

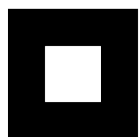
**LISTAHÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**  
Iceland University of the Arts

## **BA Project in Fine Arts**

**Statement and Thesis**

Ida Hundertmark

**BA Project in Fine Art**  
**Iceland Academy of the Arts**  
**Department of Fine Art**  
**Spring 2022**



**LISTAHÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**  
Iceland University of the Arts

## **Arrivals, Departures**

Ida Hundertmark

BA Project in Fine Arts

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Iceland Academy of the Arts

Department of Fine Arts

Spring 2022

This statement is about a 16 ECTS final project for a BA-degree in Fine Art at the Iceland Academy of the Arts. It is not allowed to copy this statement in any way without the author's consent.



**Above:** *Arrivals, Departures*, Ida Hundertmark, 2022.  
Shown at the graduation show *Verandi Vera / Being* at Kjarvalsstaðir 21-29 of May 2022.  
Photography by Ida Hundertmark.

The work *Arrivals, Departures* shown at the graduation show in Kjarvalsstaðir in May 2022 is a continuation of a body of work exploring the differences between a shelter and a house, and between a house and a home. The thoughts around the symbol of a house and what happens to our relationship toward it when it is no longer fixed at one specific location are starting points to the piece.

In it, select elements from houses are merged with suitcases. Holes cut through the bag allow glass windows to be fitted to them, and softer bags have roofs of houses visible through the top or a wooden house front sticking forward like a lived-in annex.

I have come to think of a home as something not necessarily contained within a house, but as something that can be placed in a location, object, person or memory. In many ways, a home is something that witness our journey through life.<sup>1</sup> More than a physical shelter, the symbol of a house implies the sheltering of memories and emotional safety.<sup>2</sup> From this came the realisation that we very seldom leave our house without bringing something with us. These things become a safety, like a stand-in for the home we just left, and the extra work of keeping them safe with us is a necessary trouble we all go through. In the novel *Heaven and Hell*, Stefánsson simply explains how we commonly deal with this: “The boy adjusts his bag, heavy from what we cannot do without (...)”<sup>3</sup>

We are very careful to keep track of our bags, even when we put them down to do something else; the bag is usually discreetly placed so it can still be seen by its owner, but in a way that it will not be in the way of others. I kept this in mind when the work was being placed within the exhibition space, to let them keep the active feeling of an object in use.

There is also something strangely intimate about a collection of bags, each containing personal objects, stacked against each other. The tension in the bag created from the absence of an immediate presence of an owner is interesting to me. How did they end up here? Is the bag, or the owner, lost? Through these questions in the piece the viewer is also invited to think about the current world situation, with many people all over the world forced to leave their homes because of war or other circumstances. At the time of the exhibition, the war in Ukraine is one of the most urgent current news in Europe, with over 13 million people forced to flee their homes.<sup>4</sup>

The bags merged with the elements from house façades do not have the same connotations as a traditional house, but instead become more precarious. The windows inserted into the bags

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1 Ida Hundertmark, *Transitory Beings, Immutable Earth: on a migratory house, and the makings of Home* (Iceland Academy of the Arts, 2022), 9-10.

2 Claudette Lauzon, *The Unmaking of Home in Contemporary Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2017), 3-25.

3 Jón Kalman Stefánsson, *Heaven and Hell* (London: MacLehose Press 2011).

4 "How many Ukrainian refugees are there and where have they gone?", *BBC*, May 14 2022, [www.bbc.com/news/world-60555472](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-60555472)

playfully offer the viewer the chance to try to peek through them, but the act of looking through a window at someone else's home is also uncomfortable and invasive.

I also thought of the packed bag as a symbol for what we also bring with us in terms of memories and experiences. These thoughts were unexpectedly echoed through the stories shared by the people who agreed to donate their used suitcase for the piece. I gathered the bags by reaching out online, offering to pick up people's worn luggage. An overwhelming amount of people answered, and despite being strangers, many spontaneously shared a personal story of their bag. There was almost a reluctance to let them go without having given me a chance to also take over their story. In *The Storyteller*, Walter Benjamin offers the idea that memories might be like heirlooms when someone passes on, although sometimes left without an heir.<sup>5</sup> In this cSome of the bags' stories were presented to the viewer of the piece through the wall text, but the bags outnumber the stories written out for the viewer, offering the question of which one they belong to, and what the untold stories might be.

Through the work *Arrivals, Departures* I try to make the viewer think of their own journey, and how it is oftentimes placed right next to another person's. We cannot always see where we are going, or what each other have packed, but by sharing our individual stories we allow others a small insight into our luggage.

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5 Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller*, Cornell University, accessed May 14 2022, <https://arl.human.cornell.edu/linked%20docs/Walter%20Benjamin%20Storyteller.pdf>

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Stefánsson, Jón Kalman. *Heaven and Hell*. London: MacLehose Press, 2011.





