



Winter 2023 Exhibitions Launch: Friday 20 January
Esker Foundation Proudly Presents the Alberta Premiere of
***The Visitors* by Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson**



Ragnar Kjartansson, still from *The Visitors*, 2012. Nine channel HD video projection, Duration: 64 minutes. Photo: Elísabet Davídsdóttir, Sound: Chris McDonald. Video: Tómas Örn Tómasson. Image courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York, and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik. Gift of Graham and Ann Gund to Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, and Gund Gallery at Kenyon College, 2015.1.1.

Through elements of theatre, music, and visual art, Ragnar Kjartansson creates performances in which he explores the intertwining of pathos, humour, and collective emotion.

As stated in *The Guardian* newspaper, where *The Visitors* is named as one of the [25 best art works of the 21st Century](#):
 “*The Visitors* mesmerised viewers, most of whom stayed for its entire 64 minutes, moved to tears of euphoria and sorrow.”

About the exhibition:

PRESS PAGE & HIGH RES IMAGES DOWNLOAD LINK:

<https://eskerfoundation.com/pressrelease/winter-2023/>

Ragnar Kjartansson: *The Visitors*

21 January - 30 April 2023

The Visitors is presented as part of Calgary Folk Music Festival's 8th Annual BLOCK HEATER Music Festival, powered by ATB.

The Visitors is a large sound and video installation consisting of nine audio and video channels that document a single-take musical performance. Running for approximately an hour, the work depicts eight musicians performing a folk music opus of repetition and cannon blasts," based on collaged texts by artist Ásdís Sif Gunnarsdóttir. The musicians, all friends of Kjartansson's—including Kristín Anna and Gyða Valtýsdóttir, founding sisters of the historic Icelandic band Múm; Kjartan Sveinsson, keyboard player with Sigur Rós, the musical wonder Shahzad Ismaily, who has worked in the Icelandic music scene and also alongside artists such as Will Oldham, Yoko Ono and Bob Dylan; and composer and frequent collaborator Davíð Þór Jónsson—each sing and play a different instrument, isolated yet in unison. The work is based on a video called *The End-Rocky Mountains*, that Ragnar Kjartansson and Davíð Þór Jónsson originally created at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in 2009.

The work is set in a large, dilapidated, nineteenth-century estate—Rokeby Farm—in upstate New York, with each performer occupying a separate room of the mansion. The audio and video tracks were recorded individually but are shown together in such a way that the audience is placed at the center of a continuous choral piece, a dynamic and moving ensemble performance that Kjartansson refers to as a "feminine nihilistic gospel song." Music is a fundamental element in all the of artist's work and here, as Kjartansson himself says, it is used as "an almost sculptural element." Through its unique arrangement of music in space, *The Visitors* creates a layered portrait of the house and its musical inhabitants.

With its title and concept inspired by the last album (before their nearly 40-year hiatus) of the Swedish group ABBA, *The Visitors* offers a reflection on the themes of the strength and persistence of affective ties; of friendship, love, and loss; and of the melancholy and romanticism of life.

Featuring: Ragnar Kjartansson, Shahzad Ismaily, Davíð Þór Jónsson, Kristín Anna Valtýsdóttir, Kjartan Sveinsson, Þorvaldur Gröndal, Ólafur Jónsson, and Gyða Valtýsdóttir.

Collection of the Gund Gallery at Kenyon College, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

The Visitors is presented as a Special Event with Calgary Folk Music Festival's 8th Annual BLOCK HEATER Music Festival, 9-12 February 2023, powered by ATB. Join us for a special celebratory event on Thursday 9 February, 7-9pm at Esker Foundation.



BIOGRAPHY

Ragnar Kjartansson engages multiple artistic mediums, creating video installations, performances, drawings, and paintings that draw upon myriad historical and cultural references. An underlying pathos and irony connect his works, with each deeply influenced by the comedy and tragedy of classical theatre. The artist blurs the distinctions between mediums, approaching his painting practice as performance, likening his films to paintings, and his performances to sculpture. Throughout, Kjartansson conveys an interest in beauty and its banality, and he uses durational, repetitive performance as a form of exploration.

Kjartansson (b. 1976) lives and works in Reykjavík. Major solo shows include exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Reykjavík Art Museum; the Barbican Centre, London; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Park, Washington; the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich; Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; and the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; among others. Kjartansson participated in The Encyclopedic Palace at the Venice Biennale in 2013, Manifesta 10 in St. Petersburg in 2014, and he represented Iceland at the 2009 Venice Biennale. The artist received the 2019 Ars Fennica Award, and was the recipient of the 2015 Artes Mundi's Derek Williams Trust Purchase Award, and Performa's 2011 Malcolm McLaren Award.

Notes for Editors:

1. **Exhibitions Launch: Friday 20 January, 6-9pm, free.**
Esker Foundation, 4th Floor, 1011 9th Avenue SE, Calgary. Cash bar.
2. **Special Event: Thursday 9 February, 7-9pm at Esker Foundation, free.**
The Visitors is presented as part of Calgary Folk Music Festival's 8th Annual BLOCK HEATER Music Festival, 9-12 February 2023, powered by ATB. Cash bar. www.calgaryfolkfest.com
3. **Exhibition Tours:**
When All is Said and Done: Exhibition Tour with Shauna Thompson.
Thursdays 23 February & 27 April, 6-7pm, free.
Dust in the Sunlight: Exhibition Tour with Naomi Potter.
Thursday 16 March, 6-7pm, free.

Esker Foundation presents an extensive range of free online programs for all ages. Developed in response to our exhibitions they are designed to increase accessibility and to encourage participation in contemporary art.

Visit www.eskerfoundation.art/program/current to find out more and to register.

About Esker Foundation

Esker Foundation is a privately funded contemporary art gallery located in Calgary, Canada. The gallery connects the public to contemporary art through relevant, accessible, and educational exhibitions, programs, and publications. Esker Foundation reflects on current developments in local, regional, and international culture; creates opportunities for public dialogue; and supports the production of ground-breaking new work, ideas, and research. Founded in 2012 by Jim and Susan Hill, Esker Foundation is a new model for institutional relevance, curatorial focus, and audience engagement. Find out more at www.eskerfoundation.art or follow us at @EskerFoundation.

Hours:

Wednesday to Friday: 11-6pm

Saturday & Sunday: 12-5pm

ADMISSION IS FREE

Accessibility: the gallery is barrier-free

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