

Hops Hopsi

Hulda
Rós
Guðnadóttir





The GDR.

In 1949 the German Democratic Republic, or GDR, was established in the Soviet zone of the recently split Germany.

This zone included most of the eastern part of the city of Berlin and the countryside around it, making West-Berlin an isolated island for the next 40 years. This division was physically enforced by the building of the Berlin Wall that was completed in 1961.

Treptower Nature and Recreation Park.

Spreepark is hidden behind large trees along a hiking path at the east end of Treptower park in Treptow, southeast Berlin. Treptower Park was created in the mid-19th century and is still a popular place for the locals of the Friedrichshain, Treptow and Kreuzberg neighbourhoods – a place to sunbathe, jog, take a boat trip or hang out in cafés. The park is one of the city's biggest public gardens and lies on the river Spree, complete with a Docklands' type skyline of the 'Treptowers' and one of the city's landmarks, the Molecule Man sculpture.

The Stalin Memorial.

This Soviet War memorial stands on the other side of the Puschkinallee that divides the park in two. The memorial, known among locals as the Stalin Memorial, bears a Stalinesque gigantism as its nickname suggests. It was opened in 1949 as the central war memorial of East Germany to commemorate the large amount of Soviet soldiers that died during the battle for Berlin. Along with Spreepark, the Stalin Memorial was one of the biggest tourist attractions of the former DDR.

Einstein.

Another old attraction in the park is the Archenhold Observatory, the oldest and largest of its kind in Germany, with the longest refracting telescope in the world. Built in the 19th in the world. Built in the 19th where Albert Einstein held his first lecture on the theory of relativity in 1915.

Fenced-off mystery place.

*Spreepark is 29,5 ha,
or 290.000 m²,*

and is closed to the public

by a 2,5m high fence.

Culture.

*The park was
opened in 1969 by order of
the DDR authorities as part
of the privileges endowed
on East Berliners over
other East German people.*

*It was named 'Kulturpark
Plänterwald' and during its
heyday attracted 1.7 million
people each year.*

Social thinking.

With admission fees of around 1DM during the 70s and the 80s, people used the park as a hang-out place, and the Kulturpark Plänterwald became a social and cultural meeting point of East-Berliners and East-Germans. It was a Communist-style public entertainment.

Shopping in the city.

A common sight during that time was people of all ages hanging around the squares and sidewalks of the park guarding large piles of shopping bags. At the end of a day of shopping in the capital, Kulturpark was a popular destination for many East Germans. Goods always arrived first to East Berlin before being distributed to the rest of the country.

Controlled free space.

With many concerts

being held at Kulturpark

Plänterwald's concert stage,

the small East-German

punk rock scene was

allowed to prosper.

In the 70s, celebrities like

Nina Hagen performed

in the park.

Private enterprise.

According to a

former visitor to

Kulturpark, the road

up to the park was

lined with vendors

and punks offering

goods and services.

A rare sight

for a young DDR boy.

The forbidden.

In an interview with a former security guard of the park, the guard revealed that his favourite place in the park was the exotic fruit stall. Apparently exotic fruits and bananas were a rarity in the DDR, sold only in shops and restaurants open to the privileged part of the population. The park's special exotic fruitstand was the only venue open to the public where, every weekend and Fridays, overripe, exotic fruits collected from the privileged venues were made available to the mainstream public.

Change of meaning.

An interesting insight into different types of thinking was revealed in the interview with the previously mentioned security guard. He was employed in 1973 and worked there until the park closed in 2001. Before privatisation, his job was to keep the equipment safe from harming people. After privatisation his work was to keep the equipment safe from being harmed by people.

Surprise!

When the Wall came down
in 1989, the park's existence
was a real surprise to West

Berliners. At the same

time East Berliners were
surprised that the park was
not famous all over Europe.

The west comes riding through.

After the Wall came down,
the park was privatized
and renamed Spreepark.

In the spirit of the 90s the
new owner from the west
tried to transform the park
into a Western style theme
park. By 1999, this resulted
to 11 million Euros in debt
and declining numbers of
visitors, partly due to the
expensive 29 DM
entrance fee.

*The model bankruptcy.
The park was bankrupt
and closed down after the
2001 season. The park can
be seen in its 2001 state at
the park's virtual site:
www.spreepark.de.*

In *Hops Hopsi*, Hulda Rós Guðnadóttir's first solo exhibition in Berlin, Spreepark - the now defunct GDR-era amusement park - became a site for the exploration of our collective disillusionment of the transformative potentials of architecture. The GDR, with its mandate to prove socialism's superiority over capitalism, orchestrated grand ideological projects that would showcase its vitality, moral standing, and humanist ambitions. Many of these projects - indeed the project of post-war socialism as a whole - have failed. Today, the Spreepark, with its upturned dinosaurs, overgrown paths, and dilapidated structures, stands as a physical symbol of a failed experiment - a sentiment that finds reverberation in today's failed global economy.

Historic places are often analyzed through the political, economic and social environment that brought them about. *Hops Hopsi*, a room sized video installation initially developed for PROGRAM, reintroduced Spreepark as a site of an allegorical narrative, in which a character, developed for one of Guðnadóttir's past works to embody the transcendent powers of the free-market, reappears to symbolize an opposing sentiment - the dreamworld of socialism past becomes a distorted mirror held to Guðnadóttir's native Iceland, itself currently in economic and structural ruin. With a new narrative projected onto it, the park is given a new existence dislodged from other, established historical readings. Perhaps any kind of ideological posturing is really a staging - a system of facade constructions that provide an illu-

sion of mass and substance, easy to destabilize and vulnerable to collapse.

Similar to the way the exhibition aimed to reintroduce Spreepark, this publication, made possible through the generous support of Stiftung Kunstfonds, comes a few months after the exhibition to reintroduce *Hops Hopsi* and expand on its ideas. Through the valuable contributions of Markús Þór Andrésson and Valur Brynjar Antonsson, by including research material and documentation from the preproduction and production phases, as well as by highlighting previous works by Guðnadóttir, the catalogue offers an enlarged view of the exhibition in a wider context.

Carson Chan and Fotini
Lazaridou-Hatzigoga
Co-directors
PROGRAM – initiative for art and
architecture collaborations
May 2010

Tackling the Fourth Wall and the Fourth Dimension

Upon entering Program's exhibition space through the entrance on Invalidenstrasse you find yourself in what appears to be a narrow back-stage area. There are the unfinished backsides of three provisional walls, one of which reveals the rear ends of a couple of television sets embedded into the walls. The television boxes and their wiring are visible, not their images. From above the scenic construction you hear the sounds of the exhibition you came to see, so you should be at the right place. However, the walls stand so close to one another that there is no apparent way around them. If you don't look carefully, you will be one of the numerous visitors who return out to the street, puzzled by this austere enterprise. But with sufficient curiosity you will notice a black curtain through which you can enter between two of the walls and be rewarded with the full experience of Hulda Rós Guðnadóttir's exhibition, *Hops Hopsi*.