**Above:** *Arrivals, Departures*, Ida Hundertmark, 2022. Installation view.  
Photography by LHI / Claudia Hausfeld.





**Above:** *Arrivals, Departures*, Ida Hundertmark, 2022. Detail images.  
Photography by LHÍ / Claudia Hausfeld.





**Above:** *Arrivals, Departures*, Ida Hundertmark, 2022. Detail images.  
Photography by Ida Hundertmark.





**Above:** *Arrivals, Departures*, Ida Hundertmark, 2022. Detail images.  
Photography by LHI / Claudia Hausfeld.



**LISTAHÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**  
Iceland University of the Arts

## **Transitory Beings, Immutable Earth**

**On a migratory house, and the makings of Home**

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BA Project in Fine Arts

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Iceland Academy of the Arts

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Spring 2022



This paper is a 4 ECTS final thesis for a BA-degree in Fine Art at the Iceland Academy of the Arts. It is not allowed to copy this thesis in any way without author's consent.

## Abstract

The thesis essay *Transitory Beings, Immutable Earth* discusses the idea of “home”, contrasted with that of an empty house or a shelter, and the intrinsic human longing for a safe space, both physically and emotionally. Discussed is the connection between reflective contemplation and solitude, and it reflects upon the act of waiting in a society that promotes an accelerated pace, and in what ways solitude is represented.

It also investigates the relationship between humans and the land, contrasting historical and cultural thoughts of nature through ecological discourse. Some of the issues following the rapid urbanisation of modern society are viewed in the light of the difference between emergency shelters, and homes. The sense of home is also examined in its separate elements and viewed from a feminist standpoint, and the house as a symbol in contemporary art is discussed. The concepts of traveling in land art, as well as sites and non-sites are also examined.

The theories mentioned above are mediated through my thesis project *Upon Shifting Land* (2021), in which I attempt to connect the viewer with the evanescent human experience when faced with the forces of uncompromising land, and the history remaining within objects, as traces remaining of a journey.

Referencing contemporary artists working with the house and nature through installations, site-specific artworks and land art, the explored themes are put into larger cultural context.



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## Introduction

Searching for a place to belong, a safe haven for memories, emotions and ideas, is in many ways inextricable from the human experience. I have found that the visual image of a house in many ways encapsulates this longing. What happens when this house is no longer fixed, but on a journey of its own through lands inhospitable for unsheltered human life? Is the house traveling solitary, or do we inhabit it through the sense of protected homeliness, and how does it feel when a traveling house returns to tell us of where it has been?

These were some of the questions I asked myself when I set out to create my thesis project *Upon Shifting Land* (2021). In this project, I built a small house (only big enough to house a chair and one person sitting down,) that was put together from smaller pieces, making it possible to disassemble the house and transport it to different locations where it then could be reassembled.<sup>1</sup>

I travelled together with the house to different natural sites, where I rebuilt it and then filmed through it, capturing the view from its only window. In the resulting video, nothing of me or the house is visible, only the landscape in its natural motion from wind and clouds. The clips from each scene is around 10 minutes, the full video just under two hours, never showing the same scene twice.

For the solo exhibition of the project, I rebuilt the house inside the exhibition room and showed through the window the video documentation together with the sound from the sites the house had visited. Inside the house was a stool, and the floor was covered with lava rocks. The visitors were invited to go alone into the darkened exhibition room, walking to the illuminated house over a gangway made from weathered reclaimed wood.<sup>2</sup> Any visitors arriving when someone already entered were asked to wait outside of the exhibition room. Once inside the house, the visitor could see what the house has witnessed during its travels, and hopefully experience a solitary journey of their own.

In this essay, I have divided the central themes of *Upon Shifting Land* into six parts: Home, Solitude, Shelter, Land, Waiting and Traveling. Through these chapters, I investigate different cultural and historical connotations of the themes, and put them into an artistic context with

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1 See Appendix.

2 See Appendix.

other artist's work. While there undeniably is much more to be said of each subject, the theories presented here in the thesis *Transitory Beings, Immutable Earth: on a migratory house and the makings of Home* analyses the theoretical background of this art piece and mediates these concepts through the context of my previous works and artistic practice.

I would like to end this introduction of the thesis with a poem of mine that was included in the exhibition text for *Upon Shifting Land*, and that in many ways summarises both the experience of the piece and the following essay:

Where will you go from here,  
and what did you leave behind?  
  
Like me, you carry things with you.  
Your searching soul can find shelter  
within my walls.  
  
Outside in,  
for this is where we meet.  
  
I will bear witness to this journey,  
and as you find rest I will whisper it  
to your heart.  
All these moments I harbour.  
  
You carry them with you,  
but so do I.

# 1. Home

The shape of a house in the middle of a seemingly empty and endless landscape. Is the house a home? Does the house's insistent desire to shelter human memory remain if the land surrounding it is shifting?

