what is it to understand? I remember once reading an email from her where she said something about my work in relation to the way I put myself in situations and then create. This is what she wrote: "Brynjar Sigurðarson's way of working can perhaps best be compared to the attitude of a hunter on a constant lookout for the unusual, becoming one with the very world he's studying. He lets himself be taken in by a place, its materials and habits, and intuitively reassembles these elements into ritualistic objects and scenes." I felt like someone understood my work better or deeper than I did myself, it was a special moment. So I thought, wow, that's how I'll explain my work myself since I've always had a problem explaining shortly what I do. But then when I try to explain it the way Sophie does, I seem to lack the confidence in saying it, and it starts to feel unbelievable. I guess that means I should leave her to do the explaining, while I do the work.

Galerie kreO

When I was asked to come to Paris for a meeting with Galerie kreO, I didn't really know what to expect. I had just finished my Masters studies at ECAL, and all I knew about my future was that I would be working from time to time at school, as an assistant. So I go to Paris, and I meet Didier Krzentowski, who owns the gallery with his wife Clémence. He asks me to design a collection of furniture derived from the Vopnafjörður project, my diploma project at the Icelandic

Academy of the Arts. Walking back to the train station after the meeting, I felt so weird, I felt almost angry; I couldn't believe I should do something like that. Also, it felt like too big of a challenge for me right after my studies. I called my dad and I told him the whole story. He told me to relax and that the deal was in fact great news. It took me a while to figure out how great it was. Three years later we presented *Silent Village Collection*. Now, looking back, I feel very thankful for the trust I was given, and the relationship with kreO is a precious one for me to keep.

Similar vocabulary

A friend of mine used to call me Binni Piano, which was shortened into Biano. I studied classical piano for ten/eleven years when I was younger. Then, when I started studying design, I didn't give myself time to study the piano. I recently figured that all the vocabulary I was dealing with in the piano, is more or less the same as in my visual practice. Terms such as textures, shapes, proportions and contrasts. No matter if it is visual or sonic, the same elements seem to hit me in both senses.

Legends

The idea came to Frosti [Gnarr] and me to make a film about Borgþór, a man living in the countryside in Iceland, in a tiny little cabin next to a big river, where he spends his time looking for a big fish. We asked a filmmaker from New Zealand to go and stay with Borgþór for two days, and document everything.

Borgþór, I'm sorry, I'm sorry for not giving you the right attention. I only thought about making a good film. The most beautiful part of the project was the meeting of two special characters, you and Viktor. The film is a vague delivery of what happened, and will never manage to tell exactly what happened.

Visual Vault

Throughout my studies, and still in my work today, I work a lot with images; it's a part of my work, and I call it *Visual Vault*. I'm always taking photos of my nearby surroundings, and I travel a bit as well, so I'm fortunate enough to see things from different perspectives,

and to get a sense of what I find intriguing. The *Visual Vault* did not start as a project; when I came to Switzerland in 2009, everything was so new for me, I just started taking a lot of photos of my environment, using the camera as some sort of a tool for therapy. To get a distance from my surroundings.

If I have a camera, I see things differently. I start to isolate things from their context, and make new links. When you take things out of their context and put them next to an image that's from a completely different environment, something happens. I try to compare a lot, to make parallels. To get further in my thinking. And I try to use images of what I see as triggers for new ideas. I think therefore it's kind of good to make parallels and not be too specific on what something is, to be vague on what I'm telling.

Home

I've always had a studio, or a place to work, which was separated from home, giving me a clear distinction between home and work. So I was quite scared about the idea of working from home when I moved in with my girlfriend in Berlin. Slowly, I learned to keep routines such as going out during the day, to greet the day.

When I had a studio, I was making things for the studio, things for a gallery, a place where the objects would be presented. Now, after a couple of months working from home, I realise that I've started to do things for the home; without knowing it, I am measuring my ideas and sketches to this new context. Home is a very rich environment compared to the studio: it has a bedroom, a closet, kitchen, living room, and entrance etc. So lately Veronika and me are doing things such as a woollen blanket, jewellery, and coat hooks. I guess the environment I spend most of my time in, affects me in a way that I start doing different things from before.

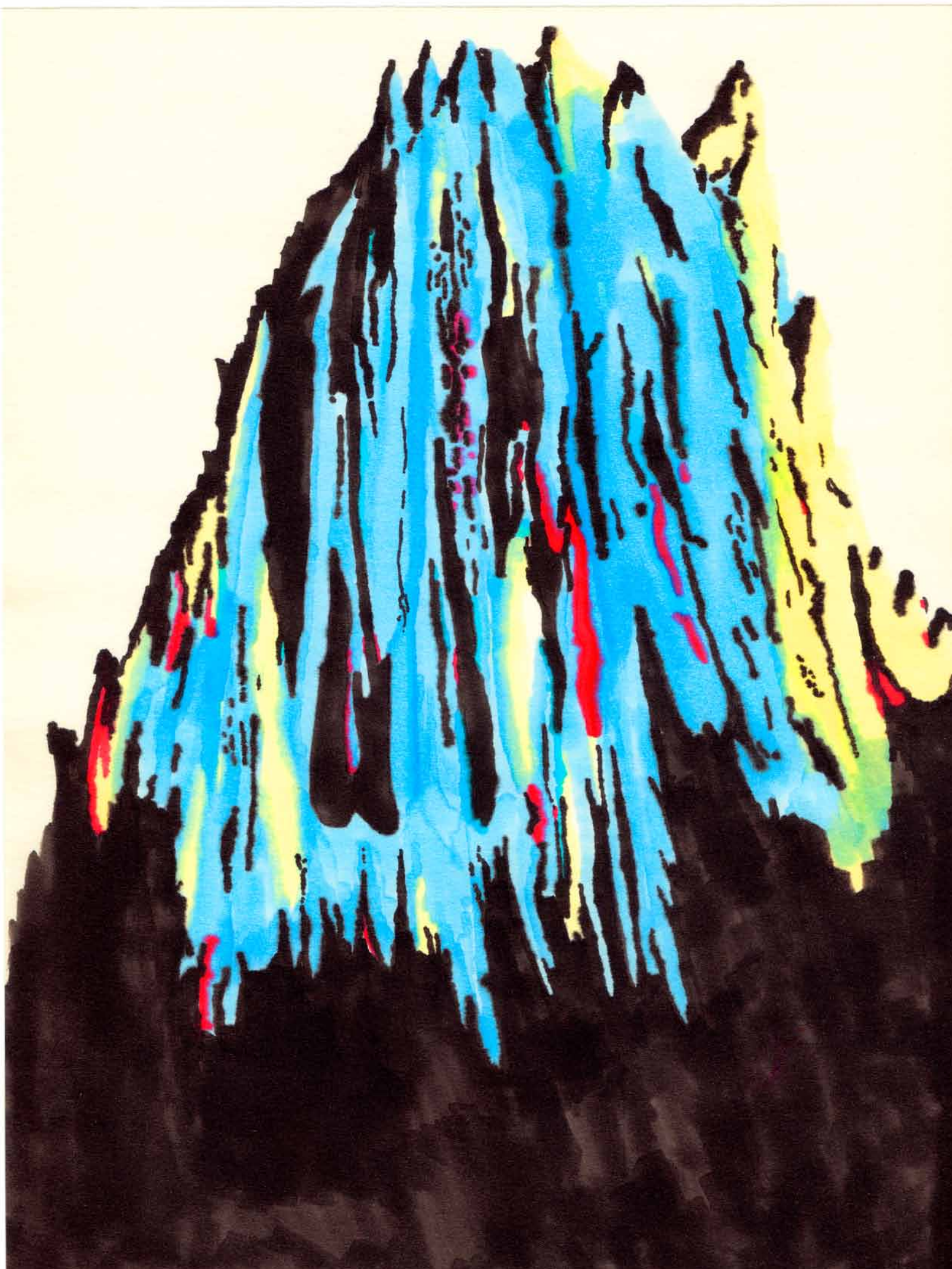
I really just start

I draw when I have nothing else to do, or when I don't feel like doing anything. I really just start, and something comes out of it. I make something and I don't know if it's horrible, or good. It's all just doing, and then I learn through doing.









