

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: THE CROWN: PARADISE RECLAIMED
Rebecca Hallie Basch, Master of Arts, 2018

Thesis directed by: Cy Keener, Assistant Professor of Sculpture /
Digital Fabrication and Media, Department of
Art

The story of my life and the story of my art are intrinsically connected. Through a personally authored story, that I identified as possessing the universal framework of the monomyth (as identified by Joseph Campbell), I became interested in the universal tendencies of humankind. My work synthesizes disparate topics into a new narrative space where parallels are drawn between the personal, extrapersonal, and the universal. In the project *The Crown: Paradise Reclaimed*, the quest for the ultimate boon, is examined through the stories of myself and others and centers around three locations: Baltimore, Utah, and Iceland.

THE CROWN: PARADISE RECLAIMED

by

Rebecca Hallie Basch

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
2018

Advisory Committee:
Professor Cy Keener, Chair
Professor Shannon Collis
Professor Liese Zahabi

© Copyright by
Rebecca Hallie Basch
2018

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	ii
List of Tables	iii
List of Figures	iv
Chapter 1: In the Beginning.....	1
Chapter 2: The Monomyth.....	6
Chapter 3: The Crown	16
Chapter 4: Finishing the Story	20
Chapter 5: Coming and Going	24
Chapter 6: The Crown: Paradise Reclaimed.....	38
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	65
Bibliography	66

List of Tables

Table 1- Drawing parallels between my narrative and two texts by Joseph Campbell.

Table 2- Joseph Campbell's definition of these final stages in the hero's quest.

List of Figures

Figure 1- Excerpt from my high school journal, 2003.

Figure 2- Newspaper clipping with article written about my installation illustrating a piece of my narrative, 2005.

Figure 3- Using my map to break down the original narrative. Bekí Basch, *Model Diagram: Narrative*, Pen on vellum and printer paper, tape, 6.5" x 6.5" 2008.

Figure 4- Using my map to correlate Joseph Campbell quotations with my narrative. Bekí Basch, *Model Diagram: Society Imposes*, Pen on vellum and printer paper, tape, 6.5" x 6.5" 2014.

Figure 5- Using my map to break down the migration pattern of puffins. Bekí Basch, *Model Diagram: Migration*, Pen on vellum and printer paper, tape, 6.5" x 6.5" 2008.

Figure 6- Using my map to compare a McDonalds character to an inverted food pyramid. Bekí Basch, *Model Diagram: Grimace*, Pen on vellum and printer paper, tape, 6.5" x 6.5" 2013.

Figure 7- Using my map to compare two public ice skating venues, one natural and one artificial. Bekí Basch, *Model Diagram: Ice Rinks*, Pen on vellum and printer paper, tape, 6.5" x 6.5" 2009.

Figure 8- My map form with the mysterious region in question.

Figure 9- Roman coin from the year 280, which depicts the emperor Probus wearing a radiant crown.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radiant_crown#/media/File:ProbusCoin.jpg

Figure 10- The Statue of Liberty wearing her radiant crown, dedicated in 1886.
<http://www.destination360.com/north-america/us/new-york/nyc/statue-crown-tour>

Figure 11- Sitting on top of Herjólfsdalur, the remains of a volcano, with puffins perched on a stack of rocks behind me. In the valley below, people are setting up for the annual festival called Þjóðhátíð.

Figure 12- Statue to Emigrating Mormons on the island of Heimaey in the Westman Islands. <http://mormonhistoricsites.org/mormon-pond-iceland/>

Figures 13 and 14- Photos of Kerid crater that I took in August, 2017. Still beautiful and relatively empty, but hardly desolate as in Kneeland or even Watson's time.

Figure 15- Bekí Basch, *Roadside Iceland*, Foam, plaster, latex paint, acrylic, bird poop, 24" x 36" x 24"

Figure 16- A photo I took in August 2017 of a chunk of floating ice at Jökulsárlón.

Figure 17- Erwin Wurm, *Convertible Fat Car (Porsche)*, 2005.
<http://www.xavierhufkens.com/exhibitions/2005-03-erwin-wurm>

Figure 18- David Shrigley, *Swan*, 2000. <https://fifteengallery.com/products/swan-david-shrigley-2000>

Figure 19- Bekí Basch, *Emigrants, Pioneers, Ancestors, Tourists*, Needle felted Icelandic wool collected from Heimaey, Iceland and Utah, 9" x 4" x 3" (each)

Figure 20- Cover page of the Reykjavík Grapevine issue 15, August 2017.
https://issuu.com/rvkgrapevine/docs/grapevine_15-2017_web

Figure 21- Scene from the movie *Magnolia* in which frogs fall from the sky. Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999.

Figure 22- Scene from the movie *Birds*, in which the presence of a flock of birds is cause for concern. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, 1963.

Figure 23- Bekí Basch, *7th Handcart Company*, Salt encrusted wood and car parts, MDF, sand, carpet underlay, resin, plaster, 4' x 36" x 18"

Figure 24- Remains of the Donner-Reed party wagon on the salt flats of Utah. The Donner-Reed Party were pioneers heading further on to California in 1846. Their story was sensationalized for the cannibalism they resorted to in order to survive the journey. <https://heritage.utah.gov/tag/the-donner-party>

Figure 25- Salt flats racer at Bonneville Speedway, Utah in 2015.
<https://arstechnica.com/cars/2015/08/venturi-battles-storms-and-salt-to-set-electric-land-speed-record/>

Figure 26- Scene from the documentary *Sweetwater Rescue: The Willie and Martin Handcart Story*, directed by Lee B. Groberg, 2006. This is the story of a well-known Mormon handcart company who struggled across the country and required rescuing in order to make it all the way to Utah.

Figure 27- Bekí Basch, *Majestic Mountain*, Inkjet print on polyester, 6' x 8'

Figure 28- Scene from *The Wizard of Oz*, directed by King Vidor, 1939.

Figure 29- The D.C. Mormon Temple, as seen from Route 495.
<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:DC-Temple-3.jpg>

Figure 30- The D.C. Mormon Temple, as seen from Route 495, with graffiti on the overpass that reads 'SURRENDER DOROTHY'. Photo from 1986.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/surrender-dorothy-painted-on-a-beltway-overpass--whats-the-story/2011/06/23/AGduf6kH_story.html?utm_term=.c4bd105249bf

Figure 31- A photo I took in the Fall of 2017 of the downtown Baltimore salt storage.

Figure 32- The Snæfellsjökull glacier on the Snæfellsnes peninsula of Iceland.
<http://icelandmag.is/article/more-people-discover-magic-snaefellsjokull-national-park-25-increase-year>

Figure 33- Paramount Pictures illustration by W.W. Hodgkinson. Referred to as 'Majestic Mountain'. <https://visitwightpro.com/paramount-majestic-mountain-logo/>

Figure 34- Utah's 'Ben Lomond' mountain outside of Ogden.
<https://www.sandiegoreader.com/weblogs/big-screen/2013/may/06/paramount-logo-history/#>

Figure 35- Bekí Basch, *Master of Two Worlds: Bird*, Inkjet print on paper, 24" x 22"

Figure 36- Bekí Basch, *Master of Two Worlds: Mound*, Inkjet print on paper, 24" x 22"

Figure 37- Roni Horn, *Untitled No. 8*, 2000.
<https://www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/16/roni-horn/list-of-works/7/>

Chapter 1: In the Beginning

My artistic practice has followed a trajectory, which has oscillated between pre-determined and revelatory. My impetus for making art spawned from necessity and it is perhaps within this deep-seeded intuitive drive that I tap into the universal again and again. Where I find myself now is a part of a journey, which can be compared to those of others in history or myth but will never truly be known in any nuanced way unless I continue to experience it first-hand. There is no end game, no rush and no race— my work is a mirror, and a sieve, and a container. Over the years I have learned that it is an investigation into what makes life feel worthwhile, and at the same time, it functions to make *my* life feel worthwhile, and as I grow, I find how it can meet new demands.

My teenage years began as rough as any. Though I was educated in a good school system, had a strong community and supportive parents— an accumulation of anxiety, depression, and family issues started to unground me. I was lucky in that my diagnosis still rendered me functional, but I knew I needed to make a fundamental change in my life. I took the opportunity to move to a different town to live with my father. I attended a new school and found myself immediately un-interested in socializing or participating in what felt were the petty concerns of teenagehood. Much of my high school years were spent basically alone, in a kind of peaceful, philosophical solitude. Nietzsche would have been proud.

“Flee, my friend, into your solitude: I see you stung all over by poisonous flies. Flee where the air is raw and strong.

Flee into your solitude!” (Nietzsche 164)

It was during this time that I started to make and appreciate artwork; intuitively understanding its therapeutic qualities. I found respite in listening to music with creative depth, and at the same time, stumbled upon Fluxus— an historic movement that radically altered my perception of what art could be. In my solitude, searching for meaning, I became more aware of people in the world who were expressing themselves in ways that felt accessible as a viewer and a maker. They weren’t specifically anti-craft, but more pro-idea. Without the hindrance of technical mastery, they could express something meaningful. This was a point of entry for me, which was only the beginning.

Fluxus and the works I studied thereafter, helped validate my own practice of art. I found the act of imagination, deep observation, critical thinking, and creative output to have a power that was completely counter to anxiety and depression. Retreating into this world was both euphoric and stabilizing. While depression sucked the value out of the world around me, practicing ‘art’— or whatever this was— enabled me to inject the value back into it. I was able to experience a deep meditative connection with all aspects of life in a way that was under control, at my own pace, and in my own style.

In the beginning I experimented with every type of media: sound recording, video, fiber art, site-specific installation, public performance, web-based pieces, drawing,

illustration, animation and more. I quickly latched on to artists that were working within new mythic worlds which were rooted in reality. This kind of work seemed to be a way for other artists (and eventually for myself) to navigate reality within a framework of their own curation. I found this particularly attractive as a coping mechanism for emotional issues because these mythic spaces were built out to feel real, important, and valuable in a hyper-specific way. Essentially, one could make for themselves a kind of utopia.

