

Phoenix Art Museum

News Release

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Phoenix Art Museum to showcase work by internationally celebrated Icelandic artist in upcoming multisensory exhibition

Ragnar Kjartansson: *Scandinavian Pain and Other Myths* represents the premiere of work by performance artist Ragnar Kjartansson in the Southwestern US



PHOENIX (October 1, 2018) – Phoenix Art Museum presents the Southwestern US premiere of work by Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson (b. 1976), one of the most celebrated contemporary artists in the world, in [Ragnar Kjartansson: Scandinavian Pain and Other Myths](#). From November 3, 2018 through April 14, 2019 in the Ellen and Howard C. Katz Wing for Modern Art, guests can experience three multisensory works by the artist that explore themes of Nordic identity, melancholia, repetition, and popular culture. Known for the performative aspects of his art, Kjartansson has displayed his works in renowned museums around the world, including the Migros Museum in Switzerland, The Guggenheim in New York City, and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C. Phoenix Art Museum becomes one of only ten American museums to welcome the addition of “The Visitors” to their collection.

“We are eager to present the work of this important contemporary artist to Phoenix,” said Amada Cruz, the Sybil Harrington Director and CEO of Phoenix Art Museum. “Ragnar’s work will give residents and visitors of our city the opportunity to have a shared experience that transcends generations and languages. We are excited to bring the world of *Scandinavian Pain* to our community.”

Kjartansson was born in Reykjavik, Iceland. Growing up, his mother was an actress and his father was a director and playwright. This theater-centric upbringing would later inform his artistic practice as he experimented with durational and repetitive performance pieces, attempting to discover new meaning in the simplest of words and actions through reiteration and time progression.

The exhibition at Phoenix Art Museum will showcase three works by the artist, including *The Visitors*, one of Kjartansson’s best-known pieces. The hour-long, nine-screen video installation features nine performers, including Kjartansson, in different rooms of the hauntingly beautiful Rokeby Farm in New York’s Hudson Valley. Each performer is shown playing an instrument and singing a song with lyrics by Kjartansson’s ex-wife. As with many of Kjartansson’s works, the song lyrics are limited and simple, but through repetition, their meaning changes as the installation progresses, resulting in an emotionally charged and moving experience. As critic Hilarie Sheets from *The New York Times* noted, “[T]he singers created an entirely absorbing ensemble piece that was alternately tragic and joyful, meditative and clamorous, and that swelled in feeling from melancholic fugue to redemptive gospel choir.”



Ragnar Kjartansson, *The End* – Venezia, 2009. 144 Paintings. © Ragnar Kjartansson; Courtesy of the artist, Lühring Augustine, New York and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik.

Also featured in the exhibition is the 40-foot long neon installation titled *Scandinavian Pain*, along with *The End*, a prime example of endurance-based art and Kjartansson's contribution to the 2009 Venice Biennale. Secluding himself in a fourteenth-century palazzo, Kjartansson made one painting per day for six months, each depicting the same friend in a Speedo. The resulting—and rarely exhibited—144-piece installation, displayed in a salon-style space, is at once complex and over-simplified, making it a can't-miss experience for the Phoenix community.

"We are excited to share works by Ragnar Kjartansson with Phoenix Art Museum guests," said Gilbert Vicario, the Selig Family Chief Curator and the curator of the exhibition. "Ragnar is one of the most interesting performance artists working today, and *The Visitors* is considered one of the best video installations of the last 20 years."

Ragnar Kjartansson: Scandinavian Pain and Other Myths offers Museum guests the chance to experience first-hand one of today's rising contemporary stars. Kjartansson's artwork is more than a series of paintings or a simple video; it is a master-class in elevating the mediocre, playfully facing failure, and finding new ways for audiences to personally experience the artistic process without even lifting a paintbrush.

About the Exhibition

Ragnar Kjartansson: *Scandinavian Pain and Other Myths* will be on view from November 3, 2018 through April 14, 2019 in the Ellen and Howard C. Katz Wing for Modern Art, and is organized by Phoenix Art Museum and curated by Gilbert Vicario, the Selig Family Chief Curator. *Ragnar Kjartansson: Scandinavian Pain and Other Myths* is made possible through the generosity of the Diane & Bruce Halle Foundation.

