

## PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

### Ragnar Kjartansson to represent Iceland at the Venice Biennale in 2009

The artist Ragnar Kjartansson has been chosen to exhibit on Iceland's behalf at the 53rd Biennale in Venice 2009. Born in 1976, he is the youngest artist ever chosen to represent the country in this important international venue where the art world gathers every two years to see the most exciting new art brought in from every corner of the earth.

Icelandic artists were first sent to the Venice Biennale in 1960 but in the last decade, more funding and effort has been expended to support and promote the representing artist, reflecting the growing importance of such international art events. Most recently, Iceland was represented in 2007 by Steingrímur Eyfjörð, in 2005 by Guðrún Friðriksdóttir, in 2003 by Rúri and in 2001 by Finnbogi Pétursson – all artists who exhibit internationally and have built a strong reputation in and outside Iceland. Until 2005, the Icelandic artists were exhibited in a small pavilion built in 1956 by Finnish architect Alvar Alto in the Giardini di Castello exhibition gardens. In 2007, however, Steingrímur Eyfjörð's exhibition was mounted in the Palazzo Bianchi Michiel on the Canale Grande, reflecting the expansion of the Biennale in recent years as more and more exhibitions are held outside the gardens traditionally reserved for the event. The location of Kjartansson's exhibition has yet to be announced.

Ragnar Kjartansson graduated from the Icelandic Academy of the Arts in 2001 but his artistic development has been rapid and he has already had twelve private exhibitions in five countries and taken part in some thirty group shows. He has built a body of work that is at once highly individual and easily appreciated, combining performances, video, sculpture and painting. In addition to his work in the visual arts, Kjartansson has a career in music, having released several albums with his bands and performing around the world. His contribution to the Reykjavík Arts Festival in 2005, though staged in an abandoned rural meeting house far from the city, was one of the most successful events of the festival and brought him to the attention of the international press. Like many of Kjartansson's works, it combined drawing and painting with a dramatically staged setting and a performance piece that tested the artist's endurance as he spent twelve hours a day for two weeks in the draughty, unheated building, dressed in fading theatrical costume, his face streaked with stage blood, strumming a guitar and singing to himself, gradually adding details to the chaotic installation. Kjartansson often highlights such themes as sadness, regret and loneliness, but his approach and execution are always fresh and intensely personal, forging a strong bond with the viewer and captivating audiences wherever he exhibits.

With Ragnar Kjartansson, the Icelandic pavilion in Venice in 2009 will feature a young artist who has in a remarkably short time built an impressive roster of international exhibitions and an engaging individual style that stands out even in today's crowded global art world. He is a worthy representative of the vibrant young art scene in Iceland, a cutting-edge contemporary artist with strong roots in cultural tradition and a keen eye for the tragicomic spectacle of human experience.

The choice of an Icelandic artist for the Biennale is in the hands of a committee that this time included Christian Schoen, Director of the Center for Icelandic Art, Hafþór Yngvason, Director of the Reykjavík Art Museum, and the artist Rúri who herself exhibited in Venice on Iceland's behalf in 2003. Two further consultants were brought in to assist in the deliberations: Halldór Björn Runólfsson, Director of the National Gallery of Iceland, and Kristján Steingrímur Jónsson, Head of Visual Arts at the Icelandic Academy of Art. Christian Schoen is the commissioner for Iceland's pavilion in Venice and the project is overseen by the Center for Icelandic Art, which in turn is funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

For press downloads and further information please visit [www.cia.is](http://www.cia.is) or contact [info@cia.is](mailto:info@cia.is).