Unconsciously drawing from my own recent experiences, I began to write a loose narrative about a person who lived in a small island country, embarked on a journey, and underwent a series of physical transformations. This story immediately felt valuable in the same way these other artist's work had to me. I felt the instinct that it was coming from the same place. My narrative was never fully-fledged as a text, but rather existed as a sort of choreography of moments portrayed through lists, diagrams and sketches as plans for experiential sculptural installations. The idea felt purely mine, like it was a thinly veiled autobiography with traces of ancient myth.

Years after creating this story, having expanded into complex detail the world in which it took place, I discovered the work of comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell. Like artists before who gave me a sense of validation of my budding creative practice, Joseph Campbell studied world mythologies in order to tap into the universal currents that run through humanity. Having abandoned the beliefs of the religion I was raised with, Joseph Campbell suggests that the narrative I was writing served as a replacement, made up of mythic content drawn from my modern world.

“In the absence of an effective general mythology, each of us has his private, unrecognized, rudimentary, yet secretly potent pantheon of a dream. The latest incarnation of Oedipus, the continued romance of Beauty and the Beast, stand this afternoon on the corner of Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue, waiting for the traffic light to change.” (Campbell, Hero 4)

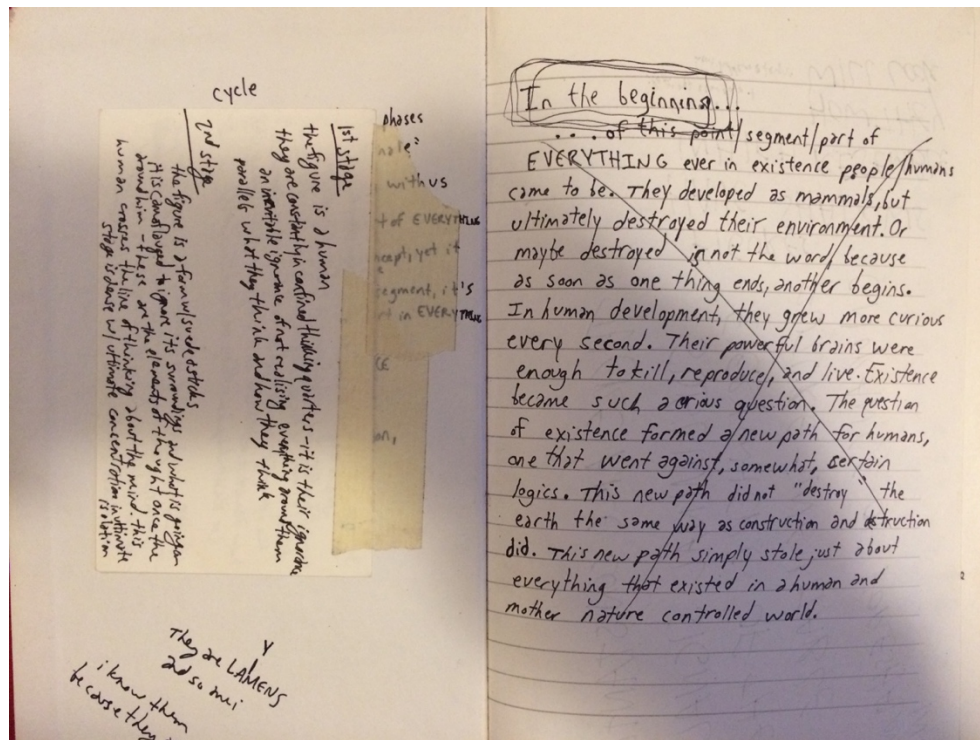


Figure 1- Excerpt from my high school journal, 2003.



Figure 2- Newspaper clipping with article written about my installation illustrating a piece of my narrative, 2005

Chapter 2: The Monomyth

I set to work telling my story through sculpture, installation and drawing. I adapted techniques from natural history museum displays to borrow an aura of credibility towards my more visually fantastical world. I felt I could do this forever, illustrating one piece at a time until the whole tale was complete, building out this world until it was whole. At one point I decided to draw a map of the imagined island where the events occurred. I sat and thought about how the character(s) would need certain geographical features that corresponded with moments in the story— a pier, a cave, a glacial river, etc. The map I drew was an island with geometry fit to the story precisely.

In my college years, reading more Joseph Campbell, I kept coming to new realizations about my original narrative. Not only was it a private myth in place of a shared ancient one, but it also followed closely the stages of the ‘monomyth’ as defined by Campbell. Recognizing that my story drew from a place of collective unconscious, I felt both very rooted in myself and very connected to humanity throughout all of time. Alone in my father’s basement with the naivete of a suburban 16-year old, I was able to tap into the “second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals.”(Jung 60).

At first thought, this story was written in isolation but of course I had immeasurable influences from the outside world. I grew up with the culture and traditions of Judaism, watched Disney movies, read about Greek gods and goddesses in school, was heavily affected by the art of Matthew Barney, read books like Moby Dick and

knew a bit about Star Wars. All of this and more surely have imprinted me with cultural knowledge that links itself back to universal qualities of the human condition. But there is a distinct difference between consciously copying or referencing these influences and creating a world of one's own with unconscious nods to everything that came before. The difference is that I am telling a story which is on the surface, specific to myself (even if I myself am an accumulation of my influences and experiences), my time, my place, my origin, my ethics, my politics— while underneath it is completely impersonal, owing itself to the same collective unconscious that all of these outside influences also stem from. The fact is, the collective unconscious is present whether or not the author is aware of this fact. The question becomes: *Does something in the work change when you realize it is there?*

Below is a table that draws parallels between my narrative and two texts by Joseph Campbell, one in which he lays out the stages of the generic monomyth and the other is the reasoning he suggests is behind each stage. Campbell is careful to explain that not every myth matches up exactly but that it is the commonalities that we should focus on more than what is uncommon. Over the years I have come to understand how fluid these categories can be. While they may apply to a specific moment, they can also expand to cover a larger event, and so on.

MY NARRATIVE	STAGES OF THE HERO'S JOURNEY	REFLECTIONS ON THE ART OF LIVING
Two people that live in a small society are going to get married, however, they realize that they don't know themselves well as individuals.	Here they are in the "Ordinary World". The beginning is a mix of "The Call to Adventure" and "The Refusal of the Call". (Campbell, Hero 49-59)	"The society is the enemy when it imposes its structures on the individual." (Campbell 17) "Marriage is the reconstruction of the androgyne. If you marry only for the love affair, that will not last. You must also marry on another level to reconstruct the androgyne, to make the perfect whole, male and female." (Campbell 25)
They decide at the last moment to instead leave society altogether, separately. This leads each person to go through the same events, but on opposite sides of the country and unknowing of the coincidence.	"Supernatural Aid" (Campbell, Hero 69) Suffice it to say that the 'supernatural' is merely instinct here.	"Your real duty is to go away from the community to find your bliss." (Campbell 17)
Individually, they go out to a pier and sit for a long time in a structure resembling a bird blind.	"The Crossing of the First Threshold" (Campbell, Hero 77)	"The divine lives within you. Live from your own center." (Campbell 17)
Looking out at the ocean gives them a sense of wanderlust and so they decide to set out to sea.		"It is by going down into the abyss that we recover the treasures of life." (Campbell 19)
They hop in a boat and start rowing, with no idea for direction. The boat itself is directionless as it is a sphere with oars.	"The Belly of the Whale" (Campbell, Hero 90)	"You enter the forest at the darkest point where there is no direction." (Campbell 16)
They come ashore in a place unknown to them. It feels like a far away land, but is instead the north coast of their island country. They arrive at the mouth of a cave.	"The Road of Trials" (Campbell, Hero 97) This encompasses all of the body transformations ahead.	"The very cave you are afraid to enter turns out to be the source of what you are looking for." (Campbell 19)
They retreat inside the cave and live for a very long time, completely in the dark. Here they transform into a different form, which has machine qualities. Their function is to sit in the dark and process	"The Meeting with the Goddess" "The Woman as Temptress" "Atonement with the Father" (Campbell, Hero 109-126)	"The damned thing in the cave that was so dreaded has become the center." (Campbell 19)

ideas. They have no care for their physiological self. Their life is in their mind, as they sit in the dark and cannot tell if their eyes are closed or open.	In my story these happen all together. Because this story is focused on the interior of the self, these actions happen inside a cave inside a machine-like brain.	
When they feel they have completed the task, or can process no more, they drag themselves out of the cave, now a sort of crusted over, slimmer version of themselves. This new figure rests on an iceberg, which pushes them back out to sea.	“Apotheosis” (Campbell, Hero 149)	“When you have come past the pairs of opposites you have reached compassion.” (Campbell 19)
Now they travel further north. A current takes them down a glacial river where there are puffins flying overhead inside of pink balloons. They witness a mating ritual in which the balloons and consequently the birds, fuse together, starting at the beak.	“The Ultimate Boon” (Campbell, Hero 172)	“The goal is to bring the jewel back to the world, to join the two things together.” (Campbell 19)
The two characters find each other at the confluence of two glacial rivers.	“Refusal of the Return” (Campbell, Hero 193) This is potentially appropriate here. While there is no outright refusal, there is a lack of foresight that one could not imagine leaving the land of the boon. My own instinct told me, this must be cyclical, and so a return seemed necessary.	
They fuse together like the birds and return home.	“The Magic Flight” (Campbell, Hero 196) The final stages beyond this were surely a part of my narrative, but were not given real consideration until recently.	“In the age of decrepitude, you look back over your life and forward to death as a return home.” (Campbell 36)

Table 1- Drawing parallels between my narrative and two texts by Joseph Campbell.

