

conditions the implications of any artistic renewal, major or minor, tend to be exaggerated disproportionately.

Whence the significance of the opening day – 1st of December – which is the date when Icelanders attained full sovereignty back in 1918. But, since at that time they were severely plagued by the Spanish flu, which affected one third of the inhabitants of Reykjavik, plus the harshest winter in almost 40 years, Independence Day did not become a national holiday on a par with June 17, the date of birth of the Republic in 1944. Only students at the University have paid tribute to the 1st of December as their national holiday, using the occasion to examine and question the state of affairs in the Republic. As a result, 1st of December has become for the young generation a day of political assessment.

Independence Day which opened on the 1st of December in the Municipal Art Gallery at Kópavogur questions in its own particular way the official attitude to expression. Bold in structure and aggressive in its attempt to show that "something must be rotten in the State of Iceland", the exhibition manages to confirm the young generation's natural detachment from controlled museum taste. Always referring to the omnipotence of bad taste Ásmundur Ásmundsson's ludicrous construction *Summer is gone, winter is space* was presented for the first time on Midsummer's day last year in the attic of the "Yellow House", an abandoned building in Reykjavik's Somber quarter occupied by young artists and art students in search of exhibition space.

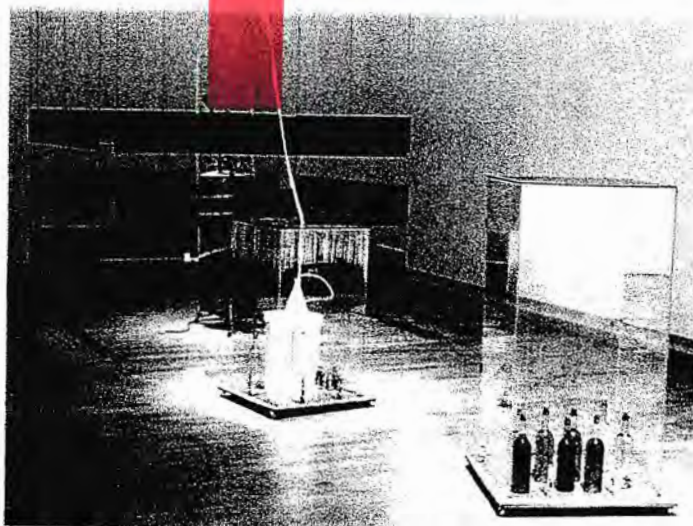
This is an allegorical work, ingeniously nonchalant and economically conceived, overtly dealing with the seasons, but latently alluding to the hackneyed interior with its promise of "home, sweet home" soothing for a worker in the aftermath of a hard day. One TV depicts an open fire while another displays only the electrostatic specks called snow. In front of thick-

frozen refrigerator elements forming a perfect modernistic sculpture hangs an original by the prewar regional master, Eggert Gudmundsson – an Icelandic Thomas Hart Benton – of a raven in snow. A much bigger installation by Ásmundur in the same room, made of a large screened-off liquor brewery and distillery kit, also deals with temperature, national temperament, traditional activities and the question of what is considered legal and illegal in terms of production, as compared to truth and falsehood in artistic terms.

Downstairs there are three photos from Anna Júlía Fridbjörnsdóttir London performance *The Mountain Lady*. The Mountain Lady is an allegorical incarnation of the Icelandic nation, a fairy queen dressed in national costume, who addresses the public on the national holiday. Anna Júlía thrives on misconceptions, myths, lies and misunderstanding concerning Iceland, helping people by every possible means to get a more distorted picture of the country and its inhabitants.

Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir uses photography in order to lay bare the image and show how she herself, the artist in general, and the people that figure in the artist's works are all highly conscious of the way they look, act and appear in front of the lens. In order to reach the truth we must learn to read through the layers of vanity which envelop an image. In his *Millennium Kiss 2000* Stephan Stephensen tries to bypass all such premeditated means in order to achieve an unequivocally sensual sensation. Conversely Hekla Dögg Jónsdóttir avoids all such clichés and in her photographic works reaches after a new sense of unicity by observing in details the unexpected as it penetrates the commonplace.

