

## Press release

Hreinn Friðfinnsson

*Artist in the air*

September 2 – October 26, 2023

[interruption September 26 – October 3]

"Heisenberg imagined that electrons do not always exist. They only exist when someone or something watches them, or better, when they are interacting with something else. They materialize in a place, with a calculable probability, when colliding with something else. The 'quantum leaps' from one orbit to another are the only means they have of being 'real': an electron is a set of jumps from one interaction to another. When nothing disturbs it, it is not in any precise place. It is not in a 'place' at all." Carlo Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics* – Second Lesson (2014)

Under the title *Artist in the air*, Hreinn Friðfinnsson proposes a new personal exhibition at Galerie Papillon presenting works from the 1970s to nowadays.

Hreinn Friðfinnsson's work spans the decades marking a history of contemporary art in a mysterious and narrative way. Despite the conceptual practice that underlies his work, this definition is limiting because of a whole range of questions the artist raises about his relationship with physics, nature and perception. Since his Icelandic origins, themes such as nature and narrative have been present. It was in Reykjavik, that he co-founded in 1965 the SÚM group. He then moved into the Dutch art scene, which in the early 1970s had a very particular character. The political and social context of Amsterdam probably offered an opportunity to practice conceptual art in a more open and diverse way. Almost in the form of a union between the scientific elements of the "see" to the more playful ones of the absurd.

In Hreinn Friðfinnsson's work, the way of looking and seeing reality becomes a central element. Hreinn's research is about perception, how things are seen, and how the act of looking can be measured. In that conceptual art context in Amsterdam, it was not unusual to measure something: Stanley Broun / body and space, Bas Jan Ader / gravity, Jan Dibbets / light and time, Marinus Boezem / weather and air. This happened in a climate in which the conceptual becomes lyrical and romantic following a tradition of the absurd that in the Netherlands finds its cultural basis in a melting pot of science and fantasy. And it is precisely in this context that Hreinn Friðfinnsson succeeds in constructing an analytical discourse on the gaze with an almost scientific objective, typical of the research that has characterized science, art and society in the Netherlands since the 1600s. In his research, the gaze becomes more than just an activity of perception, it becomes a production, a creative act. Through the artist's gaze as well as the gaze of everyone who looks at the works, a fundamental cognitive process is generated, a key to the interpretation and existence of Friðfinnsson's research. This is present in *Along a line* from 1985, an installation made from various objects. He found the color-studies at the flea market, and much later he found out that these were made by two expressionist painters (Johannes Itten and Otto Runge) who were color-theorists on the side.

A relationship as an analytical observer of his surroundings can be seen in *Atelier Sketch*, a series of works that Friðfinnsson has been carrying on since 1990. They refer to the perception of space by pointing out the smallest details that characterize it specifically. In this case, we find ourselves in his atelier, which is located in an old school converted into studios for artists. Looking at the space, Friðfinnsson sees that the beveled corners along with the old school paint are a great place for spiders to weave their webs. This natural production of the environment points to a number of elements central to the



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Icelandic artist's work: the passage of time, the neutral space of creation and the presence of nature that always realizes a boundlessness of possible variations tied to a perfection of matter/form. Again, Friðfinnsson's observation investigates a specific realm of space.

The artist's studio as a place of creation interconnects with the ready-made of a natural environment. It defines a space through complex references in simple places, such as corners and lines. The spider web becomes almost a metaphor for the complex and rhizomatic mental space of the studio. A trap for catching ideas.

A recurring element of Friðfinnsson's work is the continuity of his works starting in the 1970s, and the artist continues to make a kind of anti-gravitational time-form. There are several series of works in the exhibition that have their own continuity. One of the best known is *Drops*, which has been appearing in his exhibitions since the late 1970s to rhythmically cadence the space. Made of crystal, the elements reflect what is around them. The gazes are multiplied by the number of glass drops. Again, the work is activated by the visitor's gaze, with each different way of seeing changing its identity. Their arrangement on the walls is interspersed so as to rhythm the space in different cadences. Spaces, almost always rectangular and neutral, are reconverted into convex forms in which the environment is precisely reproduced by reconstructing a new visual configuration of the surrounding space. A relationship with space also occurs in *A Leaf that Fell To The Ground And Was Picked Up Sometime In The Early 80's*. A leaf multiplies through a play of mirrors. The perfect space tries to reproduce the perfection of nature.

*Artist in the air*, which gives the exhibition its title, is a photograph of him jumping over a field. A perfect circle abstracts him from the rest. It captures an action he performed at the turn of '75-'76. Jumping in the last moments of December 31, when he touches the ground again it is already 1976. A jump between two years, a suspension between gravity, time and space. This version of '77 highlights the artist's moment of suspension, not touching the ground and making infinite a symbolic moment of the transition between one year and the next. Taken in the polders, the photo plays on the image of the landscape and the ability to freeze an instant.

Air is perhaps one of the most central elements in Hreinn Friðfinnsson's work, it becomes almost a tool that allows him to develop much of his practice related to the idea of perception.

Lorenzo Benedetti  
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**Hreinn Friðfinnsson (IS-1943)** is one of Iceland's key figures of conceptual art. Co-founder in 1965 of the SÚM Group and its eponymous gallery, which promoted the artistic avant-garde in Iceland and brought contemporary Icelandic art to the forefront of the international scene.

He was one of the very first artists to be exhibited at the Centre Pompidou, when it opened in 1977. Presented at New York's Guggenheim Museum in 1982, his work was awarded a prize at Stockholm's Carnegie Art Awards in 2000, and he went on to win Finland's prestigious Ars Fennica prize, awarded annually since 1990 to a (usually Nordic) artist in the visual arts. In awarding the prize, Jean-Christophe Ammann, former director of Frankfurt's Museum of Modern Art, described him as "a poet who speaks to us of light, wind, landscape, rock, crystals, balance and feeling.... His works fascinate with their acute sense of concept. Thanks to this he is able to capture the strongest emotions through the most ordinary means."