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'My Anchor Point Is Here': How Icelandic Artist Sigurður Guðjónsson's Venice Pavilion Is—and Isn't—Inspired by Homeland

Guðjónsson's Venice presentation has everything and nothing to do with his native Iceland.

Sigurður Guðjónsson's Venice pavilion, "Perpetual Motion," at Palazzo Mocenigo. Image: Sigurður Guðjónsson.

Vivienne Chow April 25, 2022 ◐ Press This Article

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Sigurður Guðjónsson's Venice pavilion, "Perpetual Motion," at Palazzo Mocenigo. Image: Sigurður Guðjónsson.

Challenging Perception

Landscape, in fact, was not his mind when Guðjónsson started creating the work. He was thinking instead about the sensations he had in Iceland and heard while at the IUAV. The work, rather, is the result of experimentation with objects and materials.

The primary object is, in fact, a small magnetic disc taken from an old loudspeaker, with metal dust sprinkled around the rim. The work depicts the sensation of the magnetic field, which is invisible to the eye. The work is 45 minutes and slides shown on two screens connected to room 4 offer like mirror images, but their playback speeds are different. Accompanied by a visceral soundscape developed by Guðjónsson and the famed Icelandic musician and producer Valgeir Sigurðsson, founder of the band Múm and composer of the soundtrack for Blade Runner 2049, the work challenges viewers' perceptions of materiality.

This is not the first time that Guðjónsson has played with perception by using mundane objects. For Frankenstein (2017), the artist took a peep into a fluorescent tube and presented a mesmerizing alternative view of the ordinary. For Sundbrot (2017), he used a pair of sunglasses that he then employed an electron microscope to scan a fragment of sulfur. In Gosbrot (2018), conjuring an otherworldly image of the material, and made the mysterious parts space of Lettbrot (2018) from a six-slide projector. Tape (2019), a particularly important work for the artist, is a "portrait" of Iceland's landscape using another medium that has been largely forgotten in the digital age.

Sigurður Guðjónsson's Venice pavilion, "Perpetual Motion," at Palazzo Mocenigo. Image: Sigurður Guðjónsson.

So what inspired Guðjónsson to get his hands on these materials and look at them differently?

"Curiosity," he said. "I have definitely a curious bit, looking at hidden physics. What's happening inside the light? It's a very interesting space to explore. Sometimes I feel like I'm a kind of alchemist, trying to transforming the apparatus into something new by creating many layers of perception, and all very important to me."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the unique landscape of Iceland shaped his vision.

"When you are standing in the snow and there's a very hot spring right in front of you, you pick up the contrasting layers of smell and sound, and you sense the materials and nature differently."

Space as a New Dimension

With Perpetual Motion, an extra layer of experimentation has been added: the Icelandic pavilion's new space.

The pavilion has been romantic since the Icelandic Art Center took over the Renaissance-era Palazzo Mocenigo, which was formerly the residence of sculptors for from the center of Venice, such as in a warehouse above on the island of Giudecca in 2011 and 2016, which saw the exhibitions of Ólafur Elíasson and Ásmundur Ásmundsson (below known as Shadman, respectively.

Ólafur Elíasson, "Your Mono Chromatic Universe," 2011. Image: Courtesy of the artist.

This time, the Icelandic pavilion is right inside the Arsenale, one of the most important locations in the Biennale, and it's surrounded by a number of visitors to the area's pavilion will be 10 times that of previous editions.

Moving to a prime location means that Guðjónsson is likely to get more exposure, as well as more pressure. "But we just have to do our best and it will work out," he noted.

At the same time, the high ceiling cube that allows visitors to come in and out of the pavilion without interfering with the exhibition another dimension for his experiment.

"I was inspired by the space, the high ceiling, and the flow of the room, which influences the sound and the motion of the work," the artist noted. "The video work is like a source to activate the space."

Sigurður Guðjónsson, "Perpetual Motion," 2022. Image: Courtesy of the artist.

It's Not About the Landscape—or Is It?

Despite the small proportion of art under 200 kilos, material has been participating in Biennale since 1895. It also has a thriving music scene.

The country's vibrant cultural landscape drew the attention of Sarbara Ren, a psychology professor at the University of Kansas who led a 2017 study to investigate why Iceland is so creative.

The study concluded that family structures and education in the country's schools are important factors in creating a creative culture. In the study (similar) to the built environment of the city as a factor of creative productivity. Iceland's museums, galleries, and art spaces in the capital city of Reykjavik, the small but elegant contemporary art space L.A.M Museum can be found in Hveragerði, a town with a population of 2,000 people.

The seen strategy identified and internal landscape of Iceland. However, did not play such a conscious role in influencing artists' creations, according to Ren's findings.

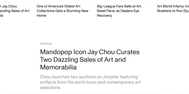
The Reykjavik Museum of Photography, Reykjavik, Iceland. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

Guðjónsson, who was born in 1975, built his career against such a backdrop. He studied at the Iceland University of the Arts between 2000 and 2003, followed by a year at the Akademie Der Bildenden Kunste in Vienna.

