

Light in the Darkness

Stray Beacons

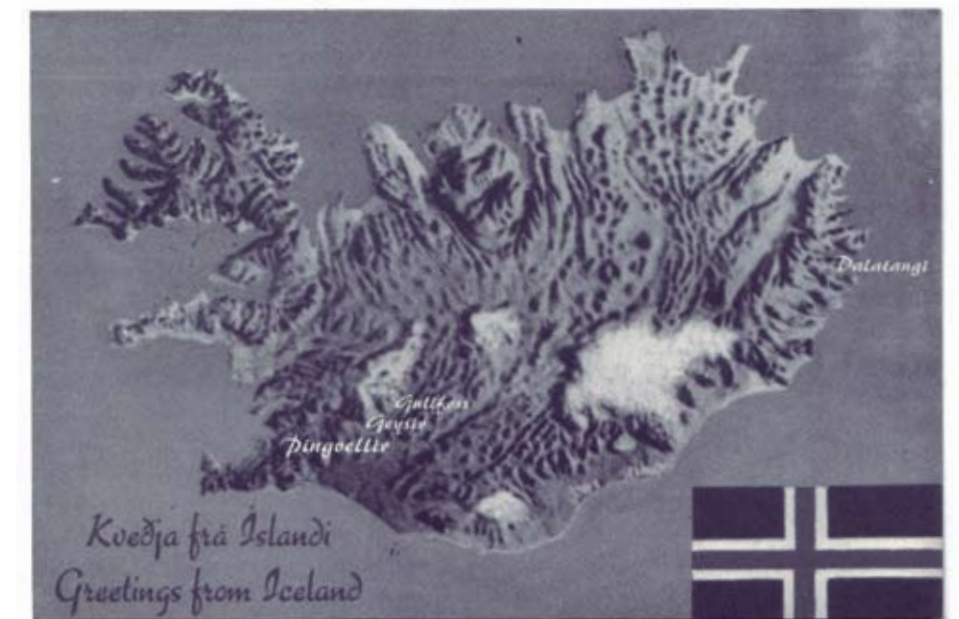
Should you be on your way to Iceland this summer, there is an alternative reason to take on a trip to some of its most remote places, other than solely enjoying the scenery. One of the two curators of an art project, which stretches out along the peripheries of the island, reports on an ongoing exhibition that may be a sign of our turbulent times.

text MARKÚS THÓR ANDRÉSSON

A winter of chaos and dismay has left Iceland in economic ruins with a collapsed banking system, a good-for-nothing currency, unforeseen international debts and a new government struggling to cope with the situation. Uncanny times carry the winds of change. In the arts, as in all other realms of society, the situation necessitates resourcefulness and innovation. The Reykjavik Arts Festival, held annually in the spring, has prided itself in recent years on two major international contemporary art projects spread around the whole island. This time, things were formulated a bit differently, but with no less geographic range.

Remote Corners

Four local artists were invited to exhibit in as many light-houses around Iceland, one in each quarter of the country. There are more than one hundred operating lighthouses on the coasts of Iceland, the oldest dating back to the turn of the 20th century. The intriguing structures attract a great number of visitors each summer. Together with installing the exhibitions in four remote corners of the island, the artists were offered space in various media where extensions of their works will appear over the course of the summer. These so-called 'flashes' pop up on the radio, on television, in the newspapers, in online news, as well as



