

New beginnings move, just like post-colonialism moved on and left the problems behind, and in the sanguine surroundings of the 53rd Venice Biennale, melancholy resides in the Icelandic Pavilion. If last year was all about Nicolas Bourriaud's Altermodern idea of the global art practice, this year is about the global artist staying at home and searching for the true values of art. As Nelson Goodman has formulated it; it is all about the question of 'when does the art happen', and in what temporality we see the art. We traveled to Venice to see the final abandonment of the necessity of female form in the muse and to encounter a bathing costume clad male body act as the figure of inspiration, the vessel of divine genius that fills the artist. When Freud has stepped down revealed as one of those who theorised his desires into being reality, and masculinity has appropriated the expression of the mother's love and paired it with danger, as in Shaun Gladwell's video 'Apology to Roadkill (1-6)', (2007-2009), there can no longer be a need for the muse to be held within the female figure. It only lived on the surface of a one-sided agreement established centuries ago. Adding the commodities together (stacks of paintings accumulated during six months) towards a greater whole, the art work represents a vision of the world. The slow collapse of Venice paired with the tulipomania in Holland, whose market came to a brusque crash, are phenomenon's of the same culture, the very culture that has fostered melancholia. This is a promise of myths (and as such also a promise of the muse). Julia Comodin and Annika von Silverhammar are in conversation with Ragnar Kjartansson, standing by the artist's easel in the center of the Palazzo Michiel dal Brusà tableaux vivant.

JC: ..the Paul Gauguin painting, you know the painting that is titled: Who are we? (**RK:** Yes.) Where are we? (**RK:** Yeah.) and Where are we going? **AvS:** And this is something that we think is really interesting, right now with this situation, to look at; how do you feel as a male artist today, in Venice? **RK:** Yeah. **AvS:** How do you feel, how do you look at this? Where are you? Who are you? And where are you going? **RK:** I definitely feel like I'm of a ... I'm of the ... de-generated class of artists, (**AvS:** Mhm.) the male class of artists, which is aah, ... I mean we should be on our way out, I think. Or at least, you know, keep... **AvS:** A dying breed. **RK:** Yeah, yeah, keeping a more low profile (**AvS:** Aha.) and, aa... in many a sense this whole thing is... is very inspired by, this, this notion that, that aa..., that well... In my country, which is fucked up because of all this male phallus energy, and it's like um (**JC:** Yeah.) I'm so sick of male energy (**JC:** Yeah.) and that's probably why I'm working so much with it. I, I love to work with this mach.. this, this, you know, boys club energy. Like, like in this piece I only work with men, (**JC:** Aaa.) so it's very kind of related (**JC:** Ah.) to, (**JC:** We, ah...) it's that kind of manly, zyeah, it's very much about men this piece, so, well, I'm guiding my way away from the question. Like a politician. **JC:** So, yeah, you... **AvS:** Like a male, a male politician. **RK:** Like a male politician. Because you were asking about the male role in this biennale.. wasn't it? **AvS:** Yes. **JC:** Uum.. **RK:** I think the male role ... is something that should be ... I have not seen the biennale, so I'm just.. **JC:** Well, I think... **RK:** I've just been stuck in this.. **JC:** Yeah, yeah, of course, because this is your contribution to the biennale and I think what we are interested in is the process of your work, your thoughts and what is happening in your art practice, you know. So, what we really are trying to, to get, get our hands onto is what you are doing, and in a.. if you say that, um, you think the male artist is degenerated and should give space for some, what is this that they should give space for? **RK:** The, no, it's the ... the artists, like all these artists you know, having more and more assistants, doing bigger and bigger projects, I mean, the, the art world has been so male oriented that the ... (**JC:** Yeah.) it's almost this kind of ... like, you know, rising phallus, or capitalism or, like always going tssc, always going.. (..ég er löngu búinn að taka myndina, sorri, sorri, ég tók hana bara á timer.. ertu ennþá að bíða? Scusi, are you all waiting for the picture? (–yes!) It was totally taken a long time ago ... I'm talking to some English journalists here, yes... INTERRUPTION AND GIGGLE.) (**AvS:** ..It will happen ...) **AvS:** We don't want to upset anyone. I hope it is all good. **RK:** I hope it is all good. **AvS:** Let's go back to the sphere of the romantic painter, and the idea.. (**JC:** as part of this fantastic setting) (**AvS:** Yes) **RK:** a part of excessive? **JC:** No, focussing on this space here where you're working, or if you say, um, that you don't like the idea of the assistant and the big production and then, then you have this very fair space. **RK:** Yeah. **JC:** So do you work see yourself as part of that trajectory of the big production, or are you...? **RK:** Aaa, in a way, you know (**JC:** Ah.) I mean the biennale is a big production, you can't escape it, (**JC:** Yeah.) so it's kind of like playing, acting to be, acting to be lo-fi and arte povera in this, in this expensive context (**JC:** Yeah, yeah, mm) because it is like crazy expensive to do this anyway. You know what I mean. (**JC:** Yeah, yeah). So, so it, anyway it's a big production, you know. **JC:** So it's kind of, would you... **RK:** It's like a lie that it's a lo-fi production. **JC:** Yeah. **AvS:** I like the contradiction in the whole project, I think that's a very good... (**RK:** Thank you madam.) ..pinpoint.. **RK:** Thank you madam. **JC:** Should we move to the next question. **AvS:** Yes. **JC:** Then our next question, question number two, is; now when time is taking over space (**RK:** Yes.) as the denominator, do you think that man is the new female body? **RK:** Yes! **AvS:** I could expand a little bit on that, I mean I had my theories regarding, em, I mean, the nude, the female nude, exemplified through history (**RK:** Yeah.) in, in acution prices would always make much more money (**RK:** ...much more money...) than the male nude, so I'm interested in if this is something that you would like to change, the view of the male body within the arts? **RK:** I just think, yeah, it's probably just like, you know, the male body is more exciting because, you know, it's not as, as ... it's not as over-exposed, in art. **AvS:** Mhm. **RK:** And, and also, usually, like in our, and it's really fu..., it's really funny, like in our modern context, like, I get so many comments eh, comments about that this is like a gay piece or something. **AvS:** Mhm. **RK:** That like if you are painting a male then, then, so it's like there we are with the assumption that always the artist-model, eeh, relationship is something sexual, which, which is kind of interesting. (**AvS:** Mm!) **RK:** that people always think so. **AvS:** Well, generally the, eh, the muse (**JC:** Yeah.) is often female (**RK:** Yeah.) and here you are with, he's just disappeared, with the object of a male. **RK:** Yeah! That's the.. (**JC:** So, aa...), so it's like a, like a, it's like a platonic muse, (**AvS:** Aha.) it's like a non-sexual muse. He's totally my muse. **AvS:** A platonic muse... **RK:** He's



