

IMAGES FROM THE EDGE

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Although there had been filmmaking in Iceland since the silent era—our series includes the country’s first two sound features—Icelandic cinema was really “born” in 1978, with the creation of the Icelandic Film Fund. Two years later, Ágúst Guðmundsson’s *Land and Sons* was released with great success nationally and internationally, making the rounds of the festival circuit. Icelandic film was finally on the cinematic map.

Despite the ever-real presence of a cinematic globalization (read: Hollywood) that threatens to engulf especially the cinemas of small nations, Iceland has more than held its own in the face of considerable overseas competition. Average feature production in the past decade has been 7-8 films per year, for a population of about 320,000; as in other parts of Europe, co-production agreements are often essential. A number of recent Icelandic films—*Jar City*, *Reykjavik Rotterdam* (recently remade here as *Contraband*)—have been enormous hits at home and have opened new markets for Icelandic films across Europe.

The “edge” in the title of our series refers not only the borders of the continental shelves of Europe and North America that jut against each other across Iceland (a rather spectacular sight), but also the quality of many of the films included here. Icelandic landscapes are beautiful, but it’s a harsh beauty, and that harshness can be felt in stories that often offer their characters the starkest of choices. This is a world in which almost everything seems pushed to the limit, and what is so remarkable is how accepting these characters are of this daily reality.

This series has been organized by the Film Society of Lincoln Center and the Icelandic Film Centre. Special thanks to the Centre’s director, Laufey Guðjónsdóttir, for her support, encouragement and hospitality. Series programmed by Richard Peña.

Don’t miss these in-person appearances



Angels of the Universe/Englar alheimsins

Friðrik Thór Friðriksson, 2000, Iceland/Norway/Germany/Sweden/Denmark; 100m

Portraits of mental illness are very tricky: it's difficult to strike a balance between the pain, suffering and even horror while avoiding either sentimentalizing or sensationalizing it. Based on Einar Guðmundsson's prize-winning novel, Friðrik Thór Friðriksson's finest film is the story of Páll (Ingvar Sigurðsson), a diagnosed schizophrenic, and his relationships to his family, childhood friends and the woman he loves--until his worsening mental state sends him to a psychiatric hospital. There, Páll meets a new cast of characters, including other patients as well as hospital staff. Friðriksson creates a wonderfully nuanced portrait of Páll, moving between his moments of calm and self-reflexion and times when he's clearly out of control. The film was lauded at dozens of international festivals, while lead actor Sigurðsson won the "People's Choice" prize for Best Actor at the 2000 European Film Awards.

📍 Sun Apr 22: 8:45 pm | Wed Apr 25: 2:00 pm



Between Mountain and Shore/Milli fjalls og fjöru

Loftur Guðmundsson, 1949, Iceland; 91m

The first Icelandic sound feature is this charming tale of star-crossed lovers shot against the stunning backgrounds of central Iceland. Gunnar Eyjólfsson, later one of the country's most popular actors, plays the son of an impoverished farmer who falls in love with the daughter of a wealthy merchant. Said to be based on an actual incident, the film was the culmination of the life-long efforts of its director, Loftur Guðmundsson—who had made some silent short films—to create a genuinely Icelandic cinema.

Wed Apr 18: 2:00 pm | Sat Apr 21: 1:30 pm

Country Wedding/Sveitabréðkaup

Valdís Óskarsdóttir, 2008, Iceland; 99m

An internationally acclaimed editor—among her achievements are Thomas Vinterberg's *The Celebration* and Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*—Valdís Óskarsdóttir turned to directing with this uproarious comedy of a wedding gone spectacularly haywire. Hoping to make the day special, Ingrid and Bardi decide to hold their wedding in a small rural church a few hours north of Reykjavik. The buses are hired, and after some expected moments of tension they're on their way—until the groom's intense claustrophobia forces them to travel the backroads instead of going through a tunnel that leads under the fjords. And that's when the fun begins. Working with 4 HD cameras, Óskarsdóttir didn't use a script, but instead set up a number of storylines and allowed her actors (many from theater) to improvise their dialogue.