Different art forms have to a lesser or greater extent put into practice what the world of theatre has coined 'breaking the Fourth Wall', i.e., disrupting the invisible wall between the actors on stage and the viewers in the auditorium. Performance art in particular has throughout its history been preoccupied with this exploration. As the tactic goes, during a moment of uncertainty an alert audience is provided with a

Text by Markús Þór Andrússon

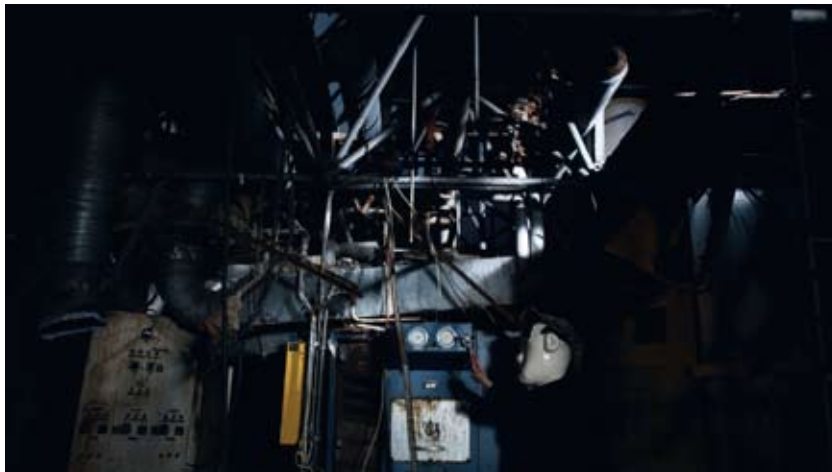
platform to actively engage in a work. Guðnadóttir's double entry is a cunning gesture that catches the visitor to her video installation off guard. He or she enters as an actor would, from a side wing onto a stage, thus becoming a participant – a performer even – in the exhibition. Drawing on the themes of staging and manipulated experience embedded in her work, the artist's strategy furthermore responds to the particularities of Program's project space and its ambition to 'challenge traditional, domesticated modes of architectural practice and representation'.

Expanding on the notion of the Fourth Wall, a similar breach has occurred in the separation between the real (the viewer) and the fictional (the actor). One of the most fertile grounds for experimentation and development in this field has been the documentary film form. Though some might make a point of denying that there ever was any distinction between documentary and fiction, the general comprehension has been that the former is closer to reality, as it is brought into being outside the grip of scripted intention through interviews, found footage, the observing camera, etc. Rather than only changing the essential features of the medium at hand, the nature of audience's reception is challenged. Conscious of the fact that the material which is being presented is influ-

Hops Hopsi The Control Station (4'17")



Hops Hopsi The Control Station (4'17")



enced and directed from the standpoint of someone other than the subject, the viewer is provided with elements to engage with the work differently.

In this way, Hulda Rós Guðnadóttir explores the theatrical and the performative on one hand and documentary filmmaking on the other. Her academic background in anthropology motivates her position as artist-cum-director. Recent works include videos, installations and live action where she plays with ideas related to identity. She regards identity in a broad sense, studying it from a personal or social perspective as well as in terms of locations and situations. The 2008 documentary, *The Cornershop*, which Guðnadóttir co-directed with Helga Rakel Rafnsdóttir, considers the nature of the relationship between the owners of a grocery store and their customers. Questions about the connection between fact and fiction, presentation and participation, media and mediation are all intrinsic to her practice. In *Hops Hopsi*, she continues her investigation, now drawing on the identity of a particular place. A character from her previous work reappears, the invented caricature of the modern day business hero, a spawn of the free market. The ten-screen video installation is an attempt to deconstruct the abandoned *Spreepark* theme park in Berlin and create a new environment in the gallery. Built in the former GDR under the title *Kulturpark Plänterwald*, this once popular park encountered hard times after the reunification

of Germany when it was outshined by more elaborate theme parks in the West. Still standing are the defunct rides and derelict constructions overwhelmed by wild vegetation—a remarkable situation of timelessness irresistible to curious passersby. The playful title of the project is borrowed from *Spreepark's* history and pays tribute to two clowns that used to entertain there. For a long time after the park closed, the open-air stage of the children's theatre stood intact with the names of the clowns painted on its marquee: *Hops* and *Hopsi*.

The artist's commitment to the social implications of the work is plain to see. In a general sense you could say that the theme park is symbolic for genuine entertainment, a place for a social 'holding among', as in the Latin origin of the term. A deserted theme park, however, is symptomatic of how entertainment and spectacle have escaped their controlled frameworks and infiltrated the social realm, the urban environment and mass media. Entertainment is no longer a communal experience but an individual one, not contained but all-embracing. The amusement park also suggests a political metaphor, the strictly regulated and controlled environment based on facades and diversion. Guðnadóttir deliberately has her capitalist persona appear in a site emblematic for post war socialism; the failed objectives of both character and site are illustrated in her work. The compelling exposure to the work within the exhibition space is set against the backdrop of these social

and political motifs. Here, the viewer is invited to discover a new place and a new paradigm.

The space on the other side of the wooden walls inside Program's entrance, *i.e.*, the stage, is activated to its utmost by way of Guðnadóttir's interventions. A single pillar in the centre of the room, a genuine part of the architecture, is used as an axis to support a huge red and yellow circus tent that is stretched to the surrounding walls. As the space is irregular, this fake ceiling is limp in places, drooping down and hindering the walkway. The light reflecting from this structure gives the whole scene an orange shade, as does the light from the only visible window, because it has been covered with a composition of gummy bears suggestive of stained glass. The candy-pixelated image can also be seen from the street side of the window, showing the previously mentioned business hero posing with dinosaurs in the park. Videos are resourcefully projected onto the walls and displayed on monitors of different sizes. Stacks of colourful chairs here and there serve as plinths for TVs and projectors, and others are free to sit on. Particular attention has been paid to the cables of the screening equipment, wrapped in multicoloured tape to match the chairs. Spatially, the installation choreographs the viewer's experience, constantly diverting the visual focus points and never allowing for a complete overview. You have to move through and look all around to catch the fragments presented down by the floor, up under the ceiling, around a

corner or in a closed off room. The magic ingredient that binds all this together is the omnipresent soundscape designed in collaboration with Magnús B. Skarphéðinsson. More than any physical or visual element in the space, the sustained and subtle audio cacophony defines this textural matrix. Suspense in the air is maintained by an undetermined drone interrupted by stuttering and twitching sounds. It is as if breaking away from the linearity of time and entering a condition of stasis.

Following the sequence of the ten videos as they are installed from the entrance and onwards into the space, a recurring composition becomes clear. Each consists of a relatively short loop where a fixed camera reveals different locations in the deserted *Spreepark*. Sometimes you observe a short sequence of events, while other footage has been manipulated by editing. References to the history of the theme park appear in the videos, for example through the use of fruits. One of the rare pleasures of visiting the place in GDR times was that you could buy exotic fruits not available to the general public in stores. The first video, projected on a wall down by the floor, contains further allusion to the topic of groceries. In the high grass under a metal grid of one of the rides, some shopping bags from twenty years ago are juxtaposed with a bag from a contemporary supermarket. This sequence introduces the character that appears in many of the videos—a man dressed in a black suit with a huge smiling puppet head. He flickers on and off in the

Hops Hopsi Restaurant 2 (4'45")



Hops Hopsi Gras (4'45")



still frame, leaning against the metal grid. A double television display installed into one of the false walls shows the same guy at the red counter of a disused bar. With a magic wand in his hand, he makes decorative tarts and drinks appear out of the blue to the sound of a delightful chime. On the twin monitors, the camera is pointed upwards, and above the bar through a glass ceiling the gigantic motionless Ferris wheel can be seen. The next video projected on the central pillar of the space shows a foot (in a cowboy boot) and hand (in a white glove) of someone crouching by a pond, and you can only guess that this is the same character again. He holds a spray bottle with which he spatters water on a couple of floating plastic ducks. In one of the corners of the space there is a large two-screen projection showing the tracks of a roller coaster half engulfed in lush vegetation. In one of the frames, the protagonist sits on the tracks leading into the open mouth of a haunted house ride, idly throwing bananas into it. The other shows a row of bananas appearing and disappearing on the tracks, accompanied by the lively sounds of something similar to a slot machine or a video game. The smallest monitor, placed on one of the stacks of chairs, shows the large interior of a tent with a stage and auditorium. There are rows of colourful chairs, the very same as in the space itself, and they seem to jump from one place to the next in sudden jerks. A repetitive clicking sound, not unlike a broken CD, reflects the shift of the chairs. Over the edges of a double corner in the gallery space,

a distorted projection reveals train tracks on the ground. Watermelons come rolling from out of the frame along the tracks, followed by the ascending scales of plucked strings. The humming noise of what sounds like an organ comes from a video projected on a wall near the ceiling, and here the ever-smiling fellow is centred, sitting with a melon in front of him. He leans his arms over either side of the small wagon of a spinning teacup ride, the camera fixed on him as the environment blurs in the background. The final and most elaborate video is found behind a curtain in a separate room, an original part of the Program architecture. As if the small space were the control station of the whole installation, here the character can be seen working in the engine room of one of the rides. Abstract scenes from the theme park are edited in a disorderly manner together with the main footage, and the sounds come across as semi-musical gestures, offset in time. They echo throughout the whole space and merge with the audio loops from the other videos in a perpetual atmosphere of anticipation.