My sense of identity that came with beliefs, history, ideas and creation, began to unravel, however, I feel lucky to have experienced this in my youth. Tapping into the

universality of my story, at first, felt like stripping away everything I held onto so tightly. This myth in place of an ancient one, felt fragile. As I continued to read, however, I felt privileged to tap into the universality of the human consciousness, and became uninterested in my story, as I could see if for what it was: a coming of age story about living in my father's basement, having zero functional purpose, being alone, procuring art materials from the bulk trash pile, thinking I might reach a state of mental and/or physical transcendence, and desperately wanting to live in Iceland (where the puffin is most populous).

Though no longer invested in what I thought would be my 'life's work', I could recognize the validity of the narrative, but also its passing relevance, as I grew past this point in my life. Since art had originally served to ease my anxiety and depression, its direction would continue to be guided by real-life concerns and interests. I started to focus my attention purely on the map I had drawn, as some wellspring of universal truths. The island's outline seemed to have the ability to confine itself to the boundaries of many other tales and even serve as a diagram to map out concepts. Here I was beginning to understand a bridge between universal ideas and universal forms.

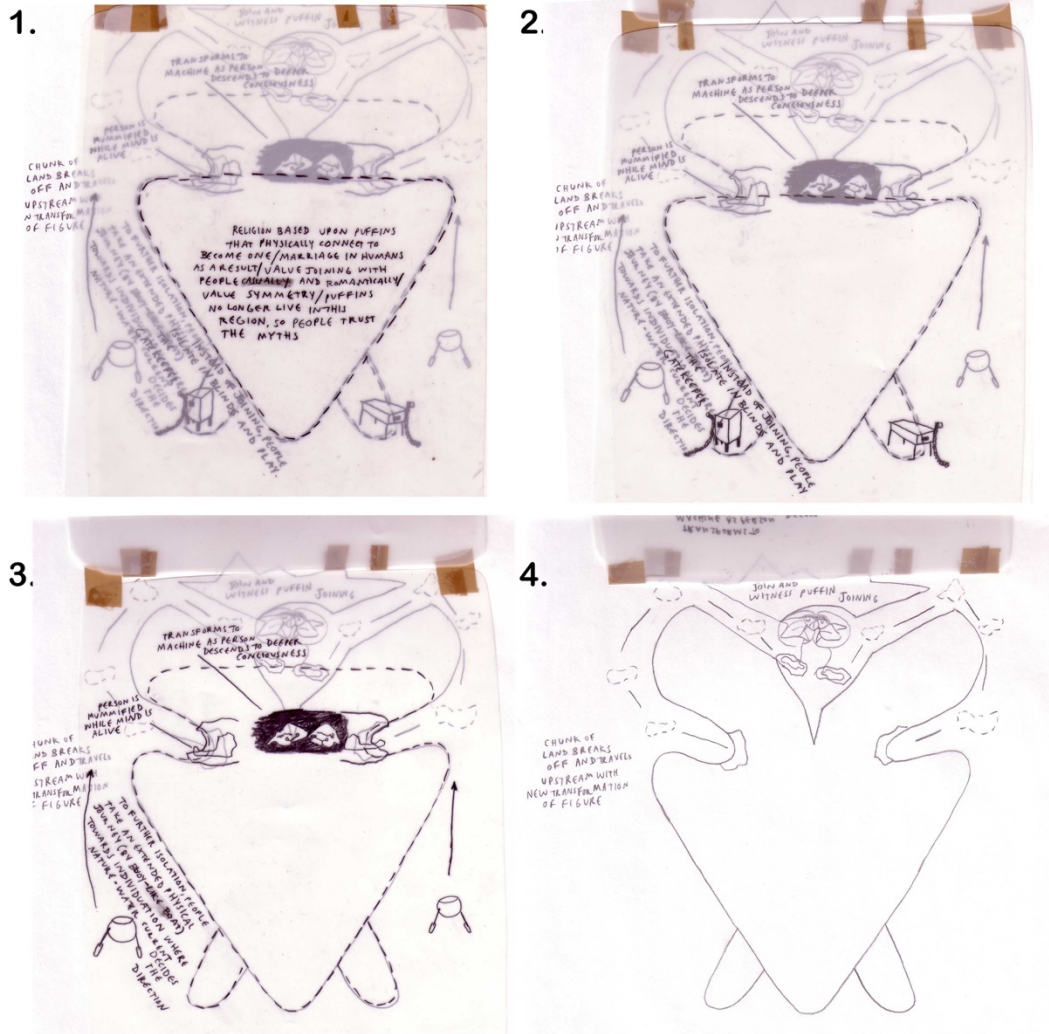


Figure 3- Using my map to break down the original narrative. Bekí Basch, *Model Diagram: Narrative*, Pen on vellum and printer paper, tape, 6.5" x 6.5" 2008.

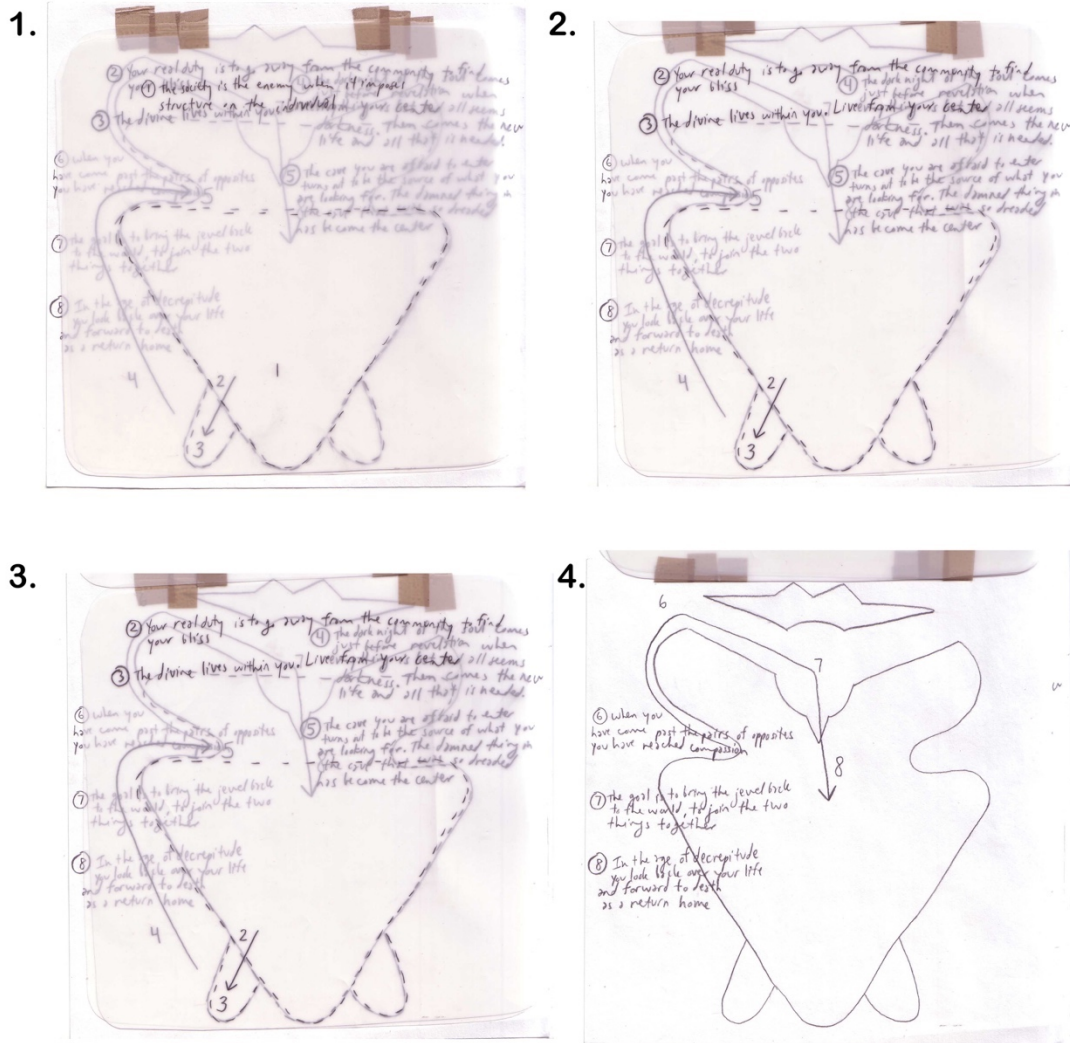


Figure 4- Using my map to correlate Joseph Campbell quotations with my narrative. Beki Basch, *Model Diagram: Society Imposes*, Pen on vellum and printer paper, tape, 6.5" x 6.5" 2014.