📍 Sun Apr 22: 2:00 pm | Wed Apr 25: 4:15 pm



Dreamland/Draumalandið

Porfinnur Guðnason and Andri Snær Magnason, 2009, Iceland; 89m

Hoping to get the multinational Alcoa Aluminum Corporation to build a giant plant in western Iceland, the government promised to build the largest dam in all of Europe to provide Alcoa with cheap electric power. Despite many warnings from various positions, the project went ahead—until the country's economic collapse in 2008 left an unfinished project, serious environmental damage and massive debt. The documentary *Dreamland* looks at the Alcoa case within the context of Iceland's economic history since its independence from Denmark in 1944, tracing a series of government stimulus projects that were sold on fear but rarely performed as they were predicted. An insightful look at the causes and consequences of short-sighted economic planning.

📍 Thu Apr 26: 8:35 pm





Either way/Á annan veg

Hafsteinn Gunnar Sigurðsson, 2011, Iceland; 85m

Two workers are assigned to paint white lines on a distant highway. One is Finnbogi, a thirty-something slacker who's actually been doing this job every summer for a while; the other is Alfred, a younger man with sex constantly on his brain and who happens to be the younger brother of Finnbogi's girlfriend. At first it seems the two just can't hit it off: every attempt at conversation ends with a thud or a quizzical look. But gradually, cracks in their respective shells begin to appear. A terrifically endearing, very wry comedy, *Either Way* features two standout performances by Sveinn Ólafur Gunnarsson (who also co-wrote the script) as Finnbogi and by Hilmar Guðjónsson as Alfred. Debut director Hafsteinn Gunnar Sigurðsson, a Columbia graduate, carefully accumulates details and observations about his characters, weaving them into a rich comic tapestry.

📍 Wed Apr 18: 6:15 pm | Thu Apr 19: 2:30 pm



The Girl Gogo/79 af stöðinni

Erik Balling, 1962, Denmark/Iceland; 90m

Perhaps not technically an Icelandic film—its production was Danish, as was its director—*The Girl Gogo* was based on an Icelandic novel (by Indriði G. Þorsteinsson), shot completely in Iceland, and featured Icelandic actors. Both enormously popular and controversial—it was seen by over 35 percent of the population—the film is a revealing document of social transition. Abandoning the family farm, Ragnar (Gunnar Eyjólfsson) moves to Reykjavik and becomes a taxi driver. His nightly rounds expose him to a different kind of Iceland; he's drawn to a beautiful young woman, Gogo (Kristbjörg Kjeld), who seems to harbor a dark secret. The hidden subject of *The Girl Gogo* is the presence of U.S. military bases in Iceland, a Cold War imposition that wound up profoundly affecting the previously rather isolated Icelandic society.

Thu Apr 19: 4:15 pm | Wed Apr 25: 6:15 pm

Ingaló

Ásdís Thoróddsen, 1992, Iceland/Germany/Finland; 96m

An interesting women's perspective on the male-dominated fishing world, *Ingaló* features an award-winning performance by Sólveig Arnarsdóttir as the title character, who works alongside her brother Sveinn on their father's small fishing boat. After a fight at a local dance, Ingaló leaves home for Reykjavik. Later, when her brother gets a job as a deckhand on a commercial fishing boat, she joins the crew as a cook; but Sveinn isn't really cut out for a life at sea, and Ingaló finds her protective feelings for her brother running up against her own complex relations with the other sailors.

Sun Apr 18: 4:00 pm | 📍 Wed Apr 20: 8:30 pm



Jar City/Mýrin

Baltasar Kormákur, 2006, Iceland/Germany/Denmark; 93m

Winner of the Grand Prize at the 2007 Karlovy Vary Film Festival, *Jar City* begins as world-weary, seen-it-all police detective Inspector Erlendur (Ingvar Sigurðsson) examines the flat of an old man who's been found bludgeoned to death. A fairly typical crime scene, except for one detail: a photograph of a gravestone on a young woman whose murder was never solved. Erlendur decides to re-open that case, in the process revealing a thick web of corruption that extends from dishonest cops to the genetic mapping of Iceland's inhabitants. A blockbuster in its native Iceland, adapted from novelist Arnaldur Indriðason's 2000 best-seller, this compelling, sinewy police procedural by the talented actor-writer-director Baltasar Kormákur expertly ratchets up the tension throughout its crisp 93 minutes.

📍 Fri Apr 20: 6:15 pm | Tue Apr 24: 2:00 pm



Icelandic national identity has always been strongly tied to both its language and literature. For Icelandic cinema this has been both a blessing and a challenge. On one hand, a centuries-old literary tradition has provided Icelandic filmmakers with narrative riches, while on the other filmmakers have had to find ways to make their mark on the national cultural scene. These “images from the edge” are indicative of the variety of ways Icelandic filmmakers have asserted their individuality—and thus step by step created an Icelandic national cinema with its own distinct identity.