## 1.1. Shelter of memories: the house as a witness

Offering the shape of a house, even in its most base simplicity, invites the mind to inhabit it as a home. It houses not the physical objects of everyday life, but offers to act as shelter of memories and longing.<sup>3</sup> *The melancholy of memories of past homes, as well as the imagined promise of future memories, all can fit inside of a house.*

*A house that could be easily dismantled, and displaced in an unrecognisable landscape can also articulate the fragility of belonging – to a location, to a memory – and an emotional preparedness of the implications of a non-permanent shelter.*

*The homeliness and familiarity of a house can be as much in the recollection of the surroundings, and of the bodily practiced motion of moving through the surrounding nature, pathways or streets. As Henry David Thoreau points out, there are moments where the accustomed body could find its way home through the dark, without the assistance of the mind or eyes, only for the mind to realise that the body was moving it toward home upon reaching the front door.*<sup>4</sup>

This bodily sense of a house is well discussed by Juhani Pallasmaa, who states that “(...) my body remembers who I am and where I am located in the world. My body is truly the navel of my world, (...) as the very locus of reference, memory, imagination and integration.”<sup>5</sup>

When removing the familiarity of the surroundings, how does that change the perception of a house? I was intrigued with what the emotional response would be when removing the recognisable from the building, also through the direct surrounding, as perceived by the viewer upon entering the exhibition room, not likening the view offered to the viewer from inside the house.

I have been investigating different aspects of spatiality in previous work, often driven by an intuitive longing for capturing of some fleeting experience through the creation of an

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3 Claudette Lauzon, *The Unmaking of Home in Contemporary Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2017), 3-25.

4 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Stockholm: Natur & Kultur 2006), 208-209.

5 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin – Architecture and the Senses* (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, 2005), 11.

enclosed, temporal space. By creating an unexpected space that contradicts the habitual expectation of the viewer, a site outside of a traditional art gallery can reach other emotional responses.

Exploring the displacement of a house from an outside environment into an exhibition space or another unexpected setting is also the core of many contemporary pieces, such as Tracy Emin's *Knowing My Enemy* (2002)<sup>6</sup> and Do-Ho Suh's *Fallen Star* (2008)<sup>7</sup>.

## 1.2. The traditional house and home

The image of the small cottage is deeply rooted in lower working class labourers throughout Swedish (and Nordic) history, with houses being built out of available material and lumber, often on land not owned by the inhabitants. The social class who would inhabit these smaller cottages were numerous in society, lacking in assets, and facing uncertain housing- and working circumstances. Even if the houses of the impoverished agricultural working class were numerous, their cultural heritage and history is almost invisible in a lot of archeological studies, for the benefit of the dwellings of the higher classes. In modern times, most of their houses are either torn down, left to decay, or rebuilt to better suit the demand for idyllic summer houses in the pastoral countryside.<sup>8</sup>

The melancholy emotions commonly connected to the Scandinavian culture can also be represented through these houses. Ragnar Kjartansson's *Scandinavian Pain* (2006)<sup>9</sup> uses this connotation, juxtaposed with the modern visual of neon lights.

The implication of feminine domestic labour within the home is also inseparable from picturing a traditional house. The "shadow work" of women in the domestic setting throughout history still today leaves an expectancy on women and the "female touch" to create homeliness through mostly unrecognised and unpaid domestic and emotional labour.<sup>10</sup> In many ways, this calls back to feminist theory, and the labours of women in a capitalist patriarchal society. Even when my work centers around other themes, I feel it important to recognise the hidden work of generations of women left out from the academic, and strive

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6 See Appendix.

7 See Appendix.

8 Pia Nilsson and Martin Hansson and Eva Svensson, *De Obesuttnas Arkeologi – Människor, Metoder och Möjligheter*, FoU Research Report (Visby: Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2020), 10-18.

9 See Appendix.

10 Gill Perry, *Playing at Home: The House in Contemporary Art* (London: Reaktion Books 2013), 61-70.

toward an intersectional feminist movement.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.3. Inside, outside, and outside in

The constant flux in the environment makes video (and sound) a well suited medium to represent the different sites visited by the house, because it allows for the small but constant changes in nature to be present in the piece. Even the weathering of the materials through the exposure to its surroundings is a testimony to the change in nature, that is embraced in a lot of ecological art aesthetics.<sup>12</sup>

*A risk of ecological information is that when facing such huge and all-encompassing issues, our innate power seem to diminish in the hopeless feeling that follows. The act of thinking ecologically seems so overwhelming, when in fact the ecology is all around us.*<sup>13</sup> My intent is not to swarm the viewer with hopelessness, but to hopefully offer an opportunity to contemplate and gather thoughts.

The play with inside and outside of a house is touched upon by many artists. One example is Hreinn Fridfinnson's *First House* (1974)<sup>14</sup>, where a house from a novel by author Thorbergur Thordarson is realised. The house has the interior walls facing outward and the façade is turned inward, thus creating a house that, in a way, is encompassing the entire world outside of itself.<sup>15</sup>

Another approach to a house turned inside out is Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1993)<sup>16</sup>, a concrete cast using a house as a cast, leaving an unenterable negative of the inside.

