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“Nanoq — Flat Out & Bluesome” **An Art Project by Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson**

The subject of this project is the culmination of a two-year period of research during which a substantial number of stuffed polar bears in the UK have been tracked down and photographed by the artists in both public and private collections. The art installation will comprise several of the bears being brought together under a single roof. The first exhibition will be in Bristol (Spike island) and the second in Glasgow (Tramway). The opening date in Bristol is to be the 14th November and closing date in Glasgow, at the end of February.

Although the exhibition will stand as a spectacle in itself, it also unlocks a host of implied narratives; its history is so inevitably bound up with whaling and fishing traditions, with arctic exploration, pioneering and generally with 18th, 19th and 20th century adventuring. As a consequence of this, its potency as a symbol continues to intrigue and baffle us in our attempt to assimilate new perspectives on old behaviour and our collective duplicity in relation to nature. The exhibition will provide the opportunity to draw together all these disparate threads by means of a series of talks and seminars, with invited specialist speakers. Together with the photographs, the results of these events will in turn constitute the substance of a publication. The work will also exist as a web-based project in which viewers are able to gather information about the project and its process as well as viewing the bears on site at their locations in Britain.

Where the exhibition will last for only a few weeks it will be both a culmination of the research and a trigger for further inquiry. Through the talks and events the project will be extended and this process will subsequently be reflected in the publication, thereby providing the opportunity to extrapolate from the wider sources.

A starting point for this work had a personal twist, as the Icelandic surname name Snæbjörnsdóttir means, literally, snow-bear’s daughter. The very common Icelandic impulse to trace family ancestry, often as far back as the first settlers in 974, is symbolically extended through the collaboration here in respect of the provenance of these preserved specimens, wherever possible tracing their journey from the arctic to their current environment. This research thus provides the structure for points of connection, historically and geographically. The bears themselves will be drawn from municipal and private collections throughout the UK. The transport of the specimens may also be documented. The touring show will consist of the installation at one contemporary art venue in England – namely Spike Island and at one venue in Scotland – Tramway in Glasgow in addition to a photographic exhibition at a number of further museum venues in England.



The first part of the project involved the mapping of taxidermied polar bears in Britain. The polar bears have been photographed in context, that is, as they are presented or stored in the museums or private collections. An important part of the project is the accumulation and processing of information gathered relating to the origin and history of these polar bears. As a consequence of this practical research, the artists have accumulated the archive of photographs, taken on medium-format camera. These images will feature in the proposed publication. Several museums have already expressed an interest in the possibility of taking the touring exhibition, comprising all or a selection of these photographs.

The artists:

Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir is Professor at Valand School of Fine Art in Gothenburg. She lectured from 1995 – 2002 on the Environmental Art programme at Glasgow School of Art. Last year she took a one year's leave of absence from teaching, having received one of the major visual arts awards from the Scottish Arts Council. During this year she took up residencies in Greenland, Iceland and in Melbourne in pursuit of her work and projects. She has exhibited extensively both nationally and internationally.

Mark Wilson is a lecturer in Fine Art at Cumbria Institute of the Arts. He has a long experience of lecturing both in the U.K. and abroad. He has lectured in most of the Fine Art programmes in the north of England as well as in America, Italy and Australia. He has recently undertaken residencies in Greenland and Melbourne. His work has been shown extensively in the UK, Europe and USA and he has received many awards in respect of residencies undertaken in connection with these exhibitions.

Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson have been collaborating on all projects since 2001, having done so for selected shows in Iceland and the UK in the two years preceding. Their work, characteristically rooted in the north, explores issues of history, culture and the environment in relation to the individual and his/her sense of belonging or detachment. The most recent projects use the relationship between humans and selected animals - the polar bear, the Greenlandic sled dog, the Icelandic sheep - as a springboard to posit questions on cultural and individual location in an uncertain nature/culture relationship. Their work is installation and process-based, utilising photography and video.

