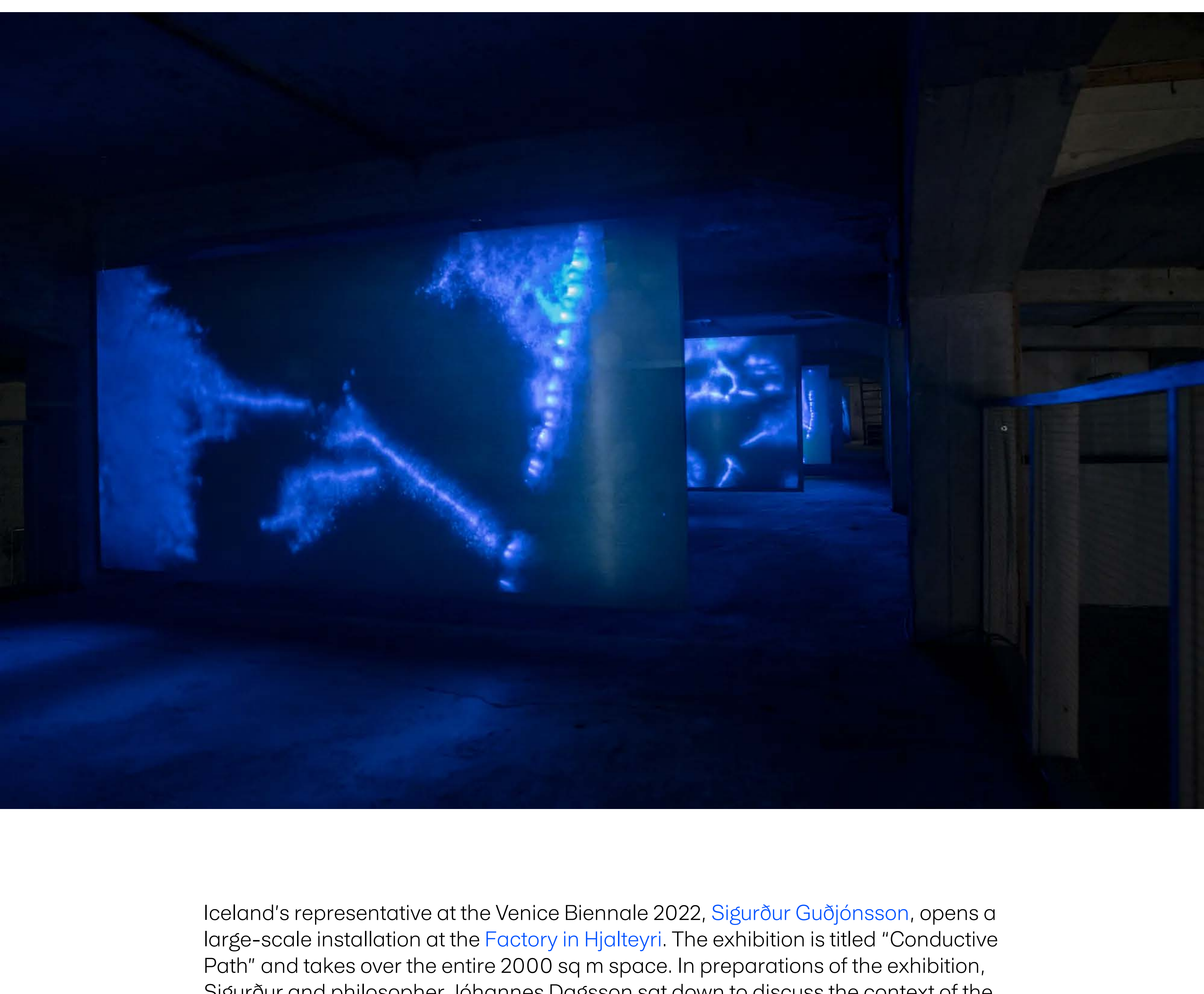


"Conductive Path" by Sigurður Guðjónsson



ICeland's representative at the Venice Biennale 2022, [Sigurður Guðjónsson](#), opens a large-scale installation at the [Factory in Hjalteyri](#). The exhibition is titled "Conductive Path" and takes over the entire 2000 sq m space. In preparations of the exhibition, Sigurður and philosopher Jóhannes Dagsson sat down to discuss the context of the work, time and energy.

JD: Presumably, the installation involves a single soundscape?

SG: I have conceived of the building as a sonic environment: its wings are like separate audio channels, left and right, like a stereo system. On the mezzanine ceiling, there are holes that I use for the sound. The sound travels between these holes, so it will organically follow the viewer as they walk through the piece. Then on the ground floor, there is a tunnel where recordings of reverb are being played. The tunnel is forty metres long, so it takes time for the sounds there to seep into the rest of the building. There are several layers that make up the soundscape. First, I'm working with the electronic sounds from the video footage used in the installation, which I then manipulate as part of my process; I'm also working with recordings of resonance inside a grand piano played by pianist Tinna Þorsteinsdóttir. With that, I'm thinking about reverb, and how the sonic environment I create enters into dialogue with reverberations within the Factory itself. I was excited to bring the vibrations or reverb from the piano into conversation with the building.