I have previously worked with the creation of an "inside" in the outdoors, experimenting with the feeling of entering a space outside (but very much rooted in) the surrounding nature. In the two stage piece *Broken up / Swept up* (2019)<sup>17</sup> the starting point was the vastness of an

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11 Audre Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (London: Penguin Random House 2018), 16-21.

12 Linda Weintraub, *To Life! Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet* (California: University of California Press 2012), 39-41.

13 Timothy Morton, *All Art is Ecological* (Suffolk: Penguin Books 2021), 103-105.

14 See Appendix.

15 Kaiser and Kwon, *Ends of the Earth*, 199.

16 See Appendix.

17 See Appendix.

untrodden surface of lake ice.

The first stage of the piece was concerned mainly with breaking up the white surface by placing found pieces of storm-felled wood from the forest surrounding the lake. The wood was frozen into the ice forming a spiral, tilting slightly outward from its center, and appeared almost like floating drawn lines against the snowy ice. The height of them were coordinated to reach up to, but not cross, the line of the horizon when viewing the piece from a nearby vantage point on land.

The second stage of the piece connected the structure with the human history of the area, by using linen curtains from a castle situated by the shore of the lake. The sheer fabric was hung between the branches of the spiral, following the form and further emphasizing the downward spiral of the height of the wood. When the viewer enters the spiral, the horizon is hidden by the fabric, and the shapes of what lies outside can only be suggested through the fabric. Another important aspect of the piece is its interaction with the surrounding environment, by the linen being caught in the wind creating motion and sound, by frost covering the wood, or by traces left in the snow by the viewer.

The piece connects to the specific location through the history of the castle and its surrounding area and waterways, and to the materials through which the piece is created. It also invited the viewer to experience these materials and connections by placing the piece on the public lake, to either observe from the vantage point on land or to approach and enter by walking onto the ice, and thus the piece was in many ways completed in the finding, and subsequent experience of the piece by the viewer.



## 2. Solitude

Loneliness and solitude are similar, but still distinctly different. Loneliness is the involuntary separation from human contact, and it's one that has been even more widely known in society following the forced social isolation of the Coronavirus pandemic.<sup>18</sup> In Sweden, discussions on loneliness commonly calls it an endemic disease<sup>19</sup> of modern society.

Solitude, then, is the creative power that allows us to contemplate our surroundings, come to deeper realisations of the self and remember our loved ones. In many ways, through solitude the urge for affection and companionship can be found.<sup>20</sup> An elegiac example of this can be found among some of the last notes found from solitary traveler Christopher McCandless, written in a book margin briefly before he passed away alone in the Alaskan wilderness; “HAPPINESS ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED.”<sup>21</sup>

The aspect of taking time for solitude and loneliness in art is also worth consideration, especially through the lens of modern society where the pace of living is ever increasing. This ever growing acceleration of our time is a product of global modernization, where the individual is expected to manage more tasks in an ever smaller window of time.<sup>22</sup>

In the modern digitised society the individual is hyper-connected, and time for solitude can be sparse. In many cases the individual has to autonomously and actively seek solitude, while the constant availability through modern digital media strive to keep the individual connected at all times. In this sense, for the individual to seek solitude is a renegotiation of power between the individual and society.<sup>23</sup>

The opportunity of solitude is also a question of who is allowed to take up space, and for what. Virginia Woolf stated that for women to be equally successful in creative endeavors as men, economical assets and a room of one's own are necessities. When contemplating the difference in assets available to women in a patriarchal system, she realises that even after a lifetime of work the women have no money to spare for leisure or amenities; “to raise bare

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18 Andrew Fiala, *On Loneliness and Solitude*, June 25, 2020, [www.andrewfiala.com/on-loneliness-and-solitude/](http://www.andrewfiala.com/on-loneliness-and-solitude/)

19 In Swedish: Ensamhet är en folksjukdom.

20 Fiala, *On Loneliness*

21 Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild* (New York: Penguin Random House 1997), 152.

22 Thijs Lijster and Robin Celikates, “Beyond the Echo-chamber: An Interview with Hartmut Rosa on Resonance and Alienation”, *Krisis*, no.1 (2019): 64-68.

23 Aena Asif and Isha Mahajan, “Mapping Solitude: An Exploratory Study of the Concept of Solitude in a Hyper-Connected Modern World”, interview by Keifer Lobo, *The CJIDS Podcast*, Episode 4, October 1, 2021, audio, 34:41, [www.cjids.in/cjids-podcast/](http://www.cjids.in/cjids-podcast/)

walls out of the bare earth was the utmost they could do”.<sup>24</sup> Therefore my work also holds a feminist aspect, by physically creating and bringing this room along for myself, but also theoretically inviting others to enter it alone, and there find room for solitary reflection.