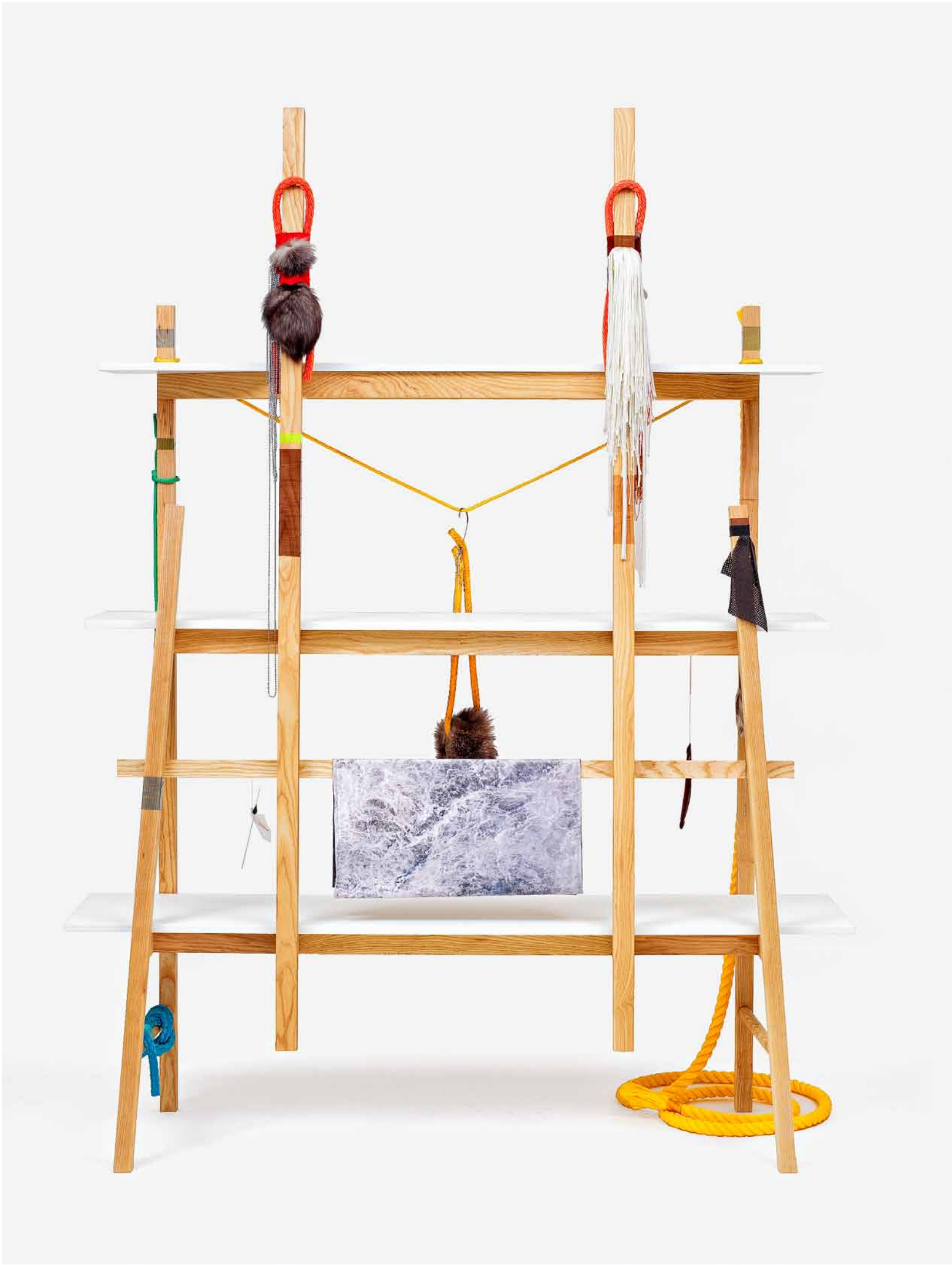


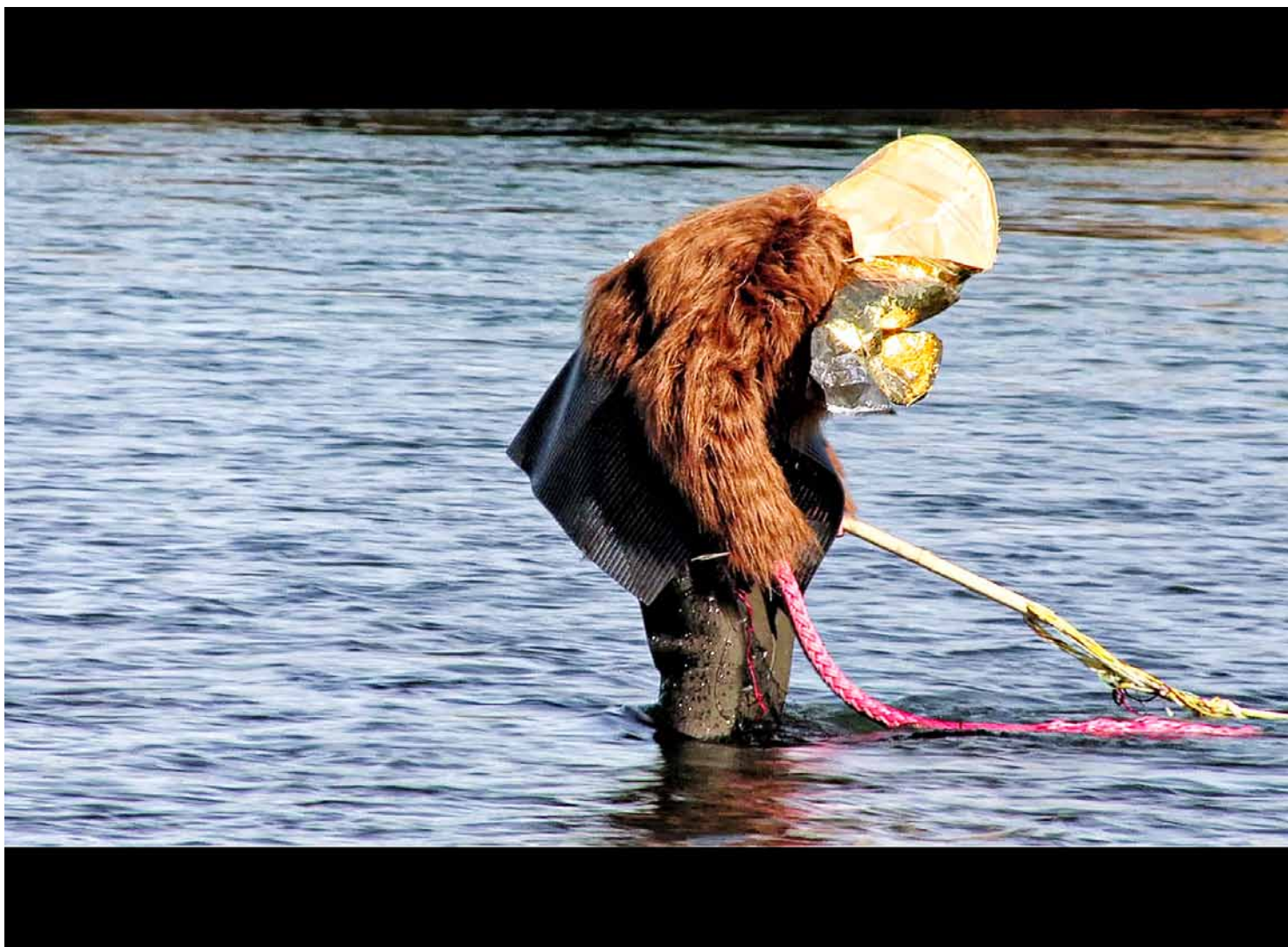












Sharks

When I was young I saw a documentary about the great white shark. It was about a man that was going down into the ocean, in a cage. The sharks would come, and try to attack him. At the end of the movie he leaves the cage with only a long stick in his hand, and pokes the sharks when they come too close. My parents recorded the documentary on VHS, and I got completely hooked; I watched the movie every day for around two months. After watching the movie so often the sharks started to become a part of my life, I got scared in the swimming pool, I got scared in the bathtub, and even today I still have sort of a phobia for sharks, especially when I swim in the ocean.

Twenty years later, I go to Cape Town for the Design Indaba Conference. One night I hear something about cage diving with the great white shark near the city. I think to myself, “Well, now is the chance, my chance to face this fear of mine”. I sign up for the day after, and I’m supposed to be picked up at four in the morning. On the evening before is the closing party of the conference, and suddenly I figure I’m almost late for the shark dive. So I run straight from the party to the hotel, feeling a little tipsy from all the drinks that were served. We drive for two hours to False Bay, get dressed in neoprene costumes and go on the boat. The boat is not very big but the waves are, and I start to get sensitive to all this movement. We stop in the middle of the bay, and the staff starts putting rotten tuna on a rope, which they throw in the sea to attract the sharks. It felt a bit strange attracting the sharks in order to get scared of them. A couple of minutes later a huge great white shark jumps right next to the boat. Another one arrives. It felt just like in the movie, except I was starting to feel a hangover along with smelling the rotten tuna, and feeling the boat rocking. Suddenly I’m handed scuba diving equipment, and I’m directed into the cage, but when I step out of the boat, I manage to slip and fall down into the sea. I think by myself: “Okay, this is the end. That’s it. I’ll be eaten alive here in front of everybody”. I look around, and I realise I fell inside the cage. I see the sharks swim next to me, they are enormous animals, I scream underwater when they get close. I get out of the cage, I run to the other side of the boat, and puke out of the boat straight onto the

back of the shark that was swimming right under me. What a weird way of getting revenge. It felt terrible. This cage diving is basically about tricking the animal to come by, making it think there is food, until it sees an animal, us, but they are in cages and impossible to reach. I got marinated in old neoprene, sea and rotten tuna. Plus I didn’t conquer any fear, I am still afraid when I swim in the ocean and look into the abyss. I guess this is one of the reasons why I’m a vegetarian and I don’t drink alcohol today.

To-do list

It’s quite basic, if I want to have an efficient day, I have to decide what I need to do beforehand, and sometimes if I really have a lot of work, I make a plan for every five minutes. And then it’s a bit up to the day how it will go on; but at least the list helps me to keep up to date. Maybe it’s also that with the list I can forget about time... To avoid spending a whole day on one thing, only to find out that there were a million other things. It’s important that I do it the day before, and I have to have it printed out, so that in the morning I wake up, and I have the things that I have to do in front of me. I sometimes write notes in the beginning, like: “Okay Brynjar, be strong”, or: “You have to tap yourself on the back when you go to the studio in the morning”, “Today is important, you can do it”. I try to visualise a bit what I’ll do — and how I will do it. And even if I wake up early in the morning, I won’t be able to make a good list for the day, the same day.

New day

Everything is a new day. I was in Marseille showing my drawings to people I had never met before, and one of them said: “They are all so different!” I thought about it for a while, and well yes, I have different days, different feelings. I don’t work under one certain feeling. I work when I’m sad, happy, impatient, deep and shallow.

Light grey fog

I’ve always been interested in working and/or discussing with anthropologists; so meeting Tim Ingold and his team was a big moment for me. Finally I could meet anthropologists and they were

even specialised in anthropology in relation to art or design! So in April 2014 we go to a city called Aberdeen, where everything is grey, light grey, light grey fog, light grey houses and light grey roads. We meet the team of doctoral and post doc anthropologists led by Tim Ingold and we start speaking. It felt so weird, they where speaking a language, which I couldn’t understand, and their way of seeing things was completely different from how I see things. It was a disappointment at first. I guess I approached this meeting with a bit of a naive mind, going there with expectations that were too specific.

Villa Noailles

Villa Noailles is a special place. It’s in the South of France, and you can see over the whole area and the ocean from the villa, which is on the top of a mountain. In the summer time it gets very hot, and I’m not very used to such heat. In fact I sweat a lot when it’s hot, I don’t manage to slow down my tempo. So when we were putting up the exhibition *Stones and Bones* with Jean-Baptiste Fastrez, I had a towel with me everywhere I went, to wipe of the sweat. In this hot place, I met all these great people that I eventually worked with, such as Galerie kreO, CIRVA, Sèvres–Cité de la céramique, and so on. Basically villa Noailles is the reason why I have had the chance to make all the things that I’ve made.

An honest view

For my Masters essay at ECAL, I was interested in stories, and the role of objects within stories; the essay spoke about how we approach cultures through stories. I especially got into something called ‘micro-history’: basically it’s about learning about distant, past cultures through small stories, collected by historians. These historians work from small diaries or a similar source to get an honest view of what the culture was like then instead of looking at the big events of history, a war or a revolution or something. I find it interesting to try to grasp an honest, personal view on a culture, through something as simple as everyday gossip or anecdotes, and to give these things relevance.





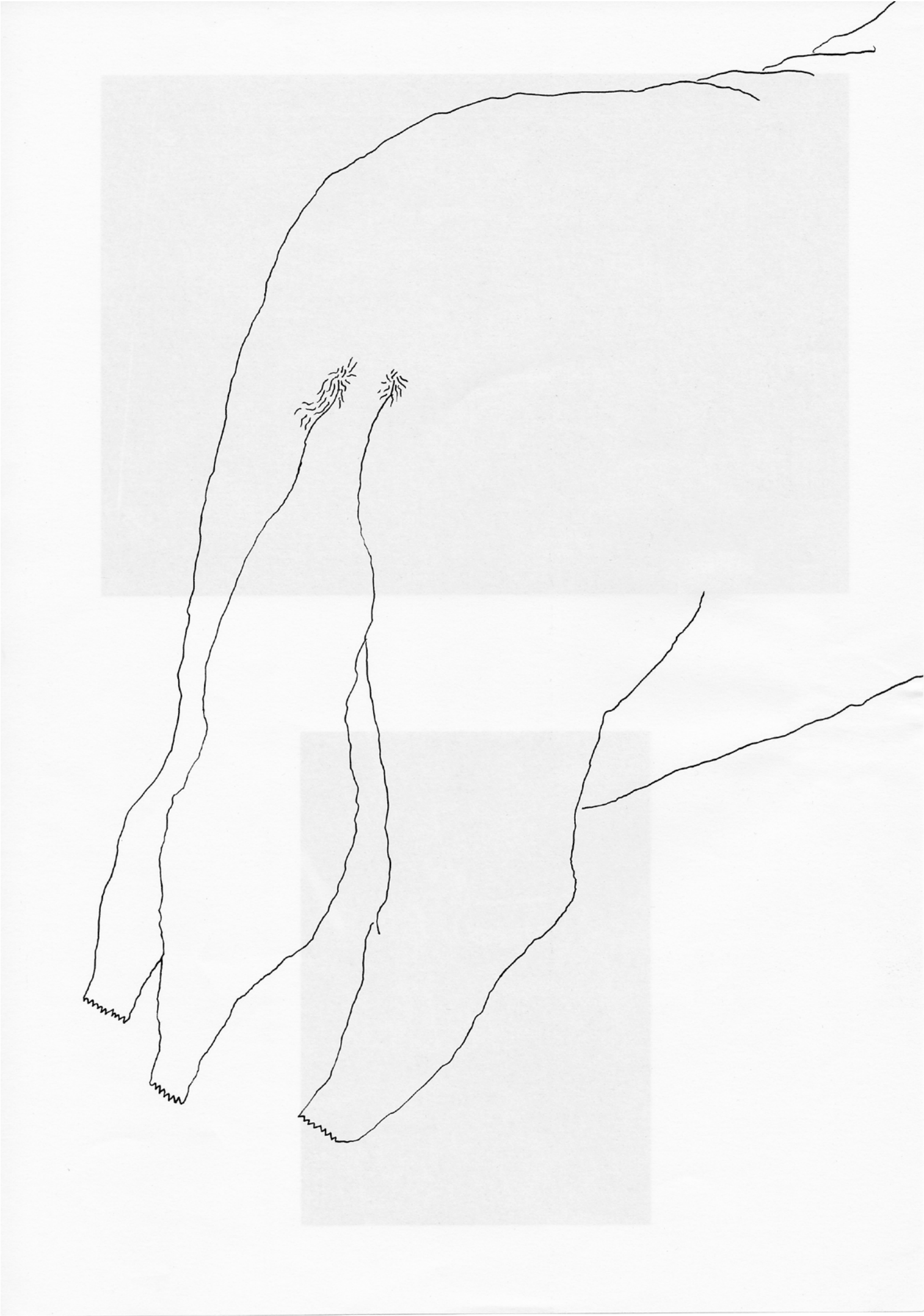




Vopnafjörður:

- 1: Collect materials and things I've done so far ____
 - 1.A: Ákveða fjölda hluta sem ég ætla að sýna 18.apríl. ____
 - 1.B: Decide roughly how I will show it, detailar, myndir, teikningar, video osfrv. ____
- 2: Ákveða hvaða hluti ég vinn í. ____
 - Try two methods:
 - A: Work for 2.5 - 3 hours entirely from my gut feeling and the atmosphere instead of functions____
 - B: Work for 2.5-3 hours fro functions____
 - B.1: Ljós____ - ____
 - B.2: Hilla ____
 - B.3: Snagi ____
 - B.4: _____
- 3: Work on things. ____
- 4: Taka saman skissur og myndir og gera mér smá yfirferð. ____
- 5: Gera mockup. ____
- 6: Breyta og vinna í hlutum. ____











Making details that speak well together

There are twenty-three sticks in total. The initial question from Sigga, the founder of Spark Design Space (a gallery in Reykjavík) was if I wanted to continue my Vopnafjörður project. After a while we decide to make a series of sticks. I wanted them quite tall, like characters. I'm one-eighty-something and the sticks range between 175 and 190 cm. It was a very nice phase to spend four weeks in Iceland sketching directly on the sticks. I worked in a very similar way to how I made the *Silent Village Collection* for kreio—I make sort of a buffet with a lot of of stuff, and I place everything so it's approachable: I take an entire floor space, and put things like feathers, furs, buoys, chains, strings, and nylon... I see them as exercises in details, of making various elements and arrangements fit together onto a wooden stick. In the end it was not so much about creating characters but more about making details that speak well together.

It has a handle, and some sort of a pin on the end

I was looking through archaeological catalogues for my bachelor thesis at Icelandic Academy of the Arts; archaeologists go to a scene, and dig up a lot of different objects somewhere where there used to be a house, or something. They then make a catalogue of the dig, so all the objects from the same dig are in the same catalogue. And they note things like: "This object was made for this, and made like this." In one catalogue, I stumbled upon an unknown iron tool from Iceland from the twelfth Century. That's all it said. It has a handle, and some sort of a pin on the end, and measures around twenty centimetres or so. Nobody had a clue what it was for. And I found it so funny: here you have archaeologists who are scientists in objects, but don't really know what this tool is for. Then I stumbled by coincidence on primitive cultures in New Guinea in another catalogue. And there was a tool that was almost looking exactly the same as the one from Iceland. It was the same size, it had the same kind of features, it was a pin, or at least something to stick or poke, and it had a little handle on the end. And I thought by myself: "Oh that's interesting, these two completely different cultures, one from the twelfth Century here in Iceland and a contemporary one in New Guinea are making the same type of objects." So I started to

look a bit into that, and what was funny was that the Viking society in Iceland and the Big Man societies of New Guinea turn out to be based on very similar values: both are structured around chief monarchies. There is a chief that rules the place and there are hunters and gatherers and so on. So to me this finding is about the question: "Is the best way to learn about our past cultures to look at distant cultures of the past with similar values to our own?"