Contrary to expectation, adaptations of literature are relatively rare, and instead of the major works of Nobel prize winner Halldór Laxness, filmmakers have turned to, for example, the novels of Indriði Þorsteinsson in both *The Girl Gogo* (1962) and *Land and Sons* (1980). Remarkably, only a single medieval saga has ever been adapted, and in his Viking epic *When the Raven Flies* (1984) director Hrafn Gunnlaugsson is equally attentive to Akira Kurosawa and Sergio Leone as the local literary tradition. Early feature films like *Between Mountain and Shore* (1949) and

particularly *The Last Farm in the Valley* (1950) make ample use of fairy tale traditions without relying on a particular literary text. And while belonging to the other end of the aesthetic spectrum, *Rainbow's End* (1983) draws on a variety of traditional literary sources in creating a most modern narrative.

In recent years Icelandic filmmakers have increasingly opted for the contemporary and the popular rather than highbrow classics when undertaking adaptations, with examples including *Angels of the Universe* (2000) and *Jar City* (2006). The latter film is also the most striking example of the crime revolution at the heart of today's Icelandic cinema. Its affinities to Hollywood cinema were confirmed with director Baltasar Kormákur's recent remake of *Reykjavik Rotterdam* (2008) as *Contraband*. While the introduction of crime has transformed Icelandic cinema, older traditions remain alive and well. The female protagonist of the fishing vessel in *Undercurrent* (2010) is heir to the titular character in *Ingaló* (1992): both films focus on fishing, the nation's major industry, while foregrounding issues of gender. More to the point, the works of Iceland's

best known auteur Friðrik Þór Friðriksson are invoked in two recent debut films, *Either Way* (2011) and *Volcano* (2011).

Whether due to the Icelandic literary tradition, which abounds with traveling characters, or the influence from the European art film, the road motif is in many ways the defining characteristic of Icelandic cinema. The road is absolutely central to the work of Friðriksson beginning with his debut feature *White Whales* (1987), appears in unusual form in *Country Wedding* (2008), and even its absence in *Noi the Albino* speaks to a frustrated desire.

And like the constantly roaming characters of Icelandic cinema, the films have increasingly begun to travel. Some were intended to appeal to foreign viewers, while others were not; pioneering directors Óskar Gíslason and Loftur Guðmundsson, for instance, would have been bemused by the idea of their films being screened in New York City in the 21st century. But this expanded viewership attests to the strength of Icelandic cinema, which now more than its literature has arguably become the cultural ambassador of Iceland abroad.

📍 **Filmmaker in person!**

18 WED

2:00 Between Mountain and Shore
4:00 Ingaló
6:15 📍 Either Way
8:30 📍 Land and Sons

19 THU

2:30 Either Way
4:15 The Girl Gogo
6:15 📍 The Last Farm in the Valley
8:45 White Whales

20 FRI

2:00 Land and Sons
4:00 Rainbow's End
6:15 📍 Jar City
8:30 📍 Ingaló

21 SAT

1:30 Between Mountain and Shore
3:45 📍 Noi the Albino
6:15 📍 When the Raven Flies
9:00 📍 Rock in Reykjavik

plus APRIL 18 - 26

Continuous free screenings of **The Circle** in the Frieda & Roy Furman Gallery

22 SUN

12:00 The Last Farm in the Valley
2:00 📍 Country Wedding
4:15 Reykjavik Rotterdam
6:30 Volcano
8:45 📍 Angels of the Universe

23 MON

No screenings for this series.

24 TUE

2:00 Jar City
4:00 White Whales

25 WED

2:00 Angels of the Universe
4:15 Country Wedding
6:15 The Girl Gogo
8:15 📍 Undercurrent

26 THU

2:00 Volcano
4:00 When the Raven Flies
6:15 Rainbow's End
8:35 📍 Dreamland



Land and Sons/Land og synir

Agúst Guðmundsson, 1980, Iceland; 93m

Most critics would date the birth of the contemporary Icelandic cinema from the release of this powerful adaptation of Indriði G. Þorsteinsson's novel. Despite the harsh conditions brought on by a disease ravaging the local sheep herds, the farmers in a remote northern family resolve to struggle on, pooling their resources and working together to get past the slump. But when his father dies, Einar sees the chance he's been waiting for: to leave home and try his luck elsewhere. *Land and Sons* beautifully captures the waning of old bonds and values as a new generation dreams of creating new lives. Widely screened at international film festivals, *Land and Sons* more than any other work put Iceland on the cinematic map.