"It's a very local, small art scene," he said of Iceland. "I like being here but it's very important for us to get a broad perspective—it's extremely important for our development."

Such a strong desire to leave and return is prominent among Icelandic artists, who have a strong presence internationally, said Ingólfur Arnarsson, director and founder of the Berg Contemporary art gallery, which represents Guðjónsson. The landscape and nature are there, she said, but it's not the subject matter of the artists' work.

"Iceland is not isolated like other places. A small society has a need to connect with others. It's far from the continent, but it's right between Europe and America. There's a connection with the mainstream, international environment of art. Over the years, artists have the opportunity to travel, to see what's going on in the world, to do something bold," said Arnarsson, whose gallery recently presented Guðjónsson's work in London ahead of the Venice presentation.



L.A.M Museum of Art, Hveragerði, Iceland, photo by Vivienne Chow for artnet.

As for Guðjónsson, he will continue upon his return to Iceland, where he will release a book chronicling his journey over the past decade. He will also be teaming up with composer Anna Fonsdóttir and multi-Grammy nominated artists the Spektral Quartet for a performance of his work at the Reykjavik Art Museum in October, culminating with a presentation of Perpetual Motion at Berg Contemporary for a home audience.

He may have plans to experiment with a prolonged period of time away from home, but he has no plans to permanently relocate.

"My anchor point is here," he said.

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Auctions

Mandaloop Icon Jay Chou Curates Two Dazzling Sales of Art and Memorabilia

Chou launches two auctions on Joopter featuring rare items from his world tours and contemporary art selections.

Jay Chou, 2019 © Universal Music Group

Jay Chou, 2019 © Universal Music Group

Chou started taking piano lessons at age four, and signed to Alfa Music at age 19 after winning a talent competition. He released his first album, governing the Inspirer at Taiwan's Golden Melody Awards. 11 albums, ten films, and six world tours later, Chou remains the top selling artist in China, where his 2021 release Greatest Works of Art has sold over seven million copies (the most ever sales for that album's three track featured Mandarin of Fantasia Cat and Tom Rice Mp3).

Chou possesses his selections for Joopter's second ever contemporary art sale, which will feature 20 lots, including a Chinese contemporary ink appearance by ascendant British Chinese portrait Oscar Yi Hou, and the largest abstraction by late South Korean legend Young-Ik Ko to date. Chou's first sale on Joopter was inspired by the date of Chou's memorabilia, and October 31 for his remaining assortment of artworks.

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Chou's recollection The Tree Has Been Cut Down

Highlights from Chou's memorabilia sale had fetch the pack decade of his storied career. Both of his most recent world tours are represented—including a black and orange sequin jacket from his just concluded, six year Carnival World Tour (estimate: $2,000–$3,000) and a commemorative jacket from his 2017 tour (estimate: $1,000–$1,500). $6,000–$8,000 (valid) the sale is one of two Tyler Black Boy Chinoiserie (model 7009W) created for Chou as part of his Chinoiserie Collection, which sold for $7,500 in 2021. The auctions also feature signature Chou hats (estimate: $10,000–$20,000). Proceeds will benefit "a charitable initiative supported by Jay Chou," according to press materials.

Chou's Tudor Black Bay Chrono. Courtesy of Joopiter.

A Look With Jay Chou, meanwhile, marks the second installment in Joopiter's Contemporary Take series. Martha Stewart curated the first this May. German artist Daniel Richter's expressionist *SIREN* (2019) dominates Chou's lineup with an estimate of $300,000 to $500,000, followed by Japanese illustrator Hajime Sorayama's 2022 print *Untitled_Sexy Robot type II floating* ($220,000 – $280,000).

Diane Dal-Pra, *Blurred Boundaries* (2022). Courtesy of Joopiter.

The rest of the sale intermingles titans with rising talents. For example, *Blurred Boundaries* (2022) ($70,000–$90,000) by the young French painter Diane Dal-Pra will hit the block just before Ernie Barnes's *Under Pressure* (ca. 1966) ($120,000–$180,000), emphasizing the similarities between their dense compositions. Artists of the East Asian diaspora prove a through-line too, from Yoshitomo Nara's 2021 drawing *Pretty Evil* ($120,000–$180,000) to Labubu creator Kasing Lung's 2021 canvas *TO!* ($25,000–$30,000). All 25 artworks are making their auction debut, save for Barnes's contribution and Robert Motherwell's *Gauloises on Scarlet over Yellow #3* (1972–82), which is expected to fetch $70,000 to $100,000.

Ernie Barnes, *Under Pressure* (ca. 1966). Courtesy of Joopiter.

Whether or not you're able to get in on the action, Chou and Joopiter are commemorating the occasion with a capsule collection of t-shirts and hats, available while supplies last.

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