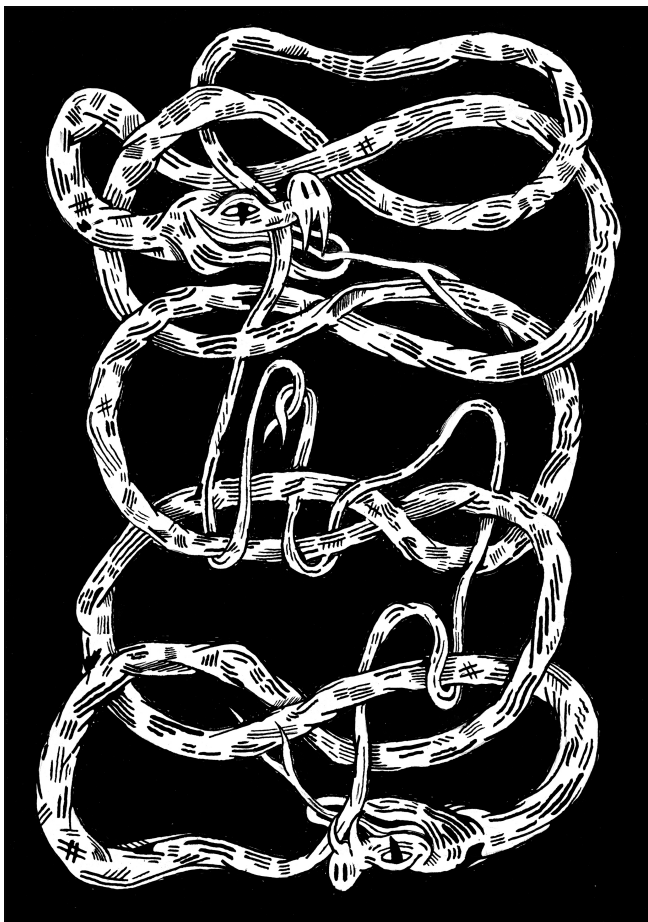


Annabelle von Girsewald in conversation with Arnar Ásgeirsson and Agata Mickiewicz

Email Berlin / Reykjavik August-October 2019

AvG: *I guess it makes sense to start at the beginning. Arnar how did you start with your drawings? When you started, did you know how many there would be?!*

AA: Hey, yes, thank you for initiating the conversation.
The series started with one spontaneous drawing of two snakes interacting, intertwining and flirting.



I remember the moment I drew it, I was in some strange conflicted mental state. Full of feelings that I didn't really know how to describe or put into words. Maybe this was some attempt to draw that state of mind, or a certain indescribable feeling?

I doubt that I managed to capture that feeling in this one drawing, but I liked this way of making and producing a drawing, so I made more, without too much thought, more just by feeling. Perhaps by not taking the drawings too seriously and allowing them to be abstract. And not deciding beforehand how many there would be, or what I would do with them.

So, I just continued making them whenever I felt like it, sometimes one a week, other times three drawings a day. Looking back, the drawings have some connection to the Rorschach test or even a deck of tarot cards,

even though that was not on my mind while I drew them. Most of the drawings depict two or three forces interacting, fighting or balancing.

While I was busy drawing I also wrote a short text. A line or two with each drawing. There ended up being 72 drawings and a short text. From there I decided to make a book.

AvG: *It is interesting to hear how you started with an attempt to draw a strange conflicted mental state. They are very powerful and ended up being so many! I'm looking forward to seeing the book and accompanying text.*

Thanks for sending the original drawing of two snakes interacting, intertwining and even flirting, like you wrote. The snakes remind me of Ouroboros, where a serpent eats its own tail. It is the ancient symbol of immortality; one who slays himself and brings himself to life – a clash of opposites – as Jung writes about the unconscious in ‘The Undiscovered Self. The Dilemma of the Individual in Modern Society’. Were you aware of this symbol when you were drawing?

You write about ‘an indescribable feeling’. This reminds me, feelings belong to different processes: emotional, thinking and feeling. Thinking of course being cognitive and conscious. Feelings too are conscious and intellectual but they are also a byproduct of emotions. Feelings are triggered by emotions. Emotions are coded in our DNA being physical and instinctual. Feelings are the meanings we give to the emotions based on our individual experiences. Feelings and emotions determine so many of the decisions we make.

It seems to me like your drawings can be read in patterns almost like a language of feelings – left to the viewer to identify and be responsible for.

What about the relationship to tarot cards? How do you think they relate to tarot cards? I have to admit I've used them as tarot cards myself.

