

Halldór Ásgeirsson

The continuous flow of cause and effect

*Art-Music, performance
by Halldór Ásgeirsson in collaboration
with composer Snorri Sigfús Birgisson,
Kjarvalsstaðir, 1998.*

Last June a seminar titled *Watercolours for 100 years* was held in Reykjavík Art Museum in collaboration with NAS and SÍM (Association of Icelandic Artists). Three lecturers, including myself, covered the mainstreams of watercolour in Iceland over the last 100 years. My input to the seminar was to discuss the status of watercolour in contemporary art, its expansion and escape from confinement, like has happened with all mediums of the fine arts.

During the seminar Icelandic artist Halldór Ásgeirsson made a performance that relayed more information about the mediums expansion and escape than any lecture I could give because it was a direct example of what I was talking about. Halldór projected an image with an overhead projector on a screen that showed a variety of colours floating



in water which he created on the spot in a dialogue with chamber music by Haukur Tómasson. For 11 minutes and 40 seconds the colours danced in the water under Halldór's intuitive choreography, perfectly tuned with the music and eventually merging into an all-black image as the artist allowed the spectators a minute of silence before the next lecture would begin. It was quite cinematic to watch, a thrilling geste and mind blowing in its beauty.

This was however not the first time Halldór performed such a piece. He has done several versions of these watercolour-performances. I saw him first perform at Kjarvalsstaðir in 1998 in an improvisational dialogue with composer and piano player Snorri Sigfús Birgisson. There Halldór dripped various colours into a watertank. Then he would step back



Watercolour on paper, 1990. Installation view, Gallery Turpentine, 2009.



"...and that a boat should carry water to land", Tungenes, Stavanger, Norway, 2008.

while Snorri played an original composition in harmony with the movement of colours in water.

At the time I did not connect Halldór's performance to the tradition of watercolour. It was not until I entered his show at Gallery Turpentine in January 2009 and I saw a row of blue watercolours on paper that he had done in the early 90's. He had hung them vertically by the entrance of the gallery as to remind us that they were the base of his experiments and his watercolour-performances were simply an expansion of those pictures. The process was the same. He had drowned the paper in water and poured colour over it so the colour could dance freely around as it structured itself on the paper. The only difference is that the water eventually evaporated and the picture was left on view but in his performances Halldór puts

the process itself on view. In this sense he approaches the art of watercolour through the legacy of Jackson Pollock, allowing the action to become the creative force, like Yves Klein, Allan Kaprow and the infamous Gutai group did in their performances during the 50's and 60's.

Most of Halldór's watercolour works have pictorial qualities. Yet, in some cases, Halldór does take an objective approach. Like in his outdoor installation "*...and that a boat should carry water to land*" at Ljósaklif in Hafnarfjörður in 2000 where Halldór sealed coloured water in transparent bags and placed them on bamboo sticks inside a shattered boat on the rocky shore. By this simple gesture the artist reversed the role of the boat which had in the past been carried by water but was now carrying water itself.



Watercolour-performance by Halldór Ásgeirsson in collaboration with CAPUT music company at EXPO in Aichi, Japan, 2005.



"...and that the water shows its heart", Halogen light, glass jars and colored water, Gallery i8, 1997.

Halldór repeated the act on the shore of Tungenes lighthouse in Stavanger Norway in 2008 but inside the lighthouse he piled up bottles of coloured water under an artificial light that shone through the bottles thus creating sparkles of coloured light in dark space

Any person that works with colour knows that light plays an essential role in making a picture. Colour is light and Halldór uses artificial light to enhance the colour and even to spread it or project it from one place to another. He did it with an overhead projector in his recent performance at Reykjavik Art Museum and at EXPO in Aichi in Japan in 2005. In 1997 Halldór exhibited in Gallery i8 in Reykjavík a row of differently shaped jars filled with coloured water. He then used halogen lamps to project an aura like images of the confined coloured water on the wall. The piece was titled "*...and that the water shows its heart*".

Halldór has practised Zen under the guidance of a Zen master since 1995. His Zen practices have influenced his art greatly and turned his attention eastward. In recent years he has dwelled partly in Japan where he has absorbed a different kind of culture compared to the Icelandic or Scandinavian one, like calligraphic symbolism and long time tradition of the art of watercolour that eventually influenced artists like Vincent Van Gogh, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Gustav Klimt.

Finally there is an aesthetic aspect in Halldór's work that relates to eastern principles which is found in the appreciation of the here and now. Through such principles one can approach Halldór's watercolour works because they show us the beauty of the process itself, where one may enjoy each moment with-out any expectation of how it will turn out in its final result, for it is ever changing in a continuous flow of cause and effect.

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