Time is the key medium of both performance and film, defining these art forms from two- and three-dimensional work. Yet Hulda Rós Guðnadóttir contests the fourth-dimension, playing with the pathology of the loop and the aesthetics of duration. This is reiterated in details, such as the image of the ferris wheel, the Sisyphean circulation of the pond water through the pump and the spinning funfair ride. Within the frame of a process, the end of

which is seamlessly connected to the beginning, Guðnadóttir invites viewers to create their own composition which does not require a beginning, middle or end. The endurance of the viewers determines the duration of the work, as the sequence is based on their experiences and how they approach the installation—perhaps following a line, but not necessarily so.

The installation's references to visual culture and artistic expression are considerably more insistent than the embedded comments on social and political notions. There is a long-standing fascination in art with otherworldly places or situations, where the rules of our everyday do not apply. As utopian laboratories for the inner and outer human conditions, these ideas temporarily relieve us from our current circumstances, *e.g.*, taking us back in time, out in space or inside parallel universes. *Hops Hopsi* is in this sense related to the eerie *Zone* in Andrei Tarkovsky's film from 1979, *Stalker*. Much like *Spreepark*, it is a deserted piece of land where scattered constructions that have lost their function give in to persistent vegetation. The nature of *The Zone* is never fully explained in the film, neither is the reason for its existence, but as the protagonists enter it, they find things to work out for themselves. Importantly, time does not seem to abide any logic in this place, and sound is an essential feature in its topography. A similar setup with the added participation of the viewer was the basis of the groundbreaking computer game, *Myst*, released in 1993. Players are

thrown onto an island which used to be inhabited but now seems abandoned. Nothing happens, a state of relentless pause takes reign, and there are no obvious goals or objectives laid out for the voyager. Curiosity alone will help him or her to unfold the mysteries of the place, and the game responds differently to each individual approach. The computer game was a conceptual skeleton to the popular TV series *Lost* launched in 2004, where plane crash survivors take on the enigma of an evacuated tropical island. *Hops Hopsi* requires the same from the visitors—that they make sense out of the fragments on display. The Achilles' heel of this request is that there is already someone else ahead of you. Instead of being the first-person protagonist of this undertaking, you become witness to how the puppet banker deals with it. Still, he is introduced in such a way that he might be a kind of a ghost: a totally passive prisoner of the *Spreepark*, flickering in and out of existence, hanging around or going about his business. The project then brings in another reference—that of the haunting—and another film comes to mind, *The Shining* from 1980. The story takes place in a huge, empty resort hotel that is closed down for the season and guarded by a small family. The place is swarming in memories, events and the people that haunt it, sometimes crossing boundaries into the family's world with catastrophic consequences. In *Hops Hopsi* there is one sequence in particular drawing on this famous horror film, where the melons come rolling into the frame apparently from nowhere, as did the ball that

Hops Hopsi Shooting the ducks (4'14")



Hops Hopsi Bananas 1 (4'14")



mysteriously rolled into a hallway of the hotel in *The Shining*.

Within the frame of contemporary art, the project brings to mind several other associations, for example with the use of puppetry. Paul McCarthy notoriously lampooned the political situation of the year 2003 in his work *Piccadilly Circus*, where actors with giant puppet heads representing Bush, Bin Laden and the Queen went berserk in an abandoned bank. At one point the Bush character makes a deposit of tarts and cookies at a teller window, parallel to the banker's magical catering in *Spree-park's* red bar. In Steve McQueen's *Giardini*, contribution to the British pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennial, the specific sense for time and place is comparable to *Hops Hopsi*. McQueen's two-channel film was shot in the exhibition gardens of the Biennial during the off-season when hardly anyone is present except for dogs and a few men seeking occasional encounters. This site, known to most only when bursting with the Biennial's art and life, is rendered uncanny by the extended focus on the passive period of waiting. Similarly, Carsten Höller thwarted the familiar in *Amusement Park* (2006), examining the effects of spatial and temporal disorientation. He had several actual rides from a theme park installed in a museum setting and manipulated the mechanism of each so that they would turn and blink ever so slowly, the changes almost imperceivable.

By looking towards other productions in art and film, the basic

elements woven into the fabric of Guðnadóttir's project manifest themselves. A further reading might be undertaken in light of the history and development in minimalist music, but hinting at it will suffice for now. *Hops Hopsi* reflects an interesting documentation of an odd place and a prolific research into ideological illusions. Both seem secondary, however, to the formalist concerns at stake. In light of the architecture of Program's project space, the piece is placed in a context that emphasizes the notion of structure, questioning the functioning of time through the problem of space. The careful installation work is an experiment in the art experience providing a compelling quandary for viewers. The audience plays a vital part as editor in a new narrative that evades the linearity of time. Detached from habitual perceptions of time and space your mind can take you in unimaginable directions. That and that alone is the work's commitment to reality.

Markús Þór Andrússon, born 1975 in Zurich, Switzerland, is an independent curator based in Berlin, Germany, and Reykjavik, Iceland. Recent exhibition projects include the Icelandic pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennial and 114 Stufen at the Sassa Trütsch Gallery, Berlin. Recent publications include contributions to the magazines *Mousse* and *DAMn* as well as various catalogue texts. He is part of LoFi Productions, a film production company focusing on the making of art related documentary films.

First we take Manhattan,
then we take Berlin

To give the reader some sense of space, I am presently here in New York City, while you are in Berlin and between us is Iceland. In a way this discussion by proxy brings about a couple of themes you seem to be working with, *e.g.*, separation.

Hulda: Yes, you are close to Coney island while I'm close to Kulturpark Plänterwald, *aka* Spreepark—similar products of different ideological systems. These ideological systems also create a separation that I experienced in a very emotional way as a child and teenager living in Iceland, the country in-between.

Valur: From what I gather, you are working on many levels simultaneously: on the one hand, there are general phenomenological considerations of space and time, and on the other, an analysis of ideological space and how the manipulation of the former produces different affections in the latter. Were you specifically interested in how theme parks, whether Spreepark in Berlin or Coney Island in New York a century ago, are literal testing grounds for an ideological warfare?

