

Grateful, Grapefruit

Valdemar Árni Guðmundsson

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For Ingibjörg Árnadóttir

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INTRODUCTION

I am an art student currently writing a thesis about his own problems. Is there anything more narcissistic in this world? I suppose when you think about it, maybe it is not so different from an art student making an artwork in general. I guess the narcissism just becomes painfully obvious when it is written. In any case, I am at peace with that.

Moving on, for a while I have struggled with the idea of being an artist. I do not feel I can allow myself to fully claim that title. I want to find out if it has something to do with myself or rather, if it has to do with the state of the art world at the moment and more importantly, whether it is feasible for me with my opinions to make a career in said world?

SUNDAY IN THE PARK
WITH GEORGE

Stephen Sondheim

*Art isn't easy
Even when you're hot.
Advancing art is easy
Financing it is not.
A vision's just a vision
If it's only in your head.
If no one gets to see it,
It's as good as dead.
If has to come to light.*

*Bit by bit,
Putting it together.
Piece by Piece,
Only way to make a work of art.
Every moment makes a contribution,
Every little detail plays a part.
Having just a vision's no solution,
Everything depends on execution:*

*Putting it together,
That's what counts.*

*Ounce by ounce,
Putting it together.*

*Small amounts,
Adding up to make a work of art.
First of all you need a good foundation,
Otherwise it's risky from the start.
Takes a little cocktail conversation,
But without the proper preparation,
Having just a vision's no solution,
Everything depends on execution.
The art of making art
Is putting it together
Bit by bit.*

*Link by link,
Making the connections.
Drink by drink
Fixing and perfecting the design.
Adding just a dab of politician*

*Knowing where to draw the line.
Lining up the funds but in addition
Lining up a prominent commission,
Otherwise your perfect composition
Isn't going to get much exhibition.*

*Art isn't easy.
Every minor detail is a major decision,
Have to keep things in scale,
Have to hold to your vision-
Every time I start to feel defensive,
I remember lasers are expensive.
What's a little cocktail conversation
If it gets the funds for your foundation,
Leading to a prominent commission,
And an exhibition in addition?*

*Dot by dot,
Building up the image.
Shot by shot,
Keeping at a distance doesn't pay.
Still, if you remember your objective,
Not give all your privacy away,*

*A little bit of hype can be effective,
Long as you can keep it in perspective.
After all, without some recognition
No one's going to give you a commission,
Which will cause a crack in your
 foundation,
And you'll have wasted all of that
 conversation.*

*Art isn't easy.
Even if you're smart.
You think it's all put together,
But then something falls apart*

*Art isn't easy.
Overnight you're a trend,
You're the right combination-
Then the trend's at an end,
You're suddenly last year's sensation.
So you should support the competition,
Try to set aside your own ambition,
Even when you jockey for position.
If you feel a sense of coalition,*

*Then you never really stand alone.
If you want your work to reach fruition,
What you need's a link with your tradition,
And of course a prominent commission,
Plus a little formal recognition,
So that you can go on exhibit-
So that your work can go on exhibition.*

*Be nice, George
You have to pay a price, George
They like to give advice, George
Don't think about it twice George*

*Be new, George.
They tell you till they're blue, George:
You're new or else you're through, George,
And even if it's true, George-
You do what you can do.
Bit by bit,
Putting it together.
Piece by piece.
Working out the vision night and day.
All it takes is time and perseverance,*

*With a little luck along the way,
Putting in a personal appearance,
Gathering supporters and adherents.*

*Mapping out the right configuration,
Starting with a suitable foundation.*

*Lining up a prominent commission
And an exhibition in addition
Here a little dab of politician
There a little touch of publication
Till you have a balanced composition
Everything depends on preparation
Even if you do have the suspicion
That it's taking all your concentration
Is a matter of promotion, but then,*

*That is the state of the art,
And art isn't easy.*

*The art of making art
Is putting it together
Bit by bit,*

*Link by link,
Drink by drink,
Mink by mink,*

*And that is
The state of the art*



I

For you to understand where I'm coming from, you need to understand I grew up in a small town of around two thousand people in the nineties, and like most small towns it was populated by a somewhat narrow minded group of people, on the south coast of Iceland. Not ideal for a little gay boy like myself.

As early as age three I realised that I did not fit in. When asked as a child what I wanted to become when I grew up, my answer would always be without hesitation "A painter! But the kind that paints houses of course." I guess that sums up the paranoia and fear that comes with being closeted. Obviously, preferring the arduous labour of painting houses instead of the delicate painting on a canvas would eliminate all suspicion of anything out of the ordinary happening in this little boys head. Being just a child I had no idea what

exactly I was hiding, but having been reprimanded for exhibiting 'feminine' behaviour, I was very careful not to expose that side to anyone, probably without much success as that was not easily contained.

Shy and careful, but I had energy bursting out of me which I couldn't restrain. My mother was an artist, my father was not. I got my creative side from her and she encouraged me to draw and paint, which I liked but I preferred spending my time living in my own world developing characters, writing plays and performing them to just about anyone brave enough to enter our home, those who did knew very well they would be forced to sit through one of my performances. However, while I was at school I was very reserved and quiet.