The loss of paradise in one way or another motivates Særún Stefánsdóttir, Sara Björnsdóttir, Egill Sæbjörnsson and Úlfur Grønvald. Memories of childhood and the magic possibility of constructing



Ásmundur Ásmundsson, *Liquor Distillery*, 2000, installation view. Photo: Halldór Björn Runólfsson.

and controlling one's own world haunts the works of Særún and Egill, while Úlfur Grønvald yearns for the heroic freedom and sexual rewards promised to the adolescent who does not betray his dreams. Sara's loss is of a totally different nature, as she observes the genetically mutated tomatoes in her hand, which have caused her cheeks to turn as bright red as the tomatoes in her palm.

Far more ironic are the pseudo-romantic constructions of Gabriela Frídríksdóttir under the rubric *Operazione romantica*. Fascinated by the dichotomy of nature and culture she harks back to the Frankenstein theme humorously emphasizing the creative potential of genetics. With her artistically fashioned musical mutants she envisages a future when artificially bred monsters will be submitted to aesthetic judgement, thus suggesting that, no matter what, art is bound to overcome.

Sarcasm also characterizes *White, black, grey*, the five-star hotel for animals

constructed by the Icelandic Love Corporation. The slogan "Let's give the animals a shelter before Christmas" announced this new business and guaranteed in the price two meals a day and a variety of toys. Visitors can leave their pets there for as long as the exhibition lasts, or buy toys and furniture which may by then have become indispensable to the guest. Visitors can even buy the pets which have been left behind by their owners. Unfortunately the Icelandic Association for Animal Protection intervened and closed down the hotel when it realized that both cats and birds might be lodged there at the same time.

With its anti-utopian and anti-positivistic stance *Independence Day* manages to preserve art's critical position in rather hostile surroundings, where everything is done to subordinate it to complaisant conformity. In view of these circumstances the exhibition merits its highly suggestive title.

—Halldór Björn Runólfsson

Joan Jonas, Galerie der Stadt, Stuttgart, 15/11/2000 – 18/2/2001;
Galerie Reinhard Hauff, Stuttgart, 11/11 – 23/12/2000

Barry Schwabsky: There is a maximum of sensory saturation and density – and a minimum of explanatory text. The emphasis is not on explanation or description but on experience.

...speak of Joan Jonas as a performance artist or even as a video artist is inadequate. As Chrissie Iles writes in the catalogue to Jonas' retrospective in Stuttgart: "Her performances, films, drawings, videotapes, objects and photographs are rooted in an encyclopaedic context stretching from land art and sculptural issues of non-site on the one hand, to new dance, theatre, ancient ritual, body art, film and video on the other." Besides, the very notion of performance art sometimes seems hopelessly mired in a metaphysics of presence and of immediacy – in the illusion that an event can take place in 'real time' and in 'real space' in some unproblematic sense, while that of 'video art' assumes an obsolescent attachment to medium-specificity.

Most of Jonas' works already exist in more than one form. There might be both

a performance and a video with the same title; or the performance might have been realized in quite different ways in different situations; or a videotape which had been shown as a self-contained work might also be incorporated into a subsequent performance. In presenting her work from 1968 to the present in the form of installations, Jonas has brilliantly confronted the problems involved in representing such multivalent artworks. These installations combine props and costumes from the original performances, sound recordings, and video; footage of performances and unedited outtakes as well as videotapes meant to be seen as self-contained works may turn up either on monitors or as projections. There is a maximum of sensory saturation and density – and a minimum of explanatory text. The emphasis is not on explanation or

description but on experience: the viewer is thrown into a series of contrapuntal variations on a theme – an experience that is multilayered and multidirectional, both sequential and simultaneous. Better not call it a retrospective – how about *Joan Jonas: The Remix*? If Jonas is now a model for some of the most astute younger artists (Pipilotti Rist and Tacita Dean are just the first to come to mind), it is not just for her pioneering position in the history of performance and video, for her work's reflexive self-consciousness and concern with narrative, or even the clear-eyed, undogmatic feminism that informs her work; rather, it's the sense of absolute plasticity of the work's underlying perceptual, gestural, and semiotic materials.

