

FOCUS ON ICELAND

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ICELANDIC CINEMA PAST AND PRESENT

'101 Reykjavik'
(Baltasar Kormákur,
2000).



Icelandic cinema is unique among the many national cinemas that make up today's world cinema. As a nation of little more than 300.000 inhabitants it is surely the smallest nation to claim both a film industry and a group of filmmakers celebrated around the world (e.g. at events such as the Valladolid International Film Festival). No doubt Iceland has only been able to do so because of its relative economic wealth, high living standards and benign

Films screened at the 62th Valladolid International Film Festival are shown in bold letters.

and generous governmental cultural policy. But even so, its extremely small population provides something of a test case for how small a national cinema can really be. So let us take a look at how it came about, its slow birth throughout most of the 20th century, and dramatic rise towards the end of the century and remarkable diversification in the 21st century.

A SLOW BIRTH

As in most other places around the world, cinema arrived in the early 20th century to Iceland as travelling entrepreneurs showed their films and



in some cases shot new footage of the island's exotic nature and traditional ways of life. At the turn of the century Icelanders numbered fewer than 100,000 and lived mostly in farms and fishing villages around the island's coast. At this time of course there was no possibility of developing a film industry in the country—the idea would have been absurd—but soon a number of inspirational photographers began shooting film actualities and then more extensive documentaries during the interwar years. Today their work provides us with wonderful historical imagery of an era that now seems to belong to the distant past.

A marked interest in film production followed the instigation of the Icelandic Republic in 1944 (ending the country's long subjection to Denmark). The pioneers Loftur Guðmundsson and Óskar Gíslason directed a number of feature films each that proved to be highly popular with Icelanders, but by professional international standards they were, however, quite amateurish. Indeed, a new group sprang up that aspired to make more sophisticated films with the assistance of Scandinavian co-producers. Although they arguably succeeded in terms of quality the quantity was most underwhelming as only one film saw the light of day each decade from the



'The Seagull's Laughter' (Ágúst Guðmundsson, 2001).

1950s to the 1970s. The outlook for Icelandic cinema midway through the 1970s was therefore everything but bright. But things were about to change...

THE EIGHTIES: A NATIONAL CINEMA EMERGES

Icelandic artists and cultural spokespersons had long called for a film fund to support local film production and in 1978 the Icelandic government finally answered their call. A couple of years later the first film, *Land and Sons* (Land og synir) by Ágúst Guðmundsson, opened and was a great hit among the local population. It nostalgically showed the disappearing farming culture as its young protagonist sells his land and moves to the growing capital Reykjavík. Guðmundsson, who continues to make films to this day, is represented at the festival with *The Seagull's Laughter* (2001, Mávahlátur), another atmospheric film that looks back to the Iceland of days gone past —this time a small fishing village in the immediate post-WWII era. Back in 1980, however, *Land and Sons* was not the only hit as Hrafn Gunnlaugsson's *Father's Estate* (Óðal feðranna), a more cynical take on the countryside,

found favors with the national audience as well. In fact, during the early 1980s the novelty of Icelandic cinema was such that many films were seen by a third of the national population and some even more. In addition to Guðmundsson and Gunnlaugsson key filmmakers like Þorsteinn Jónsson, Þráinn Bertelsson and Kristín Jóhannesdóttir joined the fray in the early 1980s. They comprise what could be truly called the first generation of Icelandic filmmakers. More than anything else their work is characterized by a singular local address as the films were intended for the national audience only. Their films were local stories told by local film crews. Indeed, their exposure outside of Iceland was most limited save for Gunnlaugsson's first Viking film *The Raven Flies* (1984, Hrafninn flýgur) which garnered the director some international renown.

So quite suddenly Iceland seemed to have established a national cinema in the early 1980s with three to four films opening every year —not a big number but considering the small population quite a feat. The quality was surprisingly high and Icelanders flocked to the theaters to see the films. Icelanders have for long been avid theater goers, often topping the world

'Cold Fever'
(Friðrik Þór
Friðriksson, 1995).



lists of most visits per capita, so this was not altogether surprising. However, as the novelty of Icelandic films wore off the attendance dropped dramatically. At the end of the decade the newfound Icelandic cinema was already in crisis. It became increasingly clear that the local box office was simply too small. Although Iceland's Nordic neighbours, especially Sweden and Denmark, may be small compared to Spain, it is possible for a film in these countries to turn a profit at their respective national box-office. More than ten times smaller than its neighbours, it was increasingly clear that this was not the case with Iceland. The state support from the Icelandic Film Fund helped of course but the contribution was simply too small. It remains a matter of debate whether increased governmental funding could have realistically supported Icelandic cinema on its own. Perhaps Iceland was too small to have a national cinema after all...

THE NINETIES: EUROPE TO THE RESCUE AND TRANSNATIONAL NARRATIVES

What really saved Icelandic cinema were the fundamental changes that took place in the European

film infrastructure in the late 1980s and early 90s. Although not the sole reason, the emergence of the European Union called for increasing cultural partnership across the continent (and not only within its member nations —to this day Iceland remains outside the EU). As regards cinema the introduction of Eurimages in 1988 was a paramount event and in the Nordic region the Nordic Film and TV fund had a comparable impact. While it is clear that such funds, and the increased partnership among European nations in producing films, fundamentally altered the landscape of cinema on the continent, in Iceland it arguably made the difference between a collapse of the emerging industry and its continuous flowering. No doubt, films would have continued to be made, but on a much lower scale and one that might not have justified the name of national cinema (by which I mean an infrastructure that guarantees continuous filmmaking rather than sporadic efforts of individuals). Thankfully such alternative futures remain a point of speculation. What we now know and is clear from the films that characterized the 1990s, Icelandic cinema shifted dramatically from local and national concerns to a European and even international ones.



We see this clearly in the work of the second generation of Icelandic directors, most notably Friðrik Þór Friðriksson, Hilmar Oddsson and Guðný Halldórsdóttir. All made their first feature films in the late 1980s, along the lines of the already established local focus, before shifting to pan-European aesthetics and narratives with their second features in the early 1990s. With *Children of Nature* (1991, *Börn náttúrunnar*) Friðriksson became the first Icelandic director to be celebrated at the international film festival circuit and the film remains the only Icelandic film to be nominated for an Academy Award for best foreign film. Along with the subsequent *Movie Days* (1994, *Bíódagar*) the film gave a strong nod to German auteur Wim Wenders, who had lent his support in the struggle for the Film Fund back in the 1970s, among other canonical figures of world cinema. Their international focus was though nothing compared to that of *Cold Fever* (1995, *Á köldum klaka*) that to this day remains the most ‘international’ of all Icelandic films. It tells the story of a Japanese man, played by Masatoshi Nagase, who travels to Iceland to carry out a burial ritual for his parents, and comes across a range of strange characters —most of which are Americans. Thus there is almost no Icelandic spoken in the film, but the wintry Icelandic landscape is no mere backdrop in this enigmatic film. Oddsson’s *Cold Light* (2004, *Kaldaljós*) is another wintry tale but with darker tones focusing on the dangers of the Icelandic winter and its effects upon individuals and larger communities alike. Oddsson had prior made the ambitious transnational biopic *Tears of Stone* (1995, *Tár úr steini*) about Icelandic composer Jón Leifs and his personal struggles in Nazi Germany. Halldórsdóttir’s *The Men’s Choir* (1992, *Karلاكó-rinn Hekla*) was a much lighter musical fair as a small-town Icelandic choir travels through Germany. She is best known, though, for a couple of adaptations, *Under the Glacier* (1988, *Kristnihald undir jökli*) and *Honour of the House* (1999, *Ungfrúin góða og húsið*), of her father’s, Nobel prize winner Halldór Laxness, work.