By the time I had become a teenager I had been suppressed to the point of finding myself in a state of paralysis in any given social situation. If I made one wrong move I risked revealing my secret. Years of

extreme bullying had made me very paranoid. Although everyone knew what I was hiding, I wasn't ready to admit it to myself.

I came out of the closet at age fourteen. I felt free to allow myself to behave how I wanted. It opened the floodgates of hate from my community wider than ever before but I wore it with pride and didn't let it bother me, and kept reminding myself I just needed to hold on a little bit longer until graduation and I could start fresh somewhere else. Anywhere else would do.

The year I started college I lost my mother to cancer. The following years were a foggy mess, I would drift through classes and was never able to pay attention to anything the teachers tried to tell me, in fact I don't remember much from that period of my life at all. I proceeded to be uninterested in everything.

At nineteen I signed up for an art class. It was taught by a British woman in her mid-forties whom I quickly began to

idolise. She told me stories of how she went to Aphex Twin concerts in London, a band I was obsessed with at the time, and that she had been a close friend of Richard Hamilton, the famous pop artist who died in 2011 and that in her home she had a large collection of his artworks which he had given to her. That gave me a tiny view into a lifestyle which had been hidden to me until then. I was completely sold on art from that day forward, not even thinking about whether this was a smart move and not considering that my mentor was working part time teaching disinterested college students the very basics of painting and that she was obviously scrambling in some ways. I just saw a way out of the world I knew and I followed it. With her I discovered I could channel my emotions into painting, which I hadn't done since childhood, and that I was actually pretty good at it.

I was on a roll, and being a self-centred

teen I liked the idea of working independently on my own issues. I was doing things my way and on my time, finally feeling able to explain myself without using words. Painting became like therapy for me and the possibility of doing this professionally was mind blowing to me.

I was motivated and very interested in what I was doing, I obsessed over making art, I worked day and night painting. Having only attended this one art class I transferred to an art department in another college and everything was going well. After a few years studying I remember feeling pretty invincible when a teacher told me and my father when we attended a group exhibition that they had nothing to teach me. Not only did that give me a confidence boost but also relaxed my father, who had some serious concerns about me ever being able to make a career out of this, actually it was a concern of all my family members.

At that point there wasn't a doubt in my mind that I was going to be successful, I imagined how I would present myself when I would exhibit at the Icelandic pavilion at the Venice biennale for example. I was naive enough to think it was all going to be easy, and for a while it felt like it would be, my confidence was through the roof and I was ready for a challenge. I applied to the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam and after a shaky performance at the entrance examinations I got in.

Shortly after arriving there though I realised that this was nothing like what I was used to in my former school. I went from being in my mind a big fish in a pond to being a rather small one in an ocean spreading to many continents, filled to the brim with interesting and well spoken individuals. I thought everyone was so talented and I was intimidated by the way people could explain themselves in ways that at the time seemed pretty profound

to me. I tried brushing it off telling myself they were pretentious but deep down I was jealous. I was never exceptionally well spoken, presenting myself was always rather problematic. I would show up with artworks I was proud of and when I couldn't answer questions students had about them I would get stuck and there were times where I would end up in the bathroom crying after a harsh critique. My confidence was dropping more every day until one day I was biking to school and being from a town of two thousand people, never having been extremely careful in traffic, I was hit by a tram moving at full speed and I was pretty badly injured.

My bones were broken and I had to take a year off to heal, I returned physically healed but mentally I was even more fucked up than before. In the year I was away I had moved to Denmark to live with my then boyfriend, I was essentially a cripple, working at a supermarket and I pretty

much lost all faith in myself. When I came back, without a boyfriend, I had forgotten what my ambitions were. Why did I want to do this in the first place? I still enjoyed making art but had lost the spark I had in the beginning. I became cynical and I developed an intolerance for bullshit. The art world suddenly felt like a cold and pretentious place which did not fit with my changed worldview.

Even though I didn't believe in myself anymore, I felt like there was no other way for me to succeed. I was twenty three years old and I had no time to start from scratch in a new field, so I kept going and decided to hold on long enough to at least get a degree, and then I could move on from there. Having arrived at that place mentally I had to ask myself whether or not I actually was an artist.



THE WORD

Am I an artist? I feel so uncomfortable with labelling myself that. I am a person that has a need to create and I need to do that for a few reasons. One is that I like expressing myself that way. Feeling like I am understood is another one, maybe rather than just being understood, it's being able to explain myself visually because I don't always explain myself well otherwise. It is rewarding when you make something and it resonates, and making a connection with someone without communicating. Having gone through what I have gone through it is nice to connect with people who have struggled with similar things, and having gone through some shit, I feel like I have a reason to keep doing things in an honest way so that somebody doesn't feel as confused as I do. Which brings me to my most important reason, creating is a great alternative to seeing a therapist.

