**Summary**

This text focusses on the importance of memory in the art practice of Georg Guðni. It also looks at the role memory plays when his works are perceived by an audience. The subject of memory is approached by examining the background and premises of Georg Guðni’s working process, which is a major part of the artist’s personal history. Collective memory, as part of our personal history, is carried by us and fused with the imagination of the situations we experience in nature and art in a way we cannot explain in words. The ambiguous nature of art keeps the communication process between the viewer and the work open to various interpretations. Georg Guðni’s experiences in nature became exposed to both to art history and the spirit of the art world during his studies in Reykjavik and Holland in the 1980s. During this time the definition of memory affected and shaped the artist’s thinking and his work. The purpose of art is not to replace nature but to create a parallel to our specific relationship with it. In contrast, to the Icelandic landscape tradition, which concerned itself with the depiction of specific natural environments, Georg Guðni’s paintings created a totally new, unseen space for us to encounter, by and through his memory as well as ours.
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Introduction

Besides there is a big difference between my view and to that Ásgrímur and the other pioneers had of the land. He chose a specific panoramic viewpoint where topography played the main part. My pictures base on memories or ideas that I store in my head. I paint memories, he painted landscape. But even though my places are not any specific places, people can attach them their own memories and compare the places to those they know.¹

Art cannot replace nature, but art can assist people to get closer to the nature. The images that Georg Guðni Hauksson created from his memory were executed from his personal connection to the living and breathing nature. Even the best artwork cannot replace the originality of the experience that we encounter while spending time with nature, the mood we cannot explain or put in words, but we sense it on our skin and in our body. In the best case, art can function like a road sign or a compass assisting us to relocate and define ourselves in the surroundings we stand in or even experience something very close to that in nature. Being open for various interpretations the nature in Georg Guðni’s paintings manage to recall and reinforce the memories and experiences, events and places we have seen and where we have been.

The creation process of this text has proceeded during a time span of around two years and it could be described as something similar to that what Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) meant saying that the dialogue with the subject becomes a source for understanding.² Even though Gadamer was discussing his theory while interpreting literature, I find that his concept of the “horizon of meaning” illustrates well the process that I have been through, but also which defines Georg Guðni’s relationship to his work and nature. For Gadamer, horizon of meaning consisted of meanings, preconceptions, expectations and questions to the one who is interpreting.³ In Georg Guðni’s exhibition catalogues among others Jón Gunnar Árnarson (1995⁴ and 2003⁵), Jón Própe (1998⁶)

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³ Anttila, Tutkiva toiminta, 556.
⁴ Jón Gunnar Árnason, Georg Guðni, ed. Ingibjörg Björnsdóttir (Reykjavík: Norræna húsið, 1995)
and Hannes Sigurðsson (2007) have all gave an account in defining the nature of Georg Guðni’s paintings. The fact that has guided in choosing the topics that discussed here has been my interest in what has happened and is in “behind the painting.” I have wanted to keep this inter-relational feature that as mentioned was for Gadamer “source for understanding,” visible in this text including Georg Guðni’s voice in the (italic) citations. The text is not trying to pursue a chronological account of artists’ career rather to explore and expose Georg Guðni’s experiences and artistic work to different theoretic viewpoints.

In chapter one I will take a look at the ways memory is defined and placed in the arts from the 19th century onwards. I relate Joan Gibbons’s book Contemporary Art and Memory 2007. I count the imagination as a part of memory and mirror the functions of the imagination when looking at a landscape in nature and landscape to that on the two dimensional surface of a canvas. I place imagination firstly, in the context of environmental aesthetics where I refer to Pauline von Bonsdorf’s view of the function of imagination in nature and secondly to art philosophy, where I introduce art philosopher and critic Jón Próppe’s definition of the “motor” in the artwork. My understanding is that in Georg Guðni’s pictures the viewer creates his “horizon of meaning” through his own memory and imagination.

In chapter two I want to try to understand what actually happened to Georg Guðni in the middle of Icelandic nature. Georg Guðni was the same man in the middle of the nature as he was in front of the painting canvas. Similarly, when he started to paint he was in the same body that had experienced something very special in the nature of Iceland. Similarly when he travelled in nature he was the same artist. I will discuss phenomenology and how our body comes to carry memory as suggested by Merlau-Ponty’s in his concept of the Memory of the Body. As identified in humanistic geography and in the research by Hanna Torvinen, places imprinted in our memory guide our way to look at our surroundings. Discussed in the end of the chapter two, colours and forms of Icelandic geology and climate search their counter part from Romanticism and the concept of the Sublime.

In chapter three I will look back in time, in Iceland and Holland and to those premises Georg Guðni started to build in his artistic career. The atmosphere during the

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7 Hannes Sigurðsson, ed., The Mountain (Reykjavík: Art.is/ Akureyri Art Museum, 2007)
first years of his art studies in Reykjavík in the beginning of the 1980’s made the life for
the young art student who chose to walk towards the crowds if not impossible, then
demanding. Events of the New Painting in Iceland is presented in art historian Laufey
Helgadóttir’s article. In Holland the legacy of the oil painting tradition is reflected in the
artists’ work throughout the centuries. When discussing oil painting tradition in Holland
I refer the Finnish translation from Hugh Honour’s and John Fleming’s A World History
of Art. My aim in the chapter three is to identify features from the Icelandic and Dutch
art history possibly affected on Georg Guðni’s memory, his work and later artistic
career during the years in the art schools in Reykjavík and Maastricht.

1. The Recalling Gaze

*I might be on my way home and gaze on the side for a moment and see
a valley, a canyon, a swamp, something – and this image attach on me.
And, when I come home I try to memorize it, to challenge myself
comparing and fusing this image together with memories from other
places.*

In this chapter I will briefly present some definitions of memory in the context of art
and give examples of how these new definitions affected and shaped artists thinking and
their work at different times and in various fields of art. I will take a look at the concept
of “Collective memory” and its impact on the ways we observe our surroundings and
art. Our personal history is carried in our memory. This mixes with our imagination
when we look at nature and art and it is this that arouses in us a visual impulse that is
subject to our gaze and surpasses our understanding. We cannot explain this vision in
words. The ambiguous nature of art keeps the communication process between the
viewer and the work alive and stays constantly open to various interpretations.

1.1 Memory and Arts

Memory has long roots, being the most important feature for learning where good
memory has been understood as a cultivated method of storing and retrieving

knowledge accurately. As related in the Joan Gibbons’ book *Contemporary Art and Memory* in the seventeenth century this viewpoint shifted to see memory no longer as a vehicle, but as a type or form of knowledge that originates from an experience. The idea was more closely formulated by English philosopher, teacher and doctor John Locke (1632–1704) who saw that a process of recalled knowledge reproduces “images or sense impressions.” As a result of Locke’s thinking, memory started later on to be connected to the imagination and has been a significant step to understanding the ways in which the concept of memory can be applied to different fields of art as in literature.