THE AUGHTS: GENRE FILMS AND DOCUMENTARY REVIVAL

The early nineties also saw a number of off-beat narratives set in the capital Reykjavík, especially Óskar Jónasson’s *Remote Control* (1992, *Só-dóma Reykjavík*) and Júlíus Kemp’s *Wallpaper*



(1992, *Veggfóður*), which proved to be great hits and remain something of a cult phenomenon in Icelandic film culture. In both their shift in tone and location, most Icelandic films up to this point were set in the countryside, they added new dimensions to Icelandic filmmaking. Baltasar Kormákur's *101 Reykjavík* (2000) was thus far from being the first Icelandic city film, but in terms of international exposure it shifted the focus from Icelandic landscape to the country's capital which was becoming an increasingly popular destination—especially for younger tourists in party mood. In something of a masterstroke the film's producers cast Victoria Abril, the Spanish actress well-known for her work with Pedro Almodóvar, in a major role in a narrative that bore some resemblance to the Spanish director's oeuvre. Its main character and city slacker falls for the lesbian lover of his mother resulting in a most unique love triangle. Kormákur who at the time was the most popular film and stage actor in Iceland showed in his debut film that he had al-

ready fully mastered his new role. *101 Reykjavík's* international success catapulted him to the center of the Icelandic film scene where he has remained ever since. He regularly switches from his Icelandic home, including such films as *The Sea* (2002, Hafíð) and *The Deep* (2012, Djúpið), to Hollywood, where he directed most recently *2 Guns* (2013) and *Everest* (2015).

A number of other directors made their debut in the millennial year as well, namely Jóhann Sigmarsson, Robert I. Douglas and Ragnar Bragason. Apart from Kormákur it is the last mentioned Bragason who has had the most lasting influence upon Icelandic cinema. Specializing early on in well-acted realistic dramas, like the duet *Children* (2006, *Börn*) and *Parents* (2007, *Foreldrar*), he shifted abruptly to comedy in television and on the big screen. At the festival Bragason is represented with his latest film *Metalhead* (2013, *Málmhaus*) that mixes both the dramatic seriousness and comedic touch of his prior work. It deals with a young woman who tries to over-

Opposite page, starting from top: 'Undercurrent' (Árni Ólafur Ásgeirsson, 2010), 'Cold Light' (Hilmar Oddsson, 2004) and 'The Together Project' (Sólveig Anspach, 2016). Above these lines: '101 Reykjavík' (Baltasar Kormákur, 2000).

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'XL'
(Marteinn Pórsson,
2013).



come her depression with heavy metal music in a small community in the countryside.

Another important debut film saw the light of day a few years later with Dagur Kári's *Noi the Albino* (2003, *Nói albínói*) that became a major hit at the international film festival circuit. Despite its setting in a small icy fishing village in the remote Westfjords of Iceland, the plight of the unique title character and the film's off-beat humor clearly struck a chord with audiences around the world. Director Kári has ever since continued to work with marginalized characters whether the setting is Iceland, Denmark or the United States. His most recent film *Virgin Mountain* (2015, *Fúsi*) won the prestigious Nordic Film Council Prize and numerous awards at Tribeca Film Festival.

As regards *Noi the Albino* it needs to be said that despite its setting, it does not at all deal with fishing and indeed this most important of all industries in Iceland is little represented on the screen. An important exception is found in Árni Ólafur Ásgeirsson's *Undercurrent* (2010, *Brim*), which is almost entirely set on a fishing vessel out at sea. It is also a powerful chamber drama that studies what happens when a young woman is thrown into an otherwise all male community.

Women directors were crucial in the emergence of Icelandic national cinema in the early 1980s. In addition to Jóhannesdóttir and Halldórsdóttir, Kristín Pálsdóttir and Þórhildur Þorleifsdóttir made important contributions. They were later joined by Ásdís Thoroddsen in the early

1990s and Silja Hauksdóttir in the early 2000s whose *Dís* (2004) depicted the world of 101 Reykjavík from a female perspective. Since then, however, the industry has become increasingly male-dominated as regards directors. A couple of important exceptions are represented here at the festival. When she made her directorial debut in 2008 with *Country Wedding* (*Sveitabréðkaup*) Valdís Óskarsdóttir was already a celebrated editor at home and abroad, including such noteworthy credits as Thomas Vinterberg's dogma film *The Celebration* (1996, *Festen*) and Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004). *Country Wedding*, which is of course also edited by Óskarsdóttir, is a multi-generation-character drama of wedding proceedings threatening to unravel. Sólveig Anspach's career was unique in that she traversed equally France and Iceland and in her last and perhaps most celebrated film *The Together Project* (2016, *L'Effet aquatique*) the two blend seamlessly together. Harking back to the transnational narratives of the 1990s, the film opens in France with the romantic entanglement of the two main characters before they head to a swimming pool conference in Iceland. The film showcases many of the quirky elements of Anspach's work and pokes fun at Icelandic swimming pool customs among other things.

As can be seen from this overview Icelandic cinema continued to grow and diversify in the first decade of the 20th century. A couple of other things are worth mentioning in that regard. The

nineties had been all about the European art film but in the new century genre cinema along the lines of Hollywood began to make its presence felt. By far the most conspicuous was the crime film following on the heels of the already widespread Nordic Noir literary wave. Most notably Kormákur adapted the popular crime novel *Jar City* (2006, *Mýrin*) to great acclaim at home and abroad—even winning the main award at Karlovy Vary Film Festival. Other crime films include Olaf de Fleur's *City State* (2011, *Borgríki*), Óskar Þór Axelsson's *Black's Game* (2012, *Svartur á Leik*), and Óskar Jónasson's *Reykjavík Rotterdam* (2008), starring Kormákur who remade the film himself in Hollywood under the title *Contraband* (2012). Crime was though far from the only new genre as, for example, Gunnar B. Guðmundsson directed the fantasy film *Astrópía* (2007) and Júlíus Kemp the aptly titled slasher *Reykjavík Whale Watching Massacre* (2009).

The other major novelty of the decade was the reemergence of the documentary film that had somewhat disappeared from the scene in all the euphoria over the long-awaited Icelandic fiction film. Numerous important films were made that became major talking points in Icelandic society tackling everything from substance abuse to the ethics of beauty contests. The most consistent contributor was though Olaf de Fleur (Ólafur Jóhannesson) who tackled a variety of topics in often clever ways. *Africa United* (2005), for example, dealt with immigration by focusing on a football team made out of a heterogeneous group of immigrants facing various challenges. Before he switched to fiction features, crime films in particular, he made a fascinating film situated somewhere at the border of fiction and documentary. The winner of the LGBT Teddy award the Berlin Film Festival, *The Amazing Truth about Queen Raquela* (2008) chronicles the travels of the title character from the Philippines to Iceland and ultimately the place of her dreams Paris.