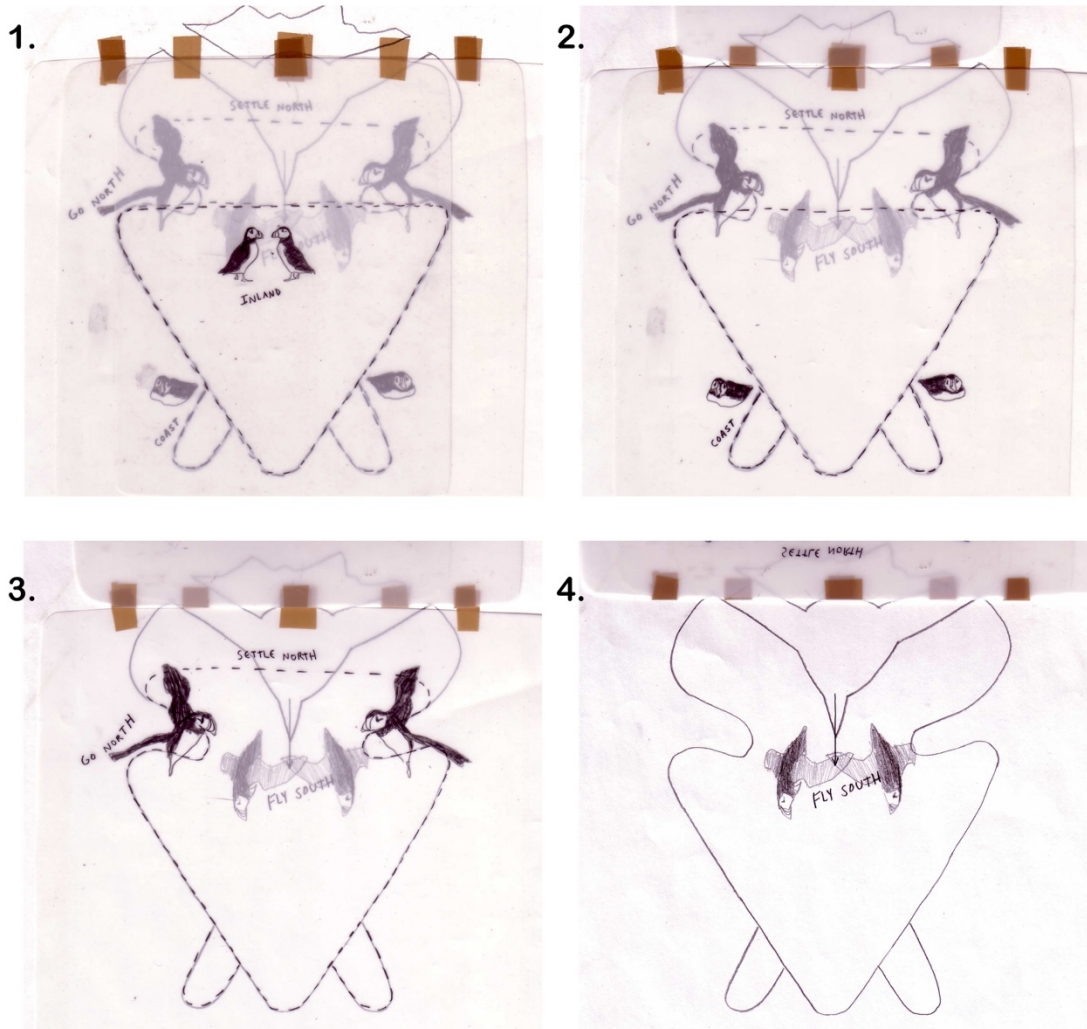


Figure 5- Using my map to break down the migration pattern of puffins. Beki Basch, *Model Diagram: Migration*, Pen on vellum and printer paper, tape, 6.5" x 6.5" 2008.

Taking a step back from the hard narrative, I was able to use the map as a tool to speculate about the potential for a monomythic framework underlying other matters in our world. Were migratory birds somehow also participating in this cycle? Did their instinctual journey include a call to adventure, procuring the grail, and the return home? Furthermore, if birds did participate, would they then serve as a natural

symbol for it? It became a sort of game to find content that I could plot onto the map, whether it fit the narrative framework, or more purely the physical map form.

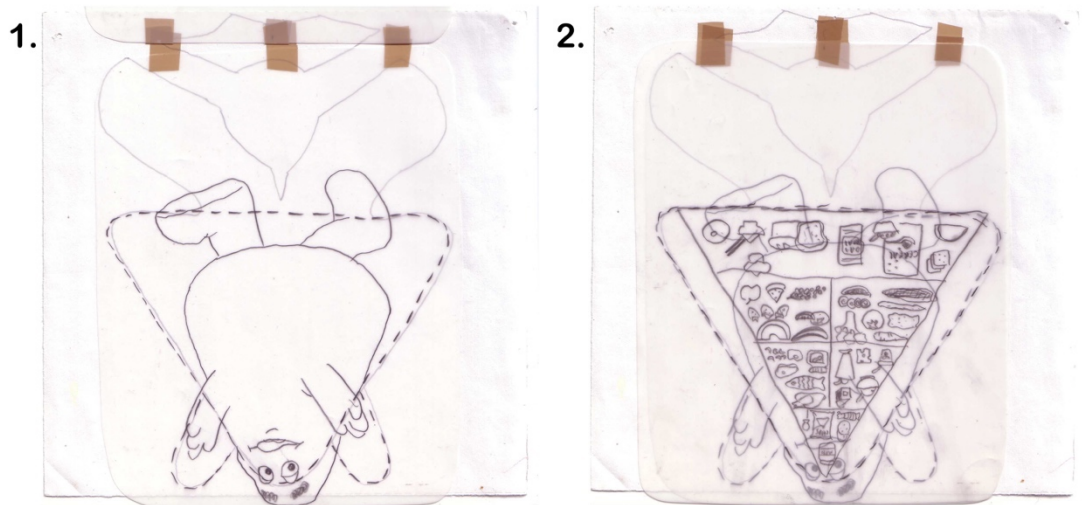


Figure 6- Using my map to compare a McDonalds character to an inverted food pyramid. Bekí Basch, *Model Diagram: Grimace*, Pen on vellum and printer paper, tape, 6.5" x 6.5" 2013.

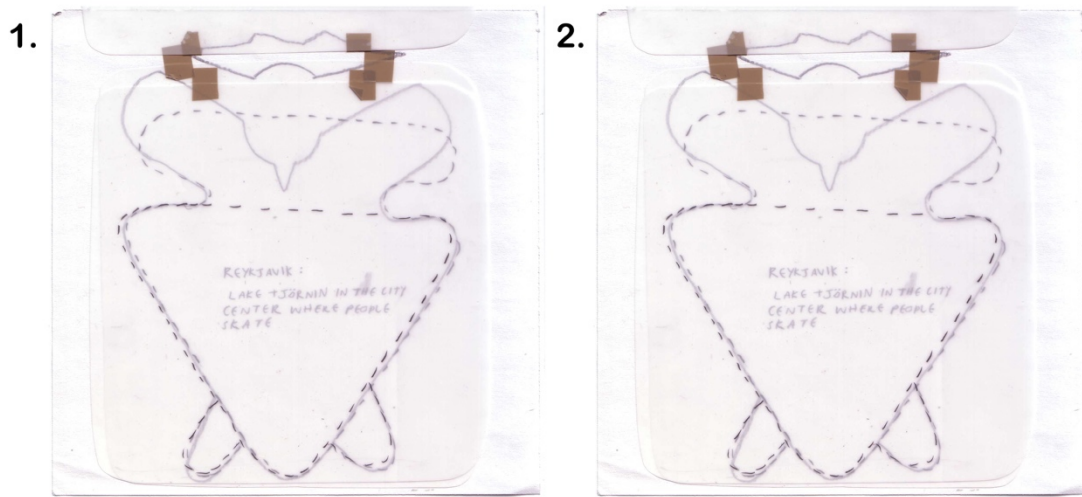


Figure 7- Using my map to compare two public ice skating venues, one natural and one artificial. Bekí Basch, *Model Diagram: Ice Rinks*, Pen on vellum and printer paper, tape, 6.5" x 6.5" 2009.

The shape of the map *is* the narrative. At the same time, the map is effectively a Rorschach test. A form which will be interpreted differently depending on who is looking at it and when. The imbued value which I have invested into it is alive in me, the collective unconscious, and now my art.

The map became the symbol for universality— a form which represented, to me, the monomyth cycle that perhaps lies within us all. Thinking about the world through this lens was like possessing a second sight with which I could directly understand underlying the value of cultural affairs, human behavior, and history. As a cure for depression, which renders the world value-less, this proved remarkable, as well as gave me the flexibility to not limit myself to one self-authored narrative, but rather to draw in from other's and pick apart through my artistic practice. I began to plug in disparate interests that would harmonize together within the tale of the monomyth.

Chapter 3: The Crown

Though the focus of the work has shifted from a more straightforward story to a general framework, there are still remnants from the former that have lingered. Perhaps this is because there are pieces which still feel mysterious, or because of their autobiographical nature (having come about at the formative age of 16) they are intrinsically tied to my character. With regards to the map as a form in itself, the top piece which floats above the main shape has long been the most mysterious—something that intuition told me was there, but which was never a part of the story.



Figure 8- My map form with the mysterious region in question.

I feel certain that this moment of intuition was the collective unconscious at work. There is that knowledge deep within my nature that I was able to tap into and have faith that it could reveal itself to me later in life.

In trying to understand this unknown piece purely based on free association, I notice several things:

- It looks like the sun. Because of the negative space below it (which I think resembles a bird) creating an arch, with spikes radiating outwards, it could be a partial sun or a sunset. The sun is above us, and the shape is at the top.
- It looks like a crown. The placement at the top as if it's a crown on a head. The crown as worn by nobility and royalty is used to signify rank and importance. The style of crown called a 'radiant crown' or 'solar crown' is made to resemble the sun and the powers associated with the sun. Both the sun and crown references something about power from above. 'Above' could be like heaven, space, or simply the unknown or unexplained.



Figure 9- Roman coin from the year 280, which depicts the emperor Probus wearing a radiant crown.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radiant_crown#/media/File:ProbusCoin.jpg



Figure 10- The Statue of Liberty wearing her radiant crown, dedicated in 1886.
<http://www.destination360.com/north-america/us/new-york/nyc/statue-crown-tour>

- It reminds me of the kippah in Judaism, which is another head-covering.
- This spiked shape is separated from the rest, but looks as though it was cut on the sides and lifted. This reminds me of the way earth splits apart and sometimes retains puzzle piece-like coast lines. This piece could be a separate island, and perhaps one with mountains. This detachment also creates a hovering effect, like the space was foreign, mysterious, otherworldly— maybe even transcendent, or like an illusion/hallucination.

In my drawings, I have variously defined it as the following: Iceland, high mountains and volcanoes, the land where puffins float in pink balloons, and the Cliffs of Moher. Adding this information together posits the top part of the map as a country north of me, with large natural land formations and puffins. If I take these free associations

and match them up with the monomyth, I am lead to think that this place is an unknown heavenly place at the height of the journey. A place in reality which perfectly fit this description was Iceland. Thus, I had concluded, in Iceland I would find my ultimate boon.

