

RAGNAR KJARTANSSON

The Visitors

November 17, 2012–January 27, 2013

Opening: November 16, 2012, 6 pm

After a comprehensive renovation and expansion of its galleries in the Löwenbräukunst-Areal, the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst reopens with the first Swiss solo exhibition of the Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson (b. 1976; lives and works in Reykjavík).

Kjartansson's enthusiasm for music and his interest in performance art are evident in the project *The Visitors*, which was conceived specifically for the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst. The video installation transports the beholder to a peculiar universe: in the various rooms of an almost two-hundred-year-old villa on the picturesque Hudson River in New York State, the artist, his friends, and residents perform a "feminine nihilistic gospel song." *The Visitors* is an act of homage to friendship—and also, a bit, to the Swedish pop band ABBA.

In June, Ragnar Kjartansson's performance piece *An die Musik* inaugurated the new exhibition spaces of the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst during the Löwenbräukunst preview. On the occasion of the museum's official opening to the public, the Icelandic artist now presents his first solo show in Switzerland. The video installation *The Visitors* is based on a performance piece he staged in the legendary villa Rokeby on the shore of the Hudson River in Upstate New York.

Almost two hundred years old, Rokeby is now headed by Ricky Aldrich and his Polish wife, Ania, who has devoted herself to shamanism since the 1970s, an interest that has helped define the villa's peculiar atmosphere. Even though the many guests who come and go animate the house, it feels like a museum where traces and recollections of generations past are being preserved.

As with most of Ragnar Kjartansson's performance and video art, music and creative collaboration with friends play a crucial role in *The Visitors*. The project's kernel is a poem by the artist Ásdís Sif Gunnarsdóttir. Kjartansson had set the text to music for a performance by Gunnarsdóttir a few years earlier; he now uses the music in a different context. He has several protagonists perform the song in a variety of settings—some appear in one of the many rooms at Rokeby, others in the property's picturesque surroundings. Each part focuses on a new room and a different musician.

The work, shot using several cameras in a single take for each scene, is presented on screens set up throughout the generously sized exhibition space. The individual scenes thus coalesce into an encompassing cinematographic tableau. The visitors are free to amble through the gallery and linger before the individual projections as they please.

The Visitors, Ragnar Kjartansson recalls, also pays homage to the Swedish pop band ABBA. The title alludes to the ABBA album also called *The Visitors*, which came out in 1981; the band's eighth and last record, it strikes a surprising and almost somber note—ABBA broke apart soon after the album came out, with members blaming crises in their relationships and their exhaustion.

Kjartansson's affinity for music is evident not least in his own musical practice with the bands Trabant, The Funerals, Kanada, Kósý, and his current band, Ragnar Kjartansson & The All Star Band. The core of that last formation consists of five musicians and Kjartansson himself; other artist friends join them for performances. For the vernissage on 16 November 2012, the Museum extends an invitation to a special event: from 9:30pm Ragnar Kjartansson will take to the stage and set the mood with his All Star Band.

Ragnar Kjartansson's first solo show in Switzerland is preceded by a whole number of solo and group exhibitions in international galleries and museums as well as biennials and triennials – amongst others at Manifesta 7, the Venice Biennale and the Turin Triennale. In 2011 he received the Malcolm McLaren Award of the Performa for his work *Bliss*, a multi-hour performance of the final chapter of Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. Solo exhibitions: Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin (2012); Arthouse at the Jones Center, Austin; Frankfurter Kunstverein; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami; BAWAG Contemporary, Vienna; i8 Gallery, Reykjavík (all in 2011). In 2009, he designed the Icelandic pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

Curator:
Heike Munder,
Director, Migros Museum
für Gegenwartskunst

Catalogue:
Ragnar Kjartansson.
To Music/An die Musik.
With essays by Philip Auslander,
Markús T. Andrússon, and
Heike Munder as well as a
conversation between Edek
Bartz and Ragnar Kjartansson.
English/German, 220 pages,
JRP|Ringier.

The Visitors
2012
9-channel video projection
(colour, sound)
53 min.

MIGROS MUSEUM FÜR
GEGENWARTSKUNST
LIMMATSTRASSE 270
PO BOX 1766
CH-8005 ZÜRICH

T +41 44 277 20 50
F +41 44 277 62 86
INFO@MIGROSMUSEUM.CH

MIGROSMUSEUM.CH
MIGROS-CULTURE-PERCENTAGE.CH