THE TEENS: AN ALIEN INVASION AND FESTIVAL SUCCESS

If each new decade that passes adds a new novelty or feature to Icelandic cinema, the most conspicuous element of the current decade is Hollywood's 'invasion' of the island. Certainly, foreign film producers had taken advantage of Iceland's spectacular natural scenery before, but after the government introduced its reimburse-



'The Amazing Truth about Queen Raquela' (Olaf de Fleur, 2008).

ment incentives in 2001 things really began to take off and reached new heights in the current decade. The big budget Hollywood productions shot in Iceland to a greater or lesser degree include *Batman Begins* (2005), *Flags of our Fathers* (2006), *Oblivion* (2013), *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2014), *Noah* (2014), *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015) and *Justice League* (2017). Such overseas Hollywood productions are hardly part of Icelandic national cinema proper, but they are an important part of the Icelandic film industry. They provide much needed finance, work and experience for local film personnel. They also tell us much about the professional competence of Icelandic filmmakers who in a matter of couple of decades have succeeded in building a creative workforce large enough to service the largest of all film productions. That in and of itself is something of an achievement.

Furthermore, many Icelanders have worked for major international productions. In addition to Óskarsdóttir, Elísabet Ronaldsdóttir is making her name editing super-fast and slick action films like *John Wick* (2014) and *Atomic Blonde* (2017). Set designer Karl Júlíusson has numerous Hollywood and European productions to his credit, including *Hurt Locker* (2006) and *Antichrist* (2009). Composers Jóhann Jóhannsson, Atli Örvarsson, Hildur Guðnadóttir and Ólafur Arnalds have created scores for numerous large scale film productions and television series. And if shy of major breakthrough actors Ingvar Sigurðsson (see him in *Cold Light*), Tómas Lemarquis (see him in *Noi the Albino*) and Ólafur Darri Ólafsson (see him in *XL*) have all had some success abroad—often as Hollywood villains.

Meanwhile at home established directors continue to make local films with their crews and there seems to be no hiccup in the flow of new directorial talent. Baldvin Zophoníasson's debut film *Jitters* (2010, *Órói*) was perhaps less unusual

ICELANDIC CINEMA PAST AND PRESENT



Top: 'Volcano' (Rúnar Rúnarsson, 2011).
Above these lines:
'Of Horses and Men'
(Benedikt Erlingsson,
2013).

for its focus on homosexuality as being a realistically driven teen pic. Even though teenagers make up the most important audience group at the Icelandic box-office, and one that tends to prefer Hollywood films over local fare, they are only rarely the main subjects in Icelandic cinema. Director Zophoníasson followed it up with *Life in a Fishbowl* (2014, *Vonarstræti*) which was an unexpected hit at the local box office and he has also contributed many episodes to two major crime television series. Reynir Lyngdal made his debut with another generic rarity, the romantic comedy *Our Own Oslo* (2011, *Okkar eigin Osló*), with perhaps a slightly more somber tone than its Hollywood equivalent. It deals with two emotionally wrought individuals who are not helped in their romantic encounters by their respective

unorthodox families. Continuing with his novel generic experiments Lyngdal followed it up with the sci-fi-horror thriller *Frost* (2012) and like Zophoníasson he has also been prolific in television, which is becoming increasingly important to local film production companies. Also debuting in 2011 was Marteinn Þórsson who is represented at the festival with *XL* (2013) which through impressionistic and subjective camerawork follows the downward spiral of a politician into alcohol and sexual abuse—an unusually gruesome entry in the Icelandic cinema canon.

A further two debut films of 2011 added still another novelty to Icelandic cinema. If in quite different ways *Volcano* (*Eldfjall*) by Rúnar Rúnarsson and *Either Way* (*Á annan veg*) by Hafsteinn Gunnar Sigurðsson, harker back to and acknowledge the influence of Friðriksson's now classic *Children of Nature*. In doing so they help to establish continuity and tradition in Icelandic cinema—arguably an important component for any thriving national cinema. The latter did so more tongue-in-cheek as the old couple of Friðriksson's film was replaced with two young men doing road work in the countryside back in the eighties. Its offbeat humor, character estrangement, local music period classics and splendid landscape imagery made for a most unusual mixture—later remade in the United States by David Gordon Green as *Prince Avalanche* (2013). *Volcano* was a much more serious affair as its aging protagonist must face his wife deteriorating health and other challenges. Indebted to Friðriksson's great themes and showcasing realism along the lines of the Belgium Dardenne brothers *Volcano* gives the audience little respite from the character's heavy burden. If the film did not garner the international rewards it rightly deserved, Rúnarsson's second feature *Sparrows* (2015, *Prestir*) made up for it, winning the main award at the San Sebastian film festival in addition to other prizes.

Sparrows' striking run at the festival circuit is though far from unique among recent Icelandic films. In addition to the success of Kári's *Virgin Mountain* already noted, Grímur Hákonarson's *Rams* (2015, *Hrútar*) became the first Icelandic film to win the Un Certain Regard award at the Cannes film festival. The experienced stage director and actor Benedikt Erlingsson also scored a big hit with his first film *Of Horses and Men* (2013, *Hross í oss*) which became the first Icelandic film to receive the Nordic Film Council Prize among



many other accolades. In accepting his award for the best new director at San Sebastian Film Festival Erlingsson made a very interesting point in claiming that the more local a filmmaker is in his/her approach the more global the validity of his/her work. In fact, all the recent international festival hits of Icelandic cinema share a local approach, often dealing with explicitly Icelandic narratives and themes, but are nonetheless able to speak to an international audience that has cherished their stories and aesthetic despite—and perhaps because of—some cultural differences.

ICELANDIC CINEMA TODAY

In this way today's Icelandic cinema spans everything from local features to transnational productions, outright art films to mainstream genre pictures—in addition to servicing the largest of Hollywood productions. This range is in ample display at the Valladolid International Film Festival. Together the films suggest that Icelandic cinema is alive and well, and that it has passed the national cinema test despite its extreme small size. Every year five to ten feature films open in theaters, and a similar number of documentaries,

not to mention the making of numerous shorts and more experimental fare—and now for the first time television series production is thriving as well. All this would not be possible without national and European funding (nota bene Iceland is far from unique in this regard but the small size makes it more reliant upon financial support). Nonetheless, funding does not provide or guarantee talent. And it has been the good fortune of Icelandic cinema to see one talented generation of directors and filmmakers after another arrive at the scene. Notably, the most recent film screened at the festival, Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson's *Heartstone* (2016, *Hjartasteinn*), is another wonderful debut film already garnering great reviews and awards at the international film festival circuit. It is a deeply moving portrayal of the growing pains of young teenagers in a remote small Icelandic fishing village. Their struggles with their environment, parents, each other and emerging sexuality are captured with beauty and subjectivity that the film camera alone can offer. Like so much of recent Icelandic cinema it is a local little story that speaks with its heart to anyone willing to listen. The future indeed does look bright for Icelandic cinema.

'Heartstone'
(Guðmundur Arnar
Guðmundsson,
2016).



LOOKING INTO THE MIRROR



'Noi the Albino'
(Dagur Kári, 2003).