Sitting in a basement of a townhouse in the suburbs of New Jersey, I longed for the Iceland I imagined from music, movies, books, articles and interviews. I read countless interview with the Icelandic singer Björk, which seemed to confirm my suspicions.

“I was brought up in the suburbs of Reykjavík,” says Björk, sitting in a small café in the heart of the Icelandic capital while the rain skitters about outside.

“I lived next to the last block of flats, and then it was moss and tundra. I used to walk a lot on my own and sing at the top of my lungs. I think a lot of Icelandic people do this. You don’t go to church or a psychotherapist – you go for a walk and feel better.” (Barton)

Iceland seemed like a place where the general population’s priorities matched up with my own. It is no surprise to me that Iceland added up to make sense as the intuited land of the ultimate boon. The things Björk described were the things I searched for in life. I would have to go see it for myself.

Chapter 4: Finishing the Story

The monomyth is the journey of a hero. The hero doesn't have to save the world, but rather "the heroic life is living the individual adventure" (Campbell 16). The individual is anyone and everyone and is not limited to time, circumstance, or self-awareness. The narratives differ, but the message is essentially the same. Whether they are figures of religious myth, characters of true fiction, our own ancestors, or ourselves— we are still participating in the same story.

With a greater awareness of these underlying threads in my own tale, I felt their truth by way of my own experiences. They gave me faith in the monomyth structure, but also put me in the seemingly backwards position of believing that while Iceland was the land of the ultimate boon and I had no real knowledge of it. If everything else was known by way of experience or some deep intuition tapped into the collective unconscious, then this seemed more like magical thinking, and of that I was highly skeptical. Still, the image I constructed was powerful and I was unconcerned that the reality would not fit the story, so I decided I would go.



Figure 11- Sitting on top of Herjólfsdalur, the remains of a volcano, with puffins perched on a stack of rocks behind me. In the valley below, people are setting up for the annual festival called Þjóðhátíð.

As of 2018, I have made three trips to Iceland. My first impression was magical, perhaps subconsciously holding onto the myth, and every moment felt like heaven incarnate. By the third trip, I was able to take these experiences and analyze them with respect to the idea of Iceland as the land of my ultimate boon. I was able to grasp some of the later stages of the hero's journey, including 'The Crossing of the First Threshold', 'Master of Two Worlds' and 'Freedom to Live' (see table below for definitions). What I imagined I might find in Iceland, has so far turned out to be accurate: general attitudes and relationship to nature, the humbling effects of the landscape, the promised peaceful calm of being somewhere far away. These experiences are what led me to the real bounty, which was the cleansing effects they

had on my psyche. Each time, upon my return, I felt myself to be cleansed of insecurity, major self-doubt and the pervasive white noise of stress. I feel that it is *this* that is the ultimate boon. This cleanse helps me to live harmoniously upon my return home. I wonder if permanent residence in Iceland would negate the cleansing effect, but I cannot truly know unless I have that experience.

The Crossing of the Return Threshold:

"The returning hero, to complete his adventure, must survive the impact of the world. Many failures attest to the difficulties of this life-affirmative threshold. The first problem of the returning hero is to accept as real, after an experience of the soul-satisfying vision of fulfillment, the passing joys and sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities of life. Why re-enter such a world? Why attempt to make plausible, or even interesting, to men and women consumed with passion, the experience of transcendental bliss? As dreams that were momentous by night may seem simply silly in the light of day, so the poet and the prophet can discover themselves playing the idiot before a jury of sober eyes." (Campbell, Hero 218)

Master of Two Worlds:

"Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back—not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other—is the talent of the master." (Campbell, Hero 229)

Freedom to Live:

"A realization of the inevitable guilt of life may so sicken the heart that, like Hamlet or like Arjuna, one may refuse to go on with it. On the other hand, like most of the rest of us, one may invent a false, finally unjustified, image of oneself as an exceptional phenomenon in the world, not guilty as others are, but justified in one's inevitable sinning because one represents the good. Such self-righteousness leads to a misunderstanding, not only of oneself but of the nature of both man and the cosmos. The goal of the myth is to dispel the need for such life ignorance by effecting a reconciliation of the individual consciousness with the universal will. And this is effected through a realization of the true relationship of the passing phenomena of time to the imperishable life that lives and dies in us all." (Campbell, Hero 238)

Table 2- Joseph Campbell's definition of these final stages in the hero's quest.

These three stages of the hero's journey occur at the end when one has achieved the boon and must return home. I equate them with my own trips to and from Iceland and what happens when I return. I feel that I could not have understood these stages with

such gravity unless I had made these trips and experienced the perspective shift of returning home and thinking distantly about the previous stages.

Chapter 5: Coming and Going

On each trip to Iceland I have taken, from 2006-2017, I have noticed a rapid increase in tourism. In 2016, there were approximately 1.7 million tourists coming to Iceland, as opposed to about 400,000 in 2006, with a predicted 2.5 million to come in 2019 (Fontaine). These are big numbers compared to the population of Iceland, which in 2017 stood at 348,580 (Ćirić). Though it is perhaps clear from multiple viewpoints why Iceland has become such a popular tourist destination, I am thinking about this giant uptick in numbers as having a potential connection to my own story. It would be foolish to deny that others share a visceral longing for what I myself sought in Iceland: connection to nature, the feeling of calm in a remote location, etc. Given the height of Björk's popularity in the mid 90's, and the subsequent musical acts (among other things) that have really put Iceland 'on the map'— perhaps there is a generation of Icelandophiles who have finally decided to see it for themselves. The hype surrounding Icelandic music (Of Monsters and Men, Sigur Rós and Björk) has opened the door [and even perhaps granted a specific affection] for other Icelandic cultural exports, including fine art, film, fashion and product design, architecture, and even sports, with the Icelandic men's soccer team winning entry into the 2018 World Cup.

Looking at these tourism numbers and the suddenly large global presence of a small country (about the same square mileage of Kentucky but 1/14 the population), it would seem as if an underwater volcano had just recently erupted and formed an entire country, upon which they quickly built some hotels and then immediately started to offer spa weekend getaway packages. Given that this is not the case, it

makes one ponder travel trends, particularly by natives who have outlived them. Iceland has history, and it wasn't always a popular tourist destination. Iceland *is* a young country in terms of independence— which it gained from Denmark in 1944— but an old country in terms of mere settlement as it was first settled in the year 871. Thinking about my own experience traveling there to find my ultimate boon, I became interested to learn about the stories of others in both the past *and* present who have a connection to Iceland either as a place to find something special or, in contrast, as a place to leave for a better life.

The book *Reykjavik 871 +-2*, written about the settling of Iceland, describes it in a way that satisfies my desire to find universality in this historical moment:

“Man is always on the move, always occupied, and indefatigable in his quest to survive or achieve a better life— according to conditions in various times and places. This human urge to seek a better life washed the first settler up on Iceland's shores 1200 years ago; it carried Icelandic immigrants to the New World in the late 19th century; and every year it brings to Iceland many new settlers, from faraway countries and continents.

What all the settlers have in common is that they have uprooted themselves, and set off into the unknown to seek their fortune in a foreign, sometimes hostile, environment.” (Gísladóttir)

It isn't known exactly why the Norse came to settle Iceland in 871. We know that in 800AD Irish monks spent some time there and wrote of their travels years later after returning home, and there were others who made trips but did not successfully settle

the island country. Icelanders name Norseman Ingólfr Arnarson as the pioneer who stuck around, after first scoping out the land some years earlier (Vésteinsson et. al 32). The Norse may have come for power, land, valuables, religious or political freedom, or something else. Research suggests that through a reshuffle of power in Scandinavia in the 9th century, men of means who had possibly lost power, looked to claim it elsewhere (Vésteinsson et. al 30).

Another story that grabs my attention occurred a millennium after the official settlement. This historical event connects Iceland to America, which is particularly interesting to me, because up until I learned about it, they felt very distant. From the mid-1850's to the early 1900's, Icelanders who had converted to Mormonism, emigrated to America to settle in their promised land.

“**10** We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.” (www.lds.org)

In 1854, two Icelandic converts started a Mormon community in Iceland's Westman Islands. During a time where America had an open-door policy, they attracted 410 followers in total to settle in Spanish Fork, Utah, approximately 200 of which came from the Westman Islands at a time when the island's population was only about 800 (Hardy). While thousands of Icelanders emigrated to other parts of the North American continent, the Mormon's journey was clearly one for religious freedom, and a religion that holds America as the promised land. Icelanders sacrificed plenty to

make this harsh journey involving multiple modes of transportation, which included over a thousand miles of walking while pushing their few belongings on wooden handcars. There is a statue on the island of Heimaey (the largest and most inhabited of the Westman Islands) that is there to remember those who made this arduous journey.



Figure 12- Statue to Emigrating Mormons on the island of Heimaey in the Westman Islands. <http://mormonhistoricsites.org/mormon-pond-iceland/>

In 1960, Iceland's beloved Nobel Laureate author Halldór Laxness wrote a fictitious account of this Mormon emigration called *Paradise Reclaimed*. The main character called 'Steinar' is by all accounts a good man in that he is honest, generous, a good father, a skilled craftsman and a loving husband. Steinar is an Icelandic farmer of meager means, who is living in the mid-1800's under Danish rule. When the Danish king comes to visit, Steinar, out of humble servitude, gifts him his children's prize white pony. The king is grateful, but Steinar's children become upset, which fills him

with regret. Steinar works to reclaim the pony for his children, but it spirals into a larger, seemingly misguided, quest to keep his children pure.

