

# T I N T Y P E

## PRESS RELEASE

### STRIPPED AWAY

24 February – 14 March 2010

242 Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9DA

Small population – massive art scene: contemporary art in Iceland continues to be direct, experimental and distinctive. We are extremely pleased to present the work of three established Icelandic artists: Birgir Snæbjörn Birgisson, Helgi Hjaltalín Eyjólfsson and Helgi Thorgils Fridjónsson.

#### **Birgir Snæbjörn Birgisson**

Is blonde a colour or a state of being? Perhaps blonde-ness is a lack of colour? In Birgisson's recent work, colour has been virtually stripped away, taken back to the palest hue. The images are like an impression of something that was once there. In spite of, or perhaps because of this, the paintings have a disquieting physical presence.

About 14 years ago, Birgir Birgisson was living in London and heard a comment on the radio by the MP Dianne Abbot. She said how there were “too many blonde nurses from Finland and Poland working in British hospitals”. Birgisson found the comment odd but more or less forgot about it. It was only after he had moved back to Reykjavík that it re-surfaced and he made a painting of a group of blonde nurses. This triggered an obsession: Birgisson embarked upon a series of works in which the ideology and politics of blonde-ness is addressed. The series *Blond heads Nordic race*, for instance, is based on the book, *Deutsche köpfe Nordischer rasse* published in 1927. Although it was not connected to Nazism, the book did become a kind of beauty contest in looking Aryan. It is as if he is subjecting ‘objectification’ itself to an acerbic scrutiny. ‘The pretty women of Paris’ is a work based on an 1883 unofficial guidebook listing and classifying Parisian prostitutes of the time, the text of which Birgisson transcribes in beguilingly pretty watercolours. His work has a pastel-shaded seductiveness, yet it chills and disturbs at the same time.

#### **Helgi Hjaltalín Eyjólfsson**

Helgi Hjaltalín Eyjólfsson is an installation artist. Since 1997, all his series and exhibitions have been called ‘Favourable Circumstances’, a title that comes from *Origin of the Species* by Charles Darwin, in which Darwin postulates that all circumstances are favourable for somebody or something.

Eyjólfsson's recent installations are ghostly clocks in which the element of temporality has been taken away. Eyjólfsson started making them in a residency deep in rural Norway where “time didn't matter”. Yet removing their functionality makes them all the more powerfully about time. They are presented as stranded domestic

objects – grandfather clocks, cuckoo clocks, carriage clocks, wall-clocks – rendered in pale pitch pine or plywood. He likes to investigate object and function, construction and purpose, organic forms and man-made structures. Another object from the Favourable Circumstances series is a tree trunk painstakingly made from scrap wood. Eyjólfsson cut each growth ring with a band-saw and constructed the trunk by gluing each band together with coloured glue. In this work, the physical appearance of time is deconstructed and then reconstructed.

### **Helgi Thorgils Fridjónsson**

Helgi Thorgils Frijónsson is an artist who both embraces and questions Icelandic identity, ‘being nationalistic is not my interest, but bringing up national questions provokes something about existence’. His paintings re-interpret and reclaim ideas about nature and myth. Animals, fishes and birds are just as likely as humans to be the protagonists in his visual scenarios. When people *are* in the picture, they are always naked and seem to be playfully questioning and looking with a fresh vision at the world in which they find themselves.

Frijónsson’s work has sometimes been called naïve but it is too unsettling and sophisticated to fit neatly into such a category: “I might use elements from naïve art to make my paintings more transparent and innocent, but they are too geometrical and complex to be considered naïve.” A recurring theme or motif is mirroring and duality. This draws attention to the things that unify humans and animals: the symmetry of the human body, the symmetry of the non-human body and the importance of eyes. There is a kind of critical irony at the heart of Frijónsson’s work. He posits a democratisation of nature and suggests we need to think in anti-hierarchical terms – man being nothing more than a biological form among other biological forms. “Nature is a playground, but it is also a frame for our culture. You know, we are born out there. It is the dock of our culture. ....it is big, and you are small, and you never seem to understand it completely.”

STRIPPED AWAY is the first show to be presented by T I N T Y P E gallery, formerly W A L L.

For further information contact  
Teresa Grimes: [teresa@wall24.co.uk](mailto:teresa@wall24.co.uk)  
Pat Treasure: [pat@wall24.co.uk](mailto:pat@wall24.co.uk)  
020 7503 9642

Exhibition at:  
242 Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9DA  
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Open Wednesday to Sunday, 11am to 6pm

PRIVATE VIEW Thursday 25 February 6.30pm – 8.30pm  
Tube: Bethnal Green. Mainline: Cambridge Heath