Stones looking like stones

Sèvres—Cité de la céramique is the national manufacturer of porcelain in France. People work there for all their life doing exactly the same: only doing plaster moulds, engraving, painting on royal plates, etc. And they get really, really good at it. The main goal of this company is to maintain the knowledge of French porcelain making. So they are remaking old porcelain pieces like sculptures of the kings from the seventeenth Century, or plates of the royal family from the eighteenth Century. In 2011 I went there, and surrounding this sort of village of ceramic workshops are gravel roads full of stones. And I really like stones. And when walking around the place I'm constantly picking up stones lying in the roads, pebble stones, sharp stones; I start to think of making stones in porcelain, simply to make beautiful artificial stones in porcelain. So I meet with a sculptor who is remaking sculptures from three hundred years ago and I ask him to make stones looking like stones. The thing is that we had to actually fabricate them—we had to remake nature; and that became quite a tricky process. In the end, the stones basically look like something in between porcelain and stones. I also tried to include a kind of magical or supernatural dimension. I like to imagine that in five years, or in twenty years, when the grandson of the couple that owns these stones finds one stone, will wonder: "What is this?" and then he finds another stone, and figures out that these stones fit together.

Things that take a long, long time

When I moved to Switzerland in 2009, I found all these small detailed objects you could find in shops very fascinating. I had never seen a shop only for miniatures. Take their watches: the value of

a watch is not necessarily determined by the material, but by the craft: how much time the craftsman spent on making these tiny, tiny mechanisms. They also have cuckoo clocks depicting miniature scenes of houses, trees, people, etc. Many of these artefacts originate from the east of Switzerland where people lived high up in the mountains. And when you are so high up you see small houses tiny little people at the bottom of the valley. And without knowing it maybe you have started to make small things. So my main question is: "How does our environment affect what we do, consciously and unconsciously?" Another aspect of living up in the mountains in the past was the isolation. Half of the year you were stuck. You had a couple of cows, which you had to feed once a day, but the rest of the day you didn't have so much to do, so you did things that took a long, long time.

Gentle giants

Whales are remarkable gentle giants. Some are even so big that a human could easily swim in their veins. Sometimes, a whale can loose its sense of direction and swim onto dry land where it dies. This is called a whale stranding. Every year, ten to fifteen whales get stranded along the coasts of Iceland. When a whale strands close to populated areas it can be a big problem, mostly because the smell gets almost unbearable when the whale starts to rot. In that case, the dead whale is towed to a more remote location. After a couple of years, the only trace of the whale is a handful of bones lying on the beach. In recent times, whalebones haven't been used much in Iceland. They mainly serve decorative purposes: people for example install them on their balcony next to or under a flower pot, or in front of their house as "natural sculptures".

This is why in January 2013 I organised a workshop around this topic, with students from ECAL and Icelandic Academy of Arts. It didn't make sense to do things in a very pragmatic way, simply because the environment didn't invite us to follow that path. The *Iceland Whale Bone Project* (2013) shows a reflection on the culture and the history of Iceland, and perhaps most importantly, the contrast between the old and the new, or the primitive and the progressive.

Þriðjudagur

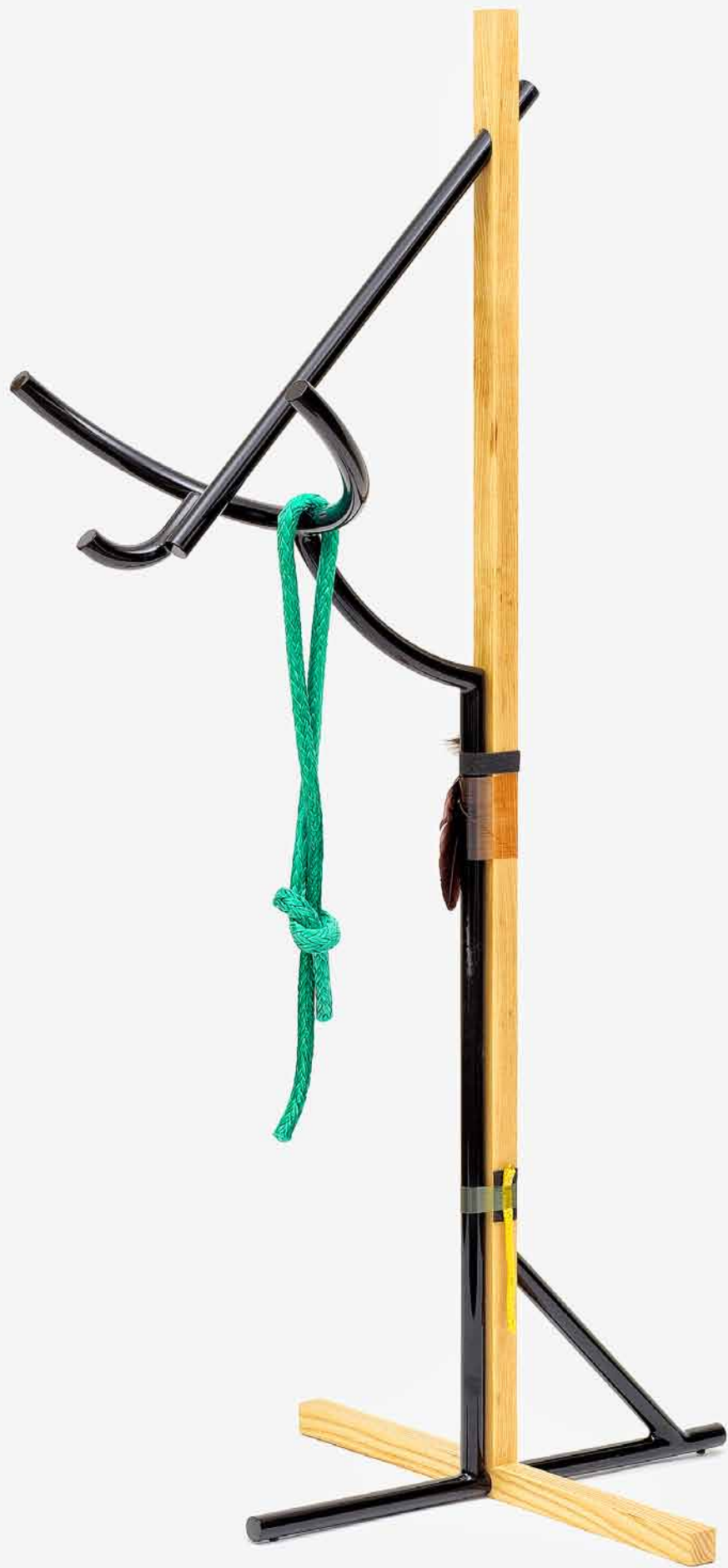
Be bright, brave, do more and think less
Ekki láta þetta vesen rugla í þér
 án djóks
 það ruglar bara í þér ef þú pælir of mikið í því
 og það er bara algjör óþarfi að pæla í því, það gefur þér ekki neitt
 ekki neitt

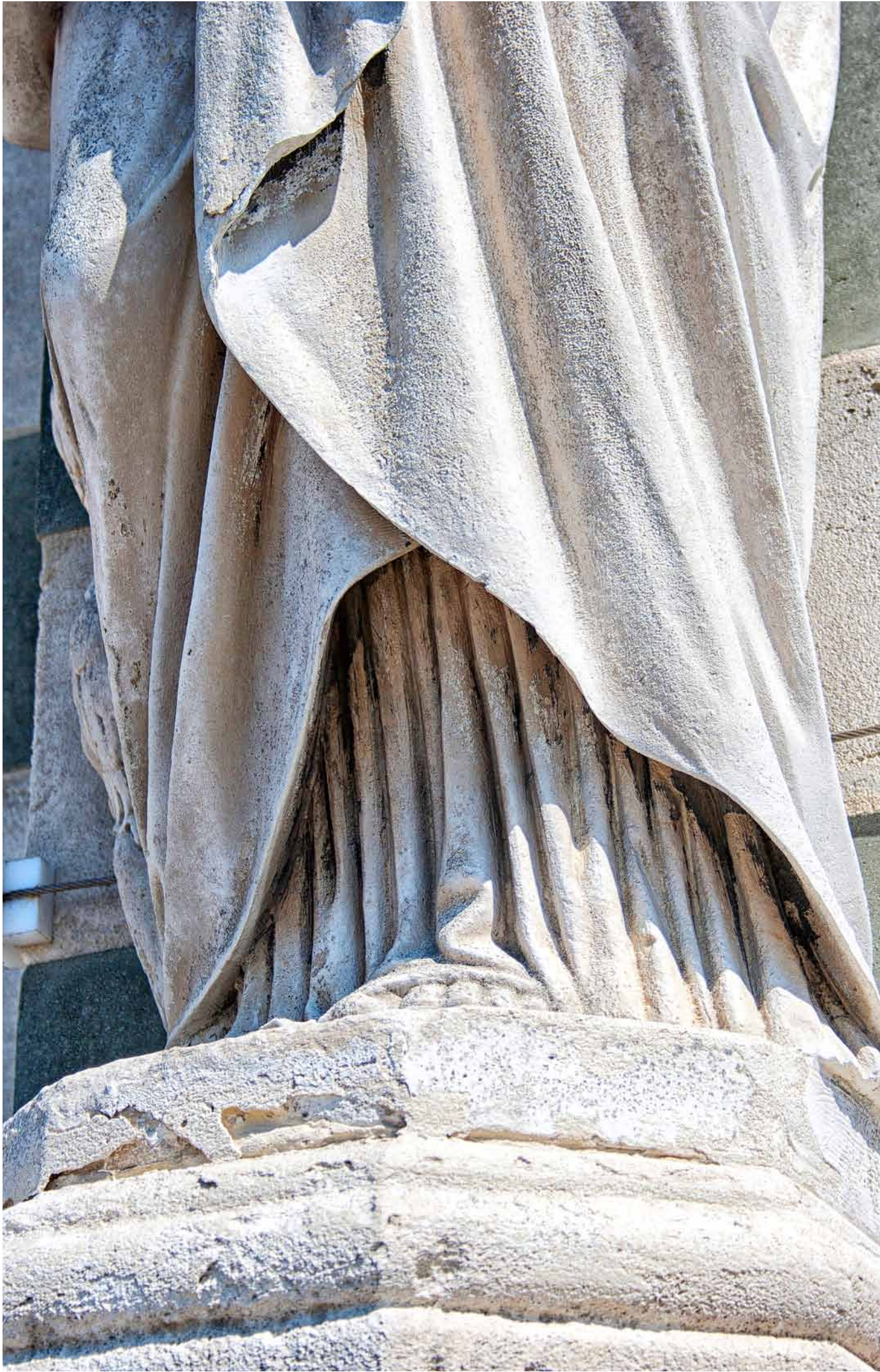
Vertu æðrulaus - ...serenity...

Núna er mikilvægast að einbeita sér
- þú verður að vera virkilega ánægður með daginn í dag í lok dagsins.

- Farðu niðreftir á bókasafnið um 09 leitið
 - farðu í gegnum mannfræðibækur
 - botany - botanique
 - plants - plantes - jardins - parc
 - nature
 - jardins de croissance
- komdu heim um 12 og farðu í ræktina
- farðu síðan upp í skóla og fáðu þér eitthvað að borða













Glacier Candles, Brynjar Sigurðarson, PCM Design, 2015.



Solar eclipse

When I was in Paris to record the stories for the vinyl, I sat in a café having a breakfast and a coffee on a Friday morning; there was a big flat screen above the bar; the news channel was on. There were only reports on the solar eclipse which was taking place that day. The news showed different places in France, and a lot of people being very excited. I noticed the daylight getting darker and darker until around 10:30, if I'm right. I go outside to see if there is a possibility to see the eclipse through the clouds. I look around, and I realise that there is no one looking up in the sky, there is no one wearing the typical glasses that you need, and in fact no one seems to be aware at all of this event. How strange, I mean we are on a moving planet, but it seems as if no one cares. Are we getting so far away from nature that being in the centre of Paris makes us forget the fact that we are on a planet, in a solar system?

Hugleikur

Once a guy called me, it was a wrong number, I was in a shop, he starts speaking about something I am not familiar with, and after he finishes his sentence, I ask who it is, he asks if I'm not Hugleikur, Hugleikur is a very rare Icelandic name, but at the exact moment he asks me if I am not Hugleikur, I see a stack of magazines and on the front cover is an artist called Hugleikur.

In the darkness you don't see

There is a huge tradition of crafts, and all kinds of folklores in Iceland. Stories about supernatural things such as trolls, ghosts, or elves. And this attitude is more or less still integrated in our culture today. Iceland during winter is completely dark. You don't see anything. And when you don't see, you start to imagine. So I think that's the natural trigger for these traditions.

Veronika

Yesterday, my partner and I changed the name of the studio; it is not anymore Brynjar Sigurðarson Creative Studio, but Studio Brynjar & Veronika, a lot better! It marks a beginning of a new era for me, for her, and for us. When I met my meditation guru for the first time,

the only thing he told me was that I needed to learn and practice yoga. Two months later I fall in love with Veronika, a soon to become a yoga teacher. Today I'm going to her yoga classes, and we are launching a common project called *History of Somethings*, or *Society of Things*, we haven't decided yet...

Something very natural

I always had sort of a problem with glass. It's really quite banal, you find glass everywhere. So I was a little worried before meeting CIRVA, a glass research centre in Marseille, for the first time. But when I got there, I discovered a whole new world of glass, something unfamiliar. There is a method called "pâte de verre": basically you mix together different powders and grains of glass, and then you put it in a kiln inside a plaster mould. And then you take it out. No part of this method is glass blowing. It made me want to try to achieve something very natural in glass. We did hundreds of tests. We were basically making recipes: "If we mix thirty per cent of K0 and twenty of transparent glass powder with this colour, and then a little bit of baking soda in between, what happens? And what if we put twenty five per cent?" And so on. The idea was to test the spectrum of this method; the bottom looks like stone, and it gradually changes into transparent glass.