Interrelation between literature, visual arts and architecture has importantly affected artists of different times and has shaped their thinking and understanding of the world. French writer Marcel Proust’s perspectives in literature are reflected in the concept of memory in contemporary art practices. According to Gibbons during his search for “authentic personal knowledge” Proust came to understand memory as a part of “a persons inner self” focussing on the emotions rather than being understood as simply being a source for knowledge. Proust’s seven-volume novel *In Search of Lost Time (À la Recher du temps perdu)*, 1908–1922) was derived from his own memories and personal sentiments and is widely know for the concept of petite madeleine (vol.1, *Swann’s Way,* 1913). In petite madeleine Proust illustrated memory as a form or particular experience of taste that creates a reason for involuntary memory (or “natural memory”), unexpectedly raising “sensations and emotions” that are located out of the reach of “intellect and voluntary memory.” Joan Gibson counts that by applying the events of his personal history Proust’s novel managed to present the role of memory for his public as “a creative power,” and that it apparently was also for Georg Guðni.

During Modernism the ideas of memory and the duration of time guided artists towards new ways of representation. Early twentieth-century writer, French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941) defined memory as “the intersection of mind and matter”

10 Ibid., 2.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 3.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 6.
in his work *Matter and Memory* (1896). Bergson had a strong influence on Cubists and importantly on Futurists stating that “the past merges into the present through “simultaneity” and “duration.”¹⁹ Art historian Amy Dempsey has said that theories of consciousness and intuition applied to processing memory and experiences had a large impact on intellectuals and artists’ thinking.²⁰ Parallel to this in fine art, the question of representation was taking various new paths where the old concept of painting and its possibilities were turned upside down.

In Georg Guðni’s artistic work the concepts of memory and imagination were functioning besides as “creative power,” a platform between the artist and his audience. In an artist’s personal history, consciously or unconsciously, things seen, heard or learned often become a part of the process of creation in the final work. As thematically presented in Georg Guðni’s large retrospective exhibition at Akureyri Art Museum in 2007 the subjects of mountain, valley and horizon²¹ had an important personal meaning that had formed his world view. These subjects made visible through his original method of oil painting created an environment for the artist and importantly for his audience to gaze upon not as simply aesthetic landscapes, but as internal mirrors inviting us and our personal memories and imagination to complete the work. Memory and our cultural background have a significant role in how we interpret places and also influence the meanings and values we attach to them.

### 1.2 Collective memory

When we are exploring how Georg Guðni involved memory to his work it becomes vital to take a look to besides subjective also to more general features that form and construct our memory and through this guide and direct our life. Not least images we carry in memory guide our life and help us to handle challenging changes in our surroundings. The concept of collective memory was coined by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) who according to Anna Green thought that "memory was a mental faculty that could only exist inside the individual," where remembering

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²⁰ Dempsey, *Styles, Schools & Movements*, 89.
occurs "in dialogue with others within social groups." Halbwachs saw that our physical surroundings “bear our and others imprint” and for that reason spatial images are of crucial importance for and to the collective memory. The researcher of environmental aesthetics Anne-Mari Forss sees that collective memory is also part of those features we can experience through our physical senses similarly to “historical dimension, depth of time, social dimension, images, atmosphere and genius logi.” Furthermore for Forss these features create ground for the way we understand and explain the places.

Maurice Halbwachs saw images of our external world inseparable from ourself, for example in situations when moving to new surroundings. For Halbwachs the idea and layout of the old home in mind my help us to “adapt” to the new environment. This fact finds its counter part also in Georg Guðni’s life. When moving to Holland, he was away from Iceland only in a physical way. He continued to develop familiar mountains of his home country such as in Snaefellsjökull 1986, Ingólfshöfði, 1986 or Ernir, 1987 (Picture 1.) “of the mind” as Georg Guðni told to art historian Ádalsteinn Ingólfsson in 1987. In Ernir Georg Guðni was already started to work with a theme characterised his later oeuvre, “the line where earth and sky met.”

The collective memory spread over the Icelandic landscape, over its history in language, texts and images and helps us to see the character of the layered subjects Georg Guðni searched for and used as a background for the development of his work. Museum director Hannes Sigurðsson noted that in Iceland at the beginning of the 20th century their political development is reflected in the landscapes that carry imprinted

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25 Forss, Paikan estetiikka, 79.
26 Halbwachs, “Space and Collective Memory,” 47.
27 Ibid., 48.
29 Mortensen and Perez, Strange familiar, 28.
30 Ibid., 37.
32 Mortensen and Perez, Strange familiar, 36.
traces of national conscious as a symbol of communal and cultural positions: "It is like a mirror that we hold in our hand both to look at our self and to show to the world where were are placed." In a course of continuous changes taking place in the surrounding world, art can offer a surface to reflect and importantly to help create our own approach to the world. As Joan Gibbons has stated art can open up a possibility for individuals to share and communicate their reconfigurations and understanding of memory. The past challenges the present when the modernistic, experiencing 'self' needs to construct their own world view and to face values rooted in the collective memory. As formulated in traditions present in religion or in our relationship to nature.

1.3 Memory and Imagination

Open landscape is very important for your imagination – there you can let your eyes and your mind wander in the distance where there is nothing, and then you look inside your brain and find what you are searching for and finish the painting.

Our contact to nature and experiences are formed through active communication where natural surroundings can offer a fruitful surface for imagination. For professor of Art Education Pauline von Bonsdorf imagination can create a space between our self and the world that allows contemplation for questions such as how we want to interpret and behave in the middle of it. von Bonsdorf sees that imagination does not exist out of the blue, but is based on reality: If we are open to approach it through imagination, we can see the world from new perspectives and possibilities. For von Bonsforf the fact that in the end world is constructed in a very similar way between people, is present especially inside the specific culture where our memories and experiences from landscape can be seen a communal, shared experience of a place. In this text subjective and communal memory, and imagination are seen as parallel concepts.

34 Gibbons, Contemporary Art and Memory, 6.
35 Mortensen and Perez, Strange familiar, 50.
37 von Bonsdorf, “Maisema toiminnan ja kuvittelun tilana,” 40.
38 Ibid., 46.
39 Ibid., 48.
Imagination per se as read above is not something that exists solely in nature, landscape or painting, but something that people produce to construct, organise and interpret their perceptions. Invisibility and immateriality are often connected to Georg Guðni’s paintings. In 1988 he got DV’s Culture Prize whose jury announced: "Georg Guðni taught us to look at the landscape through different eyes and see the beauty that is present both on the earth and invisible, in our minds, material and immaterial."\(^{40}\) For Georg Guðni “painting was not about the subject, but the spirit.”\(^{41}\) Art philosopher, teacher and art critic Jón Próppe has discussed this abstract problem we sometimes face when looking at contemporary art: We are supposed to see something more than our eye reaches, the presence of the invisible art. Próppe makes a remark that sometimes philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre, have stated that artwork actually exists only outside its material form created not by the artist, but in the imagination of an audience.\(^{42}\) Próppe points out that according to this viewpoint both the artist and the audience stand in an equal position in understanding and interpreting the work.\(^{43}\) To avoid going further in defining what art is, we can agree with Próppe and see art here as the realisation of the creative process that artists have executed through their hands and minds\(^{44}\) and Georg Guðni’s paintings as outcome of crossing subjects of memory and imagination, nature and landscape, Iceland and Holland.