Ragnar Kjartansson reenacting the dick painting made by a brute during the opening party.

At the End I Will Always Love You

RK: He's totally my muse. **AvS:** Yeah. **RK:** But I am not, it's not a, not a sexual thing.. and, (**JC:** I could...) I could not, I think I could not concentrate with a, with a, with a female muse, you know then you always start to... **JC:** So you, you don't see this as the, the sexual connotation of the relationship to the muse as anything that would actually benefit you work, rather distract from you work? **RK:** Yeah, it would, yeah. Because, eeh, I totally believe in, in, eh, you know, trying to get away from all that sexual stuff. **AvS:** Cause I think that is very interesting in the idea of Gauguin (**RK:** Yeah, well totally...) obviously having very young, (**RK:** ...) yes, also, so this is actually reconnecting with the male without being driven by your sexuality, **RK:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, **AvS:** in a sense. **RK:** it is very much about camaraderie (**AvS:** Yeah.) we are working together on this project, and collaborating on it and, and he is always commenting on my paintings as I do (**AvS:** mmm) them, so it is very much about collaborative thing. **AvS:** Yeah. **JC:** Yeah, so its sort of a, what do you say, what do you say, is it a mutual feed off each other, or does he get anything out of you, or is it just... **RK:** I don't know. Maybe he does. (**AvS:** hm) I hope he does, he is also writing eh, having his, having his... **AvS:** ...performative practice. **RK:** Yeah yeah yeah. **AvS:** And occupying the space, (**RK:** yeah) and occupying time (**RK:** absolutely) and duration... and aa... would you like to go down to the next question I think that would tie in quite nicely. **JC:** Yeah, I think so. Um, our next question is on the notion of boredom, (**RK:** Yes.) um, what your relationship to boredom is, and your relationship to boredom in a setting like this, like, like a task (**RK:** yes.) that this exhibition offers. **RK:** Well, I think boredom is ah, boredom is freedom, you know, that we are, it's like a luxury to be actually bored, and you know, in a .. (**Páll the muse:** boredom is a privilege) ..boredom is totally a privilege, it's a privilege of the aah, of the aah, privileged classes. (**AvS:** mm) **JC:** it's the privilege when you have housing and you have food (**RK:** Yeah.) and you don't have to worry about money, but if we were to take a step to the side of those sort of basic needs (**AvS:** needs), the sort of political idea about boredom amm, and think about boredom in, in terms of art making (**RK:** Yeah?) how, how would you see that then? **RK:** I think it's very, a lot of good poetic stuff, stuff comes out of boredom, you know this, this notion of, of the artist just getting like the golden, the golden ... leaf, what else to call it, what else to call it, um, (**JC:** gold dust..) .. the gold dust, yeah. (**AvS:** mmmhm) only in these, in these melancholy moments of boredom, then you reach a higher state. (**AvS:** Ah.) **JC:** Ah, so you're drawing links between melancholia and boredom, (**RK:** Yeah.) and you find that, that they are related. **RK:** Absolutely, cause, cause then we, in boredom we allow ourselves to be melancholic, in, in our busy, busy, busy, busy days it's, there is no time for it, you know. **JC:** Yeah. **RK:** Yeah. **JC:** Yeah. **AvS:** So do you think that this durational piece of six months will make you... or, are you hoping to get into a higher state (**RK:** Yeah.) of mind as an artist. **RK:** I hope to be a deeper person (**AvS:** Aha.) you know what I mean, in, in going so far into, into boredom and melancholia (**AvS:** Mh.) I hope it will, you know, I will, I will, I hope I will find some depths in my character. **AvS:** Mm. It is a very nice place to be (**RK:** ..it is..) bored in. **JC:** exploring here. **RK:** Yeah, yeah. **AvS:** Yes. **JC:** The boredom of the beautiful (**AvS:** Mmm.) almost, I would say. **RK:** Yes, yeah. (**JC:** Yeah.) **AvS:** And the beauty also becoming a commodity at the end of the day, because it's there all the time and.. (**RK:** Absolutely, absolutely..) when you appreciate what you, what you once thought was beautiful whilst you spent a lot of time with it. (**JC:** Um.) **RK:** That's true, that's true. **JC:** There is also ehm, there is also the idea of the entanglement with history (**RK:** Yeah.) that you have, you're here, and you're, you're doing this which is new but there is all, there are all these historical elements that just keeps