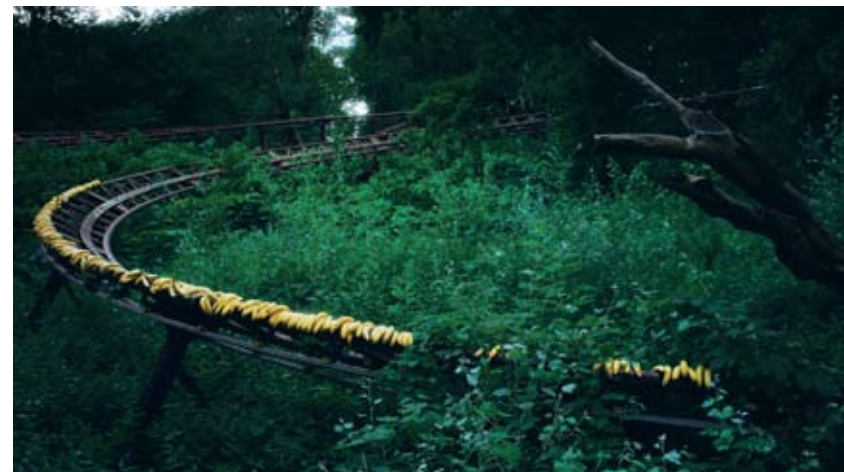
H: During research in this project I was very inspired by Rem Koolhaas' theories of the Coney Island project as a testing ground for strategies ultimately intended for Manhattan. He saw the Coney Island theme park as a model for modern Manhat-

Interview with the artist
by Valur Brynjar Antonsson

tan and called it the *Urbanism of Fantastic Technology*. Manhattan is with its glorious architectural manifestations the capital of capitalism, of course. So you can see that both sides, New York City and the GDR, used the theme park in an instrumental way to control the masses, or rather, to create an illusion. In Manhattan it was private enterprise that invested in building the illusion, while with the GDR we are talking about the government, of course. Entertainment is an ideal way to get into people's heads without them really noticing so much. People are entertained and relaxed—thus unguarded, and what goes on easily becomes the norm.

V: Which brings us to a key concept in your exhibition, that of *illusion*. According to the Aristotelian formula of aesthetics, people are entertained because they *suspend their disbelief*, hence the Brechtian agenda to shake people out of their stupor. What I find interesting is how your exhibition brings together two different critical aspects that are all too often divided in the art world, in line with the theoretical framework of the curator, the art critic, etc. Each one has an apolitical approach towards a phenomenology of space and time, very much in vogue before the financial crash of 2008, (or maybe still today, as in the Venice Biennale of Daniel Birnbaum), or deals with an ideological critique, often with

Hops Hopsi Bananas 2 (4'14")



Hops Hopsi Watermelons 1 (2'14'')



psycho-social dimensions. By drawing our attention to a theme park you point out how these are intrinsically linked. A park is a supposedly apolitical place, an escape from daily life. In a recreational park the art of illusion is brought to a peak: funny mirrors, strange houses, disproportionately built animals, disfigured dinosaurs and even the Ferris Wheel brings us to heights where houses below seem so small and our daily worries are so far removed. So we are dealing with the manipulation of appearances when we are in the park. One wonders why park-goers would be even more vulnerable to ideological indoctrination in a theme park? In this regard, I wonder if you are influenced by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who has stated that ideology works like that on a fundamental level, whereby the best illusion is one which comes in the guise of another illusion. It is precisely in a space where our perceptions of space and time are literally being manipulated, a space in which we should be highly on guard, that we are the most susceptible to ideological suggestion; it is precisely because we know we are being fooled in the theme park that we suspend our disbelief.

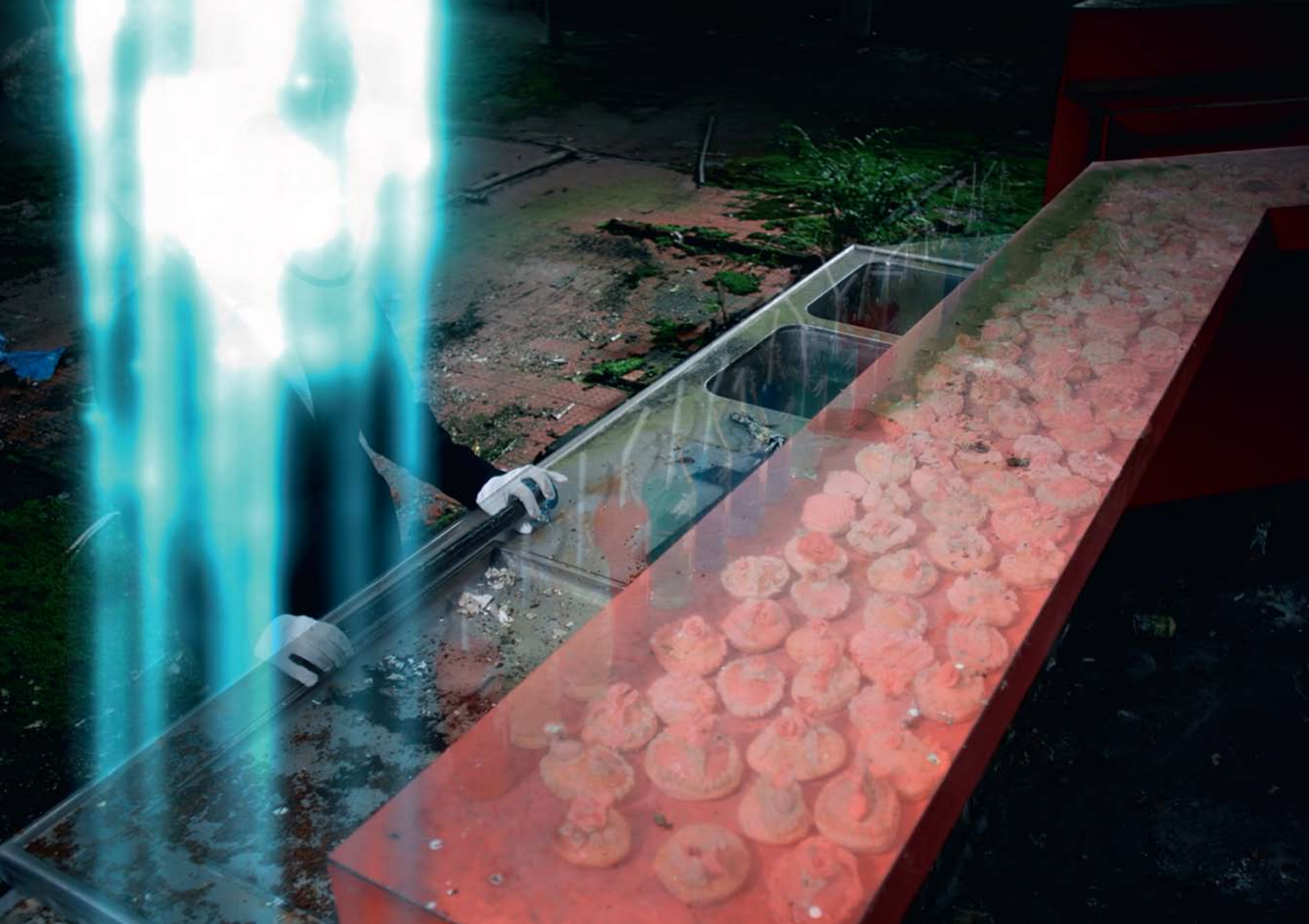
H: I have read some of the Žižek's work and saw a lecture during his visit to Iceland. Žižek is a brilliant mind, but I cannot say that I was directly thinking about his writing while researching the project. But as with everything else I read or experience with other senses, it influences me of course. Žižek is in my world. I concluded through

practicing my artwork that the best way to reach the audience, the guest or whatever you call the people you are in dialogue with, is to approach them with play. That is play on the surface level. Create a moment where the audience doesn't know how to interpret the work. Should they laugh or be serious? People thus let go of their guard, and then you can kick them. Kick them really hard. I don't like political art that points a finger or is disgustingly shocking. I'm not trying to convert people to my belief or say that I'm right. Some art can become like mass media, or at least doesn't reach audiences with the same potential as art. This is an indescribable level to which art is a gateway. Francis Bacon had a point when he said, 'If I could say it, I wouldn't paint it.'

But sure, the *illusion*. Žižek was right. In the work I draw parallels between the illusion created by a totalitarian communist government and its breakdown and the illusions and subsequent breakdown from the power elite of neo-liberal capitalism now in a time of economic crisis. A broken down GDR amusement park was the best place to build a metaphor for this narrative. It is an illusion in itself, and now in its rundown state, where nature takes over the man-made structures and the facades reveal themselves as just that, the processes of illusion-building and the consequences of its breakdown become very clear. I think neo-liberal capitalism has been like a religion to the masses, and many people are still holding on.