According to Jón Próppe a situation when we cannot clearly define what, i.e. painting is about could understand as "motor of the artwork" (vélin í listaverkinu) and through this "motor" artwork achieves interpretations.\(^{45}\) For Próppe “the motor” operates pointing back and forth between the artwork and different viewpoints: The work states something of itself concealing some kind of paradox between our understanding of the material object we see and the abstract artwork interpreted by us.\(^{46}\) According to Próppe this paradox, of the ambiguous character, makes it impossible for us to ever completely explain a work of art.\(^{47}\) This is a crucial element that takes place when we deal with, e.g. Georg Guðni’s horizon paintings like Untitled, 2011.

\(^{40\text{ATA, “Fegurð sem er hvorð tveggja jarðbundinn og hugræn,” DV, February, 26 1988, 46.}}\)
\(^{41\text{Súsanna Svarasdóttir, “Málverkið er ekki efnið, heldur andinn,” Morgunblaðið, October 25, 1987, 4.}}\)
\(^{43\text{Proppé, “Vírknin í listaverkinu,” 91.}}\)
\(^{44\text{Ibid.}}\)
\(^{45\text{Ibid., 100.}}\)
\(^{46\text{Proppé, “Vírknin í listaverkinu,” 100-101.}}\)
\(^{47\text{Ibid.}}\)
where the only thing we gaze at is a distant horizon between moss green earth and thick grey sky. In addition to viewpoints on our self-image as Hannes Sigurðsson has suggested I believe that Georg Guðni’s paintings reflect even something more, something we cannot fully explain what it is we see.

Georg Guðni brings the concept of imagination to his works by creating open and ambiguous images different from those in Icelandic art history mixing images of nature surroundings and memory together. In fact, what Georg Guðni said is that he was “trying to make visible that we are not able to see.” Here imagination plays an important role and makes his work significantly open to a versatile approach: “I am painting a landscape that is almost nothing–you have almost nothing to focus on, but it remains a landscape. You find it familiar, but I think you have to build the final picture in your head.” In the same way something very familiar, but indefinable can be found in Guðrún Kristjánssdóttir’s (b.1950) painting series Prosaic Pictures, 2008 where extremely detailed natural forms create abstract patterns, like tapestries forcing us to give them a second thought, asking where is this from, where this does belong to. They do not give any accurate definition. Georg Guðni’s paintings are also questioning memory and our “traditional manner” to look at landscape paintings. Or as Georg Guðni formulated it: “I think that the painting is a spiritual place that you can move into, or maybe the painting seduces the viewer into it. The painting makes you contemplate things or mediate upon them – it is a journey through your own memories and emotions.”

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49 Hannes Sigurðsson, “Speglandi speglar,” 141.
51 Ibid.
53 Mortensen and Perez, Strange familiar, 46.
2. The Experienced Nature

My earliest memories are of wasteland and freedom, running around in the middle of nowhere, the quietness. When you are working, you have to be out in all kinds of weather. It inspired me as an artist, standing in the rain all day where nothing was to be seen.\(^\text{54}\)

In this chapter I want to try to understand what actually happened in the middle of the Icelandic nature that was obviously a life changing experience for Georg Guðni who could again and again return to the front of a canvas and start to make these memories visible. I will first take a look at phenomenology and how it defines the processes of perception and experiencing. Icelandic geology and climate was defined in large chosen forms and muted colours by Georg Guðni to draw us to his work. As a background for depicting nature from the 19th century onwards I will shortly present two artist working during the period of Romanticism who Georg Guðni was impressed with. At the end of this chapter I will take a look at the famous concept of the period, the Sublime. In 2008 Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir curated an exhibition *Dreams of the Sublime and Nowhere in Contemporary Icelandic Art*, that was the first exhibition exploring the concept of the sublime in Icelandic visual arts.\(^\text{55}\) I will refer Emily Brady’s article *The Sublime and Contemporary Aesthetics* published in the exhibition catalogue.

### 2.1 Phenomenological background

Phenomenology connects humans to the world through their perception and experience. For this reason, it can offer a relevant background for us to see how memory is present in Georg Guðni’s work. As discussed in professor Pirkko Anttila’s book *Tutkiva toiminta*, phenomenology is a doctrine of experience of perception and how the world appears to us. More closely it is interested in our intention’s of knowledge, why objects we observe appear to us meaningful.\(^\text{56}\) Phenomenology was developed by German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) who saw that the world is a subjective

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\(^{55}\) Hafþór Yngvason, preface to *Dreams of the Sublime and Nowhere in Contemporary Icelandic Art*, ed. Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir (Reykjavík: Listasafn Reykjavíkur, 2008), 7.

\(^{56}\) Anttila, *Tutkiva toiminta*, 561.
phenomena and is constructed inside our minds. The starting point for Husserl was to define the nature of a consciousness that individuals’ worlds were consisted of. It is worth keeping in mind here that Georg Guðni never took a stand categorising himself according to some philosophical or theoretical background. Here, the phenomenological frame is introduced to clarify Georg Guðni’s relationship to nature.

Opposite to many of his countrymen Georg Guðni was privileged in so far that he became familiar with the unfolded features and places of Iceland. Despite having been born in an urban surrounding, Georg Guðni spent his childhood and youth in close connection to nature. Experiences during journeys in the middle of the harsh Icelandic nature introduced by geologist father, who had a strong influence on Georg Guðni’s forthcoming career as a fine artist and on his heightened sensitivity which enabled him to observe nature. In her studies on humanistic geography Hanna Torvinen has stated that senses and memory have a great impact on the ways we depict and locate ourselves and our surroundings as a part of the world. Memory makes it possible for us to remember connections between time and meaningful moments occurring in specific places. According to Torvinen, while seen as a part of our identity places contain also psychological meanings creating roots that can assist us later on in life to attach ourselves to different places. Important and meaningful events, sensations and places are carried in our mind, in memories from where they become to form and affect the way we perceive. As discussed by Hans Belting, Marcel Proust thought that places will be remembered because they are the destinations “to one must journey” like cathedrals, the sacred places from the past. Even a first car came to Iceland in 1904 still on the first decades of the 20th century travelling on a rural and sparsely populated country was made by horses and was in a very meaning, often an unexpected journey.