Films are sometimes seen to be windows unto the nation that produced them. It is in other words the idea that Icelandic or Spanish films somehow capture the essence of Icelandic and Spanish national identity respectively. It is no doubt a little naïve view as we know that films are often made with the specific purpose of glorying a nation (akin to propaganda) and sometimes conversely to criticize it unfairly. So no one that goes to visit an Icelandic film at the Valladolid film festival should expect it to capture exactly what Iceland or Icelanders are really like. In fact, those interested enough to visit a number of films will quickly find out that there is no consistency when it comes to portraying the country and its inhabitants. It is fascinating, nonetheless, to consider what kind of images a nation draws up of itself through its films.

LOOKING INTO THE MIRROR



'Jitters' (Baldvin Zophoníasson, 2010).

The mirror is no doubt a better analogy than the window because it suggests an indirect reflection that can reshape and even distort its subject.

While it should be kept in mind that the seventeen Icelandic films screened at the festival do not exactly represent either the range or proportions of the whole of Icelandic cinema, they do give us a very good overall idea of what Icelandic films have to say about Iceland of today. If we begin by considering their mise-en-scene and location, it is striking how many more films are set in the countryside vs. the capital Reykjavík when one considers that almost two thirds of the country's population resides in the capital area. Additionally, films are rarely set in

the larger settlements outside of the capital, including that of Akureyri in north. Instead they are typically set in the smallest of fishing villages or farming communities. An Icelandic film is thus just as likely to show you areas where only a small fraction of the population lives as neighborhoods from within the capital where the great majority resides. Arguably only three of the screened films are outright city films, *101 Reykjavík* (2000) of course, *Jitters* (2010) and *XL* (2013). Numerous other films include Reykjavík but also have extended scenes set abroad, see *The Amazing Truth about Queen Raquela* (2008) and *The Together Project* (2016), scenes set in the countryside, see *Cold Light* (2004) and *Volcano*

LOOKING INTO THE MIRROR



Starting from top left: '101 Reykjavik' (Baltasar Kormákur, 2000), 'XL' (Marteinn Pórrsson, 2013) 'The Amazing Truth about Queen Raquela' (Olaf de Fleur, 2008), 'The Together Project' (Sólveig Anspach, 2016), 'Cold Light' (Hilmar Oddsson, 2004) and 'Our Own Oslo' (Reynir Lyngdal, 2011).



(2011), or both, see *Cold Fever* (1995) and *Our Own Oslo* (2011).

Conversely, many films are set in the countryside without any scenes taking place in Reykjavík or abroad. Some of the characters found in the fishing villages of *Noi the Albino* (2003) and *Heartstone* (2016) may desire to move to the capital, or even travel there, but the camera stays behind in the little villages at the heart of the respective films. In *The Seagull's Laughter* (2001) America plays the role of the desirable other as much of plot revolves around a character that used live there, but again the action is set entirely within the village. Similarly *Metalhead* (2013) and *Of Horses and Men* (2013) remain limited to their respective farming

communities even though they may be visited by characters from the outside. Perhaps even more marginally, *Undercurrent* (2010) takes place in a fishing vessel out at sea and *Either Way* (2011) on little traveled roads far from any habitat.

The setting of a film, of course, does not tell the whole story—much depends on how it is presented on the big screen. At the risk of generalizing the overall picture presented of Iceland through its films is not all that flattering. More than one foreign critic has pondered what the Icelandic government thinks of its investment in sometimes questionable representations of the nation. Perhaps not surprisingly, considering the nature of the genre, some of the bleakest pictures drawn up of Reykja-

LOOKING INTO THE MIRROR

'Of Horses and Men' (Benedikt Erlingsson, 2013), 'The Seagull's Laughter' (Ágúst Guðmundsson, 2001) and '101 Reykjavík' (Baltasar Kormákur, 2000).



vík are found in crime films. *City State* (2011) and *Black's Game* (2012) are especially gruesome and do not seem to depict life in one of the most peaceful capitals in the world. They are, however, arguably outdone by *XL* (2013) —which unlike the crime films is screened at the festival— which paints a picture of modern Sodom characterized by political corruption and debauchery of all sorts. The main protagonist of *101 Reykjavík* (2000) also claims that the capital is a horrible place to live in and that people only do so because they are born there. However, this is not altogether borne out by the film that paints a picture of Reykjavík as a fun and exciting party town. It is hard to pinpoint exactly the ambiguous nature of its portrayal: while the protagonist may not like the place the film's audience may do the exact opposite. A similar ambiguity can be found in a number of the films set in the countryside. For example, the audience may sympathize with the plight of the title character of *Noi the Albino* and his desire to leave the small fishing village he has lived in all his life,

but at the same time they can savor its exotic and mesmerizing setting in the midst of the harrowing Westfjords of Iceland. The same could be said of the more realistic *Heartstone* in which the oppressiveness of a small village in the Eastfjords is countered by the beautiful natural world encircling the village. In *Volcano*, on the other hand, it is the fishing town (admittedly unusually large one) in Vestmannaeyjar islands that offers respite from the oppressive enclosure experienced in Reykjavík.

It may be worth noting that even though nature plays an important role in Icelandic contemporary cinema, the use of landscape imagery now avoids the pitfalls of tourism sometimes evinced in earlier films. In that way it is also completely different from the many Hollywood films like *Prometheus* (2012) and *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016) in addition to the television series *Game of Thrones* that use the landscape simply for exotic backdrops. Conversely, Icelandic filmmakers intertwine nature with the characters and the stories they tell, as e.g. in *Cold Light* and



Either Way. Overall, there can be little doubt that despite modern urbanization, in Icelandic cinema the natives continue to be seen in many ways as ‘children of nature’. Perhaps this is one reason for the popularity and success of Icelandic cinema at European film festivals. As the natural world recedes on the continent, it still seems to play a significant role in Iceland —or at the

very least Icelandic films. Whether the strong association between nature and Icelandic identity is real or a figuration of Icelandic filmmakers is a complicated question —we should certainly keep in mind the difference between windows and mirrors! The interested viewer may not want to simply enjoy the scenery, but consider what it has to say about the island and its inhabitants.

‘Either Way’ (Hafsteinn Gunnar Sigurðsson, 2011).

AT THE INTERSECTION OF FILM AND LITERATURE

'Devil's Island'
(Friðrik Þór
Friðriksson, 1996).

If language and literature are of great significance to all nations, they are especially so to Icelanders. In a globalized world where the major European languages (especially English but also French and Spanish) play an increasingly significant role, many Icelanders believe that their singularity stems from their language. As a consequence there are quite strict laws in place that determine appropriate personal names and specialists develop new words by drawing upon the Icelandic language instead of simply adapting foreign ones. Icelanders' fascination with their language and interest in literature (and all sorts of written texts) is though far from new. Indeed, due to its medieval achievements, Iceland's place in the world literary canon should be secure for the foreseeable future. Most of what we know about Norse mythology stems from two Icelandic texts, both named somewhat confusin-







gly Edda, one of which is a book of poetry and the other, written by Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241), an early example of literary analysis. And the Icelandic Sagas are arguably the most sophisticated form of prose literature predating the emergence of the novel in Spain and elsewhere in Europe a couple of centuries later. The novel itself, however, arrived belatedly to Iceland, but secured its place early on in the twentieth century as the preeminent art form in the country. The international success of writers such as Gunnar Gunnarsson and Halldór Laxness, the recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1955, further cemented the centrality of the novel. For long narrowly defined by high literary merit, the popularity of crime novelists has in recent years transformed the local literary scene in addition to providing important contributions to the global success of Nordic Noir.