Why don't I feel like I can call myself an artist? Or rather, why don't I want to be called one? I connect the word immediately with privilege, and even more specifically with white privilege. Don't misunderstand, art is by no means inherently a white business, although the last time I checked there were perhaps two black people studying at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy. I mean, that can not be a coincidence. Either the school is extremely racist or it has something to do with a specific group of people not having the means to pursue an artistic study in this country. At this point art education feels like a luxury only the rich and privileged can afford and although I am struggling to live off of my allowance from the Icelandic government, make no mistake, I am very much a white man from Iceland who has had a comfortable life financially with a family in a position to help me out when times get tough and a lot of people do not share that advantage with me. I don't

like it, and it makes it hard for me to want to belong in that group.

Maybe the thing that keeps me from wanting to be an artist is that right now creating art feels slightly masturbative to me and maybe I should do something a little bit more productive.

Like painting houses.

Maybe it's me. Perhaps I am unsure of my worth and am afraid to expose myself as a fraud. Do I lack the qualities of an artist? I wonder what I need to be or have to be able to do to claim that title. According to the Cambridge Dictionary:

Artist

noun [C] • UK /'ɑː.tɪst/ • US /ɑːr.tɪst/

- a. someone who paints, draws or makes sculptures.
- b. someone who creates things with great skill and imagination.

An artist is essentially a skilled old-timey painter. If those are the requirements I do not fit the criteria because I do not paint or sculpt anymore nor do I think I am spectacularly skilled, at least depending on who you compare it with, my skill level is debatable. It is funny how outdated these definitions are and I wonder when they were made because it's been a while since painting and sculpture were the only accepted artforms out there.

What about the second definition though? I wonder what it means to be skilled and imaginative. I find those to be subjective terms. There are different ways to be skilled and imaginative, for example, you can be technically inept but have great feeling of emotion and no one can really judge your work as long as you stand by your purpose and conviction. It's a little bit confusing because it used to be clearer, but now it's so much more than just knowing the rules. They don't really matter anymore, although

knowing them and applying them or purposely breaking them can elevate what you are doing from being purely emotional. Therefore, being technically skilled probably is not a requirement but it definitely is a plus.

Artists have challenged the requirement of skill and imagination in art as far back as the eighteenth century, where for example danish painter Oluf Braren, whose work belongs to Naivism or Naive art, which is a form



Domestic Wedding on Föhr, Oluf Braren, ca. 1830.

of visual art made by people who lack the formal education and training professional artists undergo. What characterises Naive

art is a certain awkwardness with the rules of perspective, color and a decrease of the precision of details, among other things.[1] Braren was self educated so he painted his subjects without much technical skill.[2] He was considered one of the most important early Naive painters, even though his work was not known in his lifetime, actually it did not reach popularity until the twentieth century.

Later, in 1933, Jean Arp made the work



According to the Laws of Chance, Jean Arp, 1933.

According to the Laws of Chance. It has everything to do with chance and not so much to do with skill or imagination.

He felt that he could incorporate chance within artistic production, comparing the role of the

artist to a plant bearing fruit. This work shows Arp playing with random composition, in this case dropping painted pieces of paper onto a surface.[3] The idea of making art that way at the time was pretty imaginative. He was a Dada artist but did not invent the concept. Dadaism is an art movement that was invented by an artist named Hugo Ball, who wrote and presented the original *Dada manifesto* in 1916.[4] Dadaists rejected logic and reason in favor of nonsense and irrationalism and things were often completely left to chance,[5] which makes a pretty good argument that skill is not mandatory to be an artist, as for imagination, not as much.

Richard Prince is a contemporary artist who relies heavily on other people's work. He doesn't exclusively use appropriation in his works but his most successful pieces have relied on the method completely. He began making a photographic series in the 80's entitled *Cowboys*, wherein he

rephotographed Marlboro cigarettes advertisements featuring The Marlboro Man,

originally photographed by Sam Abell. A more recent piece from the series, which was made



New Portraits, Richard Prince, 2014.

in the year 2000, sold for three million dollars at a 2014 Sotheby's auction. Photographer Sam Abell, in a PDN interview in 2008, expressed his discontent with Prince's appropriation but did not condemn it, he just said "...[Prince] has to live with that." and I imagine he does, rather well.

Richard Prince's 2014 exhibition at the Gagosian gallery in London, *New Portraits*, comprised entirely of other people's Instagram posts. The only changes made were Prince's own emoji-filled comments

made to the photos. The pieces sold for up to one hundred thousand dollars at New York's Frieze art fair.

Appropriation, which is essentially just borrowing, copying and modifying images and objects, is a method that has been used by artists for centuries but it took on a new meaning in both America and Britain in the mid-twentieth century with the rise of consumerism. Pop artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein reproduced and repeated everyday images from popular culture. Today, appropriating images and media is still a pretty common practice for artists, and like with Prince's works, it still challenges our ideas of originality and tests the boundaries of what it means to be an artist. Richard Prince has become really successful and while I admire his success, I am actually sickened by his audacity. I have always believed you should be humble and maintain a level of authenticity in

your work and that without it you are just flat out an asshole. Should you just not care about humility and go about my work with a sickening amount of confidence?