According to phenomenology our body is a key feature in preserving memories because it is in direct contact to our surroundings. French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1906–1961) became Husserl’s successor. He continued the studies of the relationship between humans and their surrounding world that for Merleau-Ponty was

57 Anttila, Tutkiva toiminta, 329.
59 “Muistojen värittämät maisemat.”
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
lived, perceived and experienced through a cultural historically formed layer.\textsuperscript{64} As related in the earlier mentioned Anttila’s book \textit{Tutkiva toiminta}, to Merleau-Ponty it is our body that is most directly in contact with the world and from that he coined the concept of the Phenomenology of the Body.\textsuperscript{65} According to Anttila, Merleau-Ponty believed that it is our body that contains all knowledge and our relationship and understanding of the world is formed through continuous observations happening in the dimensions of time and space.\textsuperscript{66} This phenomenological point of view helps us to see how Georg Guðni most likely had used the body-memory in his artistic work in recalling atmospheres and feelings, but also as a part of the creation process for his world view. Next I will take a look to some features of Icelandic geology and climate, which in large scale had a crucial impact on Georg Guðni’s art.

Geology and weather has had a significant role in forming Icelandic culture and has shaped a great part of people’s everyday life in language and actions. As described at European Commission’s eTwinning program’s homepage \textit{Water and Fire},\textsuperscript{67} the reason for Iceland’s special geology is the Mid-Atlantic Ridge that it is formed from and is the meeting point of the Eurasian and American continents. What makes Iceland an interesting destination for a geologist is that it is the only place where, is possible to observe and research the ridge on dry land. Caused by the activity of the two continents that are continuously moving apart and the hotspot situated under the Europe’s largest glacier Vatnajökull, the volcanic activity in the country is high. In average a volcano erupts in Iceland every four years.\textsuperscript{68} Besides geology also climate in Iceland is highly dynamic as illustrated in professor Ölafur Ingólfsson’s article \textit{The dynamic climate of Iceland}.\textsuperscript{69} Iceland belongs to the cool maritime climate. The border between the cold sea temperatures and air masses of the Arctic and the warm air masses of lower latitudes can cause a rapidly shifting weather within hours. The mild winters and low summer temperatures on a large part of Iceland indicate also that the country is part of the arctic climate zone. In Iceland the local topography and altitude also influences the speed and direction of the wind. The highest wind speeds take place in the highlands, where Georg

\textsuperscript{64} Anttila, \textit{Tutkiva toiminta}, 562.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 562, 564.
Guðni often travelled and arouse dust storms.\footnote{70}{“The dynamic climate of Iceland.”}

Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson (b.1967) has brought the characteristics of both Icelandic geology and climate to his multi-disciplinary projects inviting the viewer to participate in his work through spatial experience. Eliasson has reconstructed “landscapes” from the original soil materials, stones and water in his recent work in Riverbed, 2014 (Picture 3.)\footnote{71}{“Olafur Eliasson, Riverbed 20.8. 2014 – 4.1.2015,” Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, accessed August 14, 2014, http://en.louisiana.dk/exhibition/olafur-eliasson.} built in Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark. In these works Eliasson has recreated an undefined natural area inside a museum space where similarly in its original context the visitors are walking on the work as if they would be in a natural environment. In The Weather Project, 2003 Eliasson created a gigantic light source that functioned as an artificial sun where visitors could sun bathe on the floor of Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall.\footnote{72}{“The weather Project, Artwork, Studio Olafur Eliasson,” Olafur Eliasson, accessed September 9, 2014, http://olafureliasson.net/archive/artwork/WEK101003/the-weather-project#slideshow.} In great measure Eliasson’s work is drawn from the spatial and physical experience of nature where the contact with the work, its materiality and the viewer turns to the centre as he describes: “Contact is content and is a visual narrative that takes you up close and far away, that asks you to turn around, to look at the landscape anew, to look at yourself.”\footnote{73}{“Studio Olafur Eliasson,” Olafur Eliasson, accessed August 20, 2014, http://www.olafureliasson.net/.

2.2 Signs from the past

When Skeiðarárédóttur flooded in February 1982 I was with the measuring men in the east for a while and we stayed in Skaftafell. It was an ordinary winter, sometimes frost, sometimes rain. Sometimes we could see Ingólfsfjöll and sometimes not; it had great impact on me to stare it. This was before I started to paint landscape, but I took these photographs. I was started to look on these matters, I see that now later.\footnote{74}{Einar Falur Ingólfs, “Fjallabí var min sjálfstæðisbaráttu,” Lesbók Morgunbladsins, March 29, 2003, 5.}

Similarly to art nature is also viewed differently during different periods of history, loaded with the current beliefs and theories of man’s place in the surrounding world. An example of this long relationship is the fact that in many cultures, nature has originally functioned as a surrounding for sacred places such as like caves in Iceland as churches.
"One should be quiet in nature” or ”it is not proper to run in the forest” might be traces of this legacy inside the Finnish culture and the collective memory. Today this way of thinking is for myself a very natural way to respect nature. During Modernism churches and cathedrals started to be seen differently than before. In his book The Invisible Masterpiece art historian Hans Belting has placed a novel by Marcel Proust’s within the social context of memory: In his novel In Search of Lost Time Proust illustrated a new way to interpret and value art and places from the past through the concept of the cathedral. During Modernism, opposite to their old function as a place to connect heaven and earth, immortal and mortal, the cathedrals became valued for modern people as “places of memory.” According to Hans Belting Proust applied the cathedral to his text firstly as a metaphor for the construction process of a personal life (’self’) and secondly, to illustrate “a lost masterpiece of religious art, one that existed only in memory.”

Proust’s usage of the cathedral as a place reminding us of the past finds an interesting reflection in Georg Guðni’s Icelandic landscape. An interesting resonance appears in art philosopher Gunnar J. Árnason’s words who regards the landscape in Georg Guðni’s painting as being like a “hazy memory of place whose location one no longer remembers.” Georg Guðni approached historically glorified areas and natural formations like mountains and glaciers through simplicity, but with respect. Something similarly quiet and modest can be seen in Hubert Nói’s (b.1961) Painting of the painting, 2003 where the title already reveals the background of the long tradition to the artist is placing in his landscape motif.

The fact that Georg Guðni learned to read the traces of time, saw behind the current moment, formed an important and deep perspective to his work. Georg Guðni explained to Kevin Power how he was fascinated and impressed following his father and his colleagues’ working in the middle of nature and how they could “read the land.” Through this occurrence, Georg Guðni understood how time is constantly present, but often hidden from our eyes. More closely Guðni said that: “In fact, it was an opportunity to see thousands of years back and even to see marks from trees that had

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76 Ibid., 226.
77 Ibid., 225.
78 Jón Gunnar Árnason, Georg Guðni, ed. Ingibjörg Björnsdóttir (Reykjavik: Norraena húsið, 1995)
80 Mortensen and Perez, Strange familiar, 34.
been bent down in a flood four thousands years ago. It’s these kinds of layers, I think that are in my paintings and make time present in them.”\(^{81}\) Georg Guðni’s scientific approach towards nature and landscapes was echoed in his artistic work.

