

Markús Þór Andrésson

ON THE WORK OF HLYNUR HALLSSON

Markús Þór Andrésson is a curator based in Reykjavík, and Chief Curator at the Reykjavík Art Museum. He writes about Hlynur Hallsson's text based work.

Language is the wall between us. It bricks us up on one side, leaving the rest of the world on the other. The arbitrary relationship between what we think and feel and the words we choose to express it, leaves us roaming around a semantic labyrinth. It is substantial enough to enclose seven and a half billion individuals whose paths never seem to cross. We can only just hear each other murmuring on the other side of these endless walls. Outside the maze are all the non-human animals chirping, squeaking, barking, growling and roaring in incoherent, phonemic union. Inside, someone is giving these walls a taste of their own medicine, with words serving exclusively as raw material for his practice. Working expeditiously, he leaves words and sentences behind in different bright colours and separate languages, conflating perception and meaning. Should anyone stumble across these writings, they are left with an invitation to do two things, understand and/or penetrate. One will bring you possible meaning, leaving you—after a moment of contemplation—to continue your aimless roam along the walls. The other, however, may allow you to see language as architecture, syntax as sculpture and words as clay. The relationship between language and spatial cognition unravels and, brick by brick, you may deconstruct a hole in the wall big enough for you to comprehend the Om – giving rise to every word used in all languages. From the rubble you can build novel spatial representations; tunnels, stairs, bridges or whatever may facilitate harmony beyond the walls.

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 FÜR DANKS 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.

Alexander Steig

ROCHADE

Alexander Steig is an artist and curator.

He writes about the work *The King of Norway* at Grorud metro station.

Iceland has not had a king since its independence from Denmark in 1944. Do the Icelandic people miss their monarch? There are 47 sovereign states in Europe, with two queens and six kings (as well as several noble families without political influence). We are not dealing with despots, but the constitutional representatives of their countries. Nevertheless, the constitutional monarchy, which does not assess the competence of the persons it employs, seems old-fashioned as a form of state. Most of the royal houses have a major presence in the tabloids. From the point of view of parliamentary democracy, these representations remind one of anti-modern theatre and the rituals of folklore. Whether they are innocent or deliberate remains an open question.

The Icelandic conceptual artist Hlynur Hallsson has placed a hidden monument to the Norwegian kings in the east of Oslo, spray-canning trilingual fragments of inconsequential anecdotes and key events in Norwegian history in a metro-station (Grorud stasjon) in English (as *lingua franca*), Norwegian (the local language) and Polish (contextual). The succinct sentences provide information about Olav V's international education. That the Danish-Norwegian king lost Denmark-Norway to Sweden. Or how, as the scion of a dynasty, Harald V met elected foreign representatives. One learns that the regents of the old Europe networked internationally and that they were in some ways not only rulers of their countries, but were also (and still are?) the 'first Europeans.'

Hlynur Hallsson draws these fragments of text from the media environment – newspapers and other sources – which he searches for on the Internet. In doing so, he combines them thematically in terms of language and colour in such a way that the piece could be formally reminiscent of a poem beyond understanding. Since 2002, the artist has realized more than 20 of these text projects in Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Japan, Croatia, Sweden and the USA. The hyper-authenticity of the capitals, their colour classification, and their location-related arrangement, paired with the way their respective semantic features and absurdities are treated, can also be read as a contribution to political/concrete poetry. Here in Oslo, the artist has represented well-known figures and events as a laconic commentary addressing both Norwegians and visitors to their capital. He reflects on the relaxed attitude in which people regard contemporary monarchies, whose members make considerable efforts to appear just like everyone else, as well as a certain tragedy and involuntary comedy that constantly gains fresh nourishment from their over-presence in the media. The piece draws attention to this widespread attention, while the pomp and glory of monarchy are rendered redundant when presented as graffiti. The three slogans are not a revolutionary appeal against feudal structures. They seem interchangeable with the host of similar headlines about the throne and the crown. Their variety suggests a potential rocade, a manoeuvre by the artist, a *modus operandi* that fosters uncomplicated multilayered interpretations of politics and society.



The King of Norway, Grorud Metro Station

Einar Bjarki Malmquist

PRECISELY OSLO

Einar Bjarki Malmquist is an architect, at Ola Roald Arkitektur in Oslo, and former editor of Arkitektur N, The Norwegian Review of Architecture. He writes about the work *Minority Groups in Oslo* at The Vigeland Sculpture Park in Frogner Park.

As a former land surveyor, artist Hallsson knows that every measurement one takes suffers an element of inbuilt imprecision, a possible error. As a land surveyor lays out a road in the landscape or places a house, his measuring peg—sprayed blue, green, yellow or red—is always slightly to the left or the right of the peg placed by the previous surveyor. Sometimes the pegs are a few centimetres apart, sometimes almost on the same spot. But only almost. So is it with Hlynur Hallsson's work. Three sentences found on the Internet are now on a wall in Oslo. The themed sentences, like another piece about “minority groups in Oslo,” are written in three different languages, spray-canned in three different colours. Like the pegs of the land surveyor, precision and imprecision intertwine. There is bound to be at least some small difference in x, y or z.