Admission is free for Museum Members; veterans, active-duty, and retired military and their families; Maricopa Community College students, staff, and faculty (with ID); and youth aged 5 and under. Entrance to the exhibition is included in general admission for the general public. During voluntary donation, pay-what-you-wish admission hours (no General Admission required), the exhibition is offered free to the general public. Pay-What-You-Wish times include Wednesdays from 3 – 9 pm, the first Fridays of every month from 6 – 10 pm, and the second Sunday of each month from noon – 5pm. For a full breakdown of general admission prices and hours, see bit.ly/VisitPhxArt.

To request interviews and high-resolution photography, contact Phoenix Art Museum's Marketing and Communications Office at 602.257.2105 or marqaree.bigler@phxart.org.

Exhibition Programs and Events

First Friday | November 2, 6 – 10 pm

Celebrate the special First-Friday exhibition preview of *Ragnar Kjartansson: Scandinavian Pain and Other Myths* on November 2! This is a free event open during voluntary-donation times at the Museum. Please check phxart.org/events/calendar for updates.

[The pARTy in the Garden | November 3, 6:30 pm](#)

This exclusive annual gala kicks off a full year of celebrations leading up to the Museum's 60th anniversary. Featuring an inside look at an anniversary-themed fashion installation, an exclusive viewing of *Ragnar Kjartansson: Scandinavian Pain and Other Myths*, fine food, custom cocktails, dancing under the stars, and the gala's first-ever guest of honor, Arizona State University President Michael Crow, The pARTy in the Garden will play an essential role in supporting Phoenix Art Museum. All proceeds from the event will support exhibitions and education programs at the Museum.

[The afterpARTy | November 3, 9:00 pm](#)

The afterpARTy is the late-night, art-gala experience at Phoenix Art Museum, immediately following The pARTy in the Garden annual gala and is inspired by [Ragnar Kjartansson: Scandinavian Pain and Other Myths](#), featuring the acclaimed video installation [The Visitors](#). Named after the final album of Swedish supergroup ABBA, the immersive installation is spoken of as one of the best video installations of all time. See it exclusively at The afterpARTy!

[Tickets | \\$75 per person](#)

Your ticket includes:

- Creative cocktails and an open bar
- An array of sweets and delicious hors-d'oeuvres
- An exclusive viewing of [Ragnar Kjartansson: Scandinavian Pain and Other Myths](#)
- Dancing with live music inspired by [Scandinavian Pain](#) (hint: ABBA tributes!) and beyond
- Exclusive late-night access to the Museum and special, one-night only installations

For more information or to purchase tickets or sponsorships, please visit tickets.phxart.org or contact specialevents@phxart.org or 602.307.2012.

Discount Tire Free Family Sunday | Second Sunday of each month, noon – 5pm

Don't miss *Ragnar Kjartansson: Scandinavian Pain and Other Myths* during voluntary-donation times on the second Sunday of each month! Guests will also enjoy exciting activities, scavenger hunts, live performances, story time, free tours, and more. Please check phxart.org/events/calendar for updates.

About Ragnar Kjartansson

Ragnar Kjartansson (b. 1976) lives and works in Reykjavík, Iceland. He draws on the entire arc of art in his performative practice, and the histories of film, music, theatre, visual culture, and literature often inform his video installations, durational performances, drawings, and paintings. The artist also uses pretending and staging in his work in an attempt to convey sincere emotion and offer a genuine experience to the audience. Kjartansson has had solo exhibitions at the Reykjavík Art Museum; the Barbican Centre, London; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Park, Washington D.C.; the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal; the Palais de Tokyo, Paris; the New Museum, New York; the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich; the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; the Frankfurter Kunstverein; and the BAWAG Contemporary, Vienna. He participated in The Encyclopedic Palace at the Venice Biennale in 2013 and Manifesta 10 in St. Petersburg, Russia in 2014, and he represented Iceland at the 2009 Venice Biennale. Kjartansson is the recipient of the 2015 Artes Mundi's Derek Williams Trust Purchase Award and Performa's 2011 Malcolm McLaren Award.

About Phoenix Art Museum

Phoenix Art Museum has provided access to visual arts and educational programs in Arizona for nearly 60 years and is the largest art museum in the southwestern United States. Critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions are shown alongside the Museum's permanent collection of more than 19,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also presents festivals, a comprehensive film program, live performances, and educational programs designed to enlighten, entertain, and stimulate visitors of all ages. Visitors also enjoy vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum's landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit phxart.org, or call 602.257.1880.

Header Image credit: Ragnar Kjartansson, *Scandinavian Pain*, 2006-2012, at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. Neon. Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik. Photo: Cathy Carver.

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