In the beginning of the 1980s photography taught Georg Guðni to look and depict the changes in nature whereas sketchbooks, water colour paintings, drawings and texts could be seen as tools in defining and giving meaning to his experiences. Anyhow they were only one stage towards a final work carrying time inside and revealing layers of his process. Afterwords Georg Guðni realised that for him photographing was “more as developing eye and documenting surroundings” stating: “Later I felt that it was perhaps unnecessary to have film in the camera.”\(^{82}\)

One of the first references to Georg Guðni’s later interest in painting is the connection between earth and sky can be found from the first black and white photographs like *Icelandic landscape*, ca. 1982-83 (Picture 4.)\(^{83}\) or *Icebergs in Jökulsárlón*, ca. 1982-84 (Picture 14.)\(^{84}\). In *Icelandic landscape* the structure in the front part reminds one of the similar effect that is created on canvas with thinly applied oil paint like in the work *Untitled*, 2003 (Picture 5.)\(^{85}\) Even photographs remained in a secondary position in Georg Guðni’s art practice in that they could provide an important stimulus to recalling places, moods and atmospheres whilst working in the studio “not to paint from, just to look at, to get the mind travelling.”\(^{86}\)

### 2.3 Depiction’s of the Sublime

In the 19th century during Romanticism, nature offered an alternative to the ordered world of Enlightenment.\(^{87}\) For Georg Guðni the ideas and techniques from Romanticism's depiction of natural phenomenas with colour and light worked as a source of inspiration. According to Nicole Myers during the Romanticism Neoclassical history painting was rejected in favour of imaginary and exotic subjects applying the

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\(^{81}\) Mortensen and Perez, *Strange familiar*, 34.
\(^{82}\) Ibid., 46.
\(^{83}\) Ibid., 54.
\(^{84}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{86}\) Mortensen and Perez, *Strange familiar*, 4.
sketch like freely painted and visible brushstrokes in their finished paintings. In addition Myers has pointed that parallel to the direct observation landscape painting was influenced by mixing together real and imaginary locations with new kind of spontaneity.

One of the artists from Romanticism Georg Guðni was impressed by was the English Joseph Mallory William Turner (1775-1851) in his use of light. Georg Guðni told Kevin Power that Turner is one of those artists he is “always looking at and who’s later works and his water colours seem to be mostly about light.” Turner’s paintings characterised by composition and form created by applying paint on the canvas without outlines, visible in Turner’s famous painting Rain Steam and Speed, The Great Western Railway, painted before 1844. In this work Turner has created the picture area almost solely from layers and structures of paint. In Germany, besides feelings of awe inspired by landscape artists included transcendent meanings in their works. Their work were images of symbols, signs and “universal spirit” which were hidden in nature. Transcendental features presented through mood and colour that are often attached to Georg Guðni’s work and can also be found in Caspar David Friedrich’s (1774-1840) paintings. According to Friz Novotny in addition to depicting ruins, sea and mountain motifs Friedrich painted also imaginary landscapes where the special character to all his nature themes is their power to deliver special moods and phenomenas of nature.

The impact of Romanticism in Georg Guðni’s paintings was noticed by art historian Halldór B. Runólfsson in Georg Guðni’s exhibition Ný landssýn (The View of the Land) in Nýlistasafninu at 1985 that for Runólfsson represented a “romantic view where each picture mediates the mood on which the paintings are based on.” This can

89 "The Aesthetic of the Sketch in Nineteenth-Century France."
90 Mortensen and Perez, Strange familiar, 32.
91 Fred S. Kleiner and Christin J Mamiya, Gardner’s Art Throught the Ages (USA: Waldsworth/Thomson Learning, 2005), 840.
93 Galitz, "Romanticism."
94 Kleiner and Mamiya, Gardner’s Art Throught the Ages, 838.
be seen in Georg Guðni’s later painting Untitled, 1995 (Picture 6).\textsuperscript{97} Importantly the light, appearing behind the thick blanket of clouds is reminiscent of the handling of the light present in Turner’s and Friedrich’s paintings. A panorama formed canvas places the viewers in an unspecified natural location and directs their gaze towards the horizon through an effective composition. The foggy or rainy atmosphere is created with moderated hues of a light grey tone with blue and green. A cross-patterned structure of evenly constructed pencil strokes binds “together the air”\textsuperscript{98} between two mountain slopes from the left and the right edge of the picture.

During Romanticism, one of the definitions of the Sublime was expressed in literature by the British politician and philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1797) in his text \textit{A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful}, 1757, where Burke importantly connect the meaning of sublime to our feelings and emotions.\textsuperscript{99} As Kleiner and Mamiya relate in the book \textit{Gardner’s Art Throught the Ages}\textsuperscript{100} sublime meant simultaneously experienced fear and fascination in nature. Art philosopher Jón Gunnar Árnason has stated that Georg Guðni’s paintings cannot be counted as an idealism behind the sublime because his Untitled landscapes are not depicting any given place in reality, but rather “places for contemplation” in our mind.\textsuperscript{101} For Árnason we see rather than feel visions that we are carrying inside us: these visions are not connected to any concrete recognizable form, but as imprints of the passing moment\textsuperscript{102} which Georg Guðni always recorded “according to his memory.”\textsuperscript{103}

In America in the middle of 20th century Barnett Newman’s (1905-1970) Colour field paintings strove to overcome those limits always present in rational experience of nature and assist an audience a free and totally limitless spiritual experience.\textsuperscript{104} Barnett Newman considered his works as “objects for meditation” leading an audience to a transcendental platform where it was possible to face oneself similarly to that in front of a vastness of unlimited nature.\textsuperscript{105} As discussed in his text \textit{The Sublime is Now}, 1948

\textsuperscript{97} Mortensen and Perez, \textit{Strange familiar}, 52.
\textsuperscript{99} Kleiner and Mamiya, \textit{Gardner’s Art Throught the Ages}, 828.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Árnason, “Skoðun Georges Guðna Haukssonar á landinu,” 14.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Gabriel, \textit{20th Century Art}, 527.
for Newman the ideas of the sensation of the sublime, were not in the past, but part of the presence of each viewer. Concepts of truth and the sublime were made tangible for an audience through a large-format colour plane that was approached from a close distance making it impossible to see the whole image at once. For Newman this made the viewer abandon a traditional perception facilitating the viewer to enter into the “space” of bright colours constructed from the thin layers of paint.\(^{106}\) One example of Newman’s presentations of the sublime can be seen in his painting *Vir heroicus sublimis*, 1950-51 *(Picture 7.)*\(^{107}\) where the only pictorial elements of the large horizontal red canvas are two thin vertical lines.