In contrast, the quintessential image of solitude from the Romantic era, Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Mist*<sup>25</sup> (1818) is a good example of how the theme of solitude before the sublimity of nature has been imagined. It is worth noting how most celebrated artworks dealing with the imagery of solitude the in the western canon centers around the imagination of the genius male intellect rising above that of the ordinary masses.<sup>26</sup>

With this in mind, I made efforts to hold a space for the viewer of *Upon Shifting Land* to experience the piece in solitude, as it was a central part of the piece from its conception and all through the performance of the transportation and rebuilding of the house. By inviting the viewer to experience an artwork alone, the only person to say how much time is needed for the individual viewer is up to the viewer themselves. Nevertheless, the societal expectation might never be completely discarded, and the viewer might still have felt hurried when trying to estimate what was expected of them. My goal was to countermeasure this by offering a calm exhibition room surrounding the house as an extra buffer between the tempo of the world and the tranquility of the house. Therein the viewer hopefully could take take their own time to just experience solitude for its own sake, without pressure of productivity.

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24 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press 1929), 34.

25 Original title: *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*.

26 Fiala, *On Loneliness*

### 3. Shelter

Small buildings can encompass a myriad of different functions, but common features are economical availability, transportability and reduced ecological footprint. The creation of small and nondemanding architecture plays a role both in recreational and bucolic pleasures, but also in harsher realities where quick assembly of shelter can be of vital importance in response to natural disaster, war or increasing homelessness.<sup>27</sup>

*Whereas the house in Upon Shifting Land* did not have such a desperate need of creation, the urgency of modern housing was nevertheless thought upon during its creation. The ever growing need of empathy and solidarity in response to human need for shelter and safety has created several houses made for quick and simple assembly in different locations.

When contemplating the environment in regard to a fast shelter, the environmental crisis of today is present at mind as well as the displacement a continuous global disregard for the environment will mean for innumerable people. When facing a harsh and unforgiving nature we are, in the end, very fragile and dependent on what shelter we have as protection against exposure to the elements.

#### 3.1. Emergency housing

The emergency accommodations of forced migration are generally created out of an urgent need for shelter, by quickly assembling emergency buildings or taking over existing buildings where there is deemed to be room, even if these buildings originally weren't designed to house people. The emergency response mainly focuses on fulfilling the key words "dry, warm, and fed", but the results are generally spaces that does not invite any sense of homeliness, safety or permanence. In an interview for the film *Shelter without shelter*, Christiane Beckmann says that the word "shelter" alone separates people, due to the fact that you normally wouldn't say that you live in a shelter.<sup>28</sup>

In the face of the rapid urbanisation the modern world is facing, there are many difficulties of creating affordable and quality housing. Villa Verde located in the Maule region of Chile, is showcasing an example of how to meet the need for affordable low-income housing by implementing incremental housing and participatory design.<sup>29</sup> One of the points made was that it was beneficial to have the formal planners of the housing interact with

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27 Rebecca Roke, *Nanotecture: Tiny Built Things* (London: Phaidon Press Limited 2016), 6-11.

28 Mark E Breeze and Tom Scott-Smith, "Shelter Without Shelter", *Architectures of Displacement*, University of Oxford. Film excerpt, 17:22. Accessed January 08, 2022, [www.shelterwithoutshelter.com](http://www.shelterwithoutshelter.com)

the informal settlers who already had created informally settled areas where the city needed to expand, but where the government had failed to support that growth. The architect John Turner said in 1963 that it was important to "view the word housing as a verb," that the solution of the fast accelerating urbanisation is to, through socio-political support, allow informal constructions of homes to be the centre of new and affordable low-income housing. By anticipating the housing of a city to be dynamic and growing, and expecting future capital growth, houses can be built that are in fact also dynamic and living homes.<sup>30</sup>

### **3.2. Emergency shelters in Iceland**

A small and brightly coloured house nestled in the Icelandic landscape also holds other associations, spurred on by the surrounding natural elements.

The nature of Iceland can be harsh and deadly, with weather changes coming on rapidly and without much warning. Travelers and hikers can easily be caught unawares by the weather, and having access to a shelter can be a matter of life and death for people caught in a storm out of reach from populated areas.<sup>31</sup> For this reason there are *neyðarskýli*<sup>32</sup>, emergency shelters, in the more inaccessible areas of Iceland; along the uninhabited coast line and in isolated mountain passes as well as along longer remote stretches of road. These huts are generally painted brightly orange to be visible in bad weather conditions, both for the traveller in need and for the emergency services. They are equipped with blankets, some food and a radio for signalling for help, and are by law not allowed for anything but absolute emergency use.<sup>33</sup>

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29 Emmaleah Jones, "Elemental and the case of Villa Verde: Incremental housing and participatory design ", 2016. Accessed January 08, 2022, [www.peopleplaces.blog/elemental](http://www.peopleplaces.blog/elemental)

30 Jones, "Elemental and the case of Villa Verde"

31 Tony Perrottet, ed., *Insight Guides: Iceland* (Singapore: Höfer Press 1992), 106

32 See Appendix.

33 Perrottet, *Iceland*, 338

## 4. Land

In modern times nature is being regarded as a commodity, and used as recreational entertainment. Throughout earlier nordic history the point of view was different, with the wilderness oftentimes symbolising dangers avoided by staying close to cultivated lands and only ventured into when strictly necessary.<sup>34</sup>