V: Yes, there are many references embedded in the exhibition, some of which point to your own personal history, I believe? When you introduce a Cowboy character from an older work exhibited in Iceland 2007, you are playing with the special significance that number has in Iceland; '2007' has become a signifier in Iceland in a similar way to '9/11', and Iceland itself has taken a central role, even as a signifier, in the financial crisis.

H: Everything is personal. How can you create a narrative to which you have no personal connection? I think that the personal is the gateway to the universal. It is much more fruitful to tell the story from your personal point of view than from a macro level. The macro level just adds to the confusion or the illusion. You are always addressing another person and you can just assume that she or he is somewhat similar to you. Yes, 2007 has become a signifier in Iceland much as the word plasma-screen. But that is another story. Following the economic breakdown of Iceland some kind of re-evaluation of the values dominant in recent years has taken place and is still continuing. The numbers '2007' referring to that year have become a signifier for a certain kind of behaviour and thinking. The phrase 'It is so 2007' is now very common to refer to extreme consumerism, arrogance or naïve belief in financial investments and neo-liberal values such as the uncontrolled free market. It was not so much this number with which I was playing. It was more the intention to bring the character

from *Don't stop me now. I'm having a good time* into the current work because he is the embodiment of this neo-liberal dude, the money-man and the free cowboy. In the videos he has stepped down from the horse pedestal I built for him in 2007, and now he is suddenly here in the middle of this broken down GDR illusion. Perhaps after having been exposed, he has lost the appearance of the free cowboy winning over new lands, and is now revealed as an Illusionist. Still playing silly games, of course. In Iceland there was a religious cult created around those young men that dealt with investment. All the media was busy praising them. The gossip papers talked about the amazing parties, the stars they associated with and the glamorous lives they were leading, while the more serious press reserved the front page for corporate and stock market news. They were idolised, and I found the whole thing very silly. The situation as a whole reminded me of the situations described in post-colonial African literature dealing with corruption and the new local elite. Iceland was a true banana republic with newly-rich boys at the control buttons. Everybody played along. There was little space for something else. The 2007 work was my critique or satire on the reality I encountered in my home country and was my graduation work. It was not very well received locally (apart from the grand size of the metal horse he rode that for a long time was kept in the beer garden of the now closed artist bar Sirkus), and the graduation project that was thought to be the most successful that year was awarded

Hops Hopsi Installation view



Hops Hopsi

Installation view



a large grant from one of the banks. They had their fingers everywhere.

V: And references like that are tricky! They often take a life on their own. When you remove the money-cowboy from his initial place and introduce him in the rundown park, in my mind some highly ambiguous interpretations present themselves. Of course, the direct link is established between the crash in Iceland and the fall of communist GDR. But something else happens, too. A couple of distinct signifiers collide. Ever since Kennedy's 'Ich bin ein Berliner' speech in 1963, the Berlin Wall came to signify the Iron Curtain of the Cold War and the abstract concept of Freedom literally poured in concrete. In the minds of people living in America and capitalist Europe, the people in the GDR were living *behind* the wall. But then that wall was torn down in 1989, and since then, the global laissez-faire market was considered infallible. In the meantime, you have this park, Spreepark, that is run down and enclosed, and people are not allowed inside. It is almost as a reminder not only of the park itself, but a souvenir of how it is to have closed space in the city, as if the people in Berlin can't let go of that past. From your exhibition one gets this sense of abandonment, as in a children's playground from a horror movie, a dream that refuses to go away. It is very eerie. It is a place of zombies, of things that can't die. And you bring this money-man of Iceland, whom so many desired during the financial boom, into this park. The result is ambiguous. Nobody desires him anymore. But he is still going

strong. *Don't stop me now*. An irrepressible drive, as if people can't let go of him even now after the crash. People want to live in that dream. I wonder if this ambiguity was intended. Or did you have a more directly political message in mind?

H: That is a very interesting reading of the work. What is special about Berlin is that history is so strongly felt here. While the rest of Europe has gone clean, Berlin hasn't covered its wounds; the bullet holes are still there in the walls and many of the buildings are still in ruins. The past hovers over an art scene that is otherwise very contemporary. Perhaps this breathing presence of a painful history facilitates the possibility for a thriving contemporary art scene. It is a place for contemplation, meeting and production but not necessarily for the market. My experience of former 'Easterners', not only Germans, is that many have nostalgia about the Communist era. They had jobs and security and didn't really feel the control breathing down their necks. As you say, there has been very little re-evaluation of history. The story is still about people rescued from life *behind* the Wall, bringing their economic problems with them in the time of hard adjustments to the Western model. There has never been any thought of looking at what could be of value in the culture that was created during those decades. I remember that as a young girl I thought of Eastern Europe as being greyscale. I couldn't imagine nature or colours behind the Wall. Now I consider myself to

have been brainwashed as a young child. I would never have imagined an amusement park behind the Wall, and neither would West Berliners. Of course the atmosphere of the work is very eerie. It has a playful surface with a serious undertone, like wanting to hide under a blanket. It is a very scary thought to be living in an illusion, to be played with by those who might benefit from it. The horror movie motif is a cliché and a very easy touchpoint to use with this material. I really tried to avoid it. We didn't use the obvious sounds of fun rides or merry-go-rounds that are already too closely connected to horror films. Instead, there was a unique soundscape with some hints to computer game music. Those are still relatively free of fixed meaning.

Last year the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Wall was celebrated all over the world. This is at a time of crisis. I agree with philosopher and historian John Gray when he says that we are experiencing a historical geopolitical shift in which the era of American global leadership is over. Today the crisis can perhaps be felt most strongly in Iceland and even Spain and Greece, but it obviously has a global impact. Somebody once said that given its small, unconventional but still demographically homogeneous population of 320.000, Iceland is the perfect testing ground for trends and new products. It is so easy to get everybody on the wagon. This quality was used by those young investors. Iceland became a testing ground for hyper neo-liberal capitalism at its most extreme. Therefore the crash has been very

hard. Of course, people that have lost their security and jobs want to believe that this is not permanent, that the boat will keep rocking with the next aluminium factory being built. And of course there is a whole generation born after 1980 that doesn't know much else. But the important point, as John Gray has mentioned, is that with the nationalisation of crucial parts of the financial system, the American free-market model has destroyed itself. It is an entire model of government and economy that has collapsed similarly to the fall of the Soviet Union. We live in awkward times, just like the whole enterprise of the money-man in an abandoned theme park. He can't let go of the game despite the world crumbling down around him. He finds himself being displaced. I think many people today feel this displacement.

V: Yes, and to come back to the eerie atmosphere that you mentioned, it is poignant how readily the horror motif comes to mind in a theme park, a cliché to such a degree that you had to disassemble our preconceptions with a different soundscape in order for us to see past it. Beware the self-evident, as Brecht would have us learn! Because there are some pertinent ideological reasons for these perceptions. First, as you mentioned, our sense of displacement. It is a tragedy of every human endeavour that our idealised world view changes much slower than the symbolic order. Our desired role models, or our ideal ego, if you like, are trans-fixed even as the socio-economic horizon under which they were born

Hops Hopsi Installation view



Hops Hopsi

Installation view



comes to an end. In the case of the money cowboy, the displacement between our ideal ego and the social criteria by which we judge ourselves is far more disconcerting than a simple case of thwarted expectations. In a usual case of personal angst we become depressed because we don't live up to our dreams; however, in this case, it is desire itself—the mirror image—which is displaced because the social order has been reconfigured. It is desire without a place. This is perhaps the hidden kernel of so many horror movies and therefore springs to mind immediately. Old desires come and haunt us. So even if you avoid any cliché in substance, there is something in the very form itself that is nightmarish.