No one really knows how to define art. "But, is it art?" is the classic cliché of a question which is being asked this very moment by thousands of confused museum visitors and also happens to be the title of the art theory book by Cynthia Freeland, where she searches for answer to that question. She says in regard to Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964), that anything can be considered art as long as galleries and/or art collectors are willing to buy it.[6] There used to be limitations to what constitutes an artwork, but now, as long as you have enough intent and steadfastness regarding a project as well as research to back it up, essentially anything can be a considered a legitimate piece of work.

I am not one hundred percent sure that I am willing to operate this way. I think the

quality of my work is good but there may be something lacking in the presentation. I have been told by teachers that I need to take more space, and when I think I have done just that they tell me again. I used to think the quality of the work was enough but it is kind of dawning on me that I need to become a salesman if I want to succeed in this industry.



THE WORLD

Today everyone that wants it has an outlet for their art on social media. The output of content is overwhelming and I wonder if that challenges the credibility of the 'artist'. If everyone can call themselves an artist and anything can potentially be categorized as art, what effect does the amount of content online have on the art world? The physical galleries may serve as a platform for 'higher' art and those in charge of them select those worthy to stand apart from the rest. There is a lot of competition to exhibit and they are the only places that set you apart from the online world. But who is it reaching to exactly, who goes to museums and galleries anymore? Art students like myself do, people connected to the art world such as benefactors, curators, gallerists, teachers, scholars and so on do as well. Tourists definitely go there and the majority of them are probably just people who go

to have done something cultural on their trip and probably take little to nothing from it, a generalisation, but I truly believe that.

My friend had an interesting thought the other day when he said, "The only people who go to openings are people who are in the arts who go to these things only to complain about the details of the work and how it could have been done better, just to feel better about themselves and their own practise." I thought about it and I think there's some truth to that. I think people just like the validation that comes with either the feeling that comes with thinking they understand the work or thinking they know how to do it better. It's just feels self-centred.

Are we are living in a world where art is no longer relevant? I think we live in a world where young people, myself included, concern themselves with their own image. We teach our children by example the importance of being liked, literally, on

social media. As I have surveyed it, the artwork, much like the tweet or the instagram post, is often a self centered statement made about oneself. If not an artwork will be made to persuade the viewer into thinking the maker is woke, that he is aware of the current climate and the problems facing the oppressed and ostracised. I just think that if they are so concerned, where is the action? There is such overabundance of mediocre work being selected and exhibited. I feel like it has more to do with the artist's sales pitch than the work itself and what succeeds is what makes money.

As I see it, If I were to make it in the art world I would need to have the right setting and context, to acquire connections by networking to get opportunities and to stand out but still stay inside the box of how an artist should behave. The right vocabulary and attitude is important so therefore I would need to have superior communication skills, but above all to have a

lot of patience and perseverance, because I would probably fail many times before achieving my goal. Now I am completely discounting status and wealth which will undoubtedly get me there quicker.

The 1984 musical *Sunday in the Park with George*, with music and lyrics by composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim, centers around the French post-impressionist painter



Sunday in the Park with George, 2017

Georges Seurat (1859–1891) and the process of making his 1884–1886 painting *A Sunday Afternoon*

on the Island of La Grande Jatte which changed the direction of modern art by initiating Neo-impressionism. He was perhaps best known for devising the painting techniques chromoluminarism and pointillism. On one hand, he had a very

delicate sensibility and on the other, he was incredibly logical and had an almost mathematical precision. He is one of the icons of nineteenth century painting. In the song *Putting it Together* from the musical, whose lyrics I have put at the very start of this thesis, Sondheim writes about the struggle of making art and advancing it within the art world, from the perspective of Georges Seurat. Even though it is now a work dealing with a totally different time in art, I think it still holds up. Art making and all the complexities that accompany it can be frustrating but that is just the state of the art, and art isn't easy.

The number one question I get asked at family gatherings since I started studying art has always been and continues to be, "But, how are you going to make money?" and I always say that we would just have to wait and see, that I would figure it out when the time came. I've always been aware that this isn't a profession one

would get into for money. It is obvious that if I'd had financial ambitions I probably would not have embarked on a career in fine arts.

I had a romantic idea of living my life as a 'penniless artist', I imagined it would be enough to have my work and the fulfillment of doing what I wanted to do. When I was asked that question, particularly in my college years, I resented those who asked it for being so materialistic and only thinking about money. "Who cares? Money is not everything." Spoiler alert, it's is. Those people who asked me that question probably hate that their lives have to revolve around money just as much as I do, but it's just the sad reality. I look at my friends who have graduated and I see them struggling to earn money by working low income jobs and what I've heard from those people is that most of the time it's a balance between working those jobs to be able to live and pay off their student loans

and then struggling to make connections and apply for funds which don't come by too easily. With whatever money they have left they sometimes manage to have enough for a cheap studio somewhere. I am graduating soon and I am severely aware of the impending doom of having to pay off my several million icelandic krona student loan, not without interest of course. The possibility of me having to move back to Iceland is high, there just seem to be more opportunities there for me.