### 4.1. Unseen dangers

In folklore, there are many examples of unseen dangers in nature that threaten people who are unaware of them or disregard the danger they pose. In Scandinavian folklore, this was many times founded on the uncertainty of what could be found within the wilderness, or in the darkness. The people were wary of the unknown, and oftentimes admonitions took the form of tales with otherworldly or supernatural beings imposing the threat of nature, and the morality of the tale explaining how real or perceived danger could be averted.<sup>35</sup>

In Selma Lagerlöf's novel *Jerusalem: I Dalarna*, there is a scene where the unsuspecting and light hearted visitors to a local dance are saved by being ushered inside by a wiser old local man. By entering a house, they narrowly escape an uncertain danger imposed by the "mountain hound" heralding the coming of supernatural beings in a wild hunt, and are chastised for not realising that they should never have left the protection of the home at such a night.<sup>36</sup>

In Western fairy tales there is also the idea of the enchanted cottage hidden within the wilderness, that could be inhabited by strange beings or hold untold power, either benevolent or dangerous. It could also be a shelter containing dreams and secrets, where values might differ from the surrounding world's, and time progress differently.<sup>37</sup>

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34 Tommy Kuusela and Lars Wahlström, "Den förtrollade skogen", *När man talar om trollen*, podcast, 182:07, 2021. [www.oknytt.com/podcast](http://www.oknytt.com/podcast)

35 Kuusela and Wahlström, "Den förtrollade skogen"

36 Selma Lagerlöf, *Jerusalem: I Dalarna* (Stockholm: Fabel Bokförlag 1901), 138-143.

37 Perry, *Playing at Home*, 66-73.

## 4.2. Heaven, Hell, and Iceland

Another strong and starkly contrasting natural symbol is the prevailing Christian idea of the paradisaical gardens of Heaven, promised to the righteous as reward in the afterlife. The gardens take different forms throughout history, but invariably it is a gentle and fertile cultivated garden of plenty.<sup>38</sup>

This is not completely different from many historical descriptions of Icelandic landscapes, that followed the conventions of other medieval literature by treating the landscape as something to read through symbols and signs, similarly to reading the Bible. The convention was to make the historical environment seem like a *locus amoenus*, a pleasant and favourable place, to heighten the historical dignity of the people settling there and, in extension, to favour different social groups. In contrast, in the 1260s, the Norweigan *King's Mirror* compared the Icelandic natural landscape with Hell, ascribing religious morality to the natural features such as volcanoes, ice caps, barren lava fields and boiling sulfuric springs.<sup>39</sup>

The idea of the implications of a specific landscape is highly connected to the conventions of contemporary times, and invariably tied to culture and societal experiences. What the individual sees when viewing a landscape is influenced by their times, but is also varying depending on the viewer's personal history and experiences.

## 4.3. Nature and the life cycle

I have had an interest in how a viewer perceived different parts of nature, and how compassion and gentleness can be expressed even in parts of the natural life cycle that are commonly associated with fear or disgust. In *Touch down* (2021)<sup>40</sup> a video projection of a dead song thrush was accompanied with a field recording of bird song from the forest where the dead bird was found. The bird carcass is moving from the worms and beetles that have taken up residency in its body post mortem, making it look as if it is still breathing or occasionally moving as if moved by a puppeteer on invisible strings. The piece also had a scent accompanying it through a mix of essential oils diffused in the exhibition space.

I did not wish to lean into the radical shock value of exhibiting a rather morbid part of the death of a forest animal. Because of this, the choice of showcasing the video together with

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38 Edward J. Wright, *The Early History of Heaven* (New York: Oxford University Press 2000), 188-189.

39 Reinhard Hennig, "Environmental Scarcity and Abundance in Medieval Icelandic Literature", *RCC Perspectives*, No. 2, Rachel Carson Center Stable 2015, 37-44.

40 See Appendix.

the pine tree smell and sound from singing birds was made. The stairwell also offer the viewer the possibility to descend to the piece from the top, first coming in contact with the scent and the sound element until the bottom of the stairs is reached, revealing the projection.

It was important that the bird and its new inhabitants got respect and indisputable dignity, and thus the choice to show the piece outside of the exhibition space in the darker and unused stairwell came about. The goal was to transform the everyday place of the stairwell into an active space to be experienced, to create a space that was almost a sanctum for the experience of viewing the song thrush.<sup>41</sup>

In my practice I am interested in investigating topics with a gentleness. I believe that there is strength to be found in avoiding chock value, because the context of our society makes the individual saturated with, and numbed by, being exposed to shocking and violent content on a daily basis.

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<sup>41</sup> Kaye, *Site-specific Art*, 2-6.



## 5. Waiting

In the exhibition of *Upon Shifting Land*, the exhibition room was only open to one visitor at a time, giving the viewer the chance to approach the house alone, and take their time in both entering and leaving the house without the influence of other visitors waiting just outside the house. In that sense, the walking path through the room to the house became almost like a buffer distance, a liminal space that allowed some emotional preparation for moving inbetween the differently paced "real life" and "inside the house".