AA: Exactly, there are a few *Ouroboros* and many other rip-offs and remixes of ancient symbols present in the drawings. Snakes, religious symbols, runes, magic symbols, but also some very modern ones, like the Mazda logo, can you find it?



Some of the other symbols depicted, I'm quite aware of. Others not so much, I like to mix them, confuse them and even screw them up. Some are misunderstood. Some of the symbols are drawn by memory, drawn incorrectly and messed up. Perhaps therefore there is more room for the viewer's interpretation?

There is also a heavy nature presence in the drawings; plants, water, insects, animals and rocks. Nature is so obviously deeply connected with mental health and feelings and also a classic metaphor for a mood, a rainy day, for example. I have heard that professionals have a new tactic in dealing with depression and anxiety by prescribing outdoors hours in nature instead of medication. Apparently, proximity to nature is connected to

positive effects on a wide range of mental health issues. So, populations close to nature and who are active in nature on a regular basis are less likely to deal with negative mental health issues.

About the tarot connection, I don't know much about tarot readings or tarot cards, but there is definitely a connection there. I remember to have tarot cards read for me as a child. I kept on getting a very dramatic card, depicting a skeleton, the death card. The woman doing the tarot reading seemed surprised, told me not to worry and kept on telling me that it can mean other things than death. If I remember correctly it had to do with dramatic changes, ups and downs? It seemed to have some dramatic undertone. Maybe you know something about the meaning of that card?



I'm curious to hear that you have used the drawings as tarot cards. Could you tell me about the experience?

AM: Hello everybody, thank you for inviting me to join the conversation.

It is very interesting that you mention tarot cards. Last year when I was thinking a lot about making prints on fabric using Arnar's drawings; I was most fascinated about using one with the *Ouroboros* snake.

Then while having some life dilemmas, I drew one tarot card from the deck hoping to get an answer. I am using an Aleister Crowley deck and the drawn card was 'Two of Disk' with the picture of the *Ouroboros* snake (please see attachment). It means perpetual change, transformation. But on this card the composition is very harmonic and in balance, which means all the positive aspects of change. Change is a natural part of life and enriches us. It lets us grow. :-)

At the time, I was just about to move to a new country so the card told me that it is going to be a good change. But I was also thinking about this project with Arnar's drawings. It was, after all, the same image, the same snake, which I got fascinated by. In the end, the big move stopped me from making those prints. Now all of a sudden, this project is popping up again, so I feel like I am coming to that point where the snake bites its own tail. I am very excited. I hope it will be an excellent bite.

P.S. The death card can also mean change but points more to radical external transformations. These can be painful but also liberating. Our experience depends on our attitude, if we keep clinging onto old habits or let them go ;-)



AvG: *Interesting to hear of what tarot cards both of you were getting! In my tarot practice I would select one of Arnar's drawings and that would set the tone for my day and of course mirror what is going on in my life. I don't have much experience with tarot in general or the death card or 'Two of Disk'. Cool to hear that you grew up with having your cards read, Arnar! I just looked up the death card, it could also mean a heightened sense of self-awareness. Arnar, you always seem to know the subtext. Agata, it is interesting how your card reflects perpetual change, transformation. Of course, this reflects our crazy lives and how important it is to accept change to grow and let go of the past.*

The dark ironic representation of your symbols seems to reflect a certain generational consciousness. This mutation of living and non-living forms of nature are constantly repeated in their unique way complete with drippings or tears and intertwining figures. What is your relationship to nature, Arnar and Agata? Arnar, you write that the new prescription for contemporary depression and anxiety is nature.