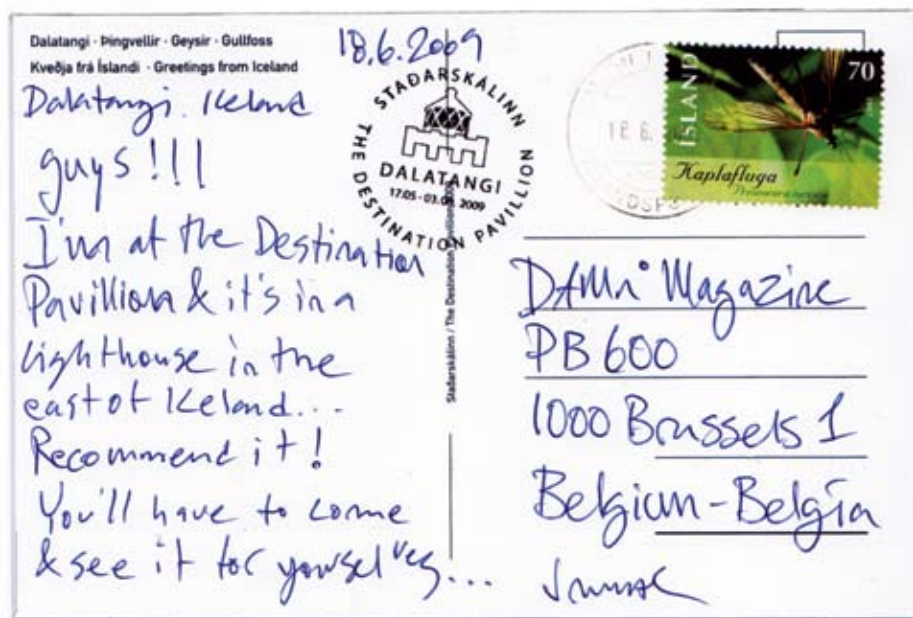
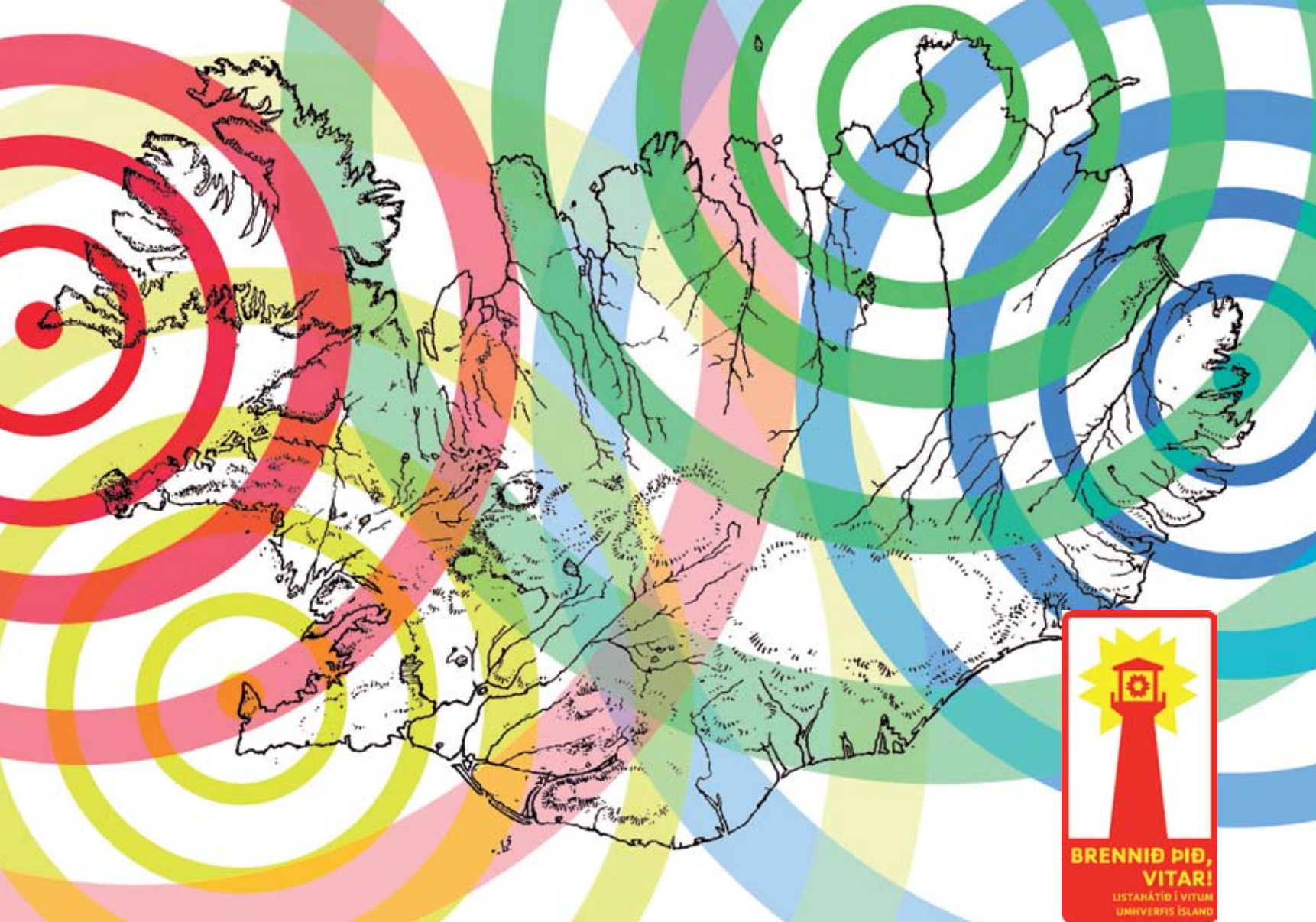
on Facebook. The itinerant nature of the project inspired the title: Stray Beacons.