I interviewed someone who may or may not know a few things about the art world in Iceland, but at least Sólveig Eir Stewart graduated from the Icelandic Academy of the Arts in 2015 and has since then been trying to find her way in the scene in Reykjavík. I thought it would be interesting to talk to her about what is to come.

Valdemar: I want to ask you just a few questions about the art world in Iceland, I want to know your thoughts on the community and the people in it, whether it is easy to get ahead within the industry and if it feel isolated?

Sólveig: We have a few galleries that kind of control what is shown and what isn't, but then we also have a few artist-run spaces in Reykjavík. Now it's getting bigger in the countryside as well, there are a lot of artists who are moving there and there are interesting things happening in the north part of Iceland whereas before it was more in the capital.

Valdemar: How do you perceive the scene at the moment in Iceland?

Sólveig: I'd say the art scene in Iceland is kind of like a bubble. It is a very condensed scene. There's only one art school in Iceland which offers a BA degree, therefore, everyone knows everybody within the art scene and maybe in

that way it's easier to... I don't know.

Valdemar: Get ahead?

Sólveig: Well, there aren't these six degrees of separation between people, you can just call someone up and get what you want but at the same time it doesn't branch out that much. There just aren't that many of us.

Valdemar: Would you consider it an exclusive group of people and do you think it's hard to become a part of it?

Sólveig: I think it really depends. Obviously there are always trends going on but it depends on who you talk to and the way people react to you and your work. Word spreads around really fast in Iceland so everybody knows everything about everyone *laughs*. Which isn't necessarily bad. I think it's easier in the artist run galleries, if you show initiative you can pretty much –

Valdemar: Get in.

Sólveig: Like, somewhere. But there isn't

a lot of money within the art world.

Valdemar: Recently you have been doing performances in collaboration with musicians at a gallery in Iceland, where they improvised a score to a skype conversation you were having with Hreinn Friðfinnson, an older Icelandic artist who lives and works in Amsterdam. How did that happen?

Sólveig: I knew one of the musicians beforehand, he asked me if I wanted to participate in this project. They already had the idea of this Skype performance.

Valdemar: Did you know each other? Did he choose you because the two of you were close or because he thought you were right for the job?

Sólveig: I knew him from before but we weren't that close, we just had a conversation in Bíó Paradís (an independent cinema and café in Reykjavík) one night and he told me, "You have such a nice voice, maybe you want to be a part of

this thing” We continued talking together, I told him I had thought of making a Skype performance as well, so we developed the ideas together.

Valdemar: So it really happened by chance and not because of networking efforts made by you?

Sólveig: No, not really *laughs*. Sometimes it’s like that, things just happen to you. We showed it in a space called Mengi, where artists actually get paid for performing. Which doesn’t happen a lot. It’s a good space when it comes to that.

Valdemar: After you graduated, you have lived in both Amsterdam and Iceland, when it comes to making money in our field, do you think it’s different in Iceland?

Sólveig: People often expect you to do things for free, which is annoying, but it really depends on your gig. If you sign up with a gallery then they will try to sell your work and then it’s easier to make

money, but they always take a part of it. You can also sell your work at exhibitions, but it’s not that easy. Not all art is easy to sell either. Then there are performance artists like Ragnar Kjartansson who is like a pop star now.

Valdemar: I want to ask in relation to the bubble. I’m assuming there is lack of diversity within it, Iceland being such an isolated country.

Sólveig: Yeah, but some people like him [Ragnar Kjartansson] manage to break out of it.

Valdemar: What I’m trying to ask is do you think the lack of diversity affects the work that’s being put out and do you think it becomes monotonous?

Sólveig: I think there’s a lot of similarities and trends that people jump on. It would probably be different if there were more schools but there’s just the one art school and a very small art scene. One day performances are in and the next

it's paintings or something like that. For example some painters that paint similarly group themselves together and make collectives. There isn't much work to see, it would only take you one day to see all the exhibitions in Reykjavík if you wanted to. I guess there is some gentrification happening now with all the tourism. I also think more artists are going to the countryside and making these kind of cool projects and I hope it's getting bigger and stronger.

Valdemar: Do you think artists in Iceland have a certain way of making art? Because as a community I think that we like to be humorous and we don't like taking things too seriously, perhaps because we're afraid of it becoming silly or romantic.

Sólveig: Yeah, I think there's a lot of irony in the work and that's been a popular trend especially in music videos and within both the art and fashion world.

It's this kind of irony that engulfs everything and it becomes kind of sad and I'm not sure if it's meant to be. It's humorous and sad at the same time. I don't always think it's genuine but maybe in some way it is.

Valdemar: Do you think this stems from our mentality as a nation or do you think people do it because everyone else seems to be doing it?

Sólveig: Honestly, I think people do it because everyone else does it. We're not at the beginning, someone starts and it has a ripple effect like any trend. For example, the rap scene is big now but who knows how it's gonna be in a couple of years.

Valdemar: Rap is sort of taking over everything in Iceland, do you think as a result the art world is becoming even less exciting? Does it have an effect?