After a failed attempt to physically reclaim the horse from the king, Steinar follows a Mormon missionary from Denmark to Utah, thinking he can build a better life there for his family. He leaves without notice (perhaps because he doesn't want to say anything to his family until he has redeemed his actions fully) and his family thinks he has died. About five years later, the man he originally followed to Utah finds Steinar's family while on a return mission trip in Iceland. They are completely destitute at this point, and though it is unspoken, it is clear that this is Steinar's fault. The missionary then ships the family to Utah without delay. Steinar's wife dies in transit, but his children survive the journey. Steinar is relieved to see them, though it seems he would have waited even longer as he was trying to build the perfect home for them. His presence in their lives would have likely changed the entire course of events. Their reunion is decidedly formal as he offers them his home and safety and security within the Mormon community. Soon after, Steinar is obliged to make his own missionary journey to Iceland to evangelize. After an unfruitful sermon in Reykjavik, we find him heading back to his old farm, feeling that maybe Iceland is his true home after all. He finds his farm in shambles and sets about fixing it, pleased to be useful now that he has effectively accomplished reclaiming something for his children (though again they are without his presence).

“He laid down his knapsack with the pamphlets by John Pritt, slipped off his jacket and took off his hat; then he began to gather stones to make a few repairs to the wall. There was a lot of work waiting for one man here”

“A passer-by saw that a stranger had started to potter with the dykes of this derelict croft.

“Who are you?” asked the traveler.

The other replied, “I am the man who reclaimed Paradise after it had been lost, and gave it to his children.”

“What is such a man doing here?” asked the passer-by.

“I have found the truth, and the land in which it lives,” said the wall-builder, correcting himself. “And that is assuredly very important. But now the most important thing is to build up this wall again.”

And with that, Steinar of Hlíðar went on just as if nothing happened, laying stone against stone in these ancient walls, until the sun went down in Steinahlíðar.” (Laxness 251)

Steinar had not only traveled to find his bounty in America, but had traveled back to Iceland, realizing that perhaps he had taken the wrong path for himself. Laxness is subtly sardonic in describing the Icelandic reaction to Mormonism and depicts Steinar as a dispassionate follower, clearly only looking to find a good life for his children, but not a spiritual path for himself. Steinar got his ultimate boon and then returned to Iceland, his true home, with the relief that his children would have what he felt they needed.

This triangulation through time wherein I travel from Baltimore to Iceland for my boon and others have traveled from Iceland to Utah for theirs, represents a simple

shift. Perhaps it isn't that one place inherently represents a sort of heaven on earth, but that the conditions which surround where we are headed, in contrast to where we are coming from, make up the situation that causes us to seek something greater. The conditions under which I travel to Iceland today would be unfathomable to those pushing handcarts across America in the mid 1800's, and perhaps they never would have left had they lived in present-day Iceland.

Out of Baltimore's small International airport, there are two Icelandic airlines that compete to offer the cheapest airfare. A flight takes approximately 4.5 hours to Keflavík International Airport. Emigrants headed to America in the 1850's had to take a boat to England to board a ship to America (a month or so long voyage), then a train to Iowa, and then walk pushing handcarts from there to Utah. Also, the condition I find Iceland in today is far different from the late 1800's. Iceland has thoroughly modernized, consistently tops charts for national literacy and happiness, and has a massively booming tourism industry that contributes a full 10% to the country's overall GDP (mbl.is). People are now heading there in droves. What I sought in Iceland (man/nature relationship, general attitudes/priorities, etc.) have arguably been present for a fairly long time, though an entire industry devoted to getting people there cheaply has made this trip increasingly easier in recent decades.

The book *An American in Iceland* is the first-person account of a professor and naturalist from M.I.T., who traveled to Iceland in a small group in 1874 to collect specimens and attend the country's millennial celebration. He reflects on connections between America and Iceland while at this celebration:

“...they would not ignore the fact that a party of American Republicans had come nearly four thousand miles to be present at their millennial celebration, and to offer in this way the greetings of the youngest nation to one of the oldest of the northern nations. The historical connection of Iceland with America long before the discovery of Columbus, and the possible emigration of some of the present inhabitants to our northwest coast— the Iceland of America— an exodus which will be increased and hastened by the terrible volcanic eruption of 1875— made this occasion especially interesting.”

(Kneeland 80)

Other remarks seem to confirm that Iceland at that time could still be credited with many of things I have sought there myself in recent years.

“Yet with all its dreariness, and cold, and barrenness, and poverty, and isolation, the people are extremely fond of their country, and say that ‘Iceland is the fairest land that the sun shines upon.’” (Kneeland 75)

“It is interesting to trace the natural connection between the physical characteristics of a barbarous country and the religious ideas of its people... strength, courage, and endurance, instead of beauty and sensuality, were the qualities that gained access to the Walhalla of the followers of Thor and Odin.” (Kneeland 99)

But it is true that the journey would be ill-suited for the common traveler of today. In Kneeland’s time, this is a far greater commitment for any traveler and would be an unlikely destination for someone seeking sheer pleasure.

“To such as wish to travel unimpeded by the artificial shams of modern tourists, to enjoy the strange and delightful sensation of visiting old and out-of-the-way places, and of getting a look at a country and a people almost in a state of primitive civilization, I can confidently recommend Iceland. It is no place for an invalid, or those who require the comforts of hotels and palace cars; one must be prepared to undergo exposure to cold, rain, hunger, and almost every personal discomfort; there are no hotels, and the hospitality of the country, though great, is not suited to the dainty or thin-skinned; and now and then trifles must be heavily paid for.” (Kneeland 102)

In the foreword to W.H. Auden’s book *Letters from Iceland*, he reflects on the country’s conditions in 1964 (almost 100 years after Kneeland), this being his first trip since 1936:

“Reykjavik today is a very different place from the rather down-at-heels town I remembered... Concrete, steel and glass may not be one’s favourite building materials, but they are an improvement upon corrugated iron sheeting... the farmer had exchanged his ponies for a Land Rover.”

“Those who wish to make the strenuous treks through the wilderness can still do so, but there are now more comfortable alternatives. There are roads everywhere, good but not too good— no autobahns, thank God— and there is an air-taxi service which will transport one quickly and scenically to the most remote spots.” (Auden 9)

Letters from Iceland is a mix of poetry, essays and letters he wrote while travelling around the country for three months. While Kneeland's approach was fairly scientific, with the occasional poetic description of people or a remarkably desolate landscape, Auden delves into something more spiritual. Also from the foreword:

“In my childhood dreams, Iceland was holy ground; when, at the age of twenty-nine, I saw it for the first time, the reality verified my dream; at fifty-seven it was holy ground still, with the most magical light of anywhere on earth.” (Auden 10)

“As to the merits of this book, if any, I am in no position to judge. But the three months I spent in Iceland upon which it is based stand out in my memory as among the happiest in a life, which has, so far, been unusually happy, and, if something of this joy comes through in the writing, I shall be content.” (Auden 11)

Kneeland's journey was critical enough for him to write a 325 page account of it, and Auden clearly found enough inspiration in Iceland to make multiple trips. These books are widely available and still find an audience today. I found *Letters from Iceland* in my university library as an undergraduate and felt a direct portal to the 1960's in sympathizing with Auden's experiences.

My beloved undergraduate professor, the artist Joan Watson, told me years ago that she had travelled to Iceland in the early 1970's. I was intrigued by what seemed like an uncommon destination for an American in the 1970's (though I would later learn this wasn't so uncommon) as well as this rare divulgence of her personal information.

I did not push her for more information, but over the years found out more details: Joan had been travelling around just because, and Iceland was one of her prolonged stops. While there, she worked at a fish factory cutting worms out of cod. She was very proud to tell me that she donated a week's salary to help the Icelanders buy a boat to fight the British in the ongoing Cod Wars, at the time. She also reminisces fondly about a crater she calls 'my crater', which was somewhere near Þingvellir, but I know I would not be able to find it unless we went together. Her memory is clear and grounded. She remembers downtown Reykjavík as being full of drunks (and very few foreigners, if any) and that once her boss at the fish factory stole her passport temporarily, thinking she was a spy for the British. It's easy for me to romanticize her experiences in the way one tends to do with history and with those they admire. Joan being a big influence in my life, I can't help but think that this story holds some significance, which may unfold in the future.

I didn't receive Samuel Kneeland's book until after my last trip to Iceland in 2017, but W.H. Auden and Joan Watson came into the mix after the first trip in 2007. Reading about Auden's childhood dreams and hearing Joan talk about *her* crater, gives me chills. This place has been spiritual for many. This spirituality is unlike a mass pilgrimage to Mecca or a mass emigration to America, rather it is individual experience that resonates throughout one's entire being. As you can imagine I am, so far, deeply averse to the current modes of mass tourism in Iceland, strictly based on this private feeling I hold dear. I still feel that the experience is special and even perhaps life-changing, but it is much harder to get the feeling of 'my crater' when they are now charging an entrance fee at the Kerid crater (in the middle of nowhere)

and you can hardly take a photo without capturing a multitude of people in their brightly colored adventurer jackets. I often wish we were all invisible to one another, just in this place alone.





Figures 13 and 14- Photos of Kerid crater that I took in August, 2017. Still beautiful and relatively empty, but hardly desolate as in Kneeland or even Watson’s time.

In addition to Iceland’s many cultural exports, particularly in the arts, they have also experienced an influx of cultural imports. Yoko Ono, Richard Serra and Roni Horn (just to name a few) all have permanent art installations in Iceland. There are also at least 19 different artist residencies situated throughout the island as of 2018 (www.resartis.org). Roni Horn started making regular trips to Iceland in 1975, just 11 years after Auden’s *Letters from Iceland*. Her trips back and forth have been a huge source of material and inspiration for her work of the last four decades.

“‘Iceland taught me to taste experience’, she has said. ‘That’s possible here, because of the intensely physical nature of experience on this island.’ Elsewhere she writes that ‘Iceland is a verb and its action is to center’,

suggesting that she is interested in Iceland's affect rather than its spectacular tourist appeal.” (www.tate.org)

In 2007, The Reykjavík Art Museum put on the show ‘My Oz’, a retrospective of Roni Horn’s work derived from Iceland. The fictional city of ‘Oz’ being the place where Dorothy, The Tin Man, The Scarecrow, and The Cowardly Lion travel to in the quintessentially monomythic book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (and subsequently, the film *The Wizard of Oz*). Each character is looking for their boon, whether it is tangible like ‘a brain’ or less so, like ‘courage’, Oz is clearly parallel to many mythical places where a bounty is to be received. Roni Horn uses this title to draw that parallel to Iceland, as the place where she is repeatedly uncovering her boon.