The participating artists are of the same generation, born in the early or mid Seventies. A mutual element in their otherwise diverse work is the search for novel ways to re-

Sliceland: The Westest Pizza in Europe, 2009
Curver Thoroddsen
(facing page)

Destination Pavilion, 2009
Unnar Örn





Stray Beacons, map displaying the location of the lighthouse (top)

Destination Pavilion, 2009
Unnar Örn
photo: the artist

late to their immediate surroundings, society and the audience. They have challenged traditional exhibition sites and the art institution with projects in such fields as the public space, the press, private publishing and the Internet. Their contributions to Stray Beacons reflect the unorthodox exhibition sites, their nature, history and local

communities, but they also include playful and uplifting notions, much appreciated in light of the general situation in Iceland at the moment.

Puffin Pizza

The Icelandic Love Corporation put on a spectacular performance on the day the exhibition opened in the spring, an elaborate routine organised together with a brass band. Indeed, Of Course! is a symbolic demonstration of the significance of harmony among individuals within a community. The artist collaborative is exhibiting in the Reykjanes Peninsula, close to the international airport in the southwest of Iceland. On the furthestmost point on the other side of the island, in Dalatangi Lighthouse, Unnar Örn invites visitors to choose from a selection of his post cards. They can write a greeting to a friend or address it to themselves, as evidence of the journey to this faraway destination. The caretaker of The Destination Pavilion, as the project is called, stamps the cards with a custom made postal stamp and the smallest post office in Iceland, in the nearby town of Mjölifjörður, delivers them to the right recipient. In Kopasker in the North, Ásdís Sif Gunnarsdóttir displays her expressive video installation, Assan Yrkir, shot and edited on location. She documented her ampli-

fied and poetic self, studying the lighthouse structure, observing the ocean and a flock of sheep from a nearby farm. In the furthest point of Iceland to the west, on the edge of the bird cliffs of Bjargtangar, Curver Thoroddsen opened his temporary pizza parlour, Sliceland: The West-east Pizza in Europe. Inspired by the nesting birds in the nearby cliffs, he offered visitors the exclusive Puffin Pizza, a delicacy that has proved to be more controversial than the traditional pepperoni slice.

With five to eight hundred kilometers from one lighthouse to the next, viewers are hardly expected to manage seeing all the venues of Stray Beacons. However, people are likely to come across some of the flashes in the form of kitsch pizza advertisements, abstract poetry, striking images or subtle correspondence randomly infiltrating the local media. This is one of the first art projects consciously aspiring to react to the dramatically changed state of affairs after the economic meltdown in Iceland. It suggests that in the aftermath of the current crisis sweeping over the world, we might expect further introvert elaborations, where localized subtleties and singularities will be explored.

Stray Beacons, curated by Markús Thór Andrésson and



Dorothee Kirch, runs until 3 August and is an initiative of Reykjavik Arts Festival, the Icelandic Maritime Administration, lighthouse guards at each lighthouse and cultural representatives from the respective communities.

www.listahatid.is

Indeed, Of Course!, 2009
Icelandic Love Corporation (top)
photo: Bernhard Ingimundarson

Assan Yrkir, 2009
Ásdís Sif Gunnarsdóttir (above)
photo: the artist