One could ask whether the slow birth of Icelandic cinema might be attributed to the established role of Icelandic literature. Conversely one might just as well ask if such a strong narrative tradition helped pave the way and support a cinema facing numerous obstacles. What is certain is that Icelandic cinema was at least partly supposed to complement Icelandic literature. In fact, the first feature films shot in Iceland, Danish productions, during the silent era where adaptations of Icelandic works of literature. And early local aspirations for filmmaking often centered on the literary heritage with the explicit goal of adapting some of the Sagas —especially *Njal's Saga*, which is often considered their crown jewel. Indeed, midway through the 20th century a company was established, notably called Edda film, to accomplish this task. Although it never succeeded in filming any of the Sagas, its two Nordic co-productions were literary adaptations. The first from Laxness's *Salka Valka* (1954, Arne Mattsson) and the latter *The Girl Gogo / 79 of the Station* (1968, 79 af stöðinni, Erik Balling) was adapted from a novel by Indriði Þorsteinsson who happens to be the father of famed Icelandic crime writer Arnaldur Indriðason (who incidentally wrote an important piece on the history of Edda film).

Following the instigation of the Icelandic Film Fund (see main article) a large proportion of Icelandic films made in the 1980s where literary adaptations or dealt with the Viking period of the Sagas. However, this did not last very long and notably most of the films were drawn from contemporary novels rather established classics.



Indeed, only one of them was a Saga adaptation, Ágúst Guðmundsson's *The Outlaw* (1981, *Útlaginn*), and strikingly to this day it remains the only Saga adaptation in Icelandic cinema. There was also only one Laxness adaptation, Þorsteinn Jónsson's *The Atom Station* (1984, *Atómstöðin*), and it remains the only one save for the two made by his daughter Guðný Halldórsdóttir. As with *Njal's Saga*, Laxness' best loved novels remain untouched. The reason need not be a lack of interest, though, as indeed many have aspired to adapt these most canonical of all Icelandic literary works. A more likely cause is the expenditure involved in epic period pieces, ill-suited to the low film budgets of Icelandic cinema.

The most prominent and well-liked adaptations stem from popular contemporary novels. Putting aside the disproportionate early success of Icelandic films in the 1980s, four out of five of the most successful films at the local box office stem from such novels: Friðrik Þór Friðriksson's *Devil's Island* (1996, *Djöflaeyjan*) and *Angels of the Universe* (2000, *Englar alheimsins*) and a couple of crime adaptations, Óskar Þór Axelsson's *Black's Game* (2012, *Svartur á leik*) and Kormákur's *Jar City* (2006, *Mýrin*). It may be worth noting that the latter is an adaptation of Indriðason's popular novel, and that before becoming the best known of Icelandic writers internationally he was a film critic —and the argument could be made that his work is in many ways film-like. It remains something of a surprise that film producers have still to follow up *Jar City's* success with a sequel. This year, however, a novel of Indriðason's main literary competitor Yrsa

Opposite page, starting from top left: 'The Outlaw' (Ágúst Guðmundsson, 1981) and 'Angels of the Universe' (Friðrik Þór Friðriksson, 2000). Above these lines: 'The Atom Station' (Þorsteinn Jónsson, 1984).



'Dancer in the Dark'
(Lars von Trier, 2000).

Sigurðardóttir was finally adapted to the screen, *I Remember You* (Ég man þig, Óskar Þór Axelson), and did very well at the local box office.

The popularity of these adaptations is, though, a little misleading as there is little to suggest that literary adaptations are any more common in Icelandic cinema than other national cinemas. In fact, great many Icelandic filmmakers prefer to draw upon their own stories and scripts—along the European auteur model. Indeed, the majority of the films chosen for the Valladolid International Film Festival are based upon original screenplays written by the directors themselves. It is worth pointing out though three films from the selection that are adaptations of popular novels: *101 Reykjavík* (2000, Baltasar Kormákur) from the novel by Hallgrímur Helgason,

The Seagull's Laughter (2001, Mávahlátur, Ágúst Guðmundsson) by Kristín Marja Baldursdóttir and *Cold Light* (2004, Kaldaljós, Hilmar Oddsson) by Vigdís Grímsdóttir. In all cases, though, the directors wrote the screenplay themselves. Additionally *Jitters* (2010, Órói, Baldvin Zophoníasson) draws upon popular novels intended for teenagers by Ingibjörg Reynisdóttir, while *Undercurrent* (2010, Brim, Árni Ólafur Ásgeirsson) is based upon a play by Jón Atli Jónasson.

It is limiting, though, to think of the relationship between literature and film solely in terms of adaptations. For example, most Icelandic film actors also perform regularly on the stage and some film directors, like Kormákur (*101 Reykjavík*) and Benedikt Erlingsson (*Of Horses and Men*), emerged



from the theater. Many writers have co-written manuscripts of their own novels in partnership with directors, and some have written original screenplays as well. Most notably perhaps Sjón who wrote the screenplay for *Reykjavik Whale Watching Massacre* (2009, Júlíus Kemp) in addition to contributing the lyrics for the Björk star vehicle *Dancer in the Dark* (2000, Lars von Trier). For a small nation such as Iceland all kinds of partnership between the arts are not only more likely to occur than in larger societies, but are arguably something of a necessity for generating rich cultural life.

Looking towards the future such connections are likely to develop and blossom as before. As regards the immediate future it is surprising how rarely Icelandic filmmakers try to take advantage

of the popularity of best-selling novels —shown to do very well at the local box office— and prefer instead to develop their own stories from scratch. The filming of major canonical literary works seems to be no nearer to fruition now than in the past, but a television series based upon Laxness's most celebrated novel *Independent People* is expected to go into production next year. Also worth noting, especially considering his strong Spanish connections, including translations of both classic (including *Don Quixote*) and contemporary works, Guðbergur Bergsson's *The Swan* has just been adapted to film by Ása Helga Hjörleifsdóttir and is about to arrive in theaters at home and abroad. It is as good a reminder as any that literature and film continue to intersect in variety of ways in Iceland.

Top: 'Cold Light' (Hilmar Oddsson, 2004). Above these lines: 'Jitters' (Baldvin Zophoníasson, 2010).

FILMOGRAPHY





Á köldum klaka

Cold Fever

Iceland / Denmark / Germany / USA / Japan, 1995

DIRECTOR: Friðrik Þór Friðriksson

SCREENPLAY: Friðrik Þór Friðriksson, Jim Stark

PRODUCERS: Jim Stark, George Gund

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Ari Kristinsson

EDITING: Steingrímur Karlsson

MUSIC: Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson

RUNNING TIME: 83'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Icycle, Icelandic Film, Altar Productions, Pandora Filmproduktion, Sunrise, Zentropa Entertainments

CAST: Masatoshi Nagase, Lili Taylor, Fisher Stevens, Gísli Halldórsson, Laura Hughes, Seijun Suzuki, Hiromasa Shimada, Masayuki Sasaki

SYNOPSIS: Cold Fever is a story of golf and ghosts; an old Citroen and exploding icebergs; funerals and boiled sheep heads; men's choirs and Icelandic country & western bands; a potent liquor called Black Death and auras; and most of all the story of how one young man goes on a very difficult journey to find out something important about himself.