It also means that a part of the piece was that a group of visitors would have to wait their turn outside of the room. The visitors, while being able to read the exhibition text and the included images, did not know exactly what they are waiting for or how the exhibition room looked.

During the exhibition opening it lead to groups of people mingling about outside, helping each other keep track of the queueing system that automatically sprang into existence when the first visitors were told to wait. The waiting visitors ended up sharing and comparing their experiences from inside of the house, and the different views each person saw there.

The act of waiting is not inherently expected equally from people, deeming the value of some people's time higher than that of others. Those who are deemed lower in capital, be it normal or social, are also expected to endure more waiting than others. In a society that values action and motion as productive and worthwhile, the passivity of seemingly unproductive waiting is deemed time wasted. Patience to endure waiting is supposedly followed by a reward, the act of waiting raising anticipation and expectation.<sup>42</sup>

Previously in my practice I have examined the theme of hospitality as an act in the piece *You Are Welcome (Service Performance)* (2020)<sup>43</sup> shown at Myndhöggvarafélags Íslands. In the performance I took on the role of the host at a performance exhibition night, acting as service personnel and greeting the visitors outside the venue, offering my service throughout the evening. By being readily available to solve any issues or minor annoyances for the visitors, the perceived waiting time is eliminated, by having a person that unquestionably will work out whatever inconvenience hindering the immediate enjoyment of the art exhibition – having someone who is waiting on them.

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42 Irina Aristarkhova, *Arrested Welcome: Hospitality in Contemporary Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2020), 29-30.

43 See Appendix.

## 6. Traveling

The act of travelling, to leave a location to experience something and somewhere else, but then to return, outwardly similar if not exactly the same but inwardly filled with new experiences.

The house in *Upon Shifting Land* bears small traces of the journey, and shares some of its experiences with the viewer when they enter. Similarly, the viewer that enters the house has journeyed to the house over the gangway, to there experience something that they can carry with them when they leave.

Another art piece featuring a house that evolves during a journey is Simon Starling's *Shedboatshed* (2005)<sup>44</sup>, where a shed was dismantled, rebuilt as a boat and paddled down the Rhine before being rebuilt in an exhibition space.

### 6.1. There, and back again

The question if someone is ever truly the same upon returning from a journey, and if the end of the journey has to be marked by returning "home", is discussed perhaps most famously in Homer's *Odyssey*, but is still continually investigated through different media.

In *Travels with Charley*, Steinbeck writes about his journey all over the United States of America, and experiences found along the way. He sets out to rediscover his country, and finds inspiration in the everyday people and locations he visits, travelling in a simple way in a built-out pickup truck. Steinbeck comes to the realisation that a journey is not dependent on the physical traveling; it can end before arrival or continue long after the traveller has ceased to physically travel through space and time. He says, that "we find after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; the trip takes us".<sup>45</sup>

A similar view is shared in J.R.R. Tolkien's works, where the road is oftentimes referenced as something that sweeps you up and carries you from home<sup>46</sup>, and the return to "home" is both sweet and melancholic, as the emotional traces of the experiences from the journey taken changes the perceptions of reality and thus also the comfort found in returning home. Upon returning, the traveler carries with them the memory of the road then left

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44 See Appendix.

45 John Steinbeck, *Resa med Charley: för att upptäcka Amerika*, trans. Pelle Fritz-Crone (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1966), 252.

46 J.R.R. Tolkien, *Sagan om Ringen*, trans. Åke Ohlmarks (Stockholm: Norstedts Förlag, 2002), 50.

behind.<sup>47</sup>

A journey can also act as a way for the traveler to seek new inspiration, perhaps in unexpected places along the way. The great wealth of information available to the traveler about any given destination, even before their own arrival, and the increasing pace of information on “new” locations sometimes urges the view on traveling to new locations to be similar to that of consumer goods.<sup>48</sup>

## 6.2. Performance and charging an object

The act of bringing a piece to different locations, and also have it physically interact with different environments, is somehow felt in an object. It felt absolutely necessary that the house actually travelled to the different locations of filming, so that it could bear witness of sorts to the viewer later in the gallery. The attentive observer can find scratches or marks made from the process of disassembly, transportation and rebuilding it over again. Even more, the charging of the object through action is somehow felt, made more real.<sup>49</sup>

A problem of art outside of traditional viewing spaces is how the artwork can be relayed to an audience who is not present at the actual site. This dilemma has been discussed for many years in regard to land art. Is the documentation is purely proof, or commodified versions of the actual artwork, or the actual realisation of the artwork?<sup>50</sup>

In showing of *Upon Shifting Land*, the run time of the video from each site is long enough that there is a possibility that viewers don't see a change of scenery, and rarely two. The video is a story of the places the house has been, but also a story of the still contemplation of viewing the scenery ahead without expectation of a narrative for entertainment's sake. If one person returns, it might look different, but if the scenery has changed it will not go back and look the same again. No one viewer is going to see all of the video.

The representation of a site somewhere else through an artwork creates a non-site in Robert Smithson's theory; differentiating between a site existing without being imposed upon

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47 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 286-287.

