

A NEW KIND OF SENSATION

(SG) Sigurður Guðjónsson in conversation with
(SW) Susanne Watzzenboeck

Sigurður Guðjónsson's art plays with the boundaries of those realities that lie outside our everyday sphere of perception. In his impressive time-based media works, the Icelandic artist repeatedly deals with mankind's technological achievements, which can also serve as tools or media in his oeuvre. Guðjónsson shows these objects from perspectives that make their presence appear intensely intimate and enigmatic at the same time. In microscopic close-ups, he observes movements and forms that result from the contact that objects make with their environment. The examination of natural elements and the parameters of time, space and perception can also be discerned as recurring themes in his work. In addition to a visual level, his type of investigation always takes place on an acoustic level. Guðjónsson uses the potential of film as a medium that allows him to produce an interplay of image and sound, resulting in a maximum symbiosis of both sensory impressions. Complex soundscapes and rhythmic images involve viewers in a synesthetic experience that expands their own field of perception and generates a new kind of sensation. *Scopes of Inner Transit*, the artist's first solo exhibition in Austria, features four recent works, including Guðjónsson's contribution to the Icelandic Pavilion at the 2022 Venice Biennale, *Perpetual Motion*.



▲ Sigurður Guðjónsson, Foto: Saga Sig

■ Sigurður Guðjónsson – *Scopes of Inner Transit* ist von 03.09.2024 bis 12.01.2025 im FC zu sehen.

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Susanne Watzelboeck ist Kuratorin für zeitgenössische Kunst in der OÖ Landes-Kultur GmbH.



SW: Dear Sigurður, thank you for taking the time to do this interview for Francisco Carolinum magazine with me. Let us start at the very beginning of your artistic career. How did your decision to work in the medium of film come about? Did you work digitally right from the start?

SG: I began working with the film medium very soon after I started studying at the Iceland University of the Arts. I had been experimenting in the past with classical media such as painting and sculpture, but I was not quite finding myself. When I got to know video, I realized that I could fit all the aspects I was interested in into one medium. The first video works I did were done with 8mm film, and sound was recorded on tape, so I came from the analogue world into the digital one. I think that having been introduced to these analogue media first has followed me in a certain way into the digital one. There is something about the aesthetics and materiality of analogue film that is always fascinating.

SW: How did sound come into the equation?

SG: Sound and music are things I started working with before I went into visual art. I was full-time in music before I started in art and played with a few bands that did death metal music,

which then evolved into electro and more experimentalism. It was therefore appropriate when I started working with video to bring my interest in music and sound into the works, which plays a key role in my practice today.

SW: For the soundtrack of *Perpetual Motion*, you collaborated with composer Valgeir Sigurðsson, and for *Trajectories* with Anna Thorvaldsdóttir. What are your thoughts on the transformative nature of collaboration, and how would you describe its qualities for you personally?

SG: Collaboration is something that has always been rather direct in my work, and I have always been unafraid of it, which may be related to the fact that I was in bands before. What usually happens in this kind of collaboration is that there is some unexpected addition to the work, and that's something I am very fascinated by. The approach and how the work is developed are different from one project to another and usually evolve in parallel with each project. In *Perpetual Motion*, Valgeir Sigurðsson and I worked very closely together on the soundscape, but always with the installation and the visual aspect as a starting point. I proposed a certain foundation that he worked with and added to, which was very pleasing because I was always looking for another voice in the soundscape of

▲ ► the work. The sound material is then thrown back and forth until a result is reached. The collaboration with Anna Thorvaldsdóttir has a different nature. We did certain conceptual sketches for the work in conversation, but then we work separately, as she works on the music and I do the visual part and the installation. In *Trajectories*, the idea was that sound and image would be completely intertwined, so I decided to use a certain basis from the music to create movement in the material mass that we see in the work. To achieve this movement, I also added some sound frequencies into the visual part to exaggerate the movement, but then I take those sounds out completely so we can say we see invisible sound frequencies through the movement in the material in total synchronization with Anna's music.