The ground upon which all these variations come into play is, of course, the real space of the room itself, but that doesn't mean that the basis of Jonas' installations is in architecture. Nor is this primarily about collage, montage, or assemblage in however expanded a form – the typical concept of installation as a three-dimensional expansion of the two-dimensional surface inherited from painting, drawing, typography, and so on. The space of

Jonas' installations is an always-already three-dimensional space – a space that we might as well call theatrical, as long as we understand the word broadly enough to remember that a theatrical space is not necessarily that of the conventional theater with its separation between performers and audience, but simply a space disposed (as the etymology of the word tells us) for the act of seeing – a place in which actions occur for the sake of being seen. In this case, the space of installation is clearly conceived of as continuous with the space of performance. An installation in this sense might be considered a performance that happens not to have live performers.

But then in Jonas' work the presence of the performer seems never to have been privileged over the image of the performer. Hers is a theater of appearance, not being (and therefore congruent with what Robert Pincus-Witten once characterized as an epistemically rather than an ontologically based conceptual art). In one of her most characteristic early works, *Mirror Check*, 1970, the artist is seen systematically examining herself, naked, with a handheld mirror. The point must have

2000.



Joan Jonas, *Mirage*, 1976, installation view.

been a kind of ironic demonstration of the insufficiency of knowledge where truth is considered to be an unveiling ('the naked truth'): the viewers were given the 'truth' of the artist's nudity yet also saw that they could get no more than random flashes of what she herself was seeing and knowing by way of the mirror. The same is true of Jonas' works on a grander scale in open space. As she remarks of *Jones Beach Piece*, 1970: "Distance flattens circles into lines, erases detail, delays sound. The mirror reflects light over distance. Working with the flat expanse of distant space I was trying to work with the absence of depth over distance, in a sense to displace the idea of the space or what happened in the space."

As a means of disturbing, fragmenting, and multiplying the visual field (one thinks of the Borgesian Gnostic who reviled mirrors and sexual reproduction because they multiply beings), the mirror remains a significant force in Jonas' work – as important as in the work of such distinct oeuvres as those of Michelangelo Pistoletto or Dan Graham. The video screen functions in her work as a more complicated kind of mirror, a more elaborate multiplier, fragmenter, and deformer

of appearances. The same is true of drawing, a constant reference in Jonas' work. In the orbit of these phantasmatic appearances, objects themselves seem to be in constant flux; recalling Jonas' remark that "I began my work, first simply, in relation to the job of moving or being moved by props", her recent work bluntly titled *Moving With No Pattern*, 1998, can be seen as a kind of *summa*. To make the piece, a group of Jonas' students at the Stuttgart Art Academy were instructed to move through the space continuously in no apparent pattern while carrying, moving, and rearranging the objects. Jonas taped the action, moving with it and in that way (becoming) part of it. This then becomes a kind of spatial dance among three sequences of images, two projected on a large scale and one on a small monitor, which adheres neither to the movements of the performers nor that of Jonas as the camera operator, but a wholly new sequence of movements that subliminally coordinate the viewer's own movements through the space in which the taped movements appear. The work says, *Whatever it is, it's moving. Move with it.* ■

—Barry Schwabsky

Hans Hemmert, (*lokale vokabuläre*) 1, 2, 3, 4
Neuer Berliner Kunstverein Berlin 3/11 – 171170000

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