Hjalti

Hjalti Axelsson is the true story teller, I'm just a messenger.

Lausanne

When I moved to Lausanne, Switzerland, I didn't really know what I was getting into. After living in Reykjavík for all my life, well, twenty-three years, it was such a change that I lost fifteen kilo in three months, just like that! There was so much to discover I guess, I was always walking: walking around the town and getting a sense of the place, again, but in a different place. The reason why I moved there was an art and design school called ECAL, to do my masters studies. One of the changes was that the workshops closed at six and the school closed at nine as well as during weekends, holidays etc. To begin with I found it a big hassle to need to finish my work

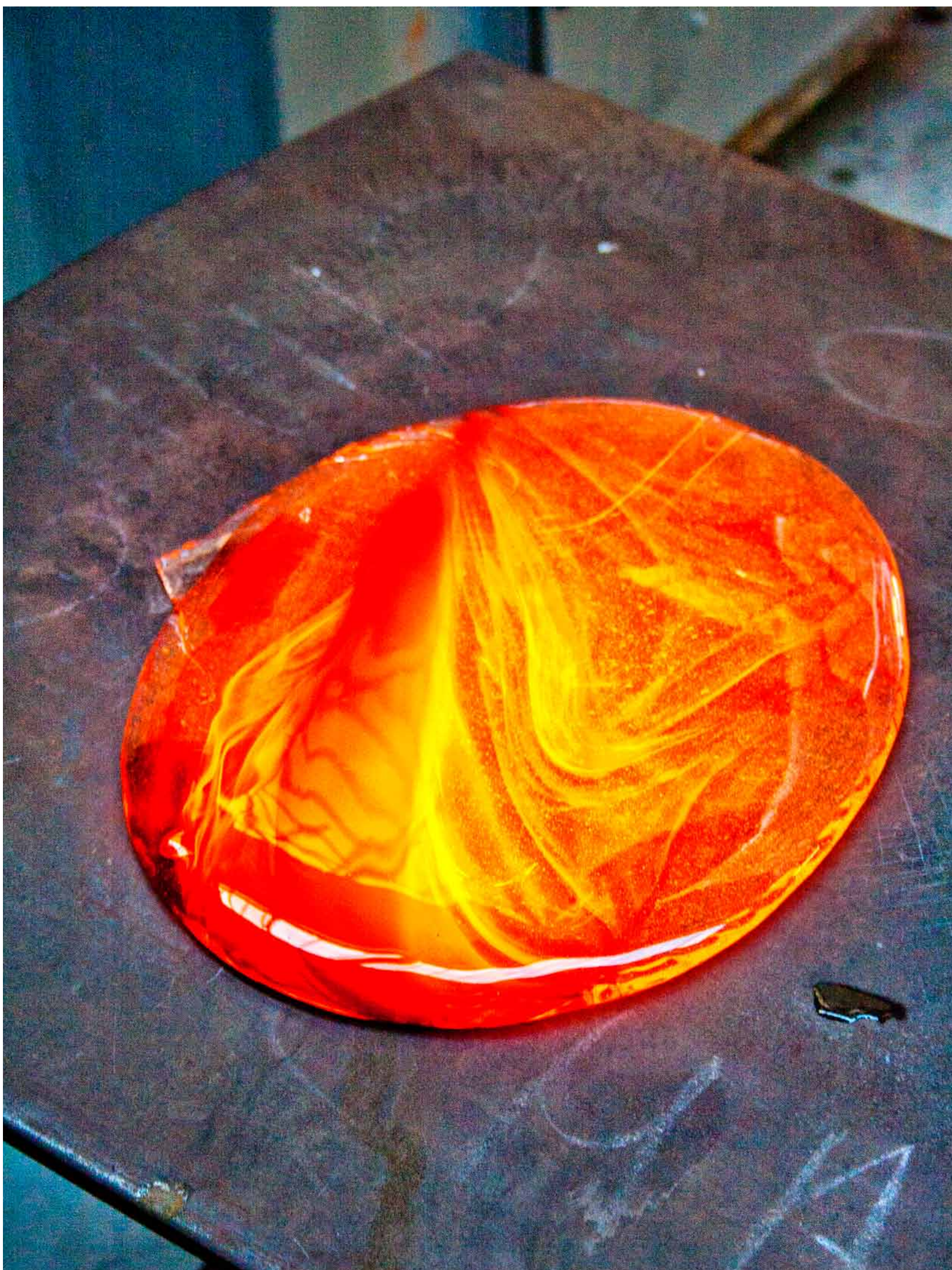
by early evening, but at the end it taught me to keep my schedule proper and efficient, something I never learned before. ECAL was simply the opposite of what the IAA (Iceland Academy of the Arts) was; it was big, clean, and somehow majestic while the IAA was some sort of a typical art school. I believe these two schools put together are the perfect combination for my design practice.

Caribbean

Last winter Veronika and I started working on a project we call *Society of Things*. We wanted to make things by ourselves and sell them straight from the studio. We produce some things in a certain quantity but other objects we make spontaneously by ourselves and only once. In fact this was a winter of preparation, not a lot of things were finished, but many new things were started. This spring I received the Swiss Design Awards for the work made during the last 2 years. Around the same time, I was nominated for the Hublot Design Prize. It was such a motivating moment; it made us really feel that we should keep on doing what we are doing. Very flattering. A month later, we go to Iceland to open up a temporary workshop and a showroom/shop in downtown Reykjavík. For the first time I had a lot of local Icelandic media speaking about the studio, both about the Swiss Design Awards as well as the project in Reykjavík. We were very optimistic about our little shop project and were even starting to speak about going on holidays with the money we would get for selling our things. We set up the showroom and our workshop and started working and waiting for people to show up. But nobody came, people stopped outside the window and looked at our objects but nobody entered, we hardly had any visitors for three weeks! Now that our time is coming to an end we have a space full of stuff and only sold for around 200 euros, which definitely won't buy us a trip to the Caribbean. In the end it was a very grounding experience after all the press hype from the awards. We learned a certain lesson during this time here in Iceland, and we are eager to keep on.











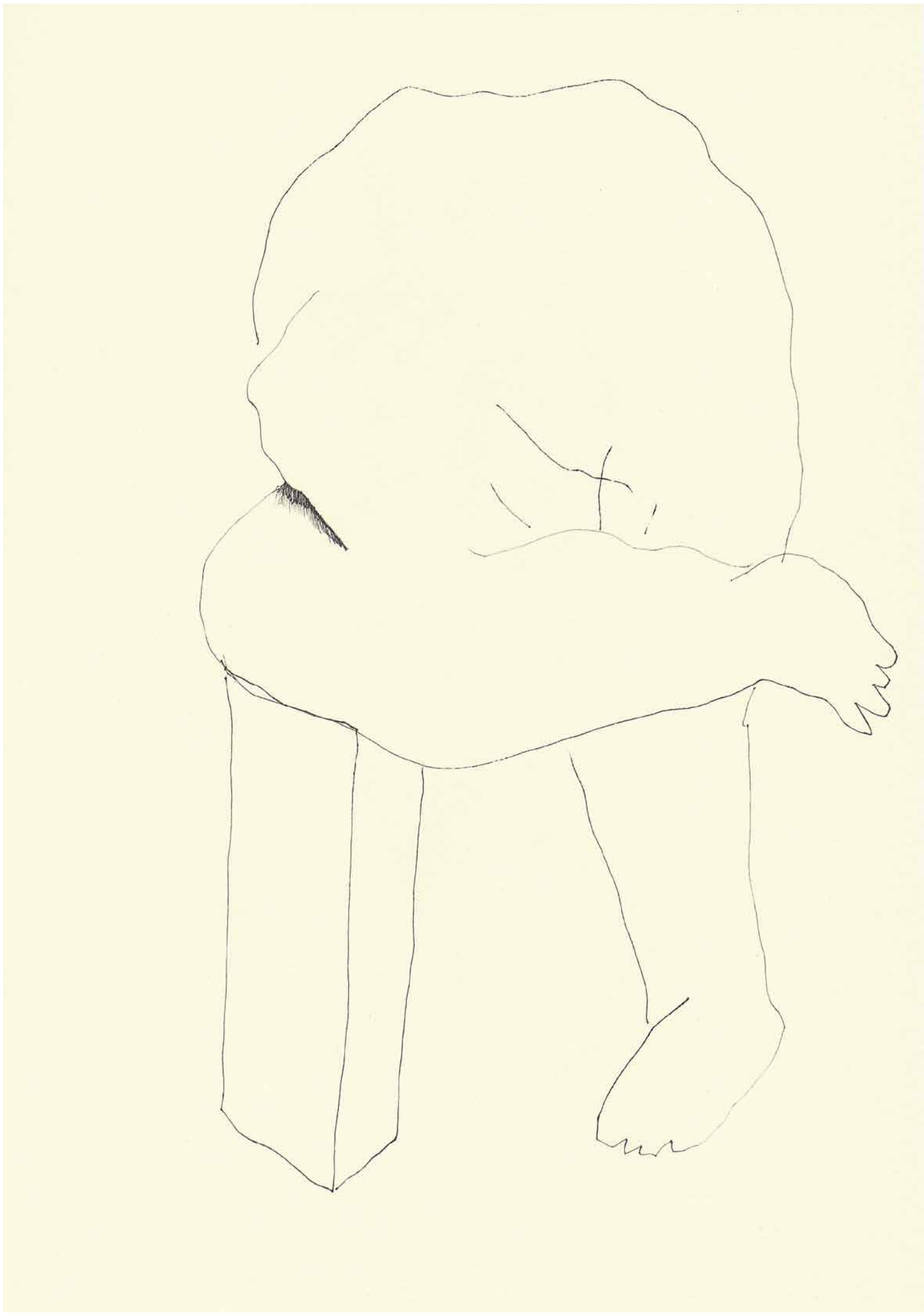
Visual Vault (Vopnafjörður, Iceland), Brynjar Sigurðarson, 2009–onwards.



Stones, Brynjar Sigurðarson, Sèvres–Cité de la céramique, 2012.

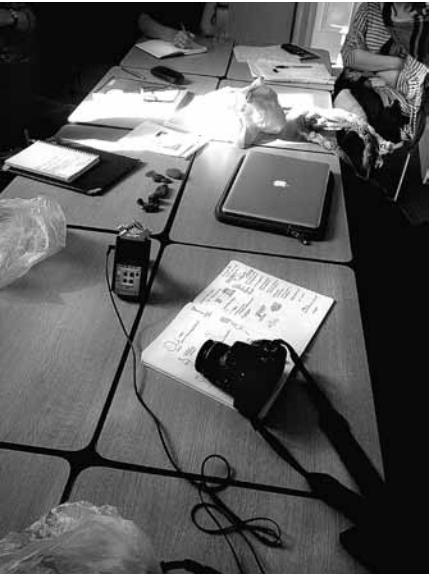






Monday

A sunny afternoon in a small meeting room and library at the Department of Social Anthropology on the University of Aberdeen campus. Brynjar Sigurðarson meets anthropologist Tim Ingold, and his team (lecturer Jo Vergunst, fellow researchers Jennifer Clarke and Rachel Harkness, and affiliated research student Paolo Gruppiso) for the first time. The conversation follows an introduction about *Field Essays* by Sophie Krier and a twenty-minute work presentation by Brynjar Sigurðarson.



Tuesday

Early morning in the office of Tim Ingold, a small room full of shelves and books on the University of Aberdeen campus. The night before, during dinner at a local pizzeria with Tim and his wife, Brynjar asked Tim if he would like to comment on specific works (*Stones, Sticks, Spectrum*). The conversation takes off at once, even before we managed to print out the images.



Brynjar Sigurðarson

I brought a couple of things for you from Iceland. This (*points to a plastic bag on the table*). I'm a bit surprised it got through security: it's volcanic ash from the Eyjafjallajökull volcano. I went there when the eruption was going on. It was quite crazy. You had this powder all over everything.

Jo Vergunst

Can I touch it? It really is ash, isn't it?

Brynjar Sigurðarson

Yes. And I really understood: "Okay, it's so fine, and that's of course why it travels so long". It travelled all over Europe. I try to respect my gut feeling on where to look and what to do. I'm interested in how natural living conditions affect what we make. Basically, in my trip to village of Vopnafjörður — I was there in February, in the darkness, in a small village — I figured out there is so much darkness, and where there is darkness you start to imagine things. So we have these huge traditions of folklore, and we believe in a lot of supernatural things, even today. You don't pee on a rock that's an elf's rock. That's just basic somehow. So if the state is building a road and there's this big rock that is believed to be an elf's rock, but the state says: "No, we take the rock, it doesn't make sense to make a loop", then one bulldozer breaks down, and then a guy gets sick, in the end the whole team is sick, and the bulldozers are not working, then the state says: "Okay, we just make a loop".

Sophie Krier

Can you say something about why anthropology is interesting for you as a designer?

Brynjar Sigurðarson

My idea is that everything we do we place in a culture and the foremost subject of the designer is people, because we make objects for people. And that's where anthropology could help us designers: in understanding people.

Sophie Krier

Something you said yesterday stuck in my mind: you said that design and anthropology share two things: the kind of approach, or method, to study what is there. And the other, more speculative part, of what could be there.