Sólveig: I feel like a lot of artists are merging with that world. They make a persona and follow it into this scene.

It's definitely a big thing right now but then there are these smaller underground scenes which are more interesting to me. You can see these other trends like, you know, witchy shamanism or political art or just really angry art *laughs*. I think it's not often you see work that's really genuine but I find it harder and harder to find something that resonates. I don't like most of the art world. Maybe that's not chill *laughs*.

Valdemar: I share that point of view with you and I wonder if people are buying into it or do they think it's fake, how do you think others perceive it?

Sólveig: I think some must like it because it serves their image.

Valdemar: So they're playing the game?

Sólveig: They might be doing it because they can't take their own initiative. They just follow all these trends and surf the wave.

Valdemar: Yeah. Because that's safe.

Sólveig: Yes, I find the more I get into the art world the less I like it. It's like when something looks beautiful from afar but then there are all these dark sides you're not gonna like.

Valdemar: I always envisioned it to be different when I was growing up. Maybe it's because I was naive. I think wanting to become a part of the art world is only something a teenager would think because they are the only ones who don't realise what it's all about. It's also really seductive because it's all about YOU. That is a teenage mindset. That is what you want.

Sólveig: Yes exactly, but then again teenagers don't usually make good work, I made a lot of shitty art when i was a teenager. It becomes better with time.

Valdemar: At some point you get disillusioned. Is it still exciting for you or do you do it because you feel like it is too late to back out?

Sólveig: I think it's still interesting. I just see more of it. It seemed so far away and now when I'm in it, I'm like "Oh, okay, is this it?" It's depressing. It can be beautiful as well but mostly [the work out there] is just a bunch of crap. That's okay because you have to know what you don't like to find out what you do like. I think it's about your taste in things and getting to know yourself.

Valdemar: Maybe it's a problem with location. It's probably not so interesting right now in Reykjavík. There is so much content being put out online now, for example via Instagram, do you think this changes the state of the art world and what does that mean for the artist?

Sólveig: Talent is not so necessary anymore. I think talent is an elusive word, even though you have talent it doesn't mean you're gonna get anywhere in the art world. It's just about how willing are you to mutate your own body and how

far do you want to go for attention? But it depends on the field, if you are a cartoonist you need to be able to draw. So, having talent doesn't hurt.

Valdemar: Where does it leave the galleries and the museums?

Sólveig: I think it has to change somehow. I find that so much in the art world is conservative, or preservative even. It has to change, that's how the world goes, it evolves and changes.

Valdemar: Do you think the venues are becoming outdated? Do you think we need to move art to a virtual venue?

Sólveig: It's one thing to go somewhere, to make a trip out of it and actually go to a gallery. It becomes a social thing, there are gallery openings and a bunch of people show up and then very few people show up for the art after the opening. So much of it is social.

Valdemar: Then it starts becoming so inbred, the people who go are the ones who

belong to that world. It's art for artists.

Sólveig: I think art should be for everyone.

I guess it still is.

Valdemar: We have the tourists who populate the museums and to some extent the galleries too, and then we have the old people who are obviously a dying breed.

Sólveig: That makes me kind of worried.

Maybe it's this eternal fear of something new. I think it's good to be wary of some things but it's not always going to be bad. Socrates said about writing that it would take away from the memory and living conversation, but then of course it just made this huge collective memory, with books. Then it goes onto computers and it just keeps evolving. Socrates was right in one sense but wasn't right in the whole. It's good to be doubtful but not too doubtful.

Valdemar: Do you think I have a conservative point of view to think about these things in this way?

Sólveig: No, I think you have to be able to see it from that perspective as well. Instead of always looking onwards, everything is built on what came before and you have to reflect on the past. I think the genuine stuff will be remembered. There's always gonna be crap. Maybe that's pessimistic.

Valdemar: Maybe it's realistic too. Do you see yourself as a part of the art scene in Iceland? If not would you like to try it somewhere else, or stay safe in this environment?

Sólveig: I think the dream would be to have a foot in one country and the other in Iceland. If you have connections in other places you can form group exhibitions and show together. I haven't been really active for the past year but I still have access to a gallery space and there's a lot of energy going on there. You have to be very active to be deeply embedded in the art scene.

Valdemar: Why are you not active?

Sólveig: I am making but not showing, I have a studio and work on my computer, but I also have to work and go to school. I'm doing creative writing now and I have to get money somehow. It's not easy to live in Iceland, everything is really expensive and if you are going to be an artist you have to have another job as well. It can also be difficult to find a collective that you want to work with because there is just less people. It's different, but I think that artists know other artists in all cities. Here in Iceland it's just even smaller. It's like, "Oh, do you know this Icelandic artist?" and it's always gonna be yes. You're always gonna know who the person is.

Valdemar: There's a lot of effort required to make it in this business and you just need a lot of patience and perseverance. You just have to keep on going. It's not gonna be easy.

Sólveig: You don't want a three year gap in your resumé *laughs*. It's not easy, but somehow it just keeps going. Art isn't easy, that's the truth. But what is it like in Amsterdam? Is it different?