Georg Guðni approached the idea of the sublime in his paintings similarly to Barnett Newman, through large geometric, colour fields where nature and the phenomena of depth was studied at a close distance. This method gave Georg Guðni a new possibility to develop his subjects concentrating on painterly terms and more importantly on bringing his memories of physical, phenomenologically experienced nature concretely closer to himself and his audience. An example can be found in *Untitled*, 1991 *(Picture 8.)*\(^{108}\) where familiar themes of earth and sky became fused together. Similar divisions of the picture plain to the lower and upper part, as suggesting the earth and sky on both sides of the horizon line, can be found in Ingólfur Arnarsson’s (b.1956) *Untitled 8*, 2013\(^{109}\) and Hrafnkell Sigurðsson’s (b.1963) *Sides VI*, 2012\(^{110}\).

Interesting comparisons between the afore mentioned works from these three artists can be made because of their background in Jan van Eyck’s Academie in Maastricht: Arnarsson in 1979-1981, Georg Guðni 1985-87 and Sigurðsson in 1988-1990.

Today when detached from a self-centred world view, the concept of the sublime can serve as a ground in art for a new kind of learning as related in Emily Brady’s article *The Sublime and Contemporary Aesthetics*. Moved from its origins from literature to natural treatment led to a situation where the sublime became connected to “natural objects and phenomena.”\(^{111}\) Emily Brady points out that changes in people’s

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111 Emily Brady, “The Sublime and Contemporary Aesthetics,” in *Dreams of the Sublime and*
preferences on tastes and experiences of nature and aesthetics lie behind the contemporary interpretation of the concept of sublime.\textsuperscript{112} Importantly, Brady sees that the explanation to the neglected discourse on the sublime, might be that similar conditions for the sublime faced in the past have today become so rare and importantly the corresponding situations for sublime nature experiences have changed their shape.\textsuperscript{113} When one comes to see and experience nature more deeply than only as a source of ones self-discovery, Brady believes the concept of the sublime is still valid in guiding human beings through great affection towards “an aesthetic-moral relationship” with nature.\textsuperscript{114} As seen in the examples of this chapter in visualising our mental and spatial connection, visual arts has been important in their aim, not to replace the real experiences, but drawing us possible closer to nature.

3. The Path to The Front of The Canvas

\textit{When I was starting, it was nice to experience this great expression of The New Painting. One read art magazines, followed what was happening abroad – one became continuously smaller. It was to be independent. Something that was apparent was that even though some style was considered a new there were artists who had been working similarly for decades. (…) Through that I saw that I needed to think everything from within myself.}\textsuperscript{115}

In this chapter I want to show what kind of impact the years spent in the art schools in Iceland and Holland had left on Georg Guðni’s memory, on his work and artistic process. In Reykjavik Georg Guðni was forced to confront the memory and weight of the oil painting tradition that was rooted inside the Icelandic culture and discover in his own way to approach it. The revolutionary atmosphere of the Icelandic art scene made life for young art student who fought for independence if not impossible, then at least demanding. In the end of this chapter I want to briefly take a look at the origins of the oil painting tradition in Holland and how the development of the landscape painting took place there. In my text on Dutch art history I relate to Hugh Honour’s and John

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{114} Brady, “The Sublime and Contemporary Aesthetics,” 55.
3.1 Icelandic art history

It is widely approved by Icelandic writers and scholars that the landscape painting style adopted by Iceland arrived from France and Denmark where the first painters were establishing their profession. For Halldór B. Runólfsson “the cezannian-landscape painting that Icelandic artists applied to their pictures through times” came from France, through Jón Steffansson (1881-1962). In the beginning of the 20th century artists were involved in the creation of the nation and its identity process. According to the art historian Kristín Guðnadóttir “Þórarin B. Þorlákur (1867-1924) and Ásgrimur Jónsson (1876-1958) these painters were destined to become the pioneers of Icelandic painting” and their “task” after coming back to the country was “to portray the Icelandic landscape.” Jóhannes Sveinsson Kjarval (1885-1972), arrived after Þorláksson and Jónsson, described the situation of the visual arts in an interview in 1922: “I knew Iceland had no history of painting and this awakened the sense of responsibility that is part of every individual. I wanted insights into what was and what is (…)” While Þorláksson’s and Jónsson’s concentrated on historical locations from the past like Þingvellir, it was Kjarval who parallel to these same motifs took the first steps to apply the invisible features like elves and spirits of the landscape to his paintings. Curator and director of Nordiska Akvarellmuseet Bera Nordal has pointed out that in general life for the artist, who did not paint in a traditional style in Iceland, was not easy in the beginning of the 20th century.

Georg Guðni sought technical and painterly influences from the pioneers. Hannes Sigurðsson has pointed that Jón Stefánsson’s recognisable mood of an atmosphere and construction mode of the picture area are visible in many Georg Guðni’s mountain motifs. Paul Cézanne’s (1839-1906) ideology and painting style had a strong

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120 Bera Nordal, foreword to *Í Deiglunni 1930-1940* (Reykjavik: Listasafn Íslands, 1994), 10.
121 Jón B.K Ransu, “Um réttlæti ofar mannlegum skilningi,” 3.
influence on Stefansson who modified these directly to his depiction’s of Icelandic nature we can see in Stefansson’s painting of Eiríksjökull, 1920 (Picture 9.)\textsuperscript{122} the motif that also Georg Guðni made his own interpretation in Eiríksjökull, 1987 as illustrated in the book The Mountain.\textsuperscript{123} Artist and art critic Jón B.K Ransu has noted that while Jón Stefansson’s massive paintings are tightly connected to the earth under our feet and painted similarly to other pioneers from the visible in front, Georg Guðni is rather searching airy and open, undefined places “according to his memories of landscapes that he has kept safe inside him is a form of a feeling or emotion.”\textsuperscript{124}

When placed in the context of Icelandic art history, Georg Guðni’s work occupies a position in which the following interpretation of his thinking becomes a challenge that requires a wider knowledge outside of art history. In Iceland, the knowledge of the traditional stories and texts stand in a crucial position in understanding the meanings of the landscape. The importance to people’s autobiographical memory, places and landscapes are a significant part of the collective memory and have been crucial for the national identity process in many countries, as in Iceland. Hannes Sigurðsson sees that Georg Guðni brought a new pictorial language to depiction than the Icelandic audience was used to, by questioning “the sacred, festive mood” of the old paintings.\textsuperscript{125} This can be seen in a difference between Ásgrímur Jónsson’s watercolour Hekla painted in 1909\textsuperscript{126} to Georg Guðni’s realistic Hekla, 1985, an interpretation of an eruption at Hekla in 1980. (Picture 10.)\textsuperscript{127} Georg Guðni clarified this difference to Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir in the interview in 2003: "He chose a specific panoramic viewpoint where topography played the main part. My pictures base on memories or ideas that I store in my head. I paint memories, he painted landscape."\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{123} Hannes Sigurðsson,“Where the earth meets the sky,” in The Mountain, ed. Hannes Sigurðsson (Reykjavík: Art.is/ Akureyri Art Museum, 2007), 38-39.
\textsuperscript{124} Jón B.K Ransu, “Um réttlæti ofar mannlegum skilningri,” 3.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibíd.
\textsuperscript{127} Olafur Kvaran ed., Georg Guðni (Reykjavik: National Gallery of Iceland, 2003), 16.
3.2 Updated horizon

