

Røða í samband við at listaframsýning letur upp í Wien – Leopold Museum

Sehr geehrter Herr Dr. Leopold, sehr geehrter Herr Mag. Weinhäpl, sehr geehrter Herr Dr. Fuhr und liebe Gäste.

Es ist mir eine grosse Ehre, mit dieser einmaligen Ausstellung der heutigen, färöischen Kunst, die färöische Regierung vertreten zu dürfen und das ausgerechnet hier in Wien, einer der grössten Metropole für Kunst und Kultur Europas.

In erster Linie möchte ich dem Leopold Museum dafür danken, dass man sich dazu entschlossen hat, 35 der besten färöischen Künstler auszuwählen, deren Werke in diesem ausserordentlich schönen Kunstmuseum, mit den besten Gemälden Europas, nun zu sehen sind. Für eine gute und grosse Auswahl der färöischen, zeitgemässen Kunst, bildet dieses Museum einen absolut grandiosen Rahmen. Vielmals Dank dafür!

Auch von unserem färöischen Landespräsidenten, Herrn Jóannes Eidesgaard, soll ich Grüsse bestellen. Er ist sehr froh darüber, dass die Ausstellung statt finden kann.

Trotz gemeinsamen Wurzeln unserer Sprachen – färöisch und deutsch – müssen Sie mich entschuldigen, dass ich meine Rede nun auf englisch weiter halten werde.

“It is a country’s littleness that fosters great thoughts” – These are the words of Austrian author Robert Menasse, who alludes to the fact that in order to survive as a writer in a small country you have to be fierce and inspired. This way of thinking could be extended to all creative trades.

The new generation of Faroese artists lives in a globalized world and there are indications that even in this context littleness is an advantage. The smaller your country, the more you have to look to other countries. This is especially true for artists, because precisely encounters with other worlds and all that is different and unknown shift boundaries and generates new contexts.

As children of a small island society, the Faroese have always felt it natural and necessary to seek knowledge and inspiration abroad to take back to expand their homeland’s horizons.

The foremost Faroese artist of the 20th century, Sámal Joensen-Mikines, studied in Copenhagen and lived much of his life abroad. Mikines was the driving force of Faroese painting in his time.

Just like the Austrian artist Egon Schiele, who lost both his wife and his own life to the Spanish influenza in 1918, Mikines experienced death first hand - when both his brother and sister’s succumbed to tuberculosis. Death became a theme in Mikines’ paintings and the silence, darkness and coldness in his paintings from the 30’s are deeply moving. Later he painted dramatic images of pilot whale killings and expressionist landscapes, which became a hallmark of Faroese art throughout most of the 20th century.

Contemporary Faroese art is not as focused on expressionist images of nature. Even though nature is still a theme in Faroese art, it has been reinterpreted and vested with new meaning. Today, our artists study in all corners of the world and this shows in our art.

Even though the first Faroese canvas was painted in the 19th century, and painting thus is a relatively young art on our isles, our culture is rooted in both Nordic and Central European culture.

The ancient chants, which we in the Faroes have preserved by transmitting them orally from generation to generation, recount historical and mythical events in Europe and the charlemagne chants about Charlemagne and the battle of Roncevalles in the Pyrenees remain a vibrant part of our culture. Thus, Europe's heartland and its periphery were connected in the Middle Ages already.

Culture can be seen as a current streaming to and from.

Thus, this exhibition can be viewed as part of the cultural current running to and fro. In recent times, many cultural bonds have been tied between Austria and the Faroes, specially in the area of music ... and sports, especially football.

I can, for example, mention that the Austrian composer Werner Schulze has taught in the Faroes and that one of our foremost pianists, Jóannes Andreassen, studied in Vienna. Furthermore, one of our biggest choirs *Havnarkórið* toured Vienna the year before last singing with the Wiener Sängerknaben. This art exhibition is an opportunity for the Faroese to let Austrians experience our art, this time our contemporary painting. And so, this is your chance to experience our fierce and inspired contemporary Faroese art.

In the globalised world it is the uniqueness that everyone seeks. This gives small countries – like the Faroe Islands – great opportunities. To grasp these opportunities it is vital for the Faroe Islands to be represented around the world. For the first time ever, the new Faroese government therefore has established a Faroese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Faroe Islands now have their own representations in Brussels, London, Copenhagen and Reykjavik. The next representations will be opened in New York and Moscow. This will give Faroese art, culture and industry new possibilities to promote their uniqueness around the world.

The first international football-match between the Faroe Islands and Austria, turned out to be a historical sportevent – and there is no doubt, that this exhibition in this beautiful city of yours – Vienna - already is a historical event for the people, the art and culture of the Faroe Islands. Hopefully this exhibition will be the beginning of a even closer relationship between Austria and the Faroe Islands.

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Liebe Gäste.

Ich hoffe, dass diese Ausstellung dazu beiträgt, Interesse für färöische Kunst und Kultur zu wecken und dass Österreich und Färöer sich auch in Zukunft kulturell gegenseitig bereichern werden. Mit diesen Wünschen eröffne ich die Ausstellung „Moderne Kunst von den Färöer Inseln“
Vielen Dank.

15. May 2008

Kristina Háfoss
Minister of Culture