Valdemar: Honestly, I really don't know. That's something I'm ashamed to admit but it's not a part of my reality at the moment. I'm in the school bubble. That's why I'm interested in knowing what it's like in Iceland. Whether I want to work there or not.

I interviewed Sólveig because I suspected that moving to Iceland to make a career would be unavoidable. I had the intention of figuring out the landscape of the scene she was in right now to help me make a decision. Truth be told, I wasn't surprised by what she had to say. It was pretty much how I imagined it. Everything being on a

smaller scale has its positive and negative aspects, it certainly makes it easier to get your art out there but at the same time it may be less stimulating simply due to lack of variety.

Above all else I realised no matter where you are there will always be difficulties in this business, perhaps that is how it is in every business. There will always be superficial work and people, and money will be hard to come by, that just comes with the territory, and yes it will be annoying at times, but I have to find a way to do things my own way. The surroundings can't be changed, the only thing I can work on is myself.



CONCLUSION

Shortly after I returned to my studies for the second time I decided to write a manifesto which I then laser cut onto the face of a mirror, wanting it to reflect the faces of those who viewed it. In actuality it wasn't so much a manifesto I intended to adhere to, nor am I sure it would have been possible. It was my way of sending a message to those around me that I felt needed a reminder of their arrogance.

1. The work must be presented anonymously.
2. The work must be distributed anonymously.
3. The work must not be associated with the artist's name.
4. The work must not be titled.
5. The work must not be explained by the artist.
6. The work must not show the

- artist's face in its natural form.
7. The work must not include the artist's voice in its natural form.
8. The manifesto must be applied to all works made by the artist.

As I look back at it now, my obsession with anonymity in this work captures my weariness of the superficial elements of the setting I found myself in, within the art school and beyond it. Since then and in the process of writing this thesis, my views have changed slightly. I still have reservations about the art world and I may never want to call myself an artist, and who knows whether I will be able to make a career in an industry I find so hard to identify with, but I know this is what I want to do and therefore all I really can do is stop focusing on my surroundings and realise that as long as I believe in it, my work can shine through.

At the Brit Awards In 1998, the Icelandic musician and artist Björk in response to winning the best international female award simply said, “I am grateful, grapefruit.” That informs the way I view my own work and how I want my career to unfold. Without pretense, straight to the point with a sense of humor and irreverence about it.

In conclusion, I decided not to write a new manifesto but rather a set of guidelines, in no particular order, that sum up what I have come to understand about myself and what I should keep in mind to succeed, and if they seem basic, that is okay, they are, but they are true.

- Call yourself a creator, not an artist.
- Retain a level of authenticity and humility.
- Tell the truth and be honest at all times.
- Create from the soul, it will resonate.
- Express yourself in a way that makes sense to you.

- Allow yourself to be confident, it does not mean you are arrogant.
- Make use of every opportunity.
- Have a sense of humor about art.
- Accept failure and keep going.