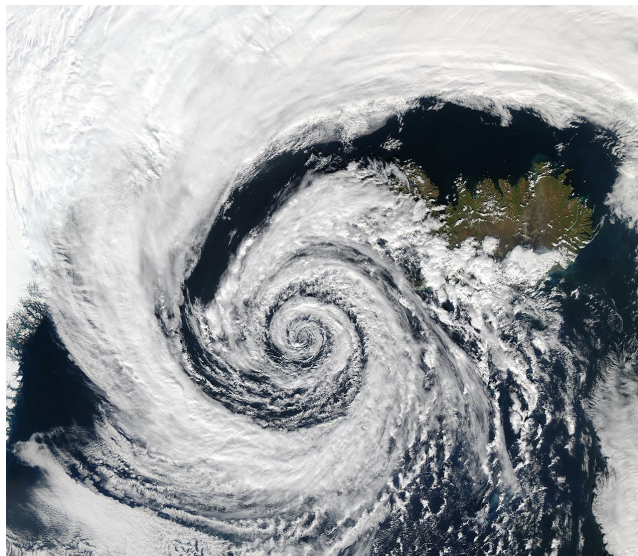
Some of the drawings remind me of an alphabet letter. They take up the entire page and since each image is so intertwined within its complexity, the mutation of symbols transforms into a new symbol or initial standing for something in itself. This reminds me of Celtic bible images from early medieval art. The first letter of a text would too take up an entire page. Manuscripts were used to spread the Word of God and each was seen as a sacred object since its contents were sacred. Writing workshops took place in monasteries and the Irish monks developed their own style – Hiberno-Saxon Style which combined Celtic and Germanic elements. Rather than depicting biblical events the manuscripts became elaborately decorative capturing a maze-like spirit in a zoomorphic style. Many patterns date before the Christian period. Please find a page from the Lindisfarne Gospels attached (which took 10 years to complete). Arnar did you have these bible images in mind when you were drawing? If not, do you think you could've been unconsciously inspired being from Iceland and having Celtic DNA? :)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdhLuW70wPs>

AA: As nature can be the possible cure for anxiety or depression, I think weather can also be an emotional factor. In Iceland for example there is this a weather condition that can occur called *lægð*, which could be translated into *low*. I will try to explain, it's where low air pressure occurs over a specific area of the earth. In the Northern hemisphere winds blow counterclockwise during lows. In these low conditions the weather tends to be unstable, hard wind, rain. But from experience the mood of the population during lows is also unstable, just like the weather, mood swings, irritation, tiredness etc. Then you also have highs, which would then be the opposite to the low, the effect of the high on the mood would then be the opposite as well, high energy, happiness, playfulness, etc. I remember my grandfather having a barometer in his apartment. A barometer is a scientific instrument that is used to measure air pressure in a certain environment and used to forecast short term changes in the weather. I remember him taking a look at it whenever the weather was acting strange or heavy, and saying "There is a low coming." I personally really feel the highs and lows having an effect on me and my mood. The drawings are a bit like the barometer, an attempt to measure a mood, feeling or an emotion.

I have heard that most places have something similar, a weather condition that effects the mood of the population. I heard that in Spain they have dry hot winds from the Sahara, that creates dramatic clouds, and supposedly effects the mood of the population, not sure in what way, maybe a dramatic effect? Do you know any other examples?

This is what a low looks like:



This image actually fits well to the first lines my book.

**Deep down
in a hopeless hole
dark and misty
a stew is brewing**

I definitely agree that some of the drawings have an alphabetic Celtic/German feel to them! Even though I can't say that it has a deep genetic meaning to me, I'm actually not very educated in the meanings of historical symbols or my own genetics. I think I more picked up the imagery from modern watered-down culture, like from Irish pups, sports club logos or tribal tattoos seen at the swimming pool.

AvG: *It is interesting to read that your influence is coming from different forms of popular culture or like you put it, 'watered-down' culture. Maybe these forms found in tribal tattoos or pub logos have their ancestry in fact in older forms of communication like the bible, the first form of printing and circulation of messages.*

It is so great to learn about the practices surrounding the weather in Iceland and the effects the weather has on the population. At least you can prepare for the lægð or low with the barometer. I was always very impressed with the accuracy of the weather on the website: <https://en.vedur.is/weather/forecasts/aurora/> I love following the earthquakes and the Aurora Borealis in Iceland on this website. Doesn't the spontaneity of the people in Iceland come from the fact that they have to take advantage of the moment when the sun shines as the weather changes so quickly?

But to get back to the emotional factor of the weather – you write that “nature can be the possible cure for anxiety or depression.” What about your drawings? Could your drawings heal as well? If the drawings can measure a mood as nature does, then your drawings are a sort of barometer, no? How is the viewer reflected in your drawings? I believe nature can heal anxiety or depression when you reflect yourself in it.

Now I would like to turn our attention to fashion. Agata as a fashion designer, I know you've been inspired by Arnar's drawings for some time. What do his drawings mean to you? Do you think his drawings have a healing effect? What does it mean for the individual to wear them?

One of the books which I referenced while studying was "Fashioning the Frame" edited by Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick. The book turns the attention of theorizing the body to theorizing dress and surfaces. The book analyzes the dress in relation to the body.

In regard to identity the dress defines who we are, Agata, how do you see your fashion for “Cozy Catastrophe”? Is it something which connects us to other individuals? To what extent does your fashion differentiate us and make us unique? Are your clothes designed for the exhibition unisex? Are they made especially for the performance?