SW: A lot of your works explore liminal spaces – the overlap between the physical world and interior life, the boundary between one moment in time and another, the borders of human perception. *Oscillation* can serve as an example in this context. Is liminality a way for you to portray motion?

SG: The space in between is something I often work with, as is the tension between two or more elements as they overlap and dissolve into something unknown. This transformation can often lead to interesting activity, and motion is one key element in this.

SW: What importance do the type of installation and the exhibition space have for you?

SG: Both the installation and the exhibition space are important factors that influence the meaning and function of my works. But at the same time, I always find it exciting to see how the work itself can activate the exhibition space. There is always a certain narrative attached to each exhibition space and I try to use that as part of the installation where image, sound and space form an unbroken whole. The structure and flow of the exhibition space affect how the audience moves around, senses and engages with the works, which often require reflection and focus.

SW: How do you perceive the relationship between your pieces and the notion of time – both in terms of how an artwork comes into being through your artistic process and how the layers of meaning of a completed work evolve over time as it exists in the world?

SG: Time is important in my process, and often the material must sit for quite a while with me for me to be satisfied. The content also needs to live with

me for a certain period of time until the work is ready, and it's almost as if I have to forget where the work came from and how it was made in order to understand and get the feeling of it. So, it's like they have to find themselves in a kind of timelessness first. You never know in advance how a work will develop and exist in the world, but it is always satisfying when you find that new layers of meaning appear and that they age well. Then you feel it is ready to be out in the world.

SW: Your works often induce a state of contemplation and meditative reflection in the viewer. They do so by means of their mesmerizing sound qualities and visual structures that invite the viewers to channel their attention exclusively on what they are perceiving in the very moment. Is this state of introspection and maximum focus also one that you experience while working on your pieces?

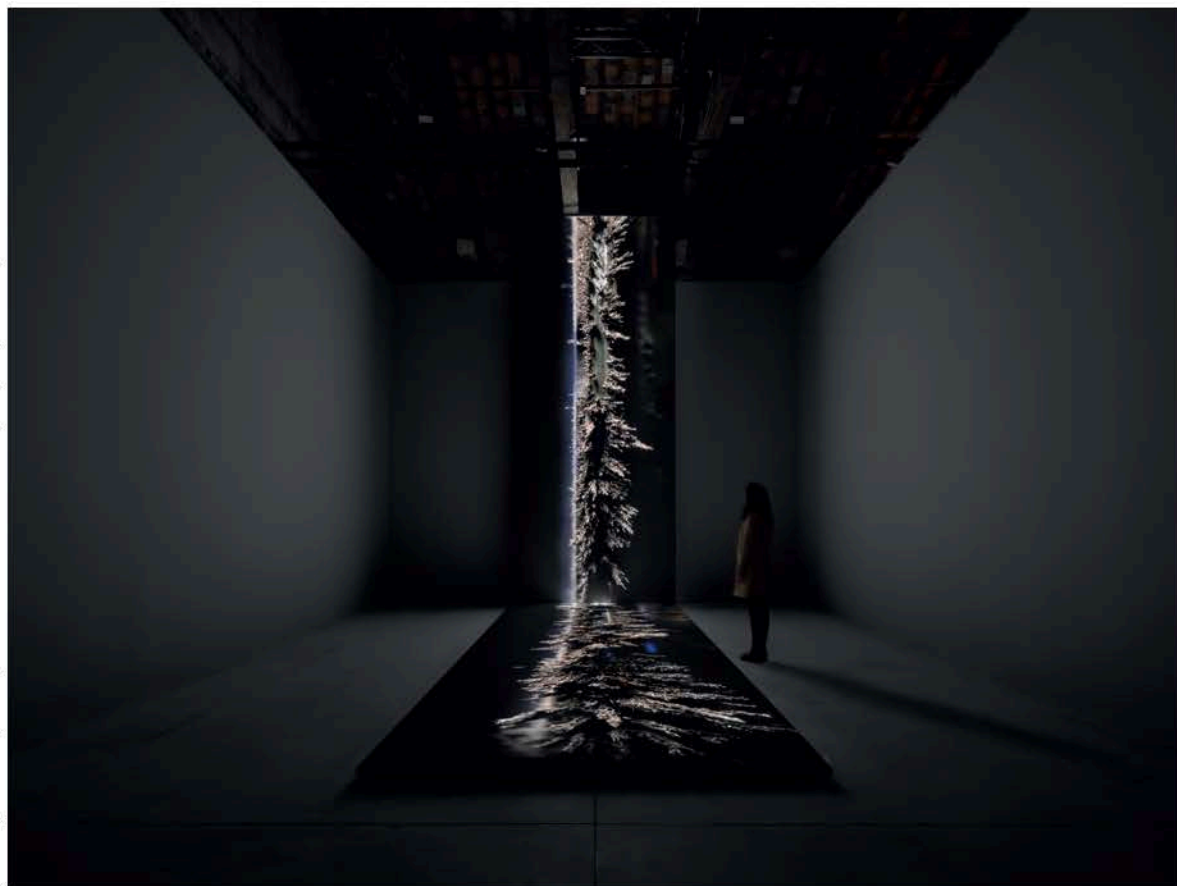
SG: Yes, I would say so. When I'm working on projects, I usually work alone, and any external stimuli can be distracting. There are certain situations, conditions and atmospheres that I create when the works are in process, a kind of perceptual space where everything is in perpetual motion.

