

## Ragnar Kjartansson

### *The Sky in a Room*

25 June – 3 July 2022

St Mary Magdalene Church, Tanworth-in-Arden



Ragnar Kjartansson, *The Sky in a Room* (2018).

Performer, organ and the song *Il Cielo in una Stanza* by Gino Paoli (1960).

Commissioned by Artes Mundi and Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales.

Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik. Photo: Hugo Glendinning

Ikon presents *The Sky in a Room* (25 June – 3 July 2022), a major off-site project with Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson, organised in collaboration with Artes Mundi (Cardiff).

*The Sky in a Room* involves professional singers taking turns to perform an ethereal arrangement of *Il Cielo in una Stanza*, the famous song by Gino Paoli, originally released in 1960. Simultaneously playing the church organ, the singers repeat the piece uninterrupted for five hours a day for nine days, like a never-ending lullaby.

The performances take place each day, 2-7pm, at St Mary Magdalene Church, Tanworth-in-Arden, in the heart of the Warwickshire countryside. The setting is profoundly appropriate for Kjartansson's work - which is characterised by a sense of melancholy - as it is also the place where singer-songwriter Nick Drake is buried.

*The Sky in a Room* is a work by artist Ragnar Kjartansson, whose artistic practice engages multiple mediums, creating video installations, performances, drawings and paintings that draw upon myriad historical and cultural references. An underlying pathos and irony connect his works, with each deeply influenced by the comedy and tragedy of classical theatre. The artist blurs the distinctions between mediums, approaching his painting practice as performance, likening his films to paintings, and his performances to sculpture. Throughout, Kjartansson conveys an interest in beauty and its banality, and he uses durational, repetitive performance as a form of exploration.

The project, originally co-commissioned by Artes Mundi, Cardiff and Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, was first performed in 2018. As part of the work, all the paintings, objects and decorative furniture from the National Museum's *Art in Britain 1700-1800* gallery were removed, leaving just the 18<sup>th</sup> century chamber organ in the centre of the room (a documentation of this performance is available [here](#)). In 2020 *The Sky in a Room* took place in the Church of San Carlo al Lazzaretto in Milan - conceived in the wake of the Covid-19 lockdown which affected the lives of millions of Italians, especially the citizens of Lombardy.

Now Ikon presents *The Sky in a Room* at St Mary Magdalene, a quintessentially English church and Grade I listed building, dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Situated in the heart of the village community, the church is also famous as the location of Nick Drake's grave, and the focus of an annual pilgrimage for his followers, not least in 2022 which marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Pink Moon* album. St Mary Magdalene Church will also have just completed a redevelopment project in order to create a welcoming, accessible space for the community. *The Sky in a Room* launches the newly renovated Church.

The performers for Ikon's presentation have been recruited in collaboration with Echo, a vocal ensemble comprising young professional singers from across the UK. Each will take their turn in a continuous performance of *Il Cielo in una Stanza*.

*Il Cielo in una Stanza* is the best song I know about the transformation of space. Gino Paoli wrote it in the 50s and got the idea when lying in bed with a woman at a brothel he had fallen in love with. Thinking of that lovely moment and how feelings transform space, how the walls of the room changed into endless woods he got that melody into his head. It is a song all Italians know, it is almost the Italian national anthem of love. Space and love. An ode to the transformation of space. *The Sky in a Room*.  
Ragnar Kjartansson

## Event information:

Daily performances, 25 June – 3 July, 2-7pm. No need to book, just drop in. Donations welcome – please support the redevelopment of St Mary Magdalene Church.

## How to get to Tanworth-in-Arden:

Tanworth-in-Arden is located 14.5 miles southeast of Birmingham and 5.5 miles northeast of Redditch. St Mary Magdalene Church postcode: B94 5AL. The closest train station is Danzey Green (1.2 miles from Tanworth).

## About the area:

Ikon encourages visitors to explore Tanworth-in-Arden, including the 300 year old Bell pub, and the local area which includes Umberslade Farm Park, Baddesley Clinton and Packwood House (National Trust) and Arrow Valley Country Park. For more information visit: <https://visit.warwickshire.gov.uk/>

For more information, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small or Muskeen Liddar on 0121 248 0708 or email [r.small@ikon-gallery.org](mailto:r.small@ikon-gallery.org) or [m.liddar@ikon-gallery.org](mailto:m.liddar@ikon-gallery.org)

Social Media - Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @ikongallery #IkonGallery @artesmundi

Links: [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org); [artesmundi.org](http://artesmundi.org); [tanworthchurch.co.uk](http://tanworthchurch.co.uk)

## Note to Editors:

1. Ragnar Kjartansson (b. 1976) lives and works in Reykjavík. Major solo shows include exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Reykjavík Art Museum; the Barbican Centre, London; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Park, Washington D.C.; the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal; and the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, among others. Kjartansson participated in The Encyclopedic Palace at the Venice Biennale in 2013, Manifesta 10 in St. Petersburg, Russia in 2014, and he represented Iceland at the 2009 Venice Biennale. The artist received the 2019 Ars Fennica Award, and was the recipient of the 2015 Artes Mundi's Derek Williams Trust Purchase Award, and Performa's 2011 Malcolm McLaren Award.
2. Artes Mundi is the key internationally focused flagship visual arts organisation in Wales. With a biennial exhibition, art prizes and co-creative partnerships and projects at its core, its mission is to stimulate dialogue and debates, internationally and locally, that develop greater understanding of ourselves, of others, and of the relations between familiar and distant cultures.  
[artesmundi.org](http://artesmundi.org)

3. Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue situated in central Birmingham. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon is an educational charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features artists from around the world and a variety of media is represented, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Through a variety of talks, tours, workshops and seminars, Ikon's Learning Team aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org)
4. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council.
5. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. ACE support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2018 and 2022, ACE will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. [artscouncil.org.uk](http://artscouncil.org.uk)