On the other hand, there are other familiar themes that come to mind. While you were conscious of the horror motif and worked around it, did you also take into account the post-apocalyptic theme with which our generation born under the horizon of laissez-faire capitalism seems to be obsessed? There is and has been for some time an infatuation with the 'beauty' of a post-industrial and dystopic future: the overgrown city after a nuclear attack, now reclaimed by nature, rusty and weathered iron structures, abandoned factories, etc. This anaesthetisation of rust and weed represents some kind of an endpoint to what was possible to imagine. Why do we—or did we—find this 'beautiful'? And were you conscious of these background tropes when you were working in Spreepark?

H: The first time I visited the park I snuck in by climbing the fence and hiding from the guards by ducking behind bushes when the guards came around. My veins were pumping with adrenaline, but I couldn't stop myself. I was absolutely captivated by the beauty of this abandoned place. I felt like I was in a secret world far away from the hustle and bustle, like I had discovered some treasure. I also love abandoned factories, villages and fjords. My fascination with these aesthetics is certainly the reason why I started working on this project in the first place. It is a very good question to ask why we find this beautiful. Personally I have always been infatuated with imperfection, whether it is the imperfection of an object or a human being. I find it romantic, exciting and intriguing.

I think the answer lies partly in my psychological condition and partly in my socio-economic background and life status. Many people do not have this infatuation with the imperfect or the overgrown and abandoned, but value places, objects or humans that are clearly under control: orderly, straight, clearcut and predictable. For me coming from a typical Icelandic middle-class background in the west side of Reykjavik, my firsthand experience of anything outside of clean cut was when I came hitchhiking to Berlin in the 90s. Before that I had never seen a building that was not in the perfect state as intended by its architect. It is very complex how one develops an aesthetic for the post-industrial state of being. Perhaps it is reactionary—the longing to return back to nature, to the

disorderly, the non-middle-class. When I was a child I lived very much in my own imaginary world, and I made many drawings of the circus. Each character in the circus got his own spread, his own profile picture. Perhaps it was that circus show the national television broadcasted on Christmas every year that influenced me. Life was pretty simple back then. A lot of state control. I have a lot of nostalgia for the 70s.

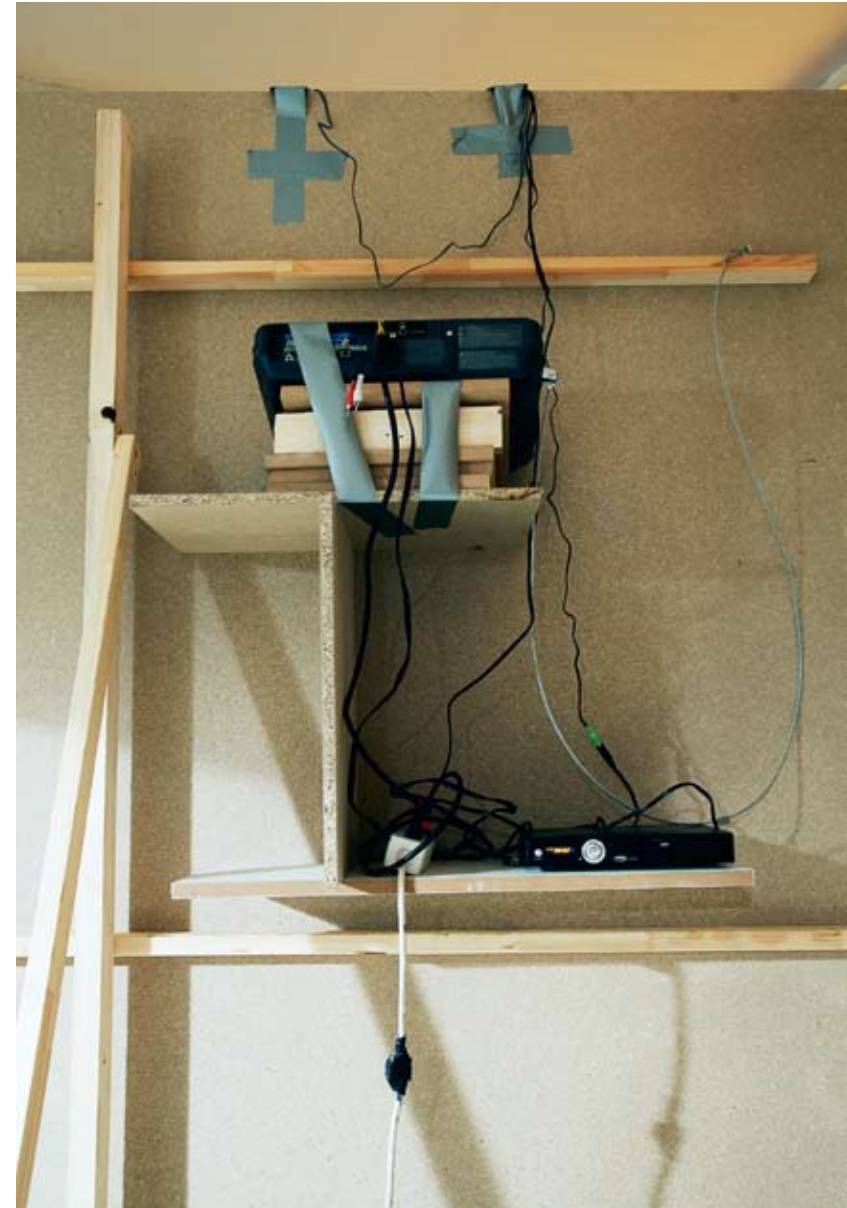
V: And you are not alone. To paraphrase your statement from a little earlier, the personal is the gateway to the universal. Therefore it is interesting that Spreepark, which represented for you a secret garden of hidden delights, was a garden that had escaped the meticulous and clean cut pruning of suburban life as you experienced in your childhood. In the garden you found imperfections. The irony is that the Spreepark is a remnant of the even tighter controlled environment in the GDR! And now that you have opened up this garden for a character that used to be the idealised hero of a petty-bourgeois society, would you even say that he could be considered as a romantic figure now that he has been displaced, a candidate for the imaginary circus? Does he represent a certain kind of relief, a sense of immortality? Or does his presence there, rather, represent something of the order Leonard Cohen sung about, quoting an old Jewish proverb, 'In every wall there is a crack...'?

H: I guess the work is some kind of satire after all. I'm not the only Icelandic artist that uses irony as a tool.

I don't really feel romantic about my money-man. He is too silly to me to be a romantic figure. But my works are very open to interpretation, and I don't want to fix one single reading of it. I'm sure someone else with a different relationship to that era will feel romantic and nostalgic. In a way, they were the first generation of Icelandic businessmen that appreciated and supported the visual arts in general. They even sneakily stole the nation's collection of Old Icelandic Masters, as the politicians that were busy giving away the banks during privatisation couldn't see the value in them (I hope). Visual artists in Iceland are traditionally considered something like beggars asking for charity, so I can understand that many welcomed the positive attention and support. As you say, I do not swear that I might not rethink my relationship and paint the money-man in a romantic light at a later date, but at this moment I find it very unlikely. All this said, Leonard Cohen as a young man is on the other hand someone I would gladly accept a date with *in my secret life* at any time. Like he says in that song, the dealers want us to think that it is either black or white, but as artists I feel it is important to resist and open up more colourful areas of discussion.

Valur Antonsson, born in Reykjavík, Iceland is a writer who lives in New York city. Aside from articles on Art and Life, he has published two books of poetry with the avant-garde ensemble of Nyhil and is presently working on a novel. He holds a M.A. degree in Philosophy and has taught at the Academy of Arts in Iceland.