A meeting of ideas and the space of democracy

The agora of ancient Athens was a marketplace, of ideas as much as goods. According to Hannah Arendt, who often mentions that Socrates' objective was to get the citizens to make friends, the aim of the polis—the city—is to bring people together and provide spaces for planned as well as unplanned human communication. Closer to modern times, the history of the Eidsvoll House and its assembly room, a room that became the setting for the bicentenary of the Norwegian constitution, tells us how an arbitrary place takes on historic importance. Democracy needs spaces, public spaces, both large ones and arbitrary small ones, in order to unfold. In Oslo, Hlynur draws attention to a plurality of spaces pregnant for human communication. Reminding us that democracy and its thought exchange must be performed rather than delegated to a bureaucracy. Are we the new surveyors of Oslo?

Jill Maurah Leciejewski

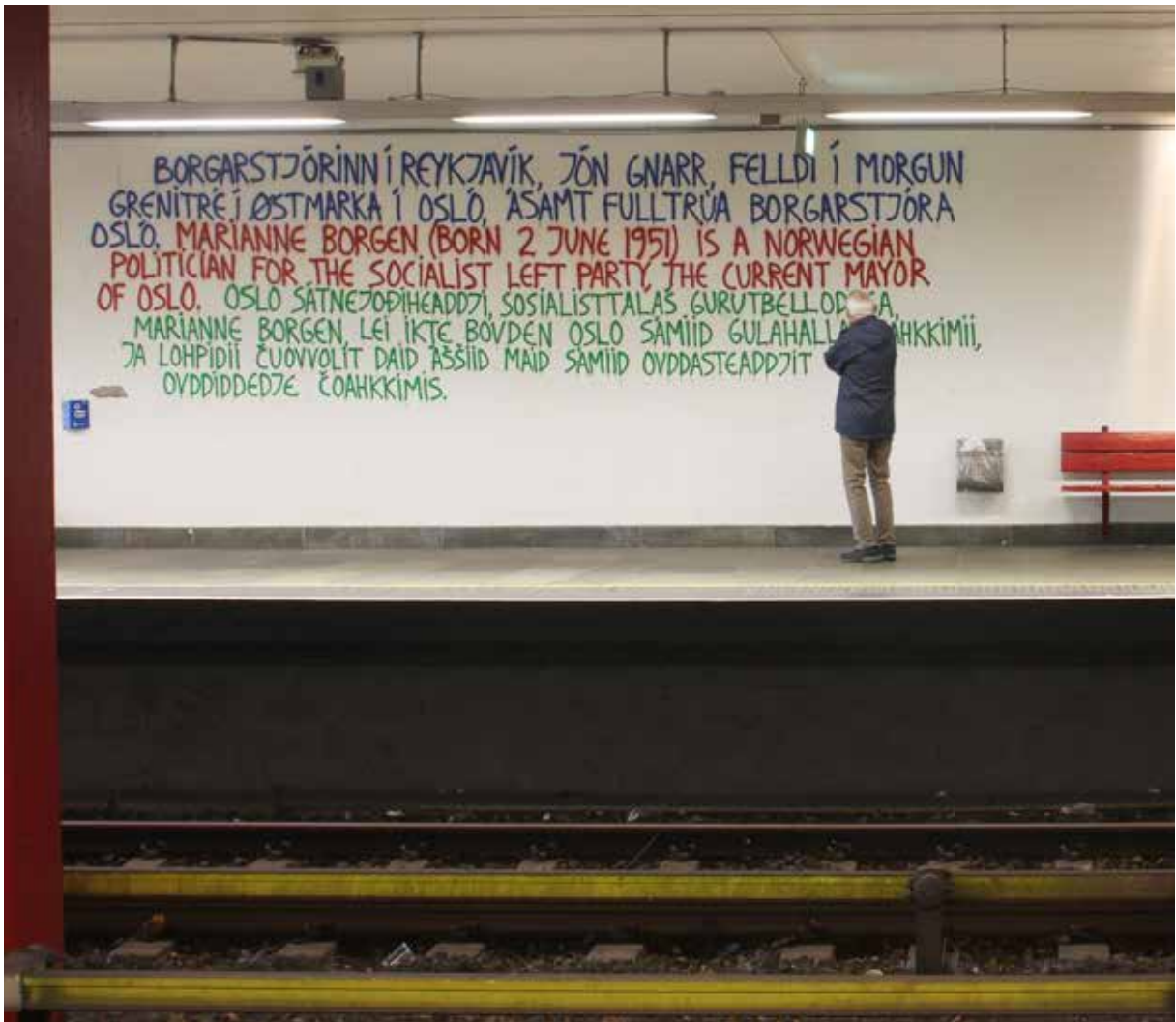
THIS IS OSLO

Jill Maurah Leciejewski is an art historian based in Berlin. She writes about the work *This is Oslo* located on an electricity mast at Bjerke.