101 Reykjavík

Iceland / Denmark / France / Norway / Germany, 2000

DIRECTOR: Baltasar Kormákur

SCREENPLAY: Baltasar Kormákur

PRODUCERS: Baltasar Kormákur, Ingvar Þórðarson, Michael P. Aust, Egil Ødegård, Marianne Slot, Christian Vizi, Peter Aalbæk Jensen, Markus Selin

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Peter Steuger

EDITING: Skule Eriksen, Sigvaldi J. Kárason

MUSIC: Damon Albarn, Einar Örn Benediktsson

RUNNING TIME: 90'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Blueeyes Productions, Zentropa Entertainment, Filmhuset, Liberator Productions, Troika Entertainment

CAST: Victoria Abril, Hilmir Snær Guðnason, Hanna María Karlsdóttir, Baltasar Kormákur, Ólafur Darri Ólafsson, Þrúður Vilhjálmsdóttir, Eyvindur Erlendsson, Jóhann Sigurðarson

SYNOPSIS: Hlynur is a young man who has always been living within the comfort of his mother's house and has never been tempted to explore beyond his little world. However, his easy life suddenly changes as he finds out that the woman he has just gone to bed with is his mother's lesbian lover. This black comedy, set in Reykjavík's lively nightlife, offers a peculiar point of view of the universe in which Hlynur's new life is developing, from an intense, occasionally confused, and frequently hilarious perspective.

'Jar City' (Baltasar Kormákur, 2006).

FILMOGRAPHY



Mávahlátur

The Seagull's Laughter

Iceland / Denmark / Germany / UK, 2001

DIRECTOR: Ágúst Guðmundsson

SCREENPLAY: Ágúst Guðmundsson

PRODUCERS: Kristín Atladóttir, Andy Paterson, Raphael Socha, Helgi Toftegard

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Peter Krause

EDITING: Henrik D. Møll

MUSIC: Ronen Waniewitz

RUNNING TIME: 105'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Isfilm, Hope & Glory Film Productions, Archer Street Productions

CAST: Margrét Vilhjálmsdóttir, Uglá Egilsdóttir, Heino Ferch, Hilmir Snær Guðnason, Kristbjörg Kjeld, Edda Björg Eyjólfssdóttir, Bára Lyngdal Magnúsdóttir, Eyvindur Erlendsson

VOICE: Magnús Ragnarsson

SYNOPSIS: 1952. Her wartime American husband freshly buried (she claims it was a heart attack), the beautiful Freyja makes a big splash upon her return to her tiny but civilized Icelandic fishing village. Her new fashions (five suitcases' worth) delight her family and captivate every man she sees, including the local constable Magnús and a wealthy engineer, Björn Theédér. He's of a different class and engaged to the local magistrate's daughter, but Freyja doesn't drop him as her target for matrimony - she can't wait to spar with his battle-axe of a mother. Meanwhile, young Agga graduates from chocolate smears on her face to being a young lady, all the while suspicious of Freyja's past and present activities.



Nói albinói

Noi the Albino

Iceland / Germany / UK / Denmark, 2003

DIRECTOR: Dagur Kári

SCREENPLAY: Dagur Kári

PRODUCERS: Philippe Bober, Bertrand Faivre, Kim Magnusson, Skuli Fr. Malmquist, Þórir Snær Sigurjónsson, Soledad Gatti-Pascual

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Rasmus Videbæk

EDITING: Daniel Dencik

MUSIC: Slowblow (Orri Jónsson y Dagur Kári)

RUNNING TIME: 93'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Zik Zak Filmworks, Essential Filmproduktion, The Bureau, M&M Productions, Das Kleinfernsehspiel

CAST: Tómas Lemarquis, Þröstur Leó Gunnarsson, Elín Hansdóttir, Anna Friðriksdóttir, Hjalti Rögnvaldsson, Pétur Einarsson, Kjartan Bjargmundsson, Greipur Gíslason

SYNOPSIS: Is he the village idiot or a genius in disguise? 17-year-old Núi drifts through life on a remote Fjord in the North of Iceland. In winter, the Fjord is cut off from the outside world, surrounded by ominous mountains and buried under a shroud of snow. Núi dreams of escaping from this white-walled prison with Iris, a city girl who works in a local gas station. But his clumsy attempts at escape spiral out of control and end in complete failure. Only a natural disaster will shatter Núi's universe and offer him a window into a better world.



Kaldaljós

Cold Light

Iceland / UK / Norway / Germany, 2004

DIRECTOR: Hilmar Oddsson

SCREENPLAY: Hilmar Oddsson, Freyr Þormóðsson

PRODUCERS: Friðrik Þór Friðriksson, Anna María Karlsdóttir, Helga Bähr, Mike Downey, Sam Taylor, Egil Ødegård, Hilmar Oddsson

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Sigurður Sverrir Pálsson

EDITING: Sigvaldi J. Kárason

MUSIC: Hjálmar Helgi Ragnarsson

RUNNING TIME: 93'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Icelandic Film, Film and Music Entertainment, Filmhuset, Lichtblick Film- und Fernsehproduktion, Íslenska Kvikmyndasamsteypan, Invicta Capital

CAST: Ingvar Eggert Sigurðsson, Áslákur Ingvarsson, Kristbjörg Kjeld, Ruth Ólafsdóttir, Snæfríður Ingvarsdóttir, Þórey Sigþórsdóttir, Helga Braga Jónsdóttir, Edda Heiðrún Backman

SYNOPSIS: What could be better than knowing your future? And what could be worse? A love-filled childhood abruptly ends when catastrophe descends. One that a child had foreseen yet failed to act upon. A 40-year-old man hides in a self-made prison of mundane life. The film opens as he finally becomes resolved to dare gaze at, and come to terms with a totally different life, his past life. He turbulently sheds the cobwebs to find that light and happiness have been waiting for him.



The Amazing Truth About Queen Raquela

Iceland / Filipinas / France / Thailand, 2008

DIRECTOR: Olaf de Fleur

SCREENPLAY: Olaf de Fleur, Benedikt Jóhannesson

PRODUCERS: Arleen Cuevas, Olaf de Fleur, Stefan C. Schaefer, Helgi Sverrisson

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Butch Maddul

EDITING: Olaf de Fleur, Dagur Kári, Benedikt Jóhannesson

MUSIC: Pavel E. Smid

RUNNING TIME: 80'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Poppoli Pictures, Cicala Filmworks

CAST: Raquela Rios, Stefan C. Schaefer, Valerie Grand Einarsson, Brax Villa, Olivia Galudo, May Rose, Markus Kalberer, Ren Christian Balasabas

SYNOPSIS: Raquela is a poor prostitute who, like many Transsexuals in the Philippines, dreams of marrying a heterosexual man from the West. She spends much of her time on the internet looking for men who can come and rescue her. They promise to come, but time after time Raquela gets stood up at the airport. Her life changes when she by luck lands a job on Transsexual porn website as a webcam host.