Hops Hopsi Installation view



Hops Hopsi

Installation view



Hulda Rós Guðnadóttir
Works (selected)

Documentary:

2008
The Cornershop, 45 min. Collaboration with Helga Rakef Rakefsson. An unusual love story about two brothers and a shop.

2004
The discreet charm of the bourgeoisie, 105 min. A study of the everyday people. It's a story of rejection, love, fear, existential crisis, consumerism and rebirth through crisis. Title homage to surrealist Luis Buñuel.

1999
Jaroslavs Castle, 23 min. Collaboration with Tinna Grétarsdóttir. Graduation project in visual anthropology at the University of Iceland.

Video installation:

2010
Hops Hopsi. 10 video loops, sculpture, relief, performance.
Videos: *Gras* (4'45"), *Restaurant 1* (4'45"), *Restaurant 2* (4'45"), *Shooting the ducks* (4'14"), *Bananas 1* (4'14"), *Bananas 2* (4'14"), *The missing audience* (4'14"), *Watermelons 1* (2'14"), *Watermelons 2* (2'14") and *The Control Station* (4'17"). Sound by Magnús B. Skarphéðinsson.
Installation: 10368 gummibärchen, acrylic glass, 31 metal chairs, particle boards, halogen reflector lamps, yellow and red sailcloth 52m², 10 DVD players, 3 TV tubes, 7 video projectors.

2006
Don't feed them after midnight. The Cult of the cute gremlin puffin. Video, sculpture, digital photo print, performance.
Video: *I'm a very special artist from Iceland – do you want to fuck* (2'58"). Music by Sigurrós and Thor. Cloth, paper-maché, paint, strings, wood, DVD player, video projector.

2005
Where do the cats go to die? Video, sculpture, performance. Video with same title (2'00"). Sound: cat screams mixed with Miles Davis. Cloth, eggs, paper-maché, paint, apples, metal-bucket, DVD player, video projector.

Video:

2005
We will never be in love again (4'10"). Performance video. Text by Susan Miller. Read by Biogen.

Crazy (2'45"). Performance video. Music by Willie Nelson. Performed and arranged by Mr. Silla (of Mum).

Sculpture and photography:

2007
Don't stop me now. I'm having a good time. Sculpture installation.

2005
McNolia. Relief. Me and the couples. Photography series.

Awards:

2009
Cultural Price of DV for best Icelandic film in 2008 (Jury prize).

2008
PENNNIN award for emerging artists in Iceland.

Edda, Icelandic Academy Awards for best documentary film.

Silver Fox for best documentary at *Reykjavik Short and Docs* (Jury prize).

Audience award for best documentary and Skjaldborg film festival, Iceland.

Solo exhibitions:

2011
Part of *Gallery D* exhibition series at Reykjavik Art Museum, Reykjavik.

2010
Part of *Neue Klasse Deutschland* exhibition series at Claus Lehmann atelier, Berlin.

PROGRAM, Berlin.

2007
ESKANDAL, Barcelona.

2006
Sequences Real Time Festival. KronKron, Reykjavik.

Grants and Recognition (selected):

2010
The Visual artists' Stipend Fund. The Icelandic Government.

2009
Stiftung Kunstfonds, Bonn, Germany. Exhibition grant for *Hops Hopsi* at PROGRAM, Berlin.

Icelandic Visual Art Copyright Association project grant.

Muggur, residency grant from The Association of Icelandic Visual Artists.

2008
The Visual artists' Stipend Fund. The Icelandic Government.

2003-2007
Project and art grants from Memory fund of Margrét Björgólfssdóttir, Center for Icelandic Art, Icelandic Film Centre, the Nordic Institute For Contemporary Art, Icelandic Visual Arts Copyright Association, The Icelandic Ministry of Social Affairs and The Art and Culture Fund.

Group exhibitions (selected):

2010
EXKURS. Isländische Kunst in außergewöhnlichen Zeiten, Fellehus, Nordic Embassies in Berlin. Curated by Markús Thór Andrésson.

2007
Graduation exhibition from Icelandic Academy of the Arts Reykjavik.

2006
Grand Narrative at Galerie Bergstub'l, Berlin. Curated by Carrie Roseland. Gallery Signe Vad, Copenhagen. Curated by Lina Björn.

2005
Klink and Bank Invasion at Berliner Liste, Berlin. Curated by Nina Magnúsdóttir. Sponsored and supported generously by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary.

Garnival, Reykjavik Cultural Night / Visual art and music in the garden at Thorsgata 6, Reykjavik. Co-curated with Berglind Jona Hlynisdóttir.

Strange Attractors, Deliberate Disguises, The Living Art Museum, Reykjavik. Curated by Signal in the heavens, Reykjavik Art Festival.

Purgatory, Gallery Boreas & Galapagos Art Space, NYC. Curated by Signal in the heavens.

2001
Digitarts – MA degree show at Middlesex University. Interactive design. The Bridge Gallery, Truman Brewery, Brick Lane, London.

Screenings and Film Festivals:

2010
Reindeerland film festival, Iceland. Shortlisted for Best Icelandic video.

2009
The Scandinavia House. The American-Scandinavian Foundation. NYC.

Minneapolis/St. Paul International Film Festival, Minneapolis, USA.

Expresión en Corto International Film Festival, Mexico. Official selection.

Thessaloniki International Film Festival, Thessaloniki, Greece. Official selection.

FAMU, Prague, Czech Republic, for students.

Göteborg International Film Festival, Gothenburg, Sweden. Official selection.

2008
YLE, Finland

Icelandic National Broadcasting Service.

Nordic Film Days, Lübeck, Germany. Official selection.

Uppsala International Short Film Festival, Sweden. Official selection. *Nordisk Panorama*, 5 cities film festival, Malmö, Sweden. Official selection.

Short and Docs, Reykjavik – Winner of the best documentary.

Haskólabíó cinema in Reykjavik. Public regular screenings.

Skjaldborg Icelandic documentary film festival - Audience award.

2006
Club der Polnischen Versager, Torstrasse, Berlin, Germany.

Cold Hearts, Monkey Town, NYC. Curated by Package Deals.

2005
Galapagos Art Space, NYC. Curated by Signal in the Heavens.

2004
Garage Cinema, side program of Nordisk Panorama.



Me and the couples - the conditions of a heteronormative society. Photography, 2005



I'm having a good time. Sculpture installation, 2007



Don't feed them after midnight.
The cult of the cute puffin gremlin.
Mixed media installation and performance, 2006.



McNolia
Relief, 2005

Hulda Rós Guðnadóttir
Curriculum vitae

Education (selected):

2010
February: PhDarts Symposium *The Artist as Researcher*. Royal Academy of the Arts, The Hague, Netherlands.

2007
B.A. Visual Art, Icelandic Academy of the Arts.

2006
Summer: UdK, Berlin. Visual Art with Professor Katharina Sieverding.

2004
Until Jan.'05: *Twelve for the Future*, workshop for young nordic documentary talents. European Documentary Network.

2001
M.A. Design for interactive media, Landsdown Centre for electronic arts, Middlesex University, London

1999
B.A. Social Anthropology, University of Iceland.

Residencies:

2007-2008
Reykjavik Academy, Reykjavik.

2007
Dionysia, Borgarfjörður-eystri, Iceland.

2004-2005
Klink and Bank, Reykjavik.

Lecturing and Artist/Directors Talk:

2009
March: FAMU, Prague, Czech Republic. A talk about *The Cornershop* documentary.

2008
December: Icelandic Film and TV Academy. A talk about *The Cornershop* documentary.

2007
November: Provincialism seminar, Hamar, Norway. Participant.

June: *Befitting, befogging, beguiling and bethinking*. Lecture at Provincialism seminar at the Reykjavik Academy.

This and That:

2007-
Dionysia international cross-genre residency in Iceland, director and founder.

2000-
Various design for print, web, stage, set and clothing.