In the work *This is Oslo*, Hlynur Hallsson resorts to one of his tried and tested artistic formats. Three passages of text in different languages are brought together as a continuous volume of text in contrasting colours under a connecting title. In this piece he uses Icelandic, synonymous with his origin; English, as a world language understood by billions of people; and Polish, as a symbol of discovery, learning processes and understanding.

This is Oslo. The title of the work reveals the thematic context linking the individual sentences, even though the viewer may not speak all three languages. Hallsson locates the texts using Internet search engines. This endows the selection with an element of chance, but at the same time selection is subject to the omnipresence of search engine optimisation. The aim is to create contrasts between language, content and form, which can reach a level tantamount to provocation. The contents themselves act as fragments of information that set out to provoke curiosity and raise questions. Hallsson is less concerned with the actual informational value of the lines of text, which in any case are removed from their original context, but rather with a mental point of departure for the recipient. This is Oslo.

Spray-painted onto surfaces, Hallsson's technique holds these otherwise volatile elements in union. He has consciously dispensed with large canvases or monumental panels in favour of the simplest means of production. In doing so, he deliberately runs a risk of being misunderstood. Especially when it comes to installations in urban areas, where his work is not always understood by the general public as art. Apperception demands an attentive eye and an alert mind. This is Oslo.





Kristin Kjartansdóttir

THE MAYOR OF OSLO

Kristin Kjartansdóttir is a social historian, freelance writer and manager of the cultural spot Flora in North Iceland. She writes about the work *The Mayor of Oslo*.

Our contemporary everyday, governed by the over-dimensional flow of information and impressions transmitted through diverse media, is a new experience for mankind. What is new is not the information itself, but its accessibility. It is the ease of access that makes it overflow. Everything flows in our direction and we can immerse ourselves in it in a second. All the info.

The sea of information we live in.

Due to its newness, we do not have grandparents, or even parents to pass on the know-how, the knowledge, of how to deal with this flow, how to live in this kind of world. We must ask ourselves: what tools should we use? By what means can we stay afloat?

Hlynur Hallsson has chosen a series of seemingly random texts from the sea of information that floods our world. Sprayed-canned onto previously unused public spaces, they have been given a new meaning and at the same time have given these spaces a new use, defined them anew. The texts drawn from the sea of information flowing across the media world now stand for themselves. They seem to range over the vast sea of information, the great flow reminiscent of *The wanderer above the sea of fog* by 19th century German landscape painter Caspar David Friedrich.

As a wanderer on today's sea of information, it is necessary to find the right tools and methods. With their assistance one may ascend to a point that overlooks the morass of information. Instead of losing our way in the fog generated by the contemporary overdose of impressions and information, we must search for ways to deal with the situation, sort it out, choose what we need, take point, and rise above it.

Kari Ósk Ege

THE FENG SHUI PROBLEM

Kari Ósk Grétudóttir Ege is an Icelandic/Norwegian visual artist and writer, based in Oslo. She writes about the work *The Vigeland Park* at Huk, Bygdøy.

In the work *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, Walter Benjamin wrote that to a child the city is a labyrinth. To get as close as possible to 'the truth' about childhood in the city, Benjamin tried to relive the city from the child's perspective. An important part of growing up in Berlin was getting lost in the Tiergarten.

Although it isn't as easy to get lost in Vigeland Park as it is in the Tiergarten, I am nevertheless unable to get clear a mind's-eye view of the park. I have recurring dreams about the park. It grows and spreads everywhere, like the Manchurian mushroom that lifestyle gurus use to brew their *kombucha*, which can grow as large as an inland lake.

But in reality nothing called Vigeland Park exists. The park in question consists of two parts. On one side there is the Vigeland complex – that is, the sculpture complex – and on the other side Frogner Park. Vigeland Park is therefore a misunderstanding. Nevertheless – or perhaps for that very reason – Hlynur Hallsson chooses to call his work *The Vigeland Park*. The work consists of three different texts about the park that the artist has found on the Internet. The Internet has long since become the ultimate lost property depot. Physical searching is today reserved for archaeologists and for people who are unable to put things where they belong, either physically or mentally. The past is not so easy to place, and the nose is the eternally open portal to memory.

Vigeland Park smells of flowers, dog poo, grilled food, alcohol, perfume, coffee, mouldy or new-mown grass, metal, juice warm and frozen, and the scent of a kindergarten teacher – the vague but exciting odour of bleach. The sensory experience of the past invades the present, irrespective of the season. And somewhere there is the sum of all the times you have ever visited the park.

Fortunately, the Vigeland sculptures, riven as they are by forces and feelings, can play out any psychodrama from the archives of memory. In the meantime, we can safely paddle in the fountain and eat a bursting sausage.