48 Alain De Botton, *The Art of Travel* (London: Penguin Books 2014), 113-117.

49 See Appendix.

50 Philip Kaiser and Miwon Kwon, *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974* (New York: Prestel Publishing 2012), 104-107.

by other objects, and a non-site where objects are placed.<sup>51</sup> The artwork, being removed from the very site it is pointing toward, highlights the absence of the site within the non-site. Never truly able to completely capture the innate essence of the limitlessness of the site, the non-site nevertheless juxtaposes the objectification of the gallery to the non static site. Their relationship is not that of opposites, but of a movement; the non-site is always pointing toward the site, mapping it, through which both of them are simultaneously present and absent in the non-site.<sup>52</sup>

### 6.3. Walking the land

The inclusion of a physical journey is also deeply rooted in land art with earth performance installations, a notable example of this is Richard Long. In his *Milestone: 229 Stones at 229 Miles* (1978), Long walked 300 miles, placing stones in a line along his path. The piece is, as many land art pieces, circumstantial in its visibility and intertwines the result of the action of the artist with the earth itself.<sup>53</sup>

Another inspiring artwork is Robert Morris' *Traveling sculpture – a means toward a sound record* (1961) where a group of participants acting as builders build a structure from assorted pieces of lumber, building a structure from all the pieces. The starting end of the construction is then dismantled, and the lumber is then used to continue building on the far side. This process continues until the lumber construction has travelled all along a predetermined path. The process is documented through photographs and a sound recording of the entire process.<sup>54</sup>

Using the act of walking, I created *Tidal Line* (2019), inspired by the ocean's movements over frost-covered stones on the beaches of the Reykjavík bay area. Walking the shorelines, I noticed the traces left behind by the tide once it pulled back: the stones washed by the ocean laid dark next to the untouched ones, still covered by frost crystals. I took to sorting the line of stones, moving them to either side depending on whether or not they had been washed clean or

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51 Robert Smithson in "Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson", *Avalanche Magazine*, no 1, fall 1970, 48-71.

52 Nick Kaye, *Site-specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (Oxon: Routledge 2000), 92-100.

53 Faye Ran, *A History of Installation Art and the Development of New Art Forms* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing 2009), 152.

54 Kaiser and Kwon, *Ends of the Earth*, 46.

still carried the crystal ice. The piece was later presented through a poem instructing its recreation, and photo documentation.

## Conclusion

The themes of my practice are interconnected though separate. Curiosity and contemplation are the starting points for my research, and following the red thread of initial emotions a larger, underlying context can usually be found. While many of my subjects start in deeply personal emotion, I also find it intriguing how the themes still can remain relateable or accessible to a wider audience through the shared experience of living.

What it means for a building to be transitory together with (or completely independent from) you, and when the mind furnishes a building to be inhabited as a Home. The human relationship with, and vulnerability in front of, the forces of nature while still being emotionally attracted to it. The intrinsic human need for both contact and solitude, as well as the changes in an object through the traces that remain after an act, documenting parts of its history. How we, as beings in near constant motion, stand in front of the different pace of the land, and what reflections that can bring. I can see all of these subjects as sharing some core emotion, and through *Upon Shifting Land* and this essay, I have tried to shed some light on how they might work together.

The more I reflect upon the themes I explore through my art, the more I come to realise that most artworks I have created are somehow connected thematically. Perhaps this is the consequence of creating from the mind a human experience: it can never truly be fractionated from the mind that created it. Just like one wave follows the other, so too thoughts follow each other. While they are each different, they also spring from the same waters and after they have run their course, return to give essence to new ones. In this sense I have come to think of creative ideas, and have found comfort in that what might seem past and hidden still can inform and shape new things.

While I am very pleased with the outcome of the piece and how it was exhibited, I also think the theme and the concept can be carried on in different locations, and think an increase of the experience of the house only would make it all the more interesting. The co-creation between the land, the subject and myself is something that I find deeply comforting, and am looking forward to continue exploring in my work.

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## Appendix



1. Ida Hundertmark, *Upon Shifting Land*, 2021. (View from in the field)



2. Ida Hundertmark, *Upon Shifting Land*, 2021. (View from the exhibition room)



6. Tracy Emin, *Knowing my Enemy*, 2002



7. Do-Ho Suh, *Fallen Star*, 2008



9. Ragnar Kjartansson, *Scandinavian Pain*, 2006



14. Hreinn Fridfinnson, *First House*, 1974



16. Ida Hundertmark, *Broken Up*, 2019 (image above) and *Swept Up*, 2019 (Image below)







17. Rachel Whiteread, *House*, 1993



32. Emergency shelter in Fagradalur, Iceland.



40. Ida Hundertmark, *Touch Down*, 2021.



43. Ida Hundertmark, *You Are Welcome (Service Performance)*, 2020.



44. Simon Starling, *Shedboatshed*, 2005.



49. Ida Hundertmark, *Upon Shifting Land*, 2021 (View from assembly in the field)