2008
Jan - Sept: Reykjavik Art Museum, assistant to the museum curator

2008
The Faroe Islands Art Museum. ISBN: 978-99918-987-4-2

'Befitting, befogging, beguiling and bethinking' in *The Provincialists* (essay p. 67).

2001 - 2008
Producer of documentary film *The Cornershop* and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*

Publications (selected) - texts and visuals by the artist

2007
July/August: *Icelandic Art News*. Published by Center for Icelandic Art. Article about *Sequences Real-time Festival*. Visuals also on the promotional material of the festival.

Summer: *www.provincialists.com*. 'Befitting, befogging, beguiling and bethinking'. A lecture delivered at the Reykjavik Academy about my artwork and curatorial project, 02.06.07: *Morgunbladid/Lesbók* – cultural special of the Morning Paper. 'Kjálkinn út', an extract article I wrote about my art work and curatorial projects. *The Provincialism* international seminar at Reykjavik Academy.

Bibliography (selected):

2009
January: *NEON*, German magazine. Interview and discussion about the work *Don't stop me now* inside a longer article.

2008
From 19.06 on: Countless media articles and reviews about *The Cornershop* and *Dionysia*, etc.

19.06: Afternoon Radio at *The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service 2*.

Film review **** review (full house) by film critic Olafur H. Torfason.

15.06: *Morgunbladid*. 'Til heiðurs hornkaupmönnum thjóðarinnar'. **** critic by film critic Saebjörn Valdimarsson in the Morning news paper.

15.06: *Fréttabladid*/Culture section of the Afternoon paper. 'Kaupmennirnir á horninu'. One page interview and article by Hanna Björk Valsdóttir.

31.05: *Morgunbladid*/Culture section of the Morning news paper. 'Ad brjóta niður mörk'. Interview and article by Einar Falur Ingólfsson.

30.05: Víðsjá/The culture radio program at *The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service 1*. Interview by Guðni Tómasson.

17.05: Kvika/The film radio program at *The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service 1*. Interview by the documentary club Homer.

15.05: Kastljós/News magazine program at the *The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service*. Interview by Thóra Tómasdóttir.

14.05: Víðsjá/The culture radio program at *The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service 1*. Interview by Haukur Ingvarsson.

2007
14.04: *Fréttabladid*/Culture section of the Afternoon paper. 'Ad rækta gardinn sinn'. Article written by Kristrún Hauksdóttir.

2006
11.11: *Morgunbladid/Lesbók* – cultural special of the Morning Paper. Skvett úr köppnum á *Sequences*. A review of the *Sequences Real-time Festival*. Written by art critic Thora Thorisdottir with a special mention of my solo exhibition in KronKron.

2005
May: *Reaching for the Stars. Just to Surrender*. A catalogue for the Signal in the Heavens curatorial project.

Part three *Purgatory* at Gallery Boreas, NYC in April 2005 and part three

Strange Attractors, deliberate disguises at the Living Art Museum in Reykjavik in May 2005.

Hops Hopsi
Hulda Rós Guðnadóttir, 2009-2010

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lectures, and residencies.
www.programonline.de



STIFTUNG KUNSTFONDS

Ghosts of the past.
Until 2008 around 23 people, men,
women and children lived in the
closed ruins of the former Wild West
zone of the park. These were former
employees of the park together
with their families. According to
the Berliner Zeitung,
from 2005 Peter and Nancy Schiller
lived there together with their 8
children. Their youngest child was
born in the park. Their status as
squatters led to their evacuation
after years of dispute
with the park guardians. Despite
thorough research it has been
impossible to locate these people today.

Something fishy.

Some of the rides found

in the park in the year 2009

have never been put to use,

despite having the

appearance of being

from the early 70s.

No letting go.

During preparation for

filming Hops Hopsi,

the production team found

an old plastic Haribo

container in a runned down

gummy candy stall.

The bottom of the container

was covered with melted

Haribo gummy bears.

Haribo gummy bears.

Other creative works.

*The scandals associated
with the closing of the park*

and the activities of its owner

and his family have been

covered by two German

documentaries produced in

2004 (Kulturpark) and

2009 (Achterbahn).

Myths.

*The park is currently being
deconstructed and will soon*

disappear all together.

It continues to be the

subject of many myths and

fascination for the endless

cycle of creative

newcomers to Berlin.

The capitalistic victory.

After the fall of the Wall

and the end of the Cold War,
it was widely believed

that the events could be

interpreted as a capitalist
victory and that capitalism

should go on uncriticized.

It was the beginning of a
religious type of faith

in capitalism.

Freedom won.

It has also been a widely
accepted historical reading
that the fall of the Wall meant

that the former inhabitants
of the Eastern bloc had been
emancipated into the free

world, that the former West
now bore the responsibility
of helping the former Eastern

bloc to become like the West
as quickly as possible.

*Privatisation and the
uncontrolled free market.*

*The 90s were characterized
by increasing belief in
the uncontrolled free market
and privatisation both in
the former Eastern bloc and*

*in the West. Some financial
entrepreneurs used this
opportunity to become
very rich.*

Neoliberal capitalism.

*The first decade of the
21st century could be
defined in terms similar
to a fundamental religious
era where the apostles of
neoliberal capitalism spread
their beliefs with great
support from governments
and leading international
economic institutions.*

Post-colonialism.

Despite having a right wing government for most of the time since

its independence in

1944, Iceland in the 70s

was characterized by

extreme state control

not unlike that of the

Eastern bloc. In the

case of Iceland, the

explanation for this

situation could be found

in the post-colonial

nature of the country

and its formation of a

local elite interested in

self-gain.

Privatisation of fisheries.

With Thatcher being widely admired by the local political elite, the first signs of neoliberal economic policy surfaced

in Iceland in 1983 with the

privatisation of the fishing quota. Later, strong censure of

the Minister of Fisheries and

his family having become very

rich from this deal were never

properly resolved by official

legal institutions. By the late

1980s, neoliberal policies had

gained wide popularity among

the local political and financial

elite formed under post-colonial

thinking.

Privatisation of the banks.

In 2002, Icelandic banks were privatized. Some of the key players had already become rich by taking advantage of the privatisation of formerly state-owned companies in the Eastern bloc in the 90s.

The privatisation process was criticized by some insiders, with at least one person resigning from the committee that handled it. Allocations of corruption have never been dealt with by official legal institutions in an effective way.

Destruction of land.

In 2003, despite widespread public and scholarly opposition, the Icelandic government decided to go ahead with the largest single project in the history of the country. The Kárahnjúkar Hydropower Project was designed to produce 4,600 Gwh annually for an aluminum smelter close to the highland of Iceland.

Key players in this were international corporations like Alcoa and Impregilo. Apart from the massive destruction of what was the largest wild land area of Europe, critics pointed out that the fragile economic system of Iceland would not be able to carry this load. Voices said that this outdated idea was a 1950s incentive that had taken 50 years to pass. The power of the political power elite was total.

Richest.

The key players that benefited from privatisation processes in Iceland and elsewhere became

the richest people in the world, according to Forbes magazine.

Throughout the decade, they continued to invest with what has been called on the street a 'bubble-methodology', creating an economic turnover that was similar to Stalinist architecture, hovering highly above the much weaker economy of its motherland.

Ideological and economic bankruptcy.

In 2008, the three largest banks of Iceland went bankrupt, leading to total state bankruptcy the following year.

In the spirit of neoliberal capitalism, the Icelandic population has been made responsible for the debts of the private banks while the individual key players continue to be wealthy players on the international stock market. The country has been under emergency law since October 2008. Iceland's bankruptcy is a direct consequence of Iceland's adoption of neoliberal policies in an environment of extreme, clan-like corruption. As a way out of the crisis, however, a leading international economic institution continues to push Iceland towards further extreme neoliberal economic policy.