pushing you (**RK:** Yeah yeah yeah) from everywhere.. **RK:** There's like, there's like there's nothing, I don't think there's anything new about this piece in a way, or I think it's like, like such a total clichée (**JC:** Yeah.) that's like, a good friend of mine, Magnus Sigurðarsson, who is like a master of melancholy he, he said that eh, that the clichée is the ultimate expression, it was a piece he did where he was naked, putting his finger up his arse, like with a cigar, looking at the camera and it said just 'a clichée is the ultimate expression' .. so, in a way that is ... **AvS:** You're putting images in my head right now.. **RK:** Oh, I'm, excuse me madam. **AvS:** No, no, I, I quite enjoy the idea of the em, also being very aware of your own practice in a sense renews history, in a way, because you can't repeat history, history will actually be when you appropriate history (**RK:** Absolutely.) it will renew itself. **RK:** Always when it becomes personal it becomes something else (**AvS:** Yes.) it's like, you know, when, when my father plays yesterday on the guitar is (**AvS:** Mmm.) a different yesterday. **AvS:** Yes. **JC:** Yeah. **AvS:** (**JC:** Oh.) We actually got some great feedback (**JC:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.) from the party last night **RK:** Well, that's great. **JC:** We, we had to go, we were actually ah, to attend the Prada party (**RK:** Oh, you went to the Prada party)(**AvS:** Yeah.) so we couldn't actually be here, which we are really sorry about, we heard you had a great great, great evening, um, but, **AvS:** We have some friends from LA (**RK:** Yeah.) and they listen to a lot of music and they go out a lot and they described it to us like the paintings that you've made these days were stage-diving in a sense.. **RK:** Yes, that was, that's what happened (**AvS:** Yes.) cause also, like, yeah, these, these, this, there was this kind of um, punk energy, like this, these jokers were like painting dicks on the paintings and stuff like that, so (**AvS:** Oh dear, yeah.) and that, that is something I found interesting because the Venice Biennale is all so much about the precious art (**JC:** Yeah.) so I was kind of glad that this had this .. **JC:** That is (**RK:** just like a..) actually really interesting (**AvS:** Mmm.) that people feel that they have the freedom to touch (**RK:** Yeahyeahyeah) the art work. **RK:** Yeah. **AvS:** But also if we are talking about the stamina of the male, the dick (**RK:** Yeah.) and how to re-impose the female.. the, the male symbol onto your paintings even though you try very hard to kind of, you know, work against the erected penis if you like. **RK:** Yeahyeahyeah, it's very much about the down, (**AvS:** Yes.) down penis. **AvS:** Yes. **RK:** So it's kind of a nice comment from this, (**AvS:** Yeah.) from this brute. **AvS:** Yeah, yeah... **JC:** .. oh, I see it over there, yes.. **RK:** Páll jokingly said, that is was wonderful that he got the proportions right, ha ha. **AvS:** Yes! Indeed. **RK:** Eh, yeah. **AvS:** We're looking forward to see.. **JC:** It's very impressive, I must say. **RK:** Yeahyeah. **JC:** So, what, when we're talking of these paintings of yours that you are making here in this show, um, thinking about the commodity of the art piece, this, the, the value within the art world, um.. **AvS:** Because if you wanted to then you made a conscious decision of making one painting a day rather than one painting all over the duration (**RK:** Yeah.) of the ... but I don't know, I don't think there is such a difference between one painting and plenty.. **RK:** No, there's just the, there's just like the .. em, performance props (**AvS:** Mhm.) just like the, the difference that the plenty will create