

THE END  
RAGNAR KJARTANSSON  
THE PAVILION OF ICELAND  
07.06. – 22.11. 2009



**The Pavilion of Iceland  
At the 53rd International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia**

***RAGNAR KJARTANSSON: THE END***

**Palazzo Michiel dal Brusa'  
Cannaregio 4391/A (Entrance on Strada Nova)  
Ca' d'Oro stop on vaporetto  
7 June – 22 November 2009**

**Vernissage: 4 – 6 June 2009**

**Hours: 4 – 13 June 2009: 10:00am - 8:00pm**

**14 June – 22 November 2009:**

**Tuesday-Sunday, 10:00am - 1:00pm, 3:00pm - 7:00pm**

**The Pavilion of Iceland Press Conference: 5 June 2009, 10:00am**

**Reykjavík, Iceland, 16 March 2009:** The official Icelandic representation at the **53rd International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia** will feature **Ragnar Kjartansson**, a self-described incurable romantic, whose multifaceted artistic practice is rooted in a tradition of acting and performance with an existential and absurdist sensibility that can be linked to artists ranging from Caspar David Friedrich to Gilbert and George. Kjartansson's exhibition for Venice, entitled *The End*, will feature a *tableau vivant* of the artist and his model that will last for the entire six-months of the Biennale, along with a monumental video and music installation. It will be presented in the Palazzo Michiel dal Brusa', a 14<sup>th</sup>-century palazzo on the Grand Canal near the Rialto, which has served as the Icelandic Pavilion since 2007.

Transforming the Pavilion into a makeshift studio for the Biennale, Kjartansson will relentlessly paint the portrait of a young man posing day after day against the backdrop of the Grand Canal. The young man modeling for him will be smoking cigarettes and drinking beer, while clothed only in a bathing suit. For six months, Kjartansson will limit his art production to the painting of this scene. He will produce one work after the other, with the paintings made on previous days left to accumulate in piles around the studio. Though not an idealized version of the artist and his model – such a proposal being disrupted by the incongruous appearance of the bathing suit, the cigarettes, and the beer in an otherwise romantic setting – the performance is partially based on questions of the artist's self, suggesting his perpetual re-conceptualization in relation to his surroundings and previously existing works of art.

In a separate room, a new video and sound installation consisting of several scenes shot in the Canadian Rocky Mountains will display Kjartansson and a collaborator playing an ambiguous

country music arrangement on a variety of instruments. Recorded directly in the snow-covered mountains, the cacophonous music will take on the sounds of nature that, along with the expansive sights in the video, will be in sharp contrast to the intimate and isolated performance in the adjoining room of the Palazzo. Taken together, the recorded performance in the Rocky Mountains and the live performance in Venice will create a dramatic juxtaposition between two iconic settings. Connecting the two portions of the exhibition, however, are themes of creativity, camaraderie, and *Weltschmerz* or world-weariness.

Also a part of the exhibition, and in anticipation of the Biennale, Kjartansson and his friend and fellow artist Andjeas Ejiksson began exchanging letters in early 2008 chronicling preparations for the Pavilion. The two artists approached this dialogue from a performance angle, slipping into the roles of two sentimental gentlemen of yore. In the correspondence, which will be published in its entirety in the exhibition catalogue, Ejiksson describes the Pavilion as follows:

*“I imagine the Venice Pavilion being a lighthouse at the end of the world, watching the verge of nothingness. Waves chasing the lost souls and the mist blurring the horizon, protecting you from the vertigo of the abyss. It is a nameless sea and sitting on the dock is a man without fate”*

*Ragnar Kjartansson: The End* will be on view from 10:00am to 8:00pm from 4 June through 13 June 2009. From 14 June through 22 November 2009, the exhibition will be open Tuesday through Sunday from 10:00am to 1:00pm and from 3:00pm to 7:00pm.

### **About the Artist**

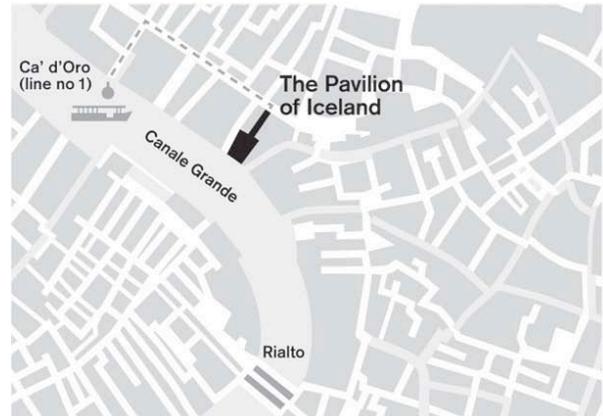
Ragnar Kjartansson (b. 1976, Reykjavík, Iceland) conjures up emotions in his work that he can pass on to his viewers, with a keen eye for the tragicomic spectacle of human experience where sorrow collides with happiness, horror with beauty, and drama with humor. In his versatile artistic career, he has focused on video, painting, and drawing, with performance at the heart of his practice. Both of Kjartansson’s parents are actors, and acting, repetition, and identity are ever-recurring themes in his work. He has taken on countless roles in his performances, combining his own personality with personas from cultural history. His work incorporates a *mélange* of show business icons and nostalgic imagery from bygone eras of theater, television, music, and art, allowing him to blur the border between life and art, reality and fiction, and to create bold statements that strike chords with his audiences. In addition to his work in the visual arts, Kjartansson has had a career in music, releasing several albums with his bands and performing throughout the world.

Kjartansson graduated from the Iceland Academy of the Arts in 2001, and is the youngest artist ever to represent Iceland at the International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. He has built an impressive roster of international exhibitions, including several major solo shows in museums, galleries, and art festivals in the last few years. He is representative of the vibrant young art scene in Iceland and has formed an engaging individual style that has drawn the attention of the international art world.

Kjartansson is represented by i8 Gallery in Iceland and Luhring Augustine in the United States.

### **Iceland in the International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia**

In 1960, the first Icelandic artists were sent to the International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia and by 1984 the country had an official presence with a national pavilion. In the last decade, more funding and effort has been expended to support and promote the representing artist, reflecting the growing importance of these international art events on artists' careers. Recently, Iceland was represented by Steingrímur Eyfjörð (2007), Gabriela Fridriksdóttir (2005), Rúrí (2003), and Finnbogi Pétursson (2001), all artists who exhibit internationally and have built strong reputations both inside and outside Iceland. Until 2005, Icelandic artists were presented in the Giardini di Castelli in a small pavilion designed by Finnish architect Alvar Aalto in 1956. In 2007, however, Steingrímur Eyfjörð's exhibition was mounted in the Palazzo Michiel, reflecting the recent expansion of the Biennale to more and more venues outside the traditional gardens. The palazzo, also known as "Dal Brusa" after a great fire in 1774, was renovated in 1777. Its richly decorated rooms still feature stuccos and frescoes by Jacopo Guarana in the upper floors and provide a dramatic setting for the Icelandic Pavilion.



The exhibition is organized by the Center for Icelandic Art (CIA.IS) in Reykjavík, Iceland under the commissionership of Christian Schoen, and is curated by Markús T. Andrússon and Dorothée Kirch.

Official website: [www.cia.is/venice](http://www.cia.is/venice)

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### **Media Contact:**

For further information, images, or to arrange an interview, please contact:

Elizabeth Reina or Antoine Vigne  
Blue Medium, Inc., USA  
T: +1 (212) 675-1800  
E: [elizabeth@bluemedium.com](mailto:elizabeth@bluemedium.com)