🗨️ **Wed Apr 18: 8:30 pm | Fri Apr 20: 2:00 pm**



The Last Farm in the Valley/Síðasti bærinn í dalnum

Ævar Kvaran, 1950, Iceland; 93m

A real discovery, this wonderfully light-hearted tale of the supernatural digs deep into local folklore and legends. In a beautiful, fertile valley, the evil trolls have managed to drive away all the farmers except for Björn and his family, who, thanks to the talisman kept by Björn's mother manage to keep the trolls at bay. Determined to take over Björn's land, the trolls come up with a devious solution: they will temporarily transform themselves into humans, and trick the family out the talisman. But not if a friendly dwarf and beautiful fairy queen can help it! Splendid with the most basic special effects, *The Last Farm in the Valley* remains one of the best-loved of all Icelandic films. **Panel discussion following April 19 screening featuring filmmakers Hafsteinn Sigurdsson, Baltasar Kormákur and Ásdís Thoroddsen and historian Björn Nordfjord.**

🗨️ **Thu Apr 19: 6:15 pm | Sun Apr 22: 12:00 pm**

Noi the Albino/Nói albínói

Dagur Kári 2003, Iceland/Germany/UK/Denmark; 82m

In a small town tucked into a fjord that's cut off from the rest of the world much of the year lives Nói (Tómas Lemarquis), tall, lanky and even blonder than the other inhabitants. For his birthday, his grandmother makes him a Polynesian themed party, which couldn't be more appropriate: Nói spends a good part of every day imaging life on another island, preferably in the far away South Seas. But Nói has a plan of action which he's preparing to unleash, provided he can get the young woman at the gas station to go along with him. Flavored with strains of David Lynch and Jim Jarmusch, *Noi the Albino* creates a world that seems much like ours except perhaps just one step away: we begin to see why Nói refuses to accept as "normal" the everyday reality he shares with his family and neighbors. An impressive debut from a director who has gone on to be one of Iceland's most important filmmakers.

🗨️ **Sat Apr 21: 3:45 pm**



Rainbow's End/Á hjara veraldar

Kristín Jóhannesdóttir, 1983, Iceland; 112m

One of the most singular artists in Iceland, Kristín Jóhannesdóttir studied literature and cinema in France, creating several short films before returning to Iceland to embark on her first feature. Drawing on motifs from Icelandic sagas and eddas, *Rainbow's End* tells the story of inter-generational family conflict. Yet the dramatic elements just provide a framework for Jóhannesdóttir's reflection on topics ranging from magic to individualism to Iceland's special place in the world. Always lyrical and never less than provocative, *Rainbow's End* is a haunting work that remains as affecting and original today as when it was first released.

Fri Apr 20: 4:00 pm | Thu Apr 26: 6:15 pm





Reykjavík Rotterdam

Óskar Jónasson, 2008, Iceland/Germany/Denmark/Netherlands; 88m

Just re-made by Hollywood as the mega-hit *Contraband* (directed by Baltasar Kormákur, star of *Reykjavík Rotterdam*), this international sensation seamlessly combines an affecting family drama with a razor's edge crime thriller. Fresh from a stint in prison, Christopher (Kormákur) tries to start a new life while patching up his relationship with his wife. But when he discovers that his thick-headed brother-in-law has crossed the mob in a smuggling deal, and now owes an insane amount of money, Christopher has no choice but to return to the criminal life, getting a job on board a ship with the hope of relieving it of some of its cargo. An engaging cat-and-mouse game, with some affectionate hat-tips to the films that inspired it.

Sun Apr 22: 4:15 pm

Undercurrent/Brim

Árni Ásgeirsson, 2010, Iceland/Poland; 95m

A woman hires on to work on a fishing vessel. Her presence causes some of the expected tension on board, but she soon discovers that what's upsetting things is not her sex but the fate of the person she's replaced on board. A graduate of the Polish National Film School, Árni Ásgeirsson has created a rich psychological drama largely set in the narrow confines of the ship, increasing the ongoing tension through the inevitability of contact. A tour-de-force of ensemble acting, led by Ingvar Sigurðsson as the ship's skipper, *Undercurrent* is full of reversals and revelations, until a sudden turn of events sets the action off in an unexpected direction.