Sveitabréðkaup

Country Wedding

Iceland / UK, 2008

DIRECTOR: Valdís Óskarsdóttir

SCREENPLAY: Valdís Óskarsdóttir

PRODUCERS: Davíð Óskar Ólafsson, Hreinn Beck, Árni Filippusson, Guðrún Edda Þórhannesdóttir, Jim Stark

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Anthony Dod Mantle

EDITING: Valdís Óskarsdóttir

MUSIC: The Tiger Lillies

RUNNING TIME: 95'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Mystery Island, Duo Productions, Ave Productions, WhiteRiver Productions

CAST: Nanna Kristín Magnúsdóttir, Björn Hlynur Haraldsson, Ágústa Eva Erlendsdóttir, Hreinn Beck, Caroline Dalton, Erlendur Eiríksson, Nína Dögg Filippusdóttir, Gísli Örn Garðarsson

SYNOPSIS: Inga and Bardi's wedding day. From the outset, tensions are visible: the best man is late, unwanted guests... With two buses, the group sets off for the countryside where the couple will get married in a picturesque church. The shaky camera work underlines the tense atmosphere in the buses. It quickly becomes obvious that the groom doesn't know the way to the church very well. The claustrophobic atmosphere in the bus makes the irritations rise. Meanwhile the minister gets drunk, the grandmother takes every opportunity to slip away and the bride almost has a nervous breakdown.



Brim

Undercurrent

Iceland / Poland, 2010

DIRECTOR: Árni Ólafur Ásgeirsson

SCREENPLAY: Árni Ólafur Ásgeirsson, Ottó Geir Borg, Ingvar E. Sigurðsson, Nína Dögg Filippusdóttir, Gísli Örn Garðarsson, Ólafur Egilsson, Björn Hlynur Haraldsson, Víkingur Kristjánsson, Nanna Kristín Magnúsdóttir

PRODUCERS: Thor Sigurjonsson, Skúli Fr. Malmquist, Grímar Jónsson, Gísli Örn Garðarsson, Arthur Reinhart, Guðmundur Kristjánsson

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Magni Ágústsson

EDITING: Valdís Óskarsdóttir, Eva Lind Höskuldsdóttir

MUSIC: Slowblow

RUNNING TIME: 88'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Zik Zak Kvikmyndir, Vesturport

CAST: Ingvar Eggert Sigurðsson, Nína Dögg Filippusdóttir, Gísli Örn Garðarsson, Ólafur Egill Egilsson, Björn Hlynur Haraldsson, Ólafur Darri Ólafsson, Víkingur Kristjánsson, Nanna Kristín Magnúsdóttir

SYNOPSIS: A young woman hires on as a crew-member on a fishing vessel, where a tight knit group of men is already in place. Slowly it is revealed that the job she got was only vacant due to a tragic incident, and her being on board is not going down well with the crew. With conflict happening within the group, as well as with nature, this motley crew has to stick together and face their destiny in a sea voyage that takes an unexpected turn.

FILMOGRAPHY



Órói

Jitters

Iceland, 2010

DIRECTOR: Baldvin Zophoníasson

SCREENPLAY: Ingibjörg Reynisdóttir, Baldvin Zophoníasson

PRODUCERS: Júlíus Kemp, Ingvar Þórðarson

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Jóhann Máni Jóhannsson

EDITING: Sigurbjörg Jónsdóttir

MUSIC: Ólafur Arnalds

RUNNING TIME: 94'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: The Icelandic Film Company

CAST: Atli Oskar Fjalarrson, Ylva Holmes, Haraldur Stefansson, Birna Rún Eiríksdóttir, Elías Helgi Kofoed-Hansen, María Birta, Lilja Guðrún Þorvaldsdóttir, Gísli Örn Garðarsson

SYNOPSIS: When Gabriel returns to Iceland from a two-week trip to Manchester, England, all those close to him seem to think that he has changed somewhat. Having met and befriended his stylist roommate Marcus in the UK, a free thinking, rebellious teenager. Through a series of unfortunate events, tragedy befalls this tight-knit group when Stella, Gabriels best girlfriend, takes her own life. Crushed, Gabriel falls into a black hole of despair, which forces him to take a hard look at himself - which ultimately forces him to reveal a harsh, agonizing secret about himself.



Á annan veg

Either Way

Iceland, 2011

DIRECTOR: Hafsteinn Gunnar Sigurðsson

SCREENPLAY: Hafsteinn Gunnar Sigurðsson

PRODUCERS: Hreinn Beck, Árni Filippusson, Sindri Páll Kjartansson, Tobias Munthe, Theo Youngstein, Davíð Óskar Ólafsson

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Árni Filippusson

EDITING: Kristján Loðmfjörð

RUNNING TIME: 84'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Mystery Productions, Flickbook Films

CAST: Sveinn Ólafur Gunnarsson, Hilmar Guðjónsson, Þorsteinn Bachmann, Valgerður Rúnarsdóttir, Runólfur Ingólfsson, Þorbjörn Guðmundsson

SYNOPSIS: In the remote north of Iceland in the 1980s, Finnbogi and Alfred spend the summer painting lines on the winding roads that stretch out to the horizon. The older and more experienced of the two, Finnbogi, has been asked to do his girlfriends' family a favor and get her younger brother, Freddi, a job with the Road Administration as well; Take him along for the summer and make a man out of him. The film follows the relationship of these different —almost opposite— characters in the remote wilderness where they must deal with and tolerate each other peculiarities, spending way more time together than either of them would ever choose to do.



Eldfjall

Volcano

Iceland / Denmark, 2011

DIRECTOR: Rúnar Rúnarsson

SCREENPLAY: Rúnar Rúnarsson

PRODUCERS: Thor Sigurjonsson, Skúli Fr. Malmquist, Egil Dennerline

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Sophia Olsson

EDITING: Jacob Secher Schulsinger

MUSIC: Kjartan Sveinsson

RUNNING TIME: 99'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Zik Zak Filmworks, Fine & Mellow

CAST: Theódór Júlíusson, Margrét Helga Jóhannsdóttir, Þorsteinn Bachmann, Elma Lía Gunnarsdóttir, Ágúst Örn B. Wigum, Benedikt Erlingsson, Auður Drauma Bachmann, Jóhann Sigurðarson

SYNOPSIS: When Hannes retires from his job as a janitor, the void that is the rest of his life takes over. He is estranged from his family, hardly has any friends and the relationship with his wife has faded. Through drastic events, Hannes realizes that he has to adjust his life in order to help someone he loves. Volcano is a coming of age love story of a 67-year-old man about dealing with past decisions and the difficulties of the present in order to embrace the future.