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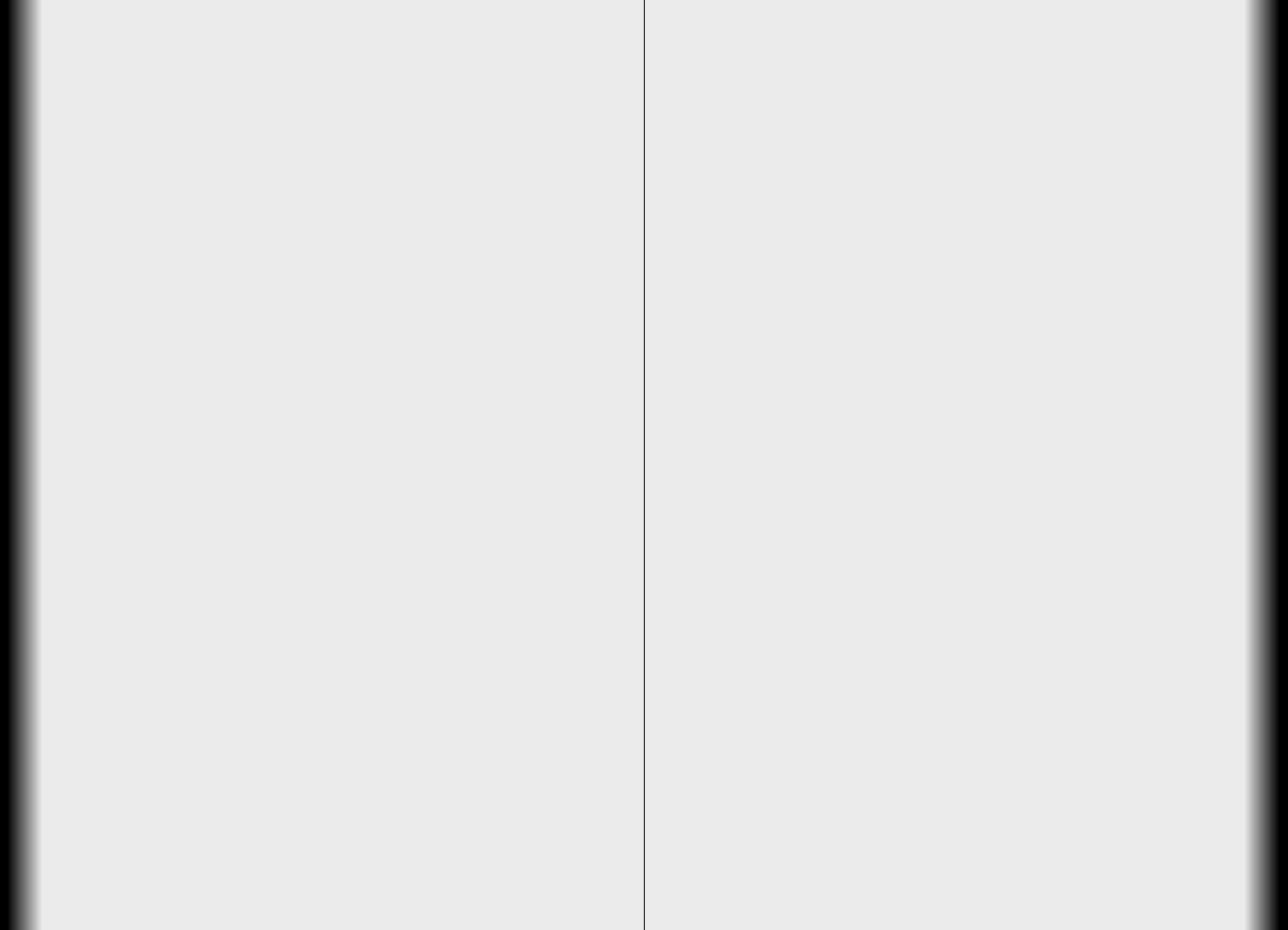
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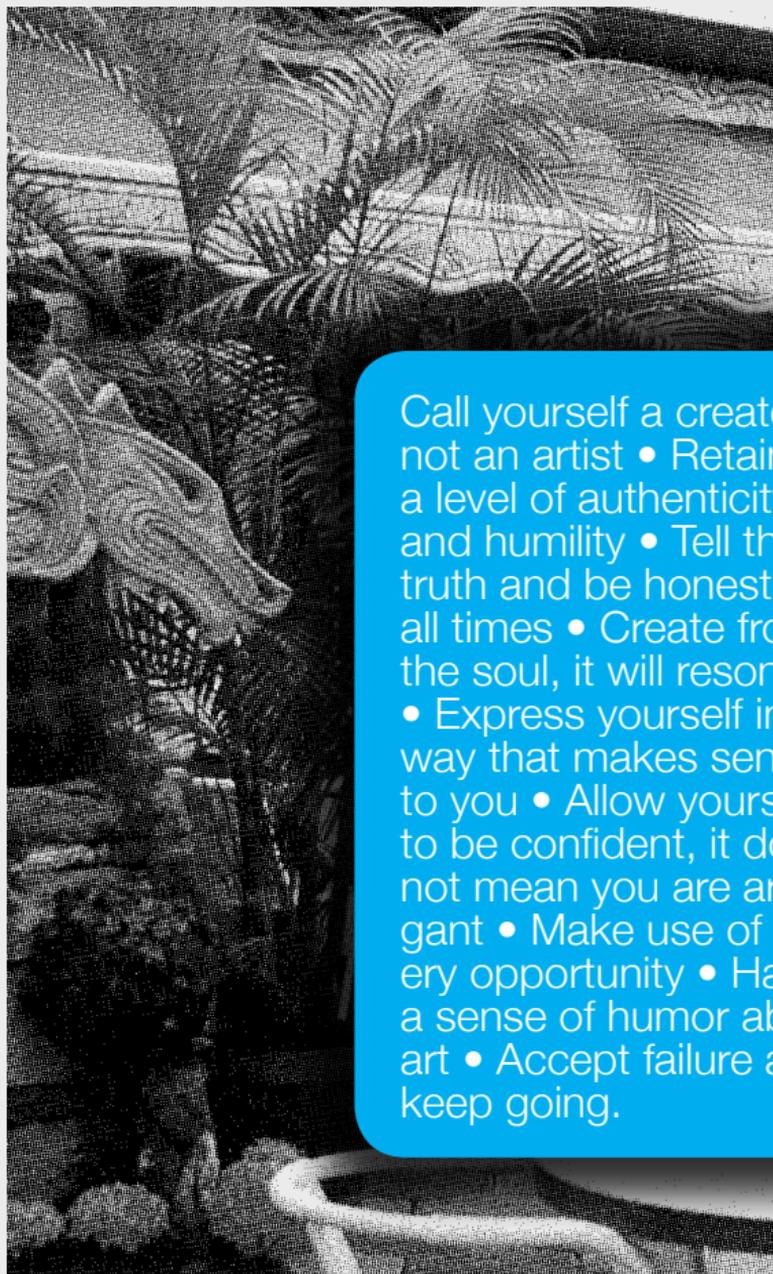
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