“Few people take an interest in Iceland, but in those few the interest is passionate.” (Auden 210)

Chapter 6: The Crown: Paradise Reclaimed

My thesis exhibition, titled *Paradise Reclaimed* after Laxness' book, is a fragment of a larger project I have titled *The Crown*. I consider the umbrella of this larger project to encompass multiple artworks that exist on various platforms, which all relate back to this idea of seeking the ultimate boon. The work in the exhibition represents connections between Baltimore, Iceland and Utah through these historic and autobiographical events. The installation as a whole is a space where these seemingly disparate stories can come together and reflect off of one another. Here I will go through each piece in the exhibition, elaborating on their concept and form.

Roadside Iceland



Figure 15- Bekí Basch, *Roadside Iceland*, Foam, plaster, latex paint, acrylic, bird poop, 24” x 36” x 24”

There is a large white spot that can be seen on practically any single map of Iceland. This is the glacier ‘Vatnajökull’. Very central to the country, the southernmost piece of it is a smaller outlet glacier called Breiðamerkurjökull, which itself ends in the lagoon Jökulsárlón. The lagoon, which is created from melting glacial ice, dumps out into the ocean. It started to form in 1934, due to warming temperatures, and has reached up to 300m deep in some parts (Blodgett). The lagoon is filled with giant chunks of floating ice in brilliant blues that change from moment to moment as they melt. Imagine what happens to snow and ice as soon as you get a warm day after a

blizzard: icicles falling from roofs, swaths of snow melting unevenly to reveal the ground. The changing landscape is active and even violent at times.



Figure 16- A photo I took in August 2017 of a chunk of floating ice at Jökulsárlón.

While this scenery is undoubtedly beautiful, one can't help but feel a bit panicked that this melting glacier is the elephant in the room. By some, this is referred to as 'ground zero of global warming'. A bridge, which allows cars to pass over the neck of the lagoon before it goes to the ocean, is threatened as the lagoon grows in size. If it continues to grow, the highway which circles the entire country will cease to do so, which will be particularly problematic for those on the east coast trying to get to the capital city.

On my last trip to Iceland I experienced noticeable negative effects of increased tourism, but Jökulsárlón was by far the most apparent. Everywhere in Reykjavik there

are tourist-aimed billboards urging you to ‘look but don’t touch’ and ‘take only photographs, leave only footprints’. At the glacial lagoon, a nearly 5-hour drive from the capitol (tour buses offer trips to go there and back in a day), the place was mobbed with tourists. Makeshift dust cloud parking lots lay all around the lagoon and people risk crossing the narrow car bridge on foot. There are rows and rows of latrines, kayak rentals, dozens of towering tour buses, a souvenir shop/cafe, and amphibious boat tours available every half hour. I am aware that these are common sights at any tourist spot in any country, but there is concern in the sudden rise in tourism alongside the slowness of government policy, which would enforce better protection of the natural landscape. Icelanders are both scrambling to make money from this and at the same time impart their own stewardship towards nature to the millions of tourists that pour in each year. It’s a hard balance. Every Icelandic tour guide seems to be telling people the same things and rolling their eyes or fiercely admonishing people who don’t follow directions. In 2015, a Canadian woman in her 50’s was killed instantly when one of these amphibious boats at Jökulsárlón backed into her. Her husband blamed inadequate safety measures at the site and the driver of the boat faces years in jail (icelandmonitor.mbl.is). This is just one of many reports of tourist fatalities. Multiple foreign visitors have fallen into the large waterfall Gullfoss and died, or at least were never found.

The title *Roadside Iceland* is a reference to ‘Roadside America’— attractions that one can easily stop off the highway and see, which was a popular tradition that arose in the US in the 1950’s. One could visit a giant ball of twine, an indoor miniature village, a cavern with a gift shop full of kitsch souvenirs, a dinosaur sculpture park, or

a re-enactment of life in a whaling village. This practice turns the highway into a theme park, and in Iceland where, conveniently, there is one major highway (called Route 1, referred to as ‘The Ring Road’) that circles the whole country, tourists can experience all of Iceland as a giant theme park, stopping off to visit mostly natural attractions, but also greenhouses, museums, campgrounds, swimming pools, and commerce.

This sculpture is intended to be a simplified boulder which would serve as a road marker along the highway. It borrows the surreal, almost unnatural blue from the Jökulsárlón ice, and the comical, obese and simplified form of an Erwin Wurm ‘fat car’ or a David Shrigley sculpture. I see it as a monument to the contradiction of being truly in awe of something while simultaneously contributing to its demise. The text set into the boulder references the depth of the lagoon and the price of a hot dog (‘pylsa’) at the cafe in 2017. The sculpture was left outside for one month under a bird feeder so that it could accumulate bird poop, to add insult to injury.



Figure 17- Erwin Wurm, *Convertible Fat Car (Porsche)*, 2005.
<http://www.xavierhufkens.com/exhibitions/2005-03-erwin-wurm>



Figure 18- David Shrigley, *Swan*, 2000. <https://fifteengallery.com/products/swan-david-shrigley-2000>

Emigrants, Pioneers, Ancestors, Tourists



Figure 19- Bekí Basch, *Emigrants, Pioneers, Ancestors, Tourists*, Needle felted Icelandic wool collected from Heimaey, Iceland and Utah, 9" x 4" x 3" (each)

While on my last trip to Iceland, I spent several days on the island of Heimaey (where 200 emigrants left for Utah from 1854-1914) and collected Icelandic sheep's wool from the side of the road. Upon my return home, I sent away for Icelandic sheep's wool from a breeder in Utah. I washed and carded both batches together to intermix the fibers and used it to make needle-felted puffins. As another fragment of *The Crown*, 15 of the birds were sent away to people and places that have significance to the project at large. The needle felted birds have individual character and with this title and material choice, serve as not only representatives of emigrants going from Iceland to Utah, but also those other solo travelers who went to Iceland looking for

something. The process of felting thoroughly combines the two batches of fibers, metaphorically reconnecting Icelanders in Utah with their ancestors in the homeland.

On my last trip to Iceland in August of 2017, there was an issue of the Reykjavik Grapevine (the local English language newspaper) whose cover was an illustration of puffins dotting the streets of the city with the title 'The Price of Progress'. I was inspired by this illustration to scatter the needle felted birds around the space. Puffins live away from people and it would be highly unusual to see them, like pigeons, camping out on a sidewalk. Paired with the title 'The Price of Progress', the newspaper is suggesting that recent changes in Iceland (namely tourism) come with the price of unnatural changes. The image reminds me of a plague. A condensed and unnatural gathering of animals has long been used symbolically as an omen of bad things to come.

IN THIS ISSUE:

News: Icelandic Nazi, Cocaine Trend
Culture: Poets Are Like Rats, Countess Malaise
Travel: Landmannalaugar, Crazy Hitchhiker Story
Issue 15 • 2017 August 25–September 07
www.grapevine.is



The Price Of Progress

Life in 101: Five years after the tourist explosion, how are the residents living? How has it affected them? What has changed, and what steps are being taken to preserve what's left? P:22

GIG GUIDE • CITY MAP • TRAVEL IDEAS • FOOD | *It's Free!*

Figure 20- Cover page of the Reykjavík Grapevine issue 15, August 2017.
https://issuu.com/rvkgrapevine/docs/grapevine_15-2017_web



Figure 21- Scene from the movie *Magnolia* in which frogs fall from the sky. Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999.



Figure 22- Scene from the movie *Birds*, in which the presence of a flock of birds is cause for concern. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, 1963.

7th Handcart Company



Figure 23- Beki Basch, *7th Handcart Company*, Salt encrusted wood and car parts, MDF, sand, carpet underlay, resin, plaster, 4' x 36" x 18"

7th Handcart Company is a sculpture whose form was inspired by the Great Salt Lake, Devil's Gate Wyoming (a rock formation along the Mormon Trail), sedimentary rock, an image of handcart remains in salt, and the modern car races that occur at Bonneville Speedway. 'The 7th Handcart Company' was historically the largest group of Icelanders to travel the Mormon Trail to Utah during this wave of emigration. The trip was rough, and there were casualties along the way. Fascinated by the stark contrast between this long and arduous journey through the salt flats and the record-breaking speeds vehicles reach on the smooth, vast and open terrain of the same landscape, I decided to combine imagined remnants of both modes of transport.

Given the prehistoric nature of the Great Salt Lake, I wanted to show periods of history by layering remnants in a form similar to sedimentary rock, where each layer represents a period of time. The layering effect was done to show how nature has no interest in human history and covers up or reveals these layers at its own will. In the eyes of nature, no one history is more important than another.



Figure 24- Remains of the Donner-Reed party wagon on the salt flats of Utah. The Donner-Reed Party were pioneers heading further on to California in 1846. Their story was sensationalized for the cannibalism they resorted to in order to survive the journey. <https://heritage.utah.gov/tag/the-donner-party>



Figure 25- Salt flats racer at Bonneville Speedway, Utah in 2015.
<https://arstechnica.com/cars/2015/08/venturi-battles-storms-and-salt-to-set-electric-land-speed-record/>



Figure 26- Scene from the documentary *Sweetwater Rescue: The Willie and Martin Handcart Story*, directed by Lee B. Groberg, 2006. This is the story of a well-known Mormon handcart company who struggled across the country and required rescuing in order to make it all the way to Utah.

