



# Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson



Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson,  
*Your Country Doesn't Exist* (Venice) 2011.  
From the project *Your Country Doesn't Exist*, 2003–ongoing.  
Venice performance production photos, 2011.  
Photo courtesy of Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson.

## “Under Deconstruction”

### Press Kit

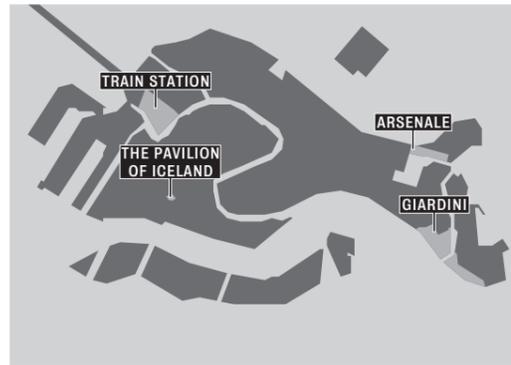
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## Press Kit



La Biennale di Venezia Dates:  
4 June–27 November 2011

Vernissage Dates:  
1–3 June 2011  
The Pavilion of Iceland Press Conference:  
Friday, 3 June 2011, 10:00 (registration required)

### Location

Palazzo Zenobio  
Collegio Armeno Moorat-Raphael  
Fondamenta del Soccorso, 2596

Access:  
Ca' Rezzonico stop on vaporetto no. 1  
or S. Basilio stop on vaporetto no. 62

The Pavilion of Iceland Hours:  
1–3 June 2011: 10:00–20:00  
4 June–27 November 2011:  
Tuesday–Sunday, 10:00–18:00

Official Website:  
[www.icelandicartcenter.is/venicebiennale](http://www.icelandicartcenter.is/venicebiennale)

Media Contacts:  
Elizabeth Reina–Longoria or Deirdre Maher  
Blue Medium, Inc., New York, USA  
T: +1 (212) 675–1800  
E: [elizabeth@bluemedium.com](mailto:elizabeth@bluemedium.com)  
or [deirdre@bluemedium.com](mailto:deirdre@bluemedium.com)

Contact in Venice  
from 30 May–4 June:  
Elizabeth Reina–Longoria  
M: +39 349 1359604



Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson, Photo © Ari Mogg

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## Press Release

Venice, Italy,  
1 June 2011

On 2 June, a performance of Your Country Doesn't Exist will be staged in the canals of the city.

The official Icelandic representation at the 54th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia is the Spanish-Icelandic duo Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson, whose collaborations explore the political, socio-economic, and personal forces that affect life in the present day. Their work, which has taken them to cities around the world, and often develops out of their personal interactions with people and places, can be characterized as an interpretation of culture and the complex relationships that compose it. The 2011 exhibition is organized by the Icelandic Art Center in Reykjavík, Iceland, under the commissionership of Dorothee Kirch, and is curated by Ellen Blumenstein. The Pavilion of Iceland is located in the former laundry house of the Palazzo Zenobio at the Collegio Armeno Moorat-Raphael in Dorsoduro.

Castro and Ólafsson's exhibition for Venice, Under Deconstruction, unveils current socio-political issues in Iceland and elsewhere, using video, performance, sculpture, sound, and music interventions. It features: a new iteration of their ongoing project, Your Country Doesn't Exist (2003–present), which is presented in various locations in the city; a musically-inflected video installation, Constitution of the Republic of Iceland (2008–2011), showcased within the pavilion; as well as a sound sculpture, Exorcising Ancient Ghosts (2010), installed on the roof of the pavilion.

Your Country Doesn't Exist is an ongoing campaign, begun in 2003, for which the artists have traveled the world spreading the message, “Your country doesn't exist” in different languages and through various visual modes, including billboards, TV advertisements, and wall-drawings. In Venice, Castro and Ólafsson are presenting the project in four iterations.

Preceding the Biennale, the artists staged and recorded a public performance that featured a mezzo-soprano, Ásgerður Jóníusdóttir, traveling the canals of Venice by gondola while singing the phrase: “This is an announcement from Libia and Ólafur: Your country doesn't exist”. The vocalist sang the phrase in several languages, and was accompanied by both trumpet (David Boato) and guitar (Alberto Mesirca). The lyrics were written by the artists, and included appropriated phrases from a text by writer and curator Antonia Majaca, about the Your Country Doesn't Exist project. The score was composed by Icelandic composer Karólína Eiríksdóttir. For the duration of the Biennale, a video installation of the performance is displayed in the Pavilion of Iceland. On 2 June, a performance will also be staged in the canals of the city. The gondola will follow a route passing the national pavilions in the Giardini di Castello and the Arsenale. Additionally, a neon sculpture reading “Il tuo paese non esiste” (“Your country doesn't exist” in Italian) is installed on the façade of the pavilion. The final part of the series is a “Do-it-Yourself” painting done by the Icelandic ambassador Gunnar Snorri Gunnarsson in February 2011, in collaboration with the artists.

Constitution of the Republic of Iceland represents Castro and Ólafsson's first collaboration with Icelandic composer Karólína Eiríksdóttir. For this piece, the artists worked with the composer to create a score to which the Icelandic Constitution could be performed by soprano and baritone vocals, piano, double bass, and a mixed chamber choir. The composition was first publicly performed in March 2008 in Iceland, six months before the collapse of the country's banking system. The video presented in Venice is a recent performance of the work, which was staged at The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service Television, and broadcast on Icelandic national TV in February 2011. The video was aired several times, the first of which having been the day the new elected Constitutional Assembly was set to begin revising the Icelandic constitution.