SW: In your art, you use motifs from the sphere of the visible, or the world at human scale, but also from a microscopic perspective that mostly remains invisible in our everyday experience and perception. By dealing with the hidden, your work engages with a longstanding tradition of representing the unseen in art. How do you perceive your work as part of this broader artistic fascination with the elements of life that are not part of our day-to-day scope of perception?

SG: The unexpected is an important factor here, because when you delve into some unknown material world, you enter a kind of unknown multi-layered space. I think my interest in the unseen also comes from the invisibility of sound, something you cannot see but can sense with your body and ears. There is a fascinating harmony.

SW: How would you relate one of the definitions of art, it being a method of research or investigation, to your work?

SG: I would say that every work and exhibition follows a specific research process, even if I do



not work directly according to classical academic research rules. My process is quite nonlinear and more based on intuition, so I don't follow certain linear trajectories in it, although of course a certain methodology has developed in my practice.

SW: Your interest in technology is something that repeatedly surfaces in your work and becomes graspable on different levels. Objects like scanners, fluorescent tubes, audio cassettes, or slide projectors are tools that we use or have used in the past without paying too much attention to the intricacies of their functionality. And yet they tell us a lot about ourselves, about the goals we want to achieve through their use. In your pieces, you bring their organization into view in a very distinctive aesthetic style. How do you approach the selection of these objects and the way they are presented?

SG: The selection of these items is very random. In many cases, these are things that have been around me for a long time or that come to me accidentally. Sometimes I have a work ready for an exhibition that calls for a conversation with another object / element, so one thing leads to another. So, we could say that these

things come to me rather automatically. Until now, I have not systematically collected objects to create my pieces, although lately I've been going more to factories and other places to look at materials for inspiration, so maybe there is a change in the process.

SW: In one of the works you are showing at the Francisco Carolinum, *Trajectories*, auditory and visual sensory impressions merge into one perceptual experience. In *Oscillation* it is perceptive illusion that plays a central role in the work's reception. Can your work also be seen as an exploration of the limits and possibilities of human perception?

SG: Absolutely. I would say that one aspect of my research is experimentation with perception. In *Trajectories*, and indeed in all of my works, the fusion of auditory and visual sensory impressions is designed to create a unified perceptual experience. By blending these senses, the work invites viewers to engage with it on multiple levels, discovering new dimensions and depths in their perceptual experience. This is also the case with *Oscillation*, where I try to push the boundaries of how we experience and interpret sensory information.