Majestic Mountain



Figure 27- Beki Basch, *Majestic Mountain*, Inkjet print on polyester, 6' x 8'

Previously, I have written about the piece at the top of my map as this distant land of the unknown. It could be heaven or it could be some earthly version of heaven— but either way, it is the place I go to find the boon. For my story thus far, it is Iceland, while for others it was Utah, and still others, somewhere else. Roni Horn labeled Iceland as ‘Oz’ for this same reason. The way that the piece of the map is slightly separated from the rest, shows a continual distance of this imagined far away land. There is magic in seeing a place from far away and thinking about what may lie there. Whether or not that place meets one’s expectations, the vision from afar holds all the potential and incites one’s imagination.

This early motion picture effect places the characters in *The Wizard of Oz* in a dreamy (albeit highly artificial) landscape where the Emerald City is a distant vision. It's hard to understand what the tall glinting towers would be used for, but in this moment, we can just assume it is like nothing we have ever known or seen before. It transcends our understanding.



Figure 28- Scene from *The Wizard of Oz*, directed by King Vidor, 1939.

Just outside of Washington D.C. there is a Mormon temple that can be seen from the highway, whose needlepoint spires rise well above the treetops. The gold and white of these spires lie in stark contrast to the surrounding nature, sky and highway. Somehow the scale of the architecture makes the temple feel impossibly distant. Western religious architecture works to transcend the ordinary and is often characterized by sweeping gestures, strong dominating symmetry, and cavernous gathering spaces that seem to reach the heavens.



Figure 29- The D.C. Mormon Temple, as seen from Route 495.
<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:DC-Temple-3.jpg>

This feeling I described in relation to Oz, is prevalent here as well. So much so that multiple times over the years, someone will highlight this reference by spray painting ‘Surrender Dorothy’ on the overpass ahead of the temple, which points to a scene in *The Wizard of Oz* when the Wicked Witch writes these words above Oz with smoke in the sky.



Figure 30- The D.C. Mormon Temple, as seen from Route 495, with graffiti on the overpass that reads 'SURRENDER DOROTHY'. Photo from 1986.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/surrender-dorothy-painted-on-a-beltway-overpass--whats-the-story/2011/06/23/AGduf6kH_story.html?utm_term=.c4bd105249bf

When I returned from Iceland at the end of August 2017, I was actively searching for visuals in Baltimore that reminded me of Iceland, and could thereby transmit some of the special power it had. In downtown Baltimore, as seen from the highway, there are giant mounds of salt that are used by the Department of Transportation to salt the roads in winter. These mounds stand in contrast with their surroundings not only because of their bleach whiteness, but also because they look like pure glacial mountains amongst a cityscape of a health insurance building, a busy and dirty port, and various other signs of a metropolis.



Figure 31- A photo I took in the Fall of 2017 of the downtown Baltimore salt storage.

These mounds feel distant in the way the church does, and the way that Oz does, and the way that an actual mountain does. On my first attempt to photograph them, I went closer to the site, but was promptly led off site by a security guard. I became relegated

to photographing these from afar, and so have retained this distance and the imagined potential that comes with it.



Figure 32- The Snæfellsjökull glacier on the Snæfellsnes peninsula of Iceland.
<http://icelandmag.is/article/more-people-discover-magic-snaefellsjokull-national-park-25-increase-year>

For visual comparison, here is an image of Snæfellsjökull. This glacial mountain can be seen on a clear day, 75 miles away in Reykjavík. During my stay last year, I could see it from the kitchen window and think about how I was in a city but could see straight out to a place which was remote and desolate. This quiet reminder settled me.

The piece *Majestic Mountain* is a six foot by eight-foot piece of fabric printed with a photographic of the Baltimore salt mounds. There is no background information, so the mound can be more easily confused with an actual mountain. The fabric is also transparent enough to see through to the other side, and the photo shows up on both sides, so the experience can be had from either direction. The transparency suggests

the elusiveness of this situation, and the difference between our perceived idea of a place and the reality of our experience.

The title *Majestic Mountain* is a reference to the mountain image used by Paramount Pictures, which, so the story goes, is based on a doodle by W.W. Hodkinson, who founded Paramount Pictures and was reminiscing about his childhood in Utah (Marks). Hollywood is certainly a promised land in itself, filled with mythical figures and wildly mythical narratives.



Figure 33- Paramount Pictures illustration by W.W. Hodkinson. Referred to as ‘Majestic Mountain’. <https://visitwightpro.com/paramount-majestic-mountain-logo/>



Figure 34- Utah's 'Ben Lomond' mountain outside of Ogden.
<https://www.sandiegoreader.com/weblogs/big-screen/2013/may/06/paramount-logo-history/#>

Master of Two Worlds: Bird/Mound



Figure 35- Beki Basch, *Master of Two Worlds: Bird*, Inkjet print on paper, 24" x 22"



Figure 36- Beki Basch, *Master of Two Worlds: Mound*, Inkjet print on paper, 24" x 22"

Though countless foreign and native artists have interpreted the landscape of Iceland, I feel a special kinship with the work of Roni Horn. Her work feels spacious and inviting. Each encounter with the work brings me something new, and I am interested in her exploration of Iceland as it exists on multiple levels and in multiple formats. I have found that many foreign artists are overly charmed by the landscape of Iceland to make anything significant with respect to it. They are either concerned with making something that matches up to it or making something that lies in stark visual contrast to the bleak landscape. Roni's work is a committed, multi-decade investigation into a place, a feeling, a people, and herself. Her photographs (not just of Iceland, but most all of them) typically possess an element of ambiguity, even when the content feels clear and obvious. The simplicity of her photos and their

position and content in relation to oneself, serve as a way to see oneself through other means.



Figure 37- Roni Horn, *Untitled No. 8*, 2000.

<https://www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/16/roni-horn/list-of-works/7/>

In *Untitled No. 8*, Roni Horn photographed the backs of taxidermied Icelandic birds. The composition referencing portraiture, also lacks a face for us to land on. In this subtle abstraction we can focus on the plumage itself and its ambiguity as color and texture, which resembles other natural forms— even a snow-capped mountain.

The title *Master of Two Worlds: Bird/Mound* refers to Joseph Campbell's defined monomyth stage of the same name. This place where one has obtained the ultimate boon and it is so much a part of them that they can be a part of their ordinary world

and retain the boon simultaneously. Each one informs the other. These two images are taken in Baltimore, with a mind for seeking visuals that connect to Iceland yet exist in a strangely artificial setting. While *Bird* is a photo of a puffin taken through glass at the Baltimore Aquarium, *Mound* is another salt mound photo.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

I consider my artistic practice to maintain a very open trajectory. While there may be moments where elements synthesize to transcend my original understanding of the individual parts, I never hold myself to one type of work, though the monomyth framework has held my interest for many years. *The Crown* has been a rich exploration of my experiences and has given me the flexibility and drive, within a structure, to expand my practice outside of autobiography and the solitary studio experience. Future plans for this project are in the works, as well as future trips to Iceland, following in Roni Horn's footsteps of a committed multi-decade investigation through which I can better understand humanity through my own story, those of others, and of course, Iceland.

Bibliography

- Auden, W. H., and Louis MacNeice. *Letters from Iceland*. Faber and Faber, 1985.
- Barton, Laura. "Björk on Iceland: 'We Don't Go to Church, We Go for a Walk'." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 16 Nov. 2015, www.theguardian.com/music/2015/nov/16/bjork-iceland-church-john-grant-sigur-ros.
- Blodgett, Renee. "Iceland's Jokulsarlon Glacier Lagoon." *The Huffington Post*, TheHuffingtonPost.com, 7 Dec. 2017, www.huffingtonpost.com/blodgett/icelands-jokulsarlon-glac_b_4215300.html.
- Campbell, Joseph, and Diane K. Osbon. *A Joseph Campbell Companion: Reflections on the Art of Living*. Harper Perennial, 1995.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Princeton University Press, 1972.
- Fontaine, Paul D. "1.7 Million Tourists In 2016." *The Reykjavik Grapevine*, 6 Jan. 2017, grapevine.is/news/2017/01/06/1-7-million-tourists-in-2016/.
- Gísladóttir, Ingibjörg Sólrún. "A Fable of Settlement." *Reykjavík 871 +-2*, Reykjavík City Museum.
- Hardy, Rodger. "» Icelandic Memorial, Spanish Fork, Utah." *Mormon Historic Sites*, Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, mormonhistoricsites.org/icelandic-memorial-spanish-fork-utah-2005/.
- "Home | ResArtis." *Home | ResArtis*, www.resartis.org/.
- Ćirić, Jelena. "Icelandic Population Continues Upward Trend." *Iceland Review*, 29 Jan. 2018, icelandreview.com/news/2018/01/29/icelandic-population-continues-upward-trend.
- Jung, C. G., and Joseph Campbell. *The Portable Jung*. Penguin Books, 1988.

Kneeland, Samuel. *An American in Iceland*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Laxness, Halldór, and Magnús Magnússon. *Paradise Reclaimed*. Vintage International, 2002.

Marks, Scott. "San Diego Reader." *Go Tell It on the Mountain: a Pictorial History of the Paramount Logo*, San Diego Reader, 6 May 2013, www.sandiegoreader.com/weblogs/big-screen/2013/may/06/paramount-logo-history/#.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Portable Nietzsche*. The Viking Press, 1954.

Smith, Joseph. "The Articles of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints." *The Articles of Faith*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saintw, www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/a-of-f/1.10?lang=eng#p9.

Tate. "Iceland." *Tate*, Tate, www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/roni-horn-aka-roni-horn/roni-horn-aka-roni-horn-explore-10.

"Tourism to Bring in 10% of Iceland's GDP in 2016." *Iceland Monitor*, 21 Sept. 2016, 9:45 GMT, icelandmonitor.mbl.is/news/nature_and_travel/2016/09/21/tourism_to_bring_in_10_percent_of_iceland_s_gdp_in_.

"Widower of Woman Killed in Jökulsárlón Accident Feels Sorry for the Driver." *Iceland Monitor*, 26 June 2017, 10:09 GMT, icelandmonitor.mbl.is/news/news/2017/06/26/widower_of_woman_killed_in_jokulsarlon_accident_fee/.