Tim Ingold

There are all sorts of agendas in *Design Anthropology*; we are thinking of design as a way of doing anthropology. And thinking of anthropology, then, as an exploration of the possibilities and potentials of human beings in the world. One way of doing that sort of exploration is by doing ethnography and studying how people are, how they live in the world. Another way of doing it might be by design. In other words, you explore by designing things (what designers sometimes call prototypes, experimental concoctions) and by making an intervention. Then you follow and see what happens. So it's a kind of experimental approach — by means of design. So you use, you make the process of designing part of this art of inquiry we were talking about yesterday. That's the way we want to do anthropology.

Brynjar Sigurðarson

Do you focus on the functional part, like we were speaking about yesterday? Do you say: "I want to make a chair, or I want to make something that works in the kitchen?" Do you think like that, or are you more *creating* something?

Tim Ingold

Creating something. We're definitely not thinking like that. We don't say: "Right I want to create a chair or a stool, or a tool of some sort or another." It's more like: "I want to create an intervention." You want to put things together perhaps in different sorts of combinations than they might otherwise occur in. And see what comes out of it.
(*silence*)

Tim Ingold

You're looking to anthropology to help put things in their context. I have this feeling that in anthropology we are trying to get out of the context, looking at design as a possible way of getting out of the obsession with having to put everything in its context! If you talk to most anthropologists, they'll say: "Yes, context is everything. And that's what we do: we understand the meanings of things, not by taking them in isolation, but by putting them in a social and environmental context." And the more I thought about that, the more dissatisfied I've become with that sort of formula, partly because it decontextualises the context. You think: Okay. You've put something in the context of the social and the cultural, but what is the context of the social and the cultural? Well, where the stuff came from in the first place! So we should go back to the world and the stuff, and concentrate on that.

Sophie Krier

Without having to extrapolate?

Tim Ingold

Without having to extrapolate — yes — somewhere else to find the meanings. It's to say that the meanings are there! And once you recognise that, then you begin to think that there might be other ways to do anthropology than writing texts about the meanings of things. And that's why we came up with this idea of anthropology by means of design. Perhaps almost like an alternative to anthropology by means of ethnography. The standard ethnographic approach is to spend a lot of time with people, talk to them, get an idea about how things fit in their lives, and that's fine. With my research team here in Aberdeen, I wanted to do the same thing with materials: you would go along and spend time with materials and actually do something rather similar to what you've been doing, Brynjar: going to a place, seeing the stuff that's lying around, seeing the funny ways in which the stuff seems to come together, and then take that as an inspiration to make an assemblage of some kind, and

Brynjar Sigurðarson

So it's more... So it's less product design as we have maybe seen it.

Sophie Krier

More of an experimental design approach?

Tim Ingold

Yes — less product design. Because one of the key things that you want to take account of — criticising the user centred paradigm — is taking the line that when people do things, with objects and stuff, they're being creative anyway. It's not the designer who creates a particular thing with a particular function. And then along comes a consumer who's supposed to use it for that purpose. The model I often take to think about it is, because I play the cello, and I've got this cello, it's a beautiful object, and it's extremely difficult to play. So you put a cello in somebody's hands, and they can't do anything with it. They have to learn it and there's no end to that learning. Because the more you play, the more things you can discover you can do. Everybody develops it in his or her own particular way. So if you think of an object not as something that is closed, that has its functions set, that says "This is what you do, this is a chair, you sit on it", but if you think of an object as something that is there, that presents its... Then people can...

Sophie Krier

Grow?

Tim Ingold

Grow with it, exactly.

Brynjar Sigurðarson

So...

Tim Ingold

So the object is not closed, it represents an opening.

say “that’s the work”! You don’t have to go off and analyse it, because the meaning is actually there, in the work itself.

Sophie Krier

Brynjar and I have both been working in the field of art education at master level for some years now. And I have doubts about how to validate the type of knowledge that designers and artists produce: the way to get to something in art and design is so specific, and intuitive, that it is hard to evaluate the result of this process. And the question is if this need is intrinsic or if its being projected onto our field in order to quantify or measure the knowledge we produce?

Tim Ingold

Brynjar, you mentioned archaeology before, in your presentation: archaeologists have had rather similar problems although they were considered to be more scientific, and perhaps more academically valid: they don’t have the same problems about academic legitimacy that artists do, and yet they often face the same problem. And archaeologists used to have an anthropology envy and say: “We just dig out stuff and we don’t really know what to say about it, so we better go to the anthropologists for some theory to help us sort it all out and give it some sort of academic gravitas.” But I’ve got the feeling that the last ten, twenty years, they’ve given anthropology up, perhaps because partly anthropologists too deal with the problem of acquiring relevance, or because they haven’t got any theory to offer! So some archaeologists have been going to other disciplines for their theory, but some archaeologists have been getting quite into art and saying: “Well, let’s just suppose that we engage with stuff. It happens to be that the stuff we engage with is usually stuff we dig up, and it might be of some antiquity, but just from the juxtaposition of the stuff itself you can learn something.”

Sophie Krier

You were talking about this in your last book, *Making: anthro-*

pology, archaeology, art and architecture (2013). You said about the excavation process that that’s what it’s all about: excavation should not be seen as data collection.

Tim Ingold

Exactly. It’s a practice that creates something, just as art does.

Sophie Krier

So you... you just dig out something?

Tim Ingold

Rather than saying that when you excavate you are collecting a lot of data, which you will then put into some model and analyse, yes. I was referring to Matt Edgeworth¹ where he’s saying that when you’re “following the cut”, which is the way an archaeologist describes it, it’s a deeply thoughtful exploratory process. And knowledge and understanding grow out of that.

Jennifer Clarke

That’s what we can draw from art as well. That you’re not just describing things or habits or ways of doing...

(silence)

Sophie Krier

You mean that you’re also asking how things could be...?

Jennifer Clarke

Exactly, I see it a mode of questioning I suppose. And what I was particularly struck by in your work, Brynjar, is the question you started off with: what are the boundaries of design? In these things that you make—the obsessive binding—I thought it would be quite interesting to think about those things together: I’m interested in what I call ecologies of practice, when practices are impending or feeding on one another. But of course, you are trying to maintain something very specific like: “What are the ways of knowing that we are aware of through these very specific engagements?” And to answer

is the way they’re brought together but they don’t quite fit together. And the thing that really interests me about stuff, and it’s in the *Making* book somewhere, is the way in which the world is put together from non-parts. And there you’ve assembled something, but the pieces were not part of the object before you put them there. So by creating some sort of whole, you’ve also created the relations between the parts. I’m really interested in the way the world is put together from bits and pieces that don’t really fit together. Because that challenges the kind of part/whole thinking that is very common in scientific thinking, where one thinks of every entity as being beautifully articulated from all these different parts. Although you know that each of these stones have come from somewhere completely different, and are not adjusted to one another, they nevertheless form *(pauses)*—a kind of coherence, in the way they come together.

Sophie Krier

If you were to describe these stones to somebody outside of the room who hasn’t seen them, how would you describe them?

Tim Ingold

I would simply say there’s a pile of stones! It would be as simple as that. When I was teaching the course on the *4 A’s course* (Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture), we had the same sort of discussion about bits and pieces that the students had brought back—I’d told them to go out and pick up stones, and piles of grass, and leaves and things, and they would bring them back, and we would talk about them; and we had that sort of discussion in which philosophers go on about assemblages and what not, but you take up a stone, and... *(looks closer at the images)* These stones look very clean. There’s no mud on them.

Brynjar Sigurðarson

They are actually not.

the question you asked, Sophie, about how to legitimise your way of knowing, one of the ways might be aesthetics: how you frame or arrange or compose those materials together is an interesting way of doing that.

Sophie Krier

Yes. The way of working is very specific. If we for instance look at the *Visual Vault*, Brynjar’s on-going collection of images, he uses his camera zoomed on 50, which is interesting because you get a non-zoom and a non wide-angle view at that aperture: you get the exact frame that is also what the eye sees. So the things you see in the world, Brynjar, are really things you take out, like ingredients you select. What intrigues me in regard to aesthetics is that what we find beautiful forms a very direct link between the world and us. So yes, I agree that aesthetics is a way to look at this. There’s a reason why we respond to some things as beautiful and others not...

Jennifer Clarke

Framing the moment to tell the stories...

Brynjar Sigurðarson

What I did when I went to the fishing village, I only did for myself. There are a lot of projects in design where you go somewhere, and you want to do something for the community. You go, and you try to spot out a problem. My only reason for doing all this was just because I found it beautiful.

Jo Vergunst

Have they seen any of this stuff, the fishermen?

Brynjar Sigurðarson

Yeah. A little bit.

Jo Vergunst

Did they like it, or did they just scratch their heads?

Tim Ingold

No, they look rather shiny and clean.

Brynjar Sigurðarson

Because they are made in porcelain.

Tim Ingold

Of course, this is the porcelain imitation of the stones... Which makes them shinier.

Brynjar Sigurðarson

Yes. And then there’s a whole new process behind making them. Maybe that’s...

Tim Ingold

Hmmm. But we can’t see that.

Brynjar Sigurðarson

No.

Sophie Krier

You can kind of, if would see them in real, you would get a sense of: “Hey, this feels so natural but...”

Tim Ingold

But it isn’t natural. You’d think this feels weird.

Sophie Krier

And in black and white they get even more abstract.

Tim Ingold

If our students bring back a bit of stone or brick or something, and it’s got mud and bits of cement sticking to it, and grass and moss, we’ll have a discussion about: “Well, is this mud part of the stone or not? And if you clean it all off, have we somehow come back to the essence of the stone or...?” And after a while you realise that you can’t actually treat the stone as something

The object is something that—like the cello—there are things you can do, that without a cello you can’t. So the presence of the cello opens up a path of development for people who would like to take up the instrument. Which would not otherwise exist. You know, there are designers who write and say that the point of design is to make life simpler! There is a classic book by Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things* (2013) that says: The whole point of design is to make life simpler for people. *(laughs)* And you think: Actually no design object has ever made life simpler for anybody but they sometimes change the things one can do.

Sophie Krier

This is a selection of different—I don’t know how to call them now, if I should call them objects or assemblages or... Tim you don’t like the word ‘object’, you substitute it with the word ‘thing’, right?

Tim Ingold

Things, yes.

Sophie Krier

So these are things made by Brynjar.

Tim Ingold

They are very definitely things!

Sophie Krier

And actually, the only question we have for you is quite a simple question: if you see these things, which one of them speaks to you? Or, even more simply: what do you see?

Tim Ingold

So that’s your question? *(laughs)* Okay. *(pauses)* It’s very straightforward to talk about: you have a collection of stones, each of which has its own particular history, and has been gathered to that place. What’s really interesting about stones

Brynjar Sigurðarson
They liked it. What I noticed when I was visiting those people was that the further you get from Reykjavík, the more friendly people are. But still, the first half an hour, during which I meet a farmer, he's very sceptical about me. He doesn't really know what I want from him. Because I don't have any precise questions, and I don't know what I'm doing there. But in the end I have a three-hour long coffee talk with him, and it's very pleasant. But then also I take a lot of photos and that is maybe a bit...

Sophie Krier
Intimate?

Brynjar Sigurðarson
I would say weird. One lady didn't want me to show the photos because she was afraid people might see them, and steal her stuff. So I have to think about these aspects.

Tim Ingold
Why do we have to do all this photography? I worry always, here we have this computer with all the pictures, but our whole discussion is biased, or turned upside down because we have to look at everything through these photographic images. You're going to a place, you're finding all sorts of interesting materials that you put together in different kinds of ways, and you're creating stuff. Granted, it's maybe a bit difficult for you to show the stuff to us here in any other way than in a photograph, should we not... should we not try to prevent the photographic image from taking over everything else?

Brynjar Sigurðarson
For me it's very important to take photographs.

Tim Ingold
But why?!

that is separate from the mud. That one has to think of all these things together. And that's the point of it, of what they learn.

Sophie Krier
Does it have an anthropological value that Brynjar is making stones that look like stones?

Tim Ingold
I'm not sure. I'm remembering an artist, the late Robert Candeller; he spent his time picking up bric-a-brac from the seashore — all this rubbish that gets washed up the shore. And he would spend enormous amounts of time creating exact replicas of these objects, using paper, cardboard, paint, and glue. They were absolutely perfect, so that when you just looked you said that is indistinguishable, and then you'd get a terrible surprise when you'd pick it up because they would be terribly light. Normally the object would be heavy... Say something like a rubber boot, which you expect to pick up, and it feels rubbery and heavy like a boot, but it's paper! He couldn't really explain why he did it. But it wasn't to cheat us, or to perplex us; it was just that in refashioning these objects he somehow got back into their insides, it was a way of knowing the object in a different kind of way. Now with this (*points to the stones*), I don't know what to think about it! It's almost like suggesting that there is some purity about a stone, you see that sometimes if you pick up some stones and put them in water, and they shine and they glisten, and they look very beautiful with all the mud washed away, and you think: "Ah, that's the real thing". So is it about preserving some sort of notion of an essence of a stone...?

Sophie Krier
Especially as, here, they keep glistening...

Tim Ingold
It's almost as though you wanted to preserve that moment, Brynjar. Because everybody says stones are more beautiful

Brynjar Sigurðarson
It's a little bit like — of course I partly work with memory when I'm trying to translate something, but the photograph somehow *remakes* the memory. Even if I would be writing things.

Jennifer Clarke
But for me that would be the same as saying — why try to record? Why try to write down or record sound or take an image of anything — as a thing, as a material, as a kind of collecting? But you, Brynjar, look in different ways with a camera, I think. [...] So there are problems with it, just as there are problems with any form of looking.

Sophie Krier
Paolo, how do you work with records or observations in your research?

Paolo Gruppосо
I recently started working with video. But then I realised it was a big trap. Nowadays when I watch my videos I see a sort of flatness. It's as if you take images but you don't look at the process. Probably it depends also on how you take those pictures or images; but in a way it's a kind of looking at the final stage of something without taking care of the process. At least, this is the experience I had. I was wondering, Brynjar, how do pictures relate with your work? Is it just a record, or in a way is it part of your making process?