a more of a chaotic situation in here (**AvS:** Mhm.) so it's like, plenty is more decorative, and also like it de-objectifies it (**AvS:** Mm.) when there are so many, so they become invaluable. **AvS:** It's a very aesthetic eem, thing that you just expressed now, that you think that plenty is better. **RK:** Yeah, it's like, it's, it's like, like this, this quantity rather than quality. **AvS:** Yeah. **RK:** Yeah. **JC:** But do you also feel that in that, like constantly making new, that you are removing yourself from the process, the precious process of the making the painting, of painting, (**RK:** Yes.) scraping, re-painting, (**RK:** Yeahyeahyeah.) so it's more of ehm, ... letting it out and... **RK:** letting it out, just hitting it, just hitting it, hitting the beat. It's just like this, this, I've, I've had some, I've had some experience in the, in the music, in music (**AvS:** Mhm.) it's very much like just hitting it, you know, getting the album done in one weekend (**JC:** Yes.) Stuff like that, which I always really like. **AvS:** And that comes down, I guess, to the expressionistic notion of Gauguin and (**RK:** Yeah, absolutely.) and.. **RK:** What was the painting again called? **AvS+JC:** 'Who are we? Where are we? Where are we going?' **RK:** 'Who are we? Where are we going?' **JC:** Where are we? ... it's three sentences; 'Who are we? Where are we? and Where are we going?' (silence) **AvS:** I think that's an amazing place to kind of ... **RK:** this is such a, thank you for this input! I totally.. (**AvS:** Yeah.) it brought this painting back into my mind. Absolutely. So.. **AvS:** Yeah. **JC:** And I think it is both a, both a rather nice starting point, (**AvS:** Yes.) but is is also a rather nice point to finish at, you're still asking yourself where are you going. **RK:** Yes, where are we going. **AvS:** The notion of arriving and departing are generally coming from the same.. place. **JC:** Or arriving at the now through the past or even going back to the past from the now. **RK:** Yes. **AvS:** There is the entanglement of history and time in space and painting. **JC:** Yeah, so. **RK:** ..this is an American gentleman, excuse me.. oh, . (**AvS:** oh.) ... milk.. oh, thank you sir. (*milk is drunk from a carton and we eat cake from the American gentleman's hand*) **JC:** So, I think maybe to finish off, ehm, we would like to ask you if there is anything you feel that..... (long pause) **RK:** Um, this notion of one famous Icelandic Modernist poet, called Steinn Steinarr (**JC:** Uhm.) who did this poem called 'Time and Water', it's a beautiful poem, 'Time and Water'. **JC:** 'Time and Water'. **RK:** 'time is water, water is time', it is all full of these abstractations this poem ... and I very much feel like that I am in that Modernist poem (**AvS:** mm!)(**JC:** Yeah.) and there was like, there's one line, in Icelandic that goes 'á ferhyrdu fleti á milli hringsins og keilunnar er hvítt blóm daudans'; at a rectangular space between the oval shape and the ring there is the white flower of death, it's like, it trans.. it does not translate very well but it's.. **JC:** Yeah. It's.. I think it is food for thought. **RK:** It's food for thoughts. **AvS:** Yeah. **RK:** Yeah. **JC:** .. go home and think about this.. **AvS:** Yeah. **JC:** So, to finish this off thank you so much **RK:** Thank you very much Ladies. **JC:** Thank you so much for taking your time and congratulations (**AvS:** I might have to ..)(**RK:** Oh..) on a truly spectacular show. **RK:** Thank you so much. It was spectacular talking to you ladies. **AvS:** Fantastic. **JC:** Pleasure, pleasure. **THE END**

Julia Comodin and Annika von Silverhammar are two independent curators based in Stockholm as well as internationally.