Okkar eigin Osló

Our Own Oslo

Iceland / Norway / UK, 2011

DIRECTOR: Reynir Lyngdal

SCREENPLAY: Þorsteinn Guðmundsson

PRODUCERS: Anna María Karlsdóttir, Hrönn Kristinsdóttir, Anders Graham, Egil Ødegård, Mike Downey, Sam Taylor

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Víðir Sigurðsson

EDITING: Steffi Thors

MUSIC: Helgi Svavar Helgason

RUNNING TIME: 94'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Spectra, Filmhuset Produksjoner, Film and Music Entertainment, Ljosband Filmworks

CAST: Þorsteinn Guðmundsson, Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir, Hilmir Snær Guðnason, Laddi, Lilja Guðrún Þorvaldsdóttir, María Heba Þorkelsdóttir, Valgeir H. Skagfjörð, Elma Lía Gunnarsdóttir

SYNOPSIS: An everyday love story following the strained courtship of wildly different Harald, an orderly and unshakably calm 40-year-old engineer, and Vilborg, an impulsive and care-less unemployed single mother. On a business trip to Oslo, Harald shares a wild night with Vilborg, but when they meet again, it is clear they're both burdened by a lot of baggage. Disciplined Harald cares for his mentally-disabled half-sister and resents his long-dead alcoholic father. Meanwhile, irresponsible Vilborg, a less-than-sympathetic drama queen, is a gambling addict with a pending fraud charge, a sullen pre-teen son, and an attractive ex-husband.



Hross í oss

Of Horses and Men

Iceland / Norway / Germany, 2013

DIRECTOR: Benedikt Erlingsson

SCREENPLAY: Benedikt Erlingsson

PRODUCERS: Friðrik Þór Friðriksson, Christoph Thoke, Egil Ødegård, Benedikt Erlingsson, Guðrún Edda Þórhannesdóttir

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Bergsteinn Björgúlfsson

EDITING: Davíð Alexander Corno

MUSIC: Davíð Þór Jónsson

RUNNING TIME: 81'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Hrossabrestur, Filmhuset Fiction, Leiknar Myndir, Mogador Film, Hughrif, Guldrengurinn

CAST: Ingvar Eggert Sigurðsson, Charlotte Bøving, Steinn Ármann Magnússon, Helgi Björnsson, Kjartan Ragnarsson, Atli Rafn Sigurðarson, Juan Camillo Roman Estrada, Sigríður María Egilsdóttir

SYNOPSIS: The man loves the woman and the woman loves the man but the man is in love with his most prized possession, the mare, and the mare is obsessed with the stallion. In a remote valley in Iceland where neighbors follow each other closely, the couple's first official visit is closely monitored. Spring is coming and with it, the dangerous force of nature. This can not end well. Love and death become interlaced and with immense consequences for the whole community. We follow the fortune of people through the horses' perception.



Málmhaus

Metalhead

Iceland / Norway, 2013

DIRECTOR: Ragnar Bragason

SCREENPLAY: Ragnar Bragason

PRODUCERS: Árni Filippusson, Davíð Óskar Ólafsson, Ragnar Bragason, Gudny Hummelvoll

CINEMATOGRAPHY: August Jakobsson

EDITING: Valdís Óskarsdóttir

MUSIC: Petur Þor Benediktsson

RUNNING TIME: 97'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Mystery Productions, Hummelvoll

CAST: Thora Bjorg Helga, Ingvar Eggert Sigurðsson, Halldóra Geirharðsdóttir, Sveinn Ólafur Gunnarsson, Hannes Óli Ágústsson, Diljá Valsdóttir, Þröstur Leó Gunnarsson, Sigrún Edda Björnsdóttir

SYNOPSIS: It's the year 1970 and as Black Sabbath record their first album and mark the birth of heavy metal, Hera Karlsdóttir is born on the cowshed floor at her parents farm in rural Iceland. The years of her youth are care-free until a tragedy strikes. Her older brother is killed in an accident and Hera blames herself for his death. In her grief she finds solace in the dark music of heavy metal and dreams of becoming a rock star. As the years pass on the farm buried under a shroud of snow and a looming ominous mountain Hera practices her guitar skills and dreams of forming a band.

FILMOGRAPHY



XL

Iceland, 2013

DIRECTOR: Marteinn Þórsson

SCREENPLAY: Marteinn Þórsson, Guðmundur Óskarsson

PRODUCERS: Marteinn Þórsson, Ólafur Darri Ólafsson, Ragnheiður Erlingsdóttir, Guðmundur Óskarsson, Bergsteinn Björgúlfsson

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Bergsteinn Björgúlfsson

EDITING: Steffi Thors, Marteinn Þórsson, Sigurður Eyþórsson, Valdís Óskarsdóttir

MUSIC: Anna Þorvaldsdóttir, Samaris

RUNNING TIME: 87'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Stór og smá ehf, Tenderlee Motion Pictures Company

CAST: Ólafur Darri Ólafsson, María Birta, Helgi Björnsson, Elma Lía Gunnarsdóttir, Þorsteinn Bachmann, Nanna Kristín Magnúsdóttir, Rúnar Guðbrandsson, Margrét Helga Jóhannsdóttir

SYNOPSIS: The ex-family man, avid womanizer, heavy drinking, heavy weight parliamentarian Leifur Sigurðarson is forced to go to rehab, by his political rival the PM, following a well publicised art exhibition brawl. Full of denial, Leifur gives a small but grand dinner party before checking in, but when it's time to leave—very few do, turning the night into an adventure exclusively for those old enough to vote.



L'Effet aquatique

The Together Project

Iceland / France, 2015

DIRECTOR: Sólveig Anspach

SCREENPLAY: Sólveig Anspach, Jean-Luc Gaget

PRODUCERS: Skúli Fr. Malmquist, Patrick Sobelman

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Isabelle Razavet

EDITING: Anne Riegel

MUSIC: Martin Wheeler

RUNNING TIME: 83'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Ex Nihilo, Zik Zak Filmworks

CAST: Florence Loiret Caille, Samir Guesmi, Didda Jónsdóttir, Frosti Runólfsson, Ingvar Eggert Sigurðsson, Kristbjörg Kjeld, Jóhannes Haukur Jóhannesson, Philippe Rebbot

SYNOPSIS: Samir, a tall, lanky, 40-something crane operator from Montreuil, in the outskirts of Paris, falls head over heels in love with Agathe. He discovers she is a swimming instructor at the local swimming pool, and, for lack of a better plan, he decides to enlist as her student...although he can swim perfectly. But his lie only lasts for 3 lessons, and Agathe hates liars. The truth surfaces. Agathe is furious. The end? Not quite! Agathe goes to Iceland on a business trip, putting an ocean between her and Samir. But it is without reckoning with his feelings and his stubbornness...



Hjartasteinn

Heartstone

Iceland / Denmark, 2016

DIRECTOR: Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson

SCREENPLAY: Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson

PRODUCERS: Lise Orheim Stender, Anton Máni Svansson, Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson, Jesper Morthorst

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Sturla Brandth Grøvlen

EDITING: Janus Billeskov Jansen, Anne Østerud

MUSIC: Kristian Eidnes Andersen

RUNNING TIME: 129'

PRODUCTION COMPANY: SF Film Production, Join Motion Pictures

CAST: Baldur Einarsson, Blær Hinriksson, Diljá Valsdóttir, Katla Njálsdóttir, Jónína Þórdís Karlsdóttir, Rán Ragnarsdóttir, Nína Dögg Filippusdóttir, Sveinn Ólafur Gunnarsson

SYNOPSIS: A remote fishing village in Iceland. Teenage boys Thor and Christian experience a turbulent summer of emotional discovery and sexual awakening. One tries to win the heart of a girl while the other realizes new feelings toward his best friend. As summer ends and the harsh nature of Iceland takes back its rights, it's time to leave the playground and face adulthood.