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Well I never try to — how do you say — I always frame things. It's always isolated from the whole rest. So it becomes something new, always. But on the other hand, for me the camera is a great tool to look at things, because I see things a bit differently.

Sophie Krier
You walk around differently when you have it around your neck, I noticed...

when they are in water. We might even say that it brings out some quality of the stone that you wouldn't see otherwise. But isn't it rather just fixing a particular moment? And saying: "Right, I shall hold that"? A bit like taking a photograph?

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Yes, because stones are constantly changing.

Tim Ingold
Exactly.

Brynjar Sigurðarson
In their natural environment, that is.

Tim Ingold
These don't.

Brynjar Sigurðarson
These don't.

Tim Ingold
Unless you... drop them...?

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Yeah.

Sophie Krier
You were thinking, Brynjar, about bringing them back to their natural environment?

Tim Ingold
Putting the porcelain stones back again!

Sophie Krier
Back on the shore.

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Also, it maybe gives me a reason to look. I don't know exactly. I use it a lot, maybe not as proof, but it somehow shows how I look and that's why I do this. Because everything you see affects what you do, I think. So if I go somewhere, like this fishing village, and I put a huge significance to a trip, I feel a bit obliged to show where it was coming from. So the image maybe gives value to the work.

Jennifer Clarke
That makes sense to me. [...] But I think it's not just the documentation, but also the framing that you do that is interesting.

Sophie Krier
I think everybody should decide for himself or herself whether or not to use photographs, or any type of record for that matter, in their process; I also think that in your case, Brynjar, the images are at the same level as for instance a physical rope you would take from that village. Maybe it's comparable to language in a way. It's a way to build a visual grammar. On Brynjar's website, the *Visual Vault* animation is always changing, the visual pairs are not fixed, but it's also not completely random. I imagine you use it to test things — like what happens if this is next to that. Right? Something new appears when we make combinations. Our mind works like that. You have these two possibilities and by combining them you make another possibility out of them.

Jennifer Clarke
One of the things that is important in a speculative approach, is that it's not about trying to faithfully recreate that particular landscape, or even a practice, or a way of doing. This is where it gets interesting with anthropology. Because the question is: "Are you trying to share the fisherman's way of doing, and therefore trying to show something that is faithful to their experience, or are you trying to add to that? Sharing your own way of seeing?"

Tim Ingold
Where they originally came from.

Sophie Krier
The originals are not actually made after a copy, they're made from... memory, right, Brynjar, from a description you made?

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Yes. It was a long work with a sculptor who does replicas of old royal porcelain sculptures [at Manufacture de Sèvres, France]. So he's remaking sculptures of the French kings since the eighteenth Century. What's interesting is you have all these different methods. Also, because porcelain shrinks when it's cooked, you're not making the actual stone, you're making a stone 17% bigger than it is. So you have to imagine how this groove will be when it's slightly smaller. So there is a bit of a twist to it, I think. And then you cook it, and you get it white and hard, and then you decide: I want this type of a glazing or...

Tim Ingold
But if you could think about that, and if you thought of it in terms of that process, and you thought of what you're doing, which is tying together one process, the porcelain making process, with another process, which is the geological one, one of many time erosions, and the rest of what has brought these stones to what they are. And if you think that you're bringing those two together and remembering that the material of porcelain...

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Is coming from...

Tim Ingold
From stone anyway, it's like... Ultimately, you've got stone. You've got one root!

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Yes!

Rachel Harkness

I think actually that’s what anthropologists tend to do: bringing things together. We have comparative anthropology that is an extreme of that, looking at two societies side by side.

Sophie Krier

That’s a specific field within anthropology?

Rachel Harkness

More a historical direction.

Jennifer Clarke

It’s when you go somewhere else and come back and tell the stories of another culture. It’s the traditional idea of the exotic, in order to bring insights back and say something about your own culture.

Rachel Harkness

Actually, I would say all of anthropological practice is about that, distancing, moving out, exorcising to some extend, and moving back.

Tim Ingold

So what we’re trying to do here is open things up, and where things have been appropriated in relation to some particular destiny or some particular purpose or some particular argument, or some particular logic—to take them out of that: to release them from those appropriations. [...] So you, Brynjar, go to this village in Iceland, and the materials laying around that you find there—they are not completely absorbed. Say you have a heap of nets. At that moment people are not fishing. So the heap of nets is there. If they were fishing they would need those nets for fishing and that’s it. But at the moment that they are just there, you can come along and say: Hey that’s interesting. And you can then say: “Well these nets are there for me to look at, and I can share these fishing nets with the fishermen, and the fishermen are quite happy to share them with me”.

Tim Ingold

One root got to these pebbles, and another root got to the raw material of porcelain, and you’re recombining them again. So thinking a bit in those sorts of processual ways, and the ways in which you can, perhaps in design or making similar activities, you can be binding together processes that at another time got separated. And that then leads you to think about those processes and those connections in new ways. That’s exiting! But what worries me is we’re encouraged all the time to not to focus on the process, you know: “Look at that, these are porcelain stones and they’re very beautiful.” But an observer who just came along, or saw them on a display, wouldn’t know anything about that process.

Brynjar Sigurðarson

Do you think then that the designer is responsible to deliver, to speak out about the process?

Tim Ingold

He should be able to. I mean I think that traditionally, design practice has been obsessed with finished objects. And making them look pretty and shiny and... Given that there’s a commercial side to it maybe to sell them, to sell the designs. But all of what we’re doing is trying to move back from the finished objects to the process and to an engagement with the process. And the puzzle is [...] how you actually do that: how can you make things that speak to the processes that give rise to them? Rather than covering them up, or swallowing them.

Sophie Krier

This is perhaps a strange question but could a project like this one be anthropology?

Tim Ingold

Yes! Wait let me just see if Jo is there. *(walks out and back in)* Where were we? Yes!

And there are all kinds of other stuff lying around, and you can bring things together in ways that are new... So there is a sharing going on. It’s just a sharing of stuff.

Jennifer Clarke

But the nature of the choices that were made, the compositions which were made, and the nature of the process of doing—you were talking about this very fine wire, Brynjar—you there is something about what is shared in these objects that is asking people, or inviting people, into a kind of co-investigation of these things, these materials, through juxtapositions. I’m slightly against the radically open attitude...

Sophie Krier

You still have to make things specific...?

Jennifer Clarke

There is something, which is being carried forward, carried through your investigations into the world, Brynjar, back into different worlds. So the particular marks that were made, the traces that are left, the materials, which were put together, can help to inform the kinds of questions, or will inevitably! Perhaps that’s the point. I keep thinking: truth to materials. I went to hear a talk by Cornelia Parker about how her work is all about truth to materials. Of course that speaks to a particular tradition in art, how form emerges through stuff; you were saying how you see how stuff speaks to you. [...] So the question is: if you’re not gathering data to build evidence, to make certain claims, what propositions are you making about the world, what speculations are you making about what it is and about what it might be? And how do you share that and bring people into those sorts of questions? That productive tension, about what it really means to try to make something open, is quite exciting.

Sophie Krier

How do you call yourselves—still anthropologists?

Sophie Krier

And I don’t mean just the end result of the pile of stones, I mean the binding up of the two material processes you described.

Tim Ingold

It could be. One of the objections that might be made is that anthropology is supposed to be about people. And here we are, we seem to be more interested in stones... But the interesting thing is that at the same time, because of developments since science studies, and material culture studies and so on, the anthropocentrism of that position has been very strongly attacked, and everybody’s saying: “We need to bring the so-called non-humans, everything else, back in”. In anthropology and in archaeology, and lots of other disciplines there has been a call for what’s called a “symmetrical approach”, which would give us much weight—not really as in: “Is this human or is this stone or is this a pig or whatever it is”, but rather: it’s all part of the world and we have to deal with it without making prior assumptions about the exceptional nature of anything. Which is to let things be, and be what they are. Let stones be stones, let humans be humans, and let’s look at the way in which everything is relating to everything else. So if we take that position, then the argument “this is not anthropology because it’s not dealing with people” doesn’t work. In other words we have to shift the idea of anthropology from the old idea that it’s kind of the study of humans, to an idea that well it’s kind of anthropology because we are human, and we can’t help that.

Sophie Krier

It’s part of human nature?

Tim Ingold

Yes, and we are studying along with other humans, figuring out what this world is that we inhabit... But it doesn’t have to, in any way, mean that we can’t spend a lot of out time working with stones!

Tim Ingold

Well, I always thought I was an anthropologist but every time I look at an anthropology journal, and the stuff that’s inside I give out a cry of despair. I don’t think there’s a lot to all this any longer.

Jennifer Clarke

In art there seems to be an openness, and in anthropology as well, and it comes with a freedom to go into all sorts of things. For instance, there was this chemistry cabinet, and I really wanted to get into it; normally you wouldn’t ask access, but as an anthropologist you can. So the label allows you to do, or to ask, certain bizarre questions, to be a bit I-don’t-really-know-what-I’m-doing. I think that kind of freedom...

Sophie Krier

That is something we have in common, finding a way into worlds we don’t know...

Tim Ingold

Well absolutely. The reason I’m staying in anthropology is you can do what you want. I’ve talked to people in other subjects, and they’re quite envious, they say: “I couldn’t do that, I have to do what I’m supposed to do according to the rules of my discipline.” And it’s really limiting. In anthropology, you can take whatever approach you want to take, and nobody’s going to tell you that you can’t do that. And that’s a very nice place to be. The other thing is, Jennifer mentioned speculation earlier. There’s a classic argument, which says that design, architecture and art are speculative disciplines: they’re producing things that weren’t there before. Whereas anthropology and archaeology are supposed to be studying the world that’s there, and not be inventing new worlds. And it doesn’t take very long before that distinction breaks down. You can easily see that art and architecture, which are inherently speculative, have to be grounded in a really good understanding of what’s there. And vice versa, anthropology is not much use if it’s not speculative about the

Brynjar Sigurðarson

I’m not too obsessed by the final result, but I also have to try to imagine how people would perceive and use the object. So there was a lot of thinking about how would people feel about it, like can I make a stone that’s a perfect skipping stone? You know what I mean? That was also the idea of the puzzle. I would see it in ten years when the grandchildren of the people that bought the stones find one stone, and then another one...

Tim Ingold

I see. But then in a way, your role as a designer is not to close things off, but to set up a puzzle, or a game, or...

Sophie Krier

A story.

Tim Ingold

Which is the glass? That one?

Brynjar Sigurðarson

Yes. *(searching for an image on his laptop)*. I want to show you a test. I’ll find it. Here it is.

Tim Ingold

What does this show?

Brynjar Sigurðarson

It basically shows the process.

Tim Ingold

Of getting to here? *(points to the Spectrum vases)*

Brynjar Sigurðarson

Yes. It was a lot about trying to find something natural within the material, within glass. So it happened through a lot of discussions and try-outs with the actual glassmakers, and the people in the workshop, with whom we were trying to mix things

possibilities of human beings. [...] But all this comes down to an issue of how imagination and creativity and these sorts of things actually work in academic research. And the debate that is going on in this country is now about practice-based research, and what that actually means.

Sophie Krier

And what are the arguments in this debate?

Tim Ingold

I don't know if I could summarise it all because I haven't been following it that tightly but there'll be purists that will say that it is inappropriate to use the word 'research' unless you are coming up with new knowledge about what is out there in the world. So you need to be able to say: "This is what I'm trying to find out, this is my hypothesis, these are my methods, this is my data, and look, this is what I found out." At the other end, are people who say that research is any kind of practice that leads to something that wasn't there before. And that something could just as well be an artwork or a scientific theory. Why? They would argue that research, just as scientific theory, is based on arbitrary and exclusionary criteria, which usually rest on the claim of the academy to produce expert knowledge. So once that is upset — once you upset the notion that the academic is the expert, who has the authority to declare on how the world works, once you dispense with that, then everything is opened up. So that's where the debate is, at the moment, in research. Sometimes I just think let's get rid of the whole word research. We're kind of stuck with it.

Rachel Harkness

What about the word investigation?

Sophie Krier

Or inquiry?

together. The technique is called "pâte de verre" — so it's not blown glass; it's glass that you cook. Basically you take a powder of glass that's green, that has specific physics, and you mix it with baking powder, and a little bit of sand, and it makes bubbles, and it mixes it together. And then my work was a lot about texture, what you see here (*points to a part of the object*); it was starting to look like marble almost. And that I found quite intriguing: to try to present the spectrum of glass. Going from something that looks like stone to transparent glass in one object.

Tim Ingold

So, again, that's more an experiment with materials. Taking those materials, sand, and whatever gives the colouring, and all the other things, and throwing these together, cooking, adding baking powder (*laughs*) and then seeing what happens! And so the question then is to what extend do you think you're designing is about creating an object or about exploring what happens to materials? I mean if you take a simple thing like a cake, you're baking a cake, you have eggs and flower and water and sugar, and then you mix them all up, and you put them in the oven at a certain temperature, and you get a cake. And although the cake might look nice and everything you don't really think of the cake as an object. You think of it as something you're going to eat! Particular mixtures, and the way you've cooked something bring out the perfection of the flavour, and the texture; it's in the eating that it counts.

Sophie Krier

You designed another possibility.

Tim Ingold

What you've created is a kind of a new material. It came together from all these other materials that have their own particular characteristics, to become a new material. If you're interested in that aspect, you might for example hold it up to the light and say what happens if I shine the light through it, what happens if I break it...? (*laughs*) There are different ways

Tim Ingold

Yes, like a detective. You wouldn't ask Sherlock Holmes: "How are you proceeding with your research?" He would regard research as something he does in his spare time!