If we think about dress as “a deep surface” like Cavallaro and Warwick do, we can think about the relationship between surface and depth. Furthermore, the dress can be seen as something which reveals and conceals the body. Do you think your fashion conceals the body? Becoming like a mask? Or can your fashion become a continuation of the body? What are your thoughts on this subject?

AM: I became fascinated by Arnar's drawings and I chose to print the snake, the Ouroboros. It looked Celtic to me but graffiti-influenced at the same time, very Arnar-ish. It is a beautiful symbol and I had a moment of fascination with it. I would love to wear it and see others wear this beautiful symbol and drawing. I want to see what happens if you switch from black and white to colors. There will be a different aesthetic and identity. Fashion can be healing when you feel good while wearing clothes that lift your identity and confidence.

Arnar Ásgeirsson (born 1982 in Reykjavik) is a visual artist based in Reykjavik. He studied Fine Art at the Icelandic Academy of the Arts, Reykjavik, at Gerrit Rietveld Academy (BA) as well as the Sandberg Institute (MA), both in Amsterdam. Recent projects and exhibitions include 'Sunny Palace', WWWG, Reykjavik (2019), 'A Chihuahua is a dog and Pluto is a planet', Sol, Reykjavik (2019), 'Prófessjónal Amatör', Kling og Bang, Reykjavik (2018), 'Happy People – A smoke lounge by Arnar Ásgeirsson', Nylistasafnid – The Living Art Museum, Reykjavik (2017), 'Transmutants and Emotional Curves', Neverneverland, Amsterdam (2017), 'It's Time to move on said the Fish and Grew Lungs', public installation, Amsterdam (2015). Recent group shows include RRD, Mexico City (2019), 'Suburb', Reykjavik Sculptural association Pavilion Nordico, Buenos Aires (2019), Ásmundarsalur (2018), Nordatlantens Brygge, Copenhagen (2018), ABC Klubhuis, Antwerp (2018) and UVAF, Portland/Oregon (2018). In 2017, Arnar founded the project space *OPEN* in Reykjavik, together with three other local artists.

www.arnarasgeirsson.com

Agata Mickiewicz (born 1980 in Wrocław, Poland) is a visual artist and fashion designer based in Berlin. She studied Fashion Design at Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam (BA) and at Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp, as well as Sculpture and Painting at The Academy of Fine Art, Warsaw (MA). She has worked as a fashion designer at, amongst others, Iris van Herpen in Arnhem, Viktor & Rolf in Amsterdam, Rick Owens Showroom in Paris, and Gosia Baczynska in Warsaw. In 2017 Agata founded the art and design studio Atagata. Agata has collaborated with many visual artists (like Hreinn Fridfinnsson, Saemundur Thor Helgason and Styrmir Örn Gudmundsson) and the dancer-choreographer Marta Ziólek for a project at Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland.

atagata.eu

Annabelle von Girsewald (1972, USA) is an exhibition maker, tour manager and art agent based in Berlin, Reykjavik and Sarasota. She obtained her M.A. in Empirische Kulturwissenschaften and American Studies from the University of Tübingen. Her academic 'home' themed shows started in her apartment in Frankfurt am Main 2005. She has been working with the Icelandic conceptual artist Hreinn Fridfinnsson since 2010. Recent projects include 'Earth Homing: Reinventing Turf Houses' and 'Terminal (TXL)', an ongoing series of an exchange of artists in an in-between state of transit inspired in part by airport aesthetics.

www.annabellehome.com

in conversation with is an exhibition format aiming at bringing people together through conversation and subsequent collaboration. Artists are invited to engage in dialogue with curators, authors, other artists, art historians, journalists or scientists and to develop an exhibition from it. The conversations are documented in writing, serving as text material accompanying the exhibition. They enable visitors to develop a deeper understanding of the artists' methods and of the artworks.

in conversation with is based on the premise that it is the artists themselves who can best provide information about their works, their methods, their ideas and inspirations. One simply needs to ask.

in conversation with was initiated in early 2018 by Katharina Wendler (www.katharinawendler.com) in Berlin and is guest of various (project) spaces.

Exhibition

Arnar Ásgeirsson in collaboration with Agata Mickiewicz

Cozy Catastrophe

October 31 – November 3, 2019

Opening: Thursday, October 31, 7–10 pm

Haus 1, Waterloo Ufer, 10961 Berlin

haus1-berlin.de