Wed Apr 25: 8:15 pm



Rock in Reykjavík/Rokk í Reykjavík

Friðrik Thór Friðriksson, 1982, Iceland; 83m

Just as Icelandic cinema was beginning to emerge onto the world's screens, new music from Iceland was finding a wide array of international fans and supporters. Shot in the crucial season of 1981-82, *Rock in Reykjavík* captures the music scene just as it was finding its groove. The film features live performances by Tappi Tikarrass (featuring a teenaged Björk), Ego, Q4U, Purrkur Pillnikk and other key bands of the era—19 in all—plus interviews with some of the key figures. A great document as exciting today as it was when first released.

Preceded by

B.S.I.

Thorgeir Guðmundsson, 2001, Iceland; 18m

As all of Iceland gathers for a major music festival, two escapees have a chance encounter in a fast-food joint.

Sat Apr 21: 9:00 pm

Volcano/Eldfjall

Rúnar Rúnarsson, 2011, Iceland/Denmark; 95m

Selected for the 2011 Directors' Fortnight at Cannes, *Volcano* offers a tender look at aging as well as a lesson that it's never too late to change. Hannes has just retired after 37 years working as a janitor. A distant man with little relationship to his family, he's incapable of imagining what to do with the rest of his life; then one evening during dinner, his wife collapses, the victim of a stroke. The doctors give her little chance to live, but Hannes insists on bringing her home and caring for her himself. Hannes' gradual transformation is beautifully expressed by actor Theodór Júlíusson, who reveals the slow emotional awakening of a long-dormant man.

Sun Apr 22: 6:30 pm | Thu Apr 26: 2:00 pm





When the Raven Flies/Hrafninn flýgur

Hrafn Gunnlaugsson, 1984, Iceland/Sweden; 110m

Setting out to offer a rejoinder to the Hollywood image of the Vikings, Hrafn Gunnlaugsson's third film recounts the adventures of Gestur, an Irishman who as a boy witnessed the murder of his two parents and the abduction of his sister during a Viking raid. Working his way into the graces of one of the bands, Gestur gets to know the two Norwegian brothers, Thor and Erik, who led the raid and now keep his sister between them. The film doesn't back off from the violence of the era, but it does provide more of a context for understanding the workings of that long-ago world. Meticulously recreated, *When the Raven Flies* was voted one of the outstanding films of the Eighties at the Tokyo International Film Festival.

🗨 **Sat Apr 21: 6:15 pm | Thu Apr 26: 4:00 pm**

White Whales/Skytturmar

Friðrik Thór Friðriksson, 1987, Iceland; 73m

After a number of prize-winning documentaries—including the seminal *Rock in Reykjavik*—Oscar-nominated director Friðrik Thór Friðriksson (*Children of Nature*) made his debut fiction feature with this unexpectedly touching portrait of two friends down and almost out in the big city. Grímur and Bubbi are experienced whalers who, after months out at sea, decide to take a break in Reykjavík. But something has changed: they no longer feel at home, or welcome, and wind up getting thrown out of one establishment after another. Yet neither is the type to simply accept what's been going down, and the two prepare themselves for what they know will be a confrontation. Friðriksson's skill as a documentarist is everywhere evident, from the lovely scenes on the whaler to the careful observation of Reykjavík nightlife.

Thu Apr 19: 8:45 pm | Tue Apr 24: 4:00 pm



The Circle/Hringurinn

Friðrik Thór Friðriksson, 1985, Iceland; 81m

The Circle is an experiment in the fields of physics, mathematics and geography but also in film directing, cinematography and sound. The procedure: a camera is fastened to a car's dashboard, a computer is connected to the camera, and the car is taken on a joyride down Highway No.1. Every twelve meters, a single frame is shot, thus simulating the speed of sound. The result: This road trip along Iceland's Ring Road, completed in 1974 in commemoration of the 1100th anniversary of the country's first human settlement, presents the viewer Iceland in all her beauty: from rolling hills, snow-capped volcanoes, valleys, seacoast, lakes, glaciers and geysers to small towns, isolated farms and ever-changing colors. A frame is made every twelve meters.

Continuous free screenings in the Frieda & Roy Furman Gallery, April 18 - 26!

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