The Factory in Hjalteyri

JD: Would you compare this to the acoustics inside a cathedral, where different spaces within it are meant to sustain sound in different ways? Or do you rather envision the Factory as becoming some kind of musical instrument itself?

SG: Yes, maybe the building becomes like an instrument; it makes sense to think of it like that. The Factory's architecture is very interesting: it is, in a way, like a musical instrument in that it is completely symmetrical, with entirely straight lines and rectilinear forms. Then there are holes throughout the building, and light and air penetrate these openings. Light and air enter the frame, then become the visual component as they merge with the sonic environment in the wings.

JD: How are you thinking about the work in the context of the building and the architecture?

SG: I'm working with the centre of the building (three floors), and I think of the exhibition as one large moving-image sculpture intertwined with the building itself. I use 150 x 300cm aluminium sheets to arrange a path down the length of the mezzanine; the whole structure is about 5 x 40 meters. Although it's enormous in length, there is also an intimacy you feel when walking through it, so the work could function as a mise-en-abyme. In addition, the big halls offer interesting perspectives of the work from the ground floor.

JD: Do the visual elements function organically?

SG: The visual imagery transforms from one landscape to another in a continuous flow; there is constantly one scene after another, and this movement then repeats itself every thirty minutes. The filming process is also very organic. It's like spraying with a spray bottle: I hardly frame anything, just point the camera in different directions, and it almost becomes a visual storm.

JD: There's no narrative, is there? With the entire installation, or from shot to shot, it's not about a process of dividing a whole into smaller and smaller parts...it's more organic than that...

SG: Yes, I've made it completely randomly. I would lose a bit of control during the filming, but then I shape it through the editing, which requires a lot of meticulous compositional work. It's almost like composing a piece of music where the flow of time is very important. It starts out with wide angles and then zooms closer, then becomes a kind of close-up of sound, light, and movement that merge together into some kind of tangible electricity.

JD: And it's quite integral in the sense that you're always looking into this world? This whirlwind? It's like an organism, in a way, with its cycle and its boundaries—you don't go outside of it?

SG: Yes, you're absolutely right. It's like an organism. Perhaps the building as a whole is one phenomenon, and this is an organism inside it. You are always inside this world. The basis then is perhaps the colour, the movement, the light. Those are its basic elements...and energy...



JD: That's what you're looking at—energy—right? But there are no flashes of lightning—it's slow and steady.

SG: At a distance, it's slow, yes. But if you take a closer look at the details, it's really dynamic...

JD: There are many temporalities throughout the work, both within single takes and as you move between them...

SG: Yes, there are different temporal scales, and between the screens as well—however you choose to look at the temporal aspect.

JD: Perhaps one might wonder, then, where or how time will be legible? Does the viewer interpret the passage of time as a function of movement within the work? Or, what point of reference does the viewer have to tell the time? Where do you end up?

SG: Exactly where you end up. When I'm editing this, I'm thinking a lot about the length of each segment, making sure it's not too short—so you don't feel each cut, or find a narrative through the editing. Each segment lasts a minute or two before it dissolves and fades into the next.

JD: Are they long enough for the viewer to stop expecting a narrative?

SG: Yes, I think it's important for the viewer to be immersed in this world without having to think about it too much. But it's new for me to sit down at the editing console; I haven't done it in years. This piece involves a lot of editing, which has been a really fun process.

JD: If you just look at the storyboard on the editing console, it looks like a film.

SG: Yes, and looking at it on the console, it's a bit like aerial views of a big city, or some sort of matrix. Flashing lights in the distance like at an airport, or occasionally like a city at night, but then it stops again.

JD: The space will be very sculptural, and your work is based on that.

SG: The aim of this exhibition and the installation was to take over the whole building—to activate and utilise the entire building, not to bring in a film that you sit on a bench and watch. Instead, each element is like a light source, or a trigger, and they ignite an experience. The Factory is a huge lump of concrete: a gloomy, black-and-white, really brutal building. It has a certain heaviness, and I wanted to create something that would contrast with that. I was always looking for this contrast, and the colour in what I'm making is very decisive. It works in opposition to the space. Maybe the building has been wishing for this, too. The space works with these works, and they also work with the building or the space.

JD: It adds a new layer of colour to this strange and brutal space. The building's shape is odd. At the same time, it becomes less so once you understand the essence of it as a factory—that is to say, when you have some insight into the function that determined its original structure, you understand it a little better. But at first sight, it is very strange.

SG: Exactly, that is what's so fascinating about this venue: both the geographic location and the unfamiliar world within its architecture.