In Iceland the collective memory of the land has stayed present among people in “sofa paintings” reminding people of these remote places and landscapes as they looked in the past. According to the art critic Anna Jóhannesdóttir and Ástráður Eysteinsson landscape paintings came to be placed above sofas as on the “pedestals” where they played a special function in Icelandic homes reminding us of the past and the present “entwining nature and cultural memory.” In the 1980’s the movement of the New Painting around Europe and United States took foothold also in Iceland where the new generation of artists and art students created a new contact to painting where the old landscape subject was totally abandoned. According to art historian Laufey Helgadóttir the common feature to the new paintings was the wild and aggressive creation process, where reality was interpreted in a new, subjective mode, concentrating on the depiction of human communication, body, existence, individuals soul and everyday experiences. In 1980 Georg Guðni enrolled at the Icelandic College of Art and Crafts in Reykjavík where he exceptionally to any other student started to make experiments combining the traditional mountain subject to the style of the New Painting.

As documented in Sigmundur Ernir Rúnarsson’s article the statement that “the art is not decoration, but aggression and a memorial of life” illustrates the debate of the new direction of Icelandic visual arts on the early 80s. Artists were recalling both their economic and artistic independence under the state regulated politics that had been ruling Icelandic art life from its beginning. Their eagerness to make change to the past was expressed in two simultaneous exhibitions Gullströndin andar and UM. Even Georg Guðni participated in these both exhibitions, aggression was far away from that he was looking for. For him the old symbolism of landscape tradition revealed another kind of horizon which he gazed at through his own experiences and memories: It gave me a sense of real contact with what I was doing, and it made me feel that I was

133 Rúnarsson, “Listið er ekki punt heldur aggressjón og minnisvarði um lífið,” 8-11.
following the same steps as the first painters in Iceland a hundred years ago. (...) It was as if I were working directly out of the tradition of Icelandic art history. This was something I felt very strongly about because I very much wanted to separate myself from the whole impact of contemporary fashions in painting. From this period Orustuhóll, 1983 became an important work in Georg Guðni’s search for a new mode for painting. Naturalistic depiction, similar to that in the painting of Hekla (Picture 10.), a mountain on a cloudy spring day and was definitely a surprise during the time of its execution.

Even though neglected position on the early 80s in Iceland, the subjects of mountain and landscape have definitely not vanished, but continue to offer a valuable source for contemporary artist. New and more recent openings to the mountain subject had been visible, e.g. in Hrafnkell Sigurðsson’s photographic piece Untitled (snow mountain 1), 1997. In his Untitled (snow mountain 1) (Picture 11.) Sigurðsson’s depicts the melting snow pile at an unspecified parking lot area. Through his image Sigurðsson manages to exemplify the fact of how little is needed to draw such mundane “mountain” phenomena back to its origins and to nations landscape painting tradition.

3.3 The painting Tradition in Holland

Being away from Iceland, I had to use my mind’s eye to see the mountains I wanted to paint, and I discovered that actually I wanted to paint them from memory, not from direct observation ... The mountains had become a means to an end. I suppose I am really trying to come to terms with concepts like stillness, awe, even memory itself.138

After finishing his studies, at the Icelandic College of Art and Crafts in Reykjavík in 1985 Georg Guðni continued his studies at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht Holland, the country to which the origins of oil painting can be traced. Holland had became an important resort for Icelandic artists during the 60s and 70s and in addition to the before mentioned Ingólfur Arnarsson and Hrafnkell Sigurðsson before Georg Guðni also Finnbogi Pétursson (1971-81) and Helgi Þorgils Friðjónsson (1977-79)

135 Mortensen and Perez, Strange familiar, 35.
136 Ibid., 36.
studied in Jan van Eyck Academie. It was not only various exhibitions by the young art student who could search his impulses and ideas for his own painting\textsuperscript{139}, but during his time away from Iceland he needed to find a new approach to his familiar mountain motifs, which were now far away on the other side of the sea.

As related in the Hugh Honour’s and John Fleming’s book A World History of Art in Holland oil painting technique was created and developed by Jan van Eyck (1390-1441). The background for the development is in the Dutch book-painting tradition where matt tones of the old tempera painting were to be replaced with the bright colours.\textsuperscript{140} Egg yellow which had been used as a binder for colour powders, was now replaced with linseed-oil.\textsuperscript{141} Flanders was also the first place in Europe in developing the air perspective, where a depth is created through stages of transitions of colour.\textsuperscript{142} As discussed by Honour and Fleming the new oil painting technique facilitated through a slow and gradual method where transparent layers, which together with a hard enamel-like surface created an impression of depth to a picture.\textsuperscript{143} This feature we can see also in Georg Guðni’s valley paintings like Untitled, 1995.

(Picture 6.)

As mentioned before in this text, landscape images always carried layered meanings of history and their surrounding culture. According to Ann Jensen Adams the landscape tradition in Holland has veiled both aesthetic and ideological connotations of politics, religion and economy.\textsuperscript{144} Similarly to Iceland also in Holland the early landscape pictures could according to Jensen be seen as one of the “social sites and issues around which identities were being constructed.”\textsuperscript{145} As in Iceland, nature the landscape painting in Holland offered the surface for a creation for both national and “communal identity.”\textsuperscript{146} In Holland, whilst depicting the famous subjects of its’ time like the sea trade and windmills and the sky, clouds are most often put in the dominant role. As related in the Honour’s and Fleming’s book, Dutch painter Aelbert Cuyp (1620–91), brought to an image through an effective handling of colours that carried an

\textsuperscript{139} Sússanna Svarasdóttir, “Málverkið er ekki efnið, heldur andinn,” Morgunblaðið, October 25, 1987, 5.
\textsuperscript{140} Hugh Honour and John Fleming, Maailman taiteen historia, transl. Merja Itkonen-Kaila, Jyri Kokkonen and Seppo Sauri (Otava: Finland, 1992), 376.
\textsuperscript{141} Honour and Fleming, Maailman taiteen historia, 376.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 377.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Adams, “Competing Communities,” 38-39.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 44.
important mediating mood, atmosphere and time of day. In the Cuyrp’s sea motifs, like *The Maas at Dordrecht*, ca. 1650-90 (Picture 12.)[^147] the sky is mirrored into the water where the artist has connected the sky and the earth (water) with the one colour, from the top edge all the way below the horizon line.