Jo Vergunst

It strikes me that these conversations about collaboration are always going to be quite tricky when they happen between people with professional identities. Maybe this could be easier in a more free world of design where you can call yourself a designer if you want to. When you are an anthropologist, and you think: I'm going to work collaboratively with an artist, you then find yourself writing proposals, and you end up thinking: "Okay, I'm an anthropologist, I better do something anthropological and the artist better do the artist thing". So this situation asks what are you going to bring as an anthropologist to collaborative research. I just want to encourage a creative process in themes that we have common interest in. An alternative is not really staying an anthropologist, but joining a gang of artists in Greenland, which I did some time ago. After a week or two, one artist said: "Jo, I really don't know what you're doing here, as far as I can see you're just one of us artists, but you better do something for the exhibition at the end". And I did. (*laughter*)

Sophie Krier

What did you do?

Jo Vergunst

I did some drawings, field notes style drawings, and reflected on the process of writing and drawing, as if it were anthropological field work; I noted the different kinds of skills that were involved and the different kinds of things that this process brought to light. So that was really nice — there wasn't an expectation of anthropology or what it should be. There was just the focus on the actual matter at hand.

to look at it. Depending on whether you think of it as an object or as a material. I found working with our students that people naturally respond in a completely different way to an object or a material. If you say this is an object, they say: "I must hold it carefully, I must not break it. I must feel it, get the form". If you think about it as a material, you think: "Oh, I can smash this up. And see what we can do with the bits...!"

Brynjar Sigurðarson

For me *Spectrum* was more about the material.

Sophie Krier

Tim, in *Making* you write about your interest in alchemy in that sense, that alchemists regarded materials not so much as what they are, but what they do.

Tim Ingold

That's exactly it, and I could think of Brynjar in this context as an alchemist. Alchemists have all these pots and cordons and curious substances, and they mix them together in all kinds of ways, with often no idea of what going to happen... It's very experimental.

Sophie Krier

What could be the value for anthropology of working in the way Brynjar does, trying to get a natural quality in glass?

Jo Vergunst

It depends on how you think of your own practice, and the kinds of ways of creating an identity or the kinds of debates that you want to contribute to. So if you're an old-school ethnographer interested in the functions of everyday society, and the context of objects in the social worlds they inhabit, then this might not say very much. But I think that, more and more, anthropology is turning towards questions of the material world, the phenomenal experience of the world around us, and the relations that people have with the materials — not in a fixed

Sophie Krier

"The matter at hand" is very interesting...

Tim Ingold

But that's the same with fieldwork too, isn't it. Really, most ethnographic field work only takes off when people completely forget about the fact that you're anthropologist: you're there for so long that the locals got to know you as a person. And you're just getting on with things.

Sophie Krier

This reminds me of the three-hour cup of coffee story. In the beginning, Brynjar got the question: "What are you, as a designer, coming for?" But after three hours of drinking coffee, they had a talk, a relationship takes shape, and all kinds of reasons emerge as to why he could come back.

Jennifer Clarke

It strikes me, in relation to what you said earlier, Sophie, about how you bring people together: you said that you keyed in on the object — the st... was it a stool², the three-legged thing...?

Sophie Krier

Yes, the three-legged thing, that's what I call it...

Jennifer Clarke

Then you came across an image of the artist [Bas Princen] who was setting up the photographic scenes. I'm interested in the fact that there was an element in both works that you could see as related. I think it's really interesting that in your story, Jo, Greenland becomes the thing that people are focused on, and therefore they can have a meeting as humans. And maybe the element, which you saw as being the relation, Sophie, becomes the focus, and therefore allows you to meet as humans as well. [...] For me that's important. That there is a focus and a matter at hand that one is investigating.

and in a static sense but in the flows, the networks, and the connections that happen.

Tim Ingold

I think what you said about place and landscape is kind of crucial. Often people will situate themselves, or feel a certain relationship to a place or home, because of the particular qualities of the materials that surround them. So if we look at cooking, there is the notion of 'terroir': the notion that foods of particular places have certain flavours because of the particular quality of the soil in that particular area, and how that then gets into the plants and the animals that are eaten. So every place has its own particular flavour. And glass is interesting because it's a super cooled liquid. So it's not crystalline in the usual sense, and so, it embodies the flux of materials.

Sophie Krier

And glass is a bit like porcelain in fact: man-made. And you Brynjar, somehow seem to want to bring it back to something natural...

Tim Ingold

But the humans have simply been carrying on processes that have been going on naturally — anyway. After all, you get glass in nature too. When volcanic stuff has been incinerated.

Sophie Krier

Yes.

Jo Vergunst

This is what one of our students talks about sometimes isn't it? She's taken on an apprenticeship with traditional stained glass makers in the Czech Republic, and she says that in the old windows, in the cathedrals and so on, the windows are actually slipping, slightly, the glass slides down, it really calls your attention to the continual movement and the changes that even something apparently fixed or static undergo.

Rachel Harkness
It strikes me that that thing can be, you know, a colour, a material, as much as—you know, like the net. You were saying, Brynjar, that to you there was a kind of beauty, aesthetic, and appreciation, while the fisherman was much more functional in his interest in the knitting technique...?

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Yeah.

Rachel Harkness
So the net, and the materiality of the net, is the matter at hand. That's such a nice...

Jennifer Clarke
It is a lovely phrase...

Brynjar Sigurðarson
I think also, that maybe what designers do a lot, or try to do, is to learn to read information. And that's maybe a common point. Designers learn to read information in a special way because the goal is to translate it into something materialised.

Tim Ingold
You said earlier that you like the idea of stories, but Sophie said that you didn't like the word storytelling. Can you tell us what this is about, what is it with the notion of storytelling that bothers you...?

Brynjar Sigurðarson
I'm not sure it's true actually.

Sophie Krier
You told me you're not comfortable with using the word stories. You said you prefer "accounts of something that happened" (which is the definition of "story" in the dictionary).

Tim Ingold
It's still flowing although very slowly.

Jo Vergunst
One of the anthropological angles that this suggests to me is a dimension of sustainability in a not too complicated way, where we know very little about where the stuff has come from, and the processes appear to us as objects, as something discreet and commoditised, and alienated from their original grounds or landscapes.

Tim Ingold (*turning to Brynjar*)
Surely that's what you're challenging with your work. I mean when you take some stones, and you do them up in porcelain, and then you say you might want to restore the porcelain to the place where the stones came from, it's precisely challenging that, isn't it?

Brynjar Sigurðarson
I'd have to think about it.

Sophie Krier
At some point in an anthropologist's career, I can imagine sticks come by as a very basic element or tool that humans use. These sticks—a family of twenty-three in total—came out of the field work that Brynjar did in Vopnafjörður, the fishing village in Iceland that we talked about yesterday. We are curious what they mean, to you? How you look at these things, and the binding especially? By the way, they're the length of Brynjar. Maybe I should say that. They're more or less his length.

Tim Ingold
Okay! (*laughs*) Right. So you're the stick.

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Yeah, they're like tall characters, somehow.

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Maybe it's just because I don't really see myself as a storyteller. Although I've been told quite a couple of times that I am. I like the idea of telling stories through something quite abstract. And telling the stories of this place through the objects.

Tim Ingold
Just now, we have on this table the ice, the ash, the rope, these stones, and what not, some are from the beach by the look of it, and some are volcanic, and you could say that the juxtaposition of these objects actually tells us quite a lot about the land that they come from.

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Hmm. Yeah.

Tim Ingold
You could almost say that putting them together like this creates a story in itself without you having to say anything much. Obviously then it's because we know; we can recognise that that's volcanic rock; we can recognise that that's a rounded pebble and so on. So there is all kinds of background knowledge that we can bring into it to make them into a story. But then I'm thinking that, well, in that sense, the things that you're designing are similarly condensed stories. Are they not?

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Yeah. I guess so.

Sophie Krier
Condensed is nice...

Brynjar Sigurðarson
I mean it's also just drawing up a portrait... of a place.

Tim Ingold
But for example you said: "That is a coat hanger".

Jo Vergunst
I've just been reading about a particular fishing industry in Shetland, in the nineteenth Century. The story is that up in the eighteenth Century very little cod was caught because the lines were going down to the bottom of the sea, and they were catching haddock and other bottom dwelling species; then they discovered that with different kinds of lines—they were all hand lines that just went half way down, and given that the cod would often form shores in the middle of the sea, they would catch much greater numbers of cod. And when that happened, it made a change in the technology of boats, whereby the boats would stay out much longer at sea, and began to have decks—a below deck and an above deck—where the fish could be processed out at sea, and it developed an industry for this. And, just looking at these sticks now, they embody to me the direct set of relations between the materials of the fishing line, the fish, the organisation of the boat, the environmental, spatial relations with the sea, and the land. It's all there! That stuff. Within the fishing line. There's nothing generic about it. There is no fishing rod in general. It's always a specific piece of equipment that has a very particular set of relations to it. So it's never just a stick. It's always a particular kind of stick that has a particular way of being held, or a particular role, or action that it gets used for.

Tim Ingold
Well, sticks are fascinating, and what is interesting for me is the combination of rigidity and flexibility that you get in a rod and line. In angling, for example. And how that is linked to a more general problem of how we anchor ourselves in a world where everything is fluid. It's the same sort of problem if you're erecting a tent, in which you have to have both rigid struts and guy-ropes, which are of string; if you didn't have the guy-ropes the tent wouldn't be able to stand up to the forces of the wind; but if you didn't have the struts you wouldn't have a structure at all. And so in order to maintain some sort of fixed place in the world, in a world, which is full of wind and movement, and rain

Brynjar Sigurðarson
That's what I like about it.

Tim Ingold
So that's a functional thing—you can hang your coat on it. But actually, I can't remember exactly now, but there was all sorts of different materials that had been brought together and strung up and bound together and fixed, and so... It's a coat hanger that spoke of all the processes that had gone into its making. It reminds me, we've been working a bit with the artist David Nash, who makes things out of wood. He makes furniture, but furniture in such a way that when you look at it, it looks actually more like part of a tree. Or logs from a tree that's been blown down. So you don't see a chair that's been made out of wood; you see wood you can sit on. And it's the same with the stuff I've seen from you: it's the materials that stand out, and they way they come together in a particular way, rather than saying: this is a coat hanger.

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Yeah.

Sophie Krier
Which you call the "elephant", by the way...

Jennifer Clarke
Well it has that angle, doesn't it!

Brynjar Sigurðarson
And the teeth...

Sophie Krier
For me it's really a giraffe but—sorry to interrupt...

Brynjar Sigurðarson
Well. It's a bit the context of a design gallery that makes me call it a coat hanger.

and running water and fish, you have to have this combination of rigidity and flexibility. And because I've been interested in lines, these are two different kinds of lines: there is the line that is like a rod, and there is the line that is like a thread. And with the binding, one of the things we've been interested in here is the knots, and knotting. Knots are fascinating. Because you get knots both when you tie up string, and you've probably got some knots there since you've got some binding, and you get knots in a tree. And the really interesting thing is, what is the relationship between the knot you tie from thread and the knot that is a joint in a relatively rigid structure like a tree? What is the relationship between jointing and knotting? So the combination of the thread of string and the stick is I think a very productive combination to think with. It raises all sorts of interesting questions. But also, the thing about binding, when you think about it, is that most prehistoric artefacts involve some kind of principle of binding. So if you take an axe, there's usually a stone blade, and a wooden handle. And you somehow have to get the handle to hold the blade. And the way in which it's done is almost always with some kind of hafting principle, and then there's a thread. That binds the two together. Because binding is for things that don't quite fit. And the interesting thing, I think, about modern consumer objects, is that they don't have string.

Sophie Krier
Or very little...

Tim Ingold
String has almost disappeared. Instead everything is supposed to fit together. Like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. So we don't longer have this thing with having to put together things that are not naturally pre-ordained to fit with one another. A piece of wood is not naturally pre-ordained to fit with a lump of stone! String is probably one of the most important things that human beings have ever made.

Tim Ingold

Yes.

Brynjar Sigurðarson (*seriously*)

It's for the people that might buy the object — I make a context for them. For me it's not — I try to keep as far away from the functions as possible.

Jo Vergunst

People could use it for...?

Tim Ingold

But actually that function is a story, isn't it. I mean a coat hanger is shorthand for: "Oh, I'll hang my coat on it."

Brynjar Sigurðarson

Yes.

Tim Ingold

So then actually that story gets added on to all the other stories that have come together in a particular thing.

Brynjar Sigurðarson

Exactly.

Jennifer Clarke

It's an anchor...

Brynjar Sigurðarson

But I think there's a certain freedom in translating when you don't have the restrictions of very specific functions like the table or a chair or whatever. At least for me it becomes much more fruitful. And maybe a bit more true to the subject, because I don't have to put it in a predetermined context. That's maybe a little bit why, when you say it's related to anthropology, maybe it's because I try to translate a place through my own eyes. Without putting it in the shape of a table.

Sophie Krier

And what about the fact that in this case Brynjar doesn't so much use the binding in a functional way but rather in an aesthetic way? There are not two sticks held together by the binding.

Tim Ingold

I don't know. I can't make much sense of that.

Jo Vergunst

It's kind of suggestive, I think, to me anyway. Suggestive of things being entwined...
(*rummaging sounds. Tim Ingold walks to his bookshelf and takes out a book. He sits down again with the book open on his lap.*)

Tim Ingold

I don't have the real thing, but I've heard of a particular tool that reindeer hunters use (*glances through the pages of the book*) — here is a drawing of it³.

Sophie Krier

The pole lasso!

