

Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir

IMMIGRANTS IN OSLO

Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir is an Associate Professor in Art History and Art Theory at the University of Iceland and freelance curator. She writes about the work *Immigrants in Oslo* on Sørenga Bridge.

Political slogans, advertising and public communication visualize power games, conflicts and social tensions in the urban space. Since 2002, Hlynur Hallsson has been using texts as rhetorical mechanisms to comment on political realities and other matters of concern in local and international contexts. His interventions interact with news and other public communications and even though they are ephemeral, like graffiti on a wall, he constantly maintains the rule that the phrases are written as a linguistic sequence in which each language is marked with a specific color that recalls the symbolism of national flags. In his early works, the sequence was Icelandic, German, and English. Icelandic is his native mother tongue; historically, German was the language of European culture; and English is the language of world politics, global consumption and communication. In his new works produced for the Oslo biennale, Hallsson extends the written texts to Norwegian, English, Icelandic, Swedish, Sami, Lithuanian, Polish and Somali, as all these languages represent the multicultural population of Norway and its global concerns.

The text-work *Immigrants in Oslo* reflects directly up on how distorted statistics are used to produce fake assumptions about immigrants. The text written in Swedish, Somali and Lithuanian, reveals the strength of language and the fragility of truth in contemporary contexts where disinformation is increasingly used in media by populist forces to undermine democratic discourse. Here Hallsson extends his textual interventions away from direct critical comments as in earlier works such as TAKK FYRIR ALLT ÁLIÐ – VIELEN DANK FUR DANS GANZE ALUMINIUM – THANKS FOR ALL THE ALUMINIUM, towards a more discursive analysis of the fragility of the public sphere in contemporary democracy. Through his bold interventions, Hallsson therefore raises important questions about the power of the written word and the frail status of truth in our global contemporaneity when the difference between public information, disinformation and advertising has become blurred in the public mind.