A pioneer of the abstract painting, Piet Mondrian started his career following the landscape painting tradition presented earlier by his countrymen. Already presented in Cuyrp’s work, Mondrian’s early landscapes like *Farm near Duivendrecht*, 1916 (Picture 13.)[^148] depicts a familiar mirroring effect in nature, form where we see similarities to Georg Guðni’s interest in binding together earth and sky. Georg Guðni had a personal contact to Mondrian’s paintings during his studies in Holland and has told Kevin Power that he “(...)saw small landscape paintings and felt that he was engaged in similar steps or in the same kind of area that I was involved in.”[^149] Mondrian’s work made Georg Guðni think “about how close landscape, geometry, and abstraction are to one another.”[^150] According to Kermit Swiler Champa, between 1908-1910, Mondrian started to simplify the subjects, concentrating on the materiality, the heavy structure created with vertical and horizontal brushstrokes[^151] through which he thought, as stated by Foster & al. that the underlying structure of the world could be brought onto the surface of the painting.[^152] According to Foster & al., crucial point in Mondrian’s work was the moment when he came to realise that painting was no longer about transcending the world, but of the painting itself where the importance lays in the codes created in colour, plane and line.[^153] The similar importance of the painting event in Georg Guðni’s work is noticed by Jón Próppé who has identified his work also as “expressions of artists relationship to his subject, put on the language of painting.”[^154] The legacy of the painting tradition in Holland has stayed strong all the way 20th century.

In the 1980s Dutch art life was colourful where expressive paintings followed the

[^149]: Mortensen and Perez, *Strange familiar*, 34.
[^150]: Ibid.
[^153]: Foster et.al., *Art Since 1900*, 149-150.
trend the country had been involved with since the late 1940’s. Painter and sculptor Constant (Constant Anton Niewenhuys) (1920–2005), painter and printmaker Corneille (Cornelis Guillaume van Beverloo) and painter Karel Appel (1921-2006) were three Dutch members of the expressionist art movement CoBrA between 1948–51. The name of the group was based on the letters carried from Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam and influenced by children’s art, primitive art and folk art. The group had a great impact on coming generations and painting in Europe. Similar expressiveness to CoBrA members paintings can be found during the 1980s in Rene Daniëls’ (b.1950) work, who became an important figure for the Dutch art scene. He was influenced by the underground culture of the 1970s and 1980s and executed works in several mediums. Rene Daniëls had a lectureship at the Jan van Eyck Academie in 1987. An example of Daniëls’ interest to fill canvas with three dimensional “spaces” can be seen in his work Aux Déon from 1985. By fusing text, figurative elements and colourful architectural constructions on a dark background is like Daniëls creates suggested perspectives to the spaces different from that we meet on the surface of canvas.

During the years in Holland, Georg Guðni’s technical knowledge was fostered by Dutch art history and its oil painting tradition. The use of paint and colour in a creation of space, three dimensional perspective as part of Van Eyck’s, Cuyrp’s, Mondrian’s and Daniëls’ work echoes in Georg Guðni’s valley and horizon subjects as well in his large colour field paintings and combined in his work Untitled, 1990 (Picture 15.): “I was very much concerned with the idea of depth; where one part is set further back than the other. I was also intrigued by the idea of mirroring forms. And, my brushstroke changed: it became longer, and I started to move the brush from one side to the other or from top to bottom.” Art historian Gertrud Sandqvist has compared this specific pattern of vertical and horizontal brushstrokes, the style that Georg Guðni applied to his

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159 Mortensen and Perez, Strange familiar, 123.
160 Ibid., 38.
paintings to weaving\(^{161}\) and can further seen for example in works like  *Untitled*, 1995 (*Picture 6.*) and *Untitled*, 1991. (*Picture 8.*) This painting technique had for Georg Guðni’s also another meaning: ”*With each layer time is put in the work. So the past comes in. Then, one puts over the new layer and then it has come a new day. Then, one carries on, so that this takes some months ... It is like one puts memories inside the work...*”\(^{162}\)

**Conclusion**

Memory in Georg Guðni Hauksson’s work and artistic practice is present in three ways: Firstly in the subjects that are grounding in his personal history, secondly in the development of the painting process and his artistic career and thirdly in the moment when the viewer encounters the work. The aim of this text has not been to give chronological discussion of Georg Guðni Hauksson’s art, but to cast a light to the background that formed the use of memory in his artistic work. The time spent within nature gave Georg Guðni the sensitivity to recognise a visual and spatial change around himself. Those experiences were stored his memories and from where, applied to the creation of his artistic language, visualisation of images where the connection between earth and sky created a frame for the process of oil painting. Furthermore Georg Guðni’s paintings facilitate a ground for each viewer’s memory and imagination form their own dialogue.

I have approached and interpreted Georg Guðni’s art according to his background and the impact of his personal history and events in art history. Icelandic writers and scholars have addressed different, but partly parallel running interpretations of the character and content of Georg Guðni’s paintings. For Jón Gunnar Árnason they are “places of contemplation,”\(^{163}\) Hannes Sigurðsson sees them as “reflections of our

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own self-image”\textsuperscript{164} and Jón Pröppe as “expressions of artists relationship to his subject, put on the language of painting.”\textsuperscript{165} All this that has been said concretises the fact that personal memories presented in Georg Guðni´s work are fuelling the “motor of the artwork” and providing a viewer to test them by his/ hers own “preconceptions, expectations and questions.”

The subject of memory as part of Georg Guðni´s artistic work has anyhow been discussed here only from the surface meanwhile various new, interesting paths has become visible and could provide material for further research. What is left outside of the discussion here is Georg Guðni´s own sketchbook texts. Georg Guðni´s notes dealt with deeply existential and philosophical subjects and could open up further viewpoints to his memories especially when one thinks of his world view and the nature of painting. In addition, humanistic geography as only slightly passed by in chapter two, might offer a shared and fruitful platform to approach the subjects of memory and landscape. Besides, memory and horizon, as intertwined to Georg Guðni´s, Ingólfur Arnarsson´s and Hrafnkell Sigurdsson´s work could as well be a subject for further research. Through an understanding of the role of memory in Georg Guðni Hauksson´s artistic practice we can interpret his paintings differently to that of traditional Icelandic art history and approach them through a dialogue in which our personal background is placed upon new horizons.

Bibliography


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Attachment of Pictures


Picture II. Hrafnkell Sigurðsson. Untitled (Snow mountain 4), 1997, photograph on Epson exhibition fiber paper, 47 x 70 cm. Provenance unknown.

Picture 13. Piet Mondrian, *Farm near Duivendrecht*, 1916, oil on canvas, 86.3 x 107.9 cm. Provenance unknown.