Tim Ingold

It's called the pole lasso, yes, it's a long stick, it's very long, maybe about twice your height. And there's a rope that's tied, here are bindings along here, so the rope is bound onto the stick, up to the tip, then it loops back and it makes a lasso. It's used for catching reindeer in the fence. Otherwise they'd use the lasso that you simply throw. But particularly when they're marking, when they're catching calves, which are a little delicate and don't have antlers, they use this instead. Everybody's... They're all holding one of these things, (*leafs back and forth through the book*) I haven't got any other pictures of it, but there's a guy with it over his shoulder. And he's about to throw it. So it's exactly the same thing: there's this combination of rigidity and flexibility in this particular case where you're sort of standing

Sophie Krier

You're not trying to explain the place.

Brynjar Sigurðarson

It's just that that's how I see it. I don't try to be... I don't try to be someone else than I am, somehow. And also, I think the context where you're making things is very important. For example you were saying, Jo, about people meeting: "When you meet already you're making a kind of tension". Some artists need a lot of time, in their own workshop. You would never create the same if you are in your own workshop or if you are in a completely different context. I mean, I speak differently here than I would be speaking to my friends in Iceland. So I think that's where you get all these different layers that are a bit hard to get. And for me, in this [Vopnafjörður] project, I got so caught up with my experience of being there, and at the same time there were so many layers. Like being alone for four weeks. I was alone in nature for the first time in my life. That was weird. And that's when I started to understand: "Oh, that's where all these folklores come from." You know, I couldn't find my cap for three weeks and I was sure a ghost had taken it. Then I found it under the table.
(*laughter*)

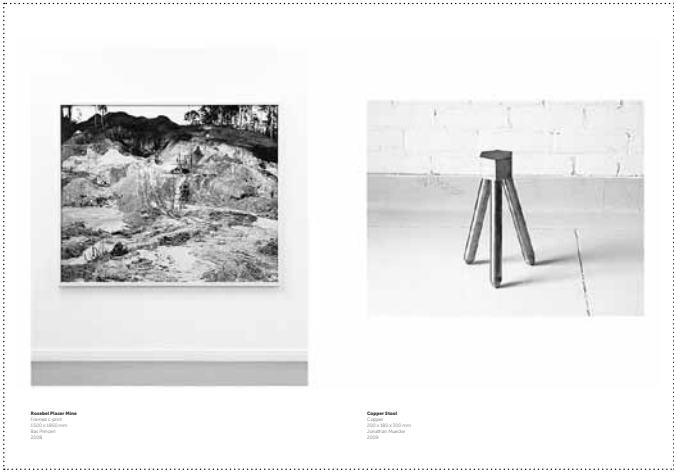
Tim Ingold

That's why you keep it permanently on your head!

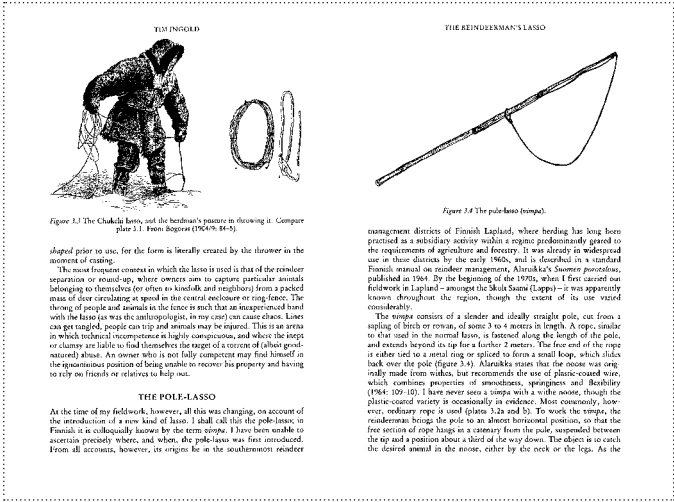
in one place, but you've caught animals, and they're running around all over the place! So you've got the mixture... The combination of rigidity and flexibility in the instrument is a kind of reflexion of the combination of fixity or anchorage, and movement, in the world that these people are operating in. And you need the combination in order to do the job. It's exactly the same as if you're fishing with a rod and line.

1. Tim Ingold refers to Matt Edgeworth to point out another way of doing anthropology — a way that would be informed by matter more than by method. Ingold develops this idea in his book *Making. Anthropology, Archeology, Art and Architecture* (2013) on page 11: "In the practice of excavation [...] archaeologists are obliged to follow the cut — to 'see where it goes, and in what direction it takes us' — not passively but actively, as hunters tracking their prey, ever alert and responsive to visual and tactile clues in an intrinsically variable environment. In effect, the cut is a line of correspondence."

2. *Rosebel Placer Mine*, Bas Princen and *Copper Stool*, Jonathan Muecke in *Field Essays* (2012).



3. *Technological choices, transformations in material cultures since the Neolithic*, ed. Pierre Lemonnier, Routledge (1992), pp. 112–113.



Brynjar Sigurðarson (IS)

holds a Master’s degree from ECAL/École Cantonale d’art de Lausanne and a Bachelor’s degree from The Iceland Academy of the Arts, from which he graduated with *Furnitures with open functions*, the outcome of a one-month trip to the village of Vopnafjörður in North East Iceland. The project is accompanied by a thesis exploring *The effect of the environment on the meaning of things*. Sigurðarson’s first show, *Sticks*, is hosted by Spark Design Space in Reykjavík. In 2009, he wins the Design Parade 6 prize at villa Noailles, Hyères, alongside Jean-Baptiste Fastrez; he is granted work residencies at the glass research centre CIRVA – Centre International de Recherche sur le Verre et les Arts plastiques and the ceramic expertise centre Sèvres – Cité de la céramique, both in France. The same year, Sigurðarson moves to Lausanne to study at ECAL, from where he graduates in 2011 with *Like Animals*, and the essay *Approaching Cultures through Stories*. In 2012, the fiction documentary *Borgþór Sveinsson Bullfish* is selected by design visionary Li Edelkoort to be shown on national Dutch television; it is acquired by MAK Vienna (AT) in 2014. In 2014, Galerie kreio hosts the solo show *Silent Village Collection*, an enigmatic family of objects. His body of work is shown among others at MAK Vienna (AT) and Design Indaba (RSA); it wins the Swiss Design Awards in 2015. Brynjar currently works between Berlin and Lausanne, where he teaches design research at the ECAL Masters department. Recent studio projects involve work for Camper, CIRVA, Galerie kreio, New Tendency, PCM, Spark Design Space, and Thomas Eyck. Next to this, Brynjar is working with his partner Veronika Sedlmair on various projects, ranging from a theater play to a collection of self-produced objects sold from the studio, called *Society of things*.

www.biano.is

Tim Ingold (UK)

is currently Chair of Social Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, where he directs the five-year research project *Knowing from the Inside*, about the practices of inquiry in the human sciences and the forms of knowledge to which they give rise. The project’s fundamental premise is that knowledge grows from our practical and observational engagement with beings and things around us. Previously, Ingold has carried out ethnographic field-work among Saami and Finnish people in Lapland, and has written on comparative questions of environment, technology and social organisation in the circumpolar North, on the role of animals in human society, and on human ecology and evolutionary theory in anthropology, biology and history. More recently, he has explored the links between environmental perception and skilled practice. He is currently writing and teaching on issues on the interface between anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture. Books by his hand include *Lines: A Brief History* (2007), *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (2011) and *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (2013).

www.abdn.ac.uk/research/kfi

Field Essays

is an ongoing research about the tactile world of making and thinking at the frontier of design—there where imaginative tactics and ideas are tried out. Every issue matches a designer with an artist, scientist or thinker able to create an interesting conversation. Central to the encounter are the sources, methods and motives for making something: Where does the work come from, and how does it come about? What is its value in today’s society? By looking closely at a design process, *Field Essays* captures and articulates the qualities of a specific way of working. Ultimately, *Field Essays* strives to produce a meaningful viewpoint on design, and a growing grammar of visual research. Since its founding in 2008, *Field Essays* takes the form of an occasional journal, often accompanied by exhibitions, debates and educational workshops. Previously published in this series: *Pick of sticks embodied*, LucyandBart & Marek Pokropski, Onomatopee 55 (2010); *Every object contains an image*, Jonathan Muecke & Bas Princen, Onomatopee 55-1 (2012). Initiator Sophie Krier runs a research-based practice in which she brings together things, people and places through editorial projects; in short, she develops tools for collective narration and reflection.

www.fieldessays.net

The book
Editor: Sophie Krier
Graphic design: ÉricandMarie
Proof reading: Ellen Zoete
Printer: UNICUM | Gianotten Printed Media

The vinyl
12-inch LP (33 rpm)
Running Cow Side: *Cup, Pigeon, Banana, Botox* (10'08'')
Shark, Whale (3'44'')
Steaming Moss Side: *Secretary and artist, Swimming pool, Knock on the window* (13'48'')
Audio stories recorded and composed by Brynjar Sigurðarson
Audio mastering: Rico Querin, Benjamin Joubert
Vinyl pressing: Squeezer

Edition: 500 (50 copies signed & numbered)

Images by Brynjar Sigurðarson unless otherwise stated.
Page 5, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division
Washington USA. Pages 6, 11–12, 29–30, 35–36, 49–50, 51–52,
59–60, 69–70, 79–80, 89–90, 97–98, 103–104, Fabrice Gousset
for Galerie kreó. Pages 14, 71–72, 93–94, ECAL/Julien Chavaillaz.
Pages 19–22, Vigfús Birgisson for Spark Design Space.
Pages 31–32, Alice Martina for CIRVA. Page 53, Sebastian Ziegler.
Pages 55–56, Myriam Ziehli & Simon Rimaz for Sèvres – Cité
de la céramique. Page 99, Alice Martina for Sèvres – Cité de la
céramique. Pages 107–108, Sophie Krier.

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In partnership with Cité Internationale des Arts, Mission
Culturelle du Luxembourg en France, Atelier Néerlandais/
Ambassade des Pays-Bas à Paris, University of Aberdeen/
Department of Social Anthropology, Sandberg Instituut/Studio
for Immediate Spaces, Spark Design Space.

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ONOMATOPEE

Onomatopee 55•2

Distribution: Anagram books (United Kingdom, Ireland and France),
Vice Versa Distribution GmbH (Germany, Switzerland, Austria,
The Netherlands, Scandinavia), múltiplos (Spain and Portugal),
Ram Publications (North America), Perimeter Distribution
(Australia and New Zealand).

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ISBN 978-94-91677-34-2

Sophie Krier wishes to thank Brynjar Sigurðarson, ÉricandMarie,
Tim Ingold, Li Edelkoort, Philippe Vergoz, Eugénie delaRivière,
Freek Lomme, Carlos Casas, Ilse van Rijn, Joke Robaard,
Brynhildur Pálsdóttir, Alastair Fuad-Luke, Virginia Tassinari and
Alice Guareshi for the sharp conversations that helped to shape
this issue.

Brynjar Sigurðarson wishes to thank in particular Veronika
Sedlmair for shining so bright. Mom, dad, Auður Ýr, Sigvaldi
and Snotra for being such a good family. Sophie Krier for being
sincerely interested in what I do, it is of great value to me.
Hjalti Axelsson for sharing many of the stories published in this
vinyl book, Frosti Gnarr for your help with crafting the names of
many of my projects. The two schools I went to, ECAL and Iceland
Academy of the Arts, which threw me around, shaped me and
got me going. CIRVA – Centre International de Recherche sur
le Verre et les Arts plastiques, Galerie kreó, PCM, Sèvres – Cité
de la céramique, Spark Design Space and villa Noailles for your
support. Last but not least I'd like to thank my computer for
keeping up with me despite all that messiness, all those trips in
my backpack and the times when I expected more from you than
you were made to handle.

Special thanks to all those backed this issue through the online
crowdfunding platform Kiss Kiss Bank Bank:
Marie-Sarah Adenis, Nik Baerten (Pantopicon), Luc Guy
Beaussart, Bas van Beek, Martijn van Berkum, Anna Bernagozzi,
Sævar Björnsson, Hans Bloemsma (University College Roosevelt),
Listahaskoli Islands Bokasafn, Jasper Budel, Rudolf Bussmann,
Carlos Casas, Sébastien Cluzel, Francesca Cozzolino (EHES,
École nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs), Ghazaleh
Dabiran, Sophie Dars, Liz Davis (Ensci-Les Ateliers), Marie
Descourtieux (École nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs),
Elodie Elsenberger, Simone Farresin (Formafantasma), Rana
Ghavami, Jan Glas (Lux Innovation), Sébastien Gouju, Henk
Groenendijk (Icecreamdesign), Philipp Grundhoefer, Alice
Guareschi, Tinna Gunnarsdottir, Cynthia Hathaway, Claudine
Hemmer, Eline Hesse, Ed van Hinte (Lightness Studios),
Bart Hofstede, Christoph Knoth, Carine Kraus, Isabelle Krier,
Marc Krier, Monique Krier-Favyts, Matylda Krzykowski (Depot
Basel), Sophie Lomme, Sigrun Magnusdottir, Jentsje van
der Meer, Cathelijne Montens (KCCM), Eugenia Morpurgo,
Jonathan Muecke, Alan Murray, Satoshi Nishio (Department
of Architecture, Musashino Art University), Christelle Notelet
(CIRVA), Brynhildur Pálsdóttir, Fedde Peutz, Bettina Pozzo Di
Borgo, René Put (PutGootink), Valérie Quilez, David Richiuso
(deFact Studio), Maaïke Roozenburg, Hrönn Sævarsdóttir,
Birgir Sævarsson, Lena Shafir, Audur Yr Sigurdardottir, Solveig
Sigurdardottir, Ragnheidur Sigurdardóttir, Sigurdur Sigurðarson,
Sigvaldi Sigurðarson, Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir, Jacqueline Simon,
Mara Skujeniece, Hafrún Stefánsdóttir, Charlotte Talbot, Rúna
Thors, Conor Trawinski, Ana Varela, Philippe Vergoz, Gudmundur
Viktorsson, Erik Viskil, Rinske Wessels, Francien van Westrenen
and Dimitry Zephir.