JD: Maybe because narrative is absent from your work, viewers will access it through the visual rather than through a story. Are we directed straight into the visual world, into the image itself?

SG: Yes, but at the same time, we also have the sound and the building around us. Basically, I see the visual components as elements that will activate an atmosphere throughout the entire building. They're like triggers. But the images are strong; they will be like portals.

JD: Interesting that they will be like the space, to some extent. It's full of passages and openings.

SG: The building has a circulation system. It's a functional building. It's an old factory, so it had to have routes between spaces in order to work.

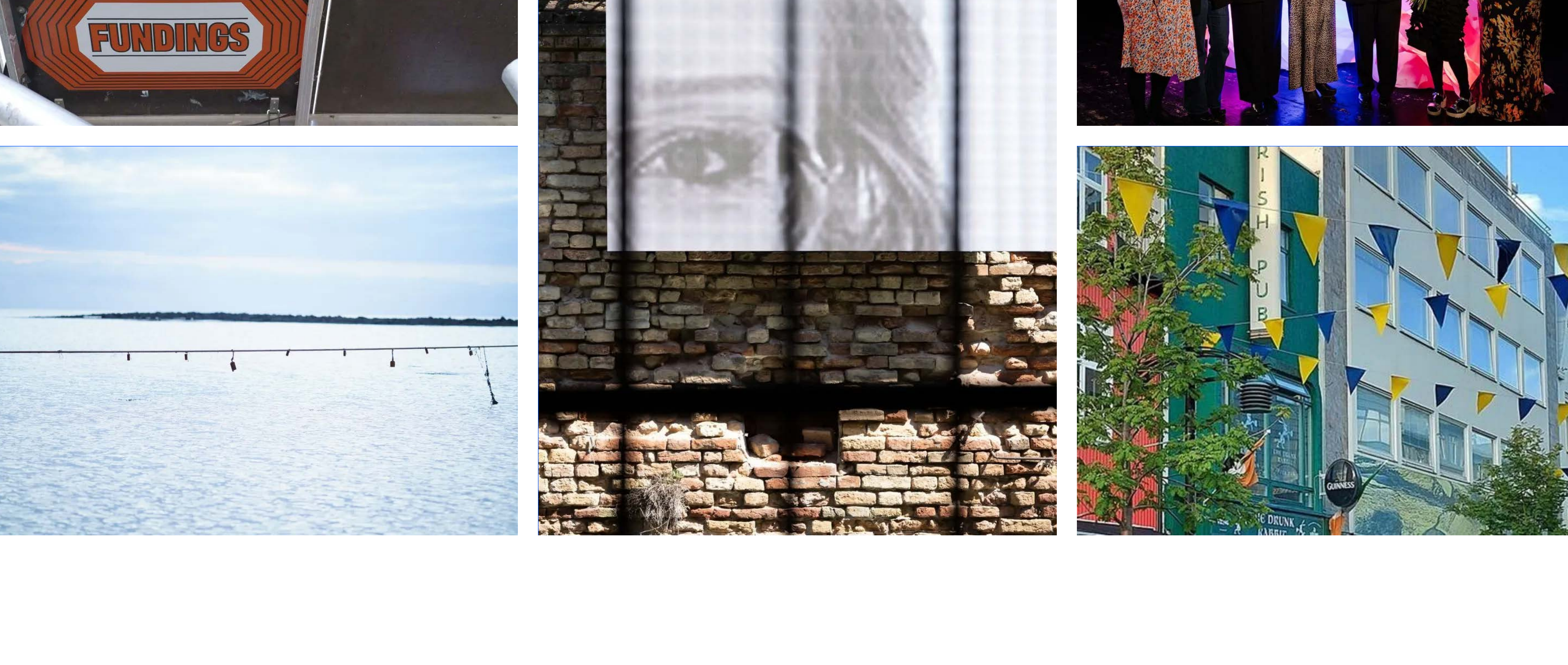
JD: It's kind of amazing that the visual world you're working with clearly has a connection to the organic—that is, to life and movement—and even though it doesn't include anything recognisable, you can't talk about it as abstract. You don't go there; those aren't the connections that come to mind. Instead, you think about time, a temporal world, rather than approaching it like a painting. Temporality comes first, which is interesting.

SG: Yes, what we are looking at is time, energy, electric light, an image generated by a high-voltage source. This is what we perceive, and it affects the viewer's psyche. The electric light loops, forming a mechanical rhythm; at the same time, it's organic in nature. It's not exactly an object being observed, but rather a connection to some kind of other world.

"Conductive Path" is on display from May 20 to July 16, 2023. For more information: [verksmiðjanhjalteyri.com](#)

Author: Jóhannes Dagsson | Photos: Courtesy of the artist and Verksmiðjan á Hjalteyri Share: [f](#) [t](#)

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