Exorcising Ancient Ghosts is a bilingual audio piece based on Castro and Ólafsson's research into the rights of women and foreigners in ancient Greek society, which was produced in Naples in 2010. The work was inspired by the artists' discovery of an Athenian law from the mid. 5th-century B.C, which prohibited Athenians from marrying, or having intimate relations with foreigners. Castro and Ólafsson worked together with a team of researchers to create a dramatic “text collage”, composed of various excerpts from ancient Greek political, philosophical, judicial, and literary texts. The artists then staged two readings of the texts, spoken by two couples having sex: one featured a Neapolitan woman and a Balinese man reading the text in Italian, and the other featured a couple from New Zealand reading the text in English. For Venice, the artists present the work as a sound installation on the roof of the pavilion, incorporating the architecture of the pavilion itself into the work. The audio recordings are projected simultaneously from a terra cotta vase through two sets of headphones.

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#### Comunicato Stampa

Venezia, Italia,  
1 giugno 2011

Il 2 giugno sarà anche messa in scena una performance di Il Tuo Paese Non Esiste nei canali della città.

La rappresentanza ufficiale islandese alla 54ma Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte—La Biennale di Venezia è costituita dal duo ispano-islandese Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson, le cui collaborazioni esplorano le forze politiche, socio-economiche e personali che influiscono sulla vita di oggi. Il loro lavoro, che li ha condotti in città di tutto il mondo e che spesso si sviluppa al di là delle loro personali interazioni con persone e luoghi, può essere definito come un'interpretazione della cultura e delle complesse relazioni che la compongono. L'esposizione del 2011 è organizzata dall'Icelandic Art Center di Reykjavík, sotto la direzione del commissario Dorothee Kirch, ed è curata da Ellen Blumenstein. Il Padiglione dell'Islanda è situato nella ex lavanderia di Palazzo Zenobio, a Dorsoduro, che ospita il Collegio Armeno Moorat-Raphael.

L'esposizione di Castro and Ólafsson per Venezia, "Under Deconstruction/In De-costruzione", mette in luce i temi socio-politici dell'Islanda e di altri luoghi, utilizzando video, performance, scultura, suono e interventi musicali. Essa comprende: una nuova edizione di un loro progetto già in corso (dal 2003 ad oggi), Your Country Doesn't Exist/Il Tuo Paese Non Esiste, presentato in vari luoghi della città; una video installazione coniugata alla musica, Constitution of the Republic of Iceland/Costituzione della Repubblica d'Islanda (2008-2011), esposta all'interno del padiglione; nonché una scultura sonora, Exorcising Ancient Ghosts/Esorcizzando Antichi Fantasmi (2010), installata sul tetto del padiglione.

Your Country Doesn't Exist è una campagna tuttora in corso, iniziata nel 2003, per la quale gli artisti hanno viaggiato nel mondo diffondendo il messaggio, Il Tuo Paese Non Esiste in diverse lingue e tramite vari mezzi visivi tra i quali cartellonistica, pubblicità televisiva e disegni murali. A Venezia, Castro e Ólafsson presentano il progetto in quattro iterazioni.

Prima della Biennale, gli artisti hanno messo in scena e registrato una performance pubblica interpretata da un mezzo-soprano, Ásgerður Jóníusdóttir, che attraversava i canali di Venezia in gondola cantando la frase: "Questo è un annuncio di Libia e Ólafur: il tuo paese non esiste". L'artista cantava la frase in diverse lingue ed era accompagnata da tromba (David Boato) e chitarra (Alberto Mesirca). Le liriche erano state composte dagli artisti e comprendevano frasi tratte da un testo della scrittrice e curatrice Antonia Majaca sul progetto Your Country Doesn't Exist. La partitura era opera della compositrice islandese Karólína Eiríksdóttir. Per tutta la durata della Biennale una video installazione della performance sarà in mostra nel Padiglione dell'Islanda. Il 2 giugno sarà anche messa in scena una performance nei canali della città. La gondola seguirà un percorso attraverso i padiglioni nazionali dei Giardini di Castello e l'Arsenale. Inoltre, una scultura neon recante la scritta "Il tuo paese non esiste" ("Your country doesn't exist") sarà installata sulla facciata del padiglione. La parte finale della serie è rappresentata da un dipinto "Fai da te" dell'Ambasciatore dell'Islanda Gunnar Snorri Gunnarsson, eseguito nel febbraio 2011 sotto la direzione degli artisti, e ora esposto nel padiglione.

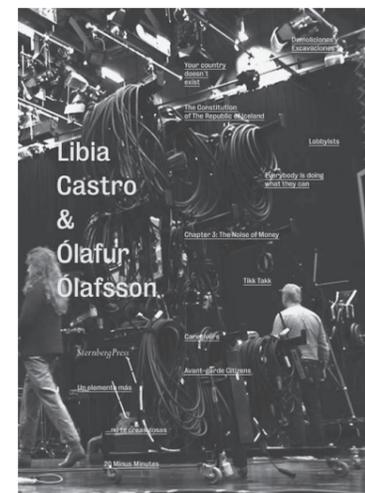
Constitution of the Republic of Iceland rappresenta la prima collaborazione di Castro e Ólafsson con la compositrice islandese Karólína Eiríksdóttir. Gli artisti e la compositrice hanno lavorato per creare una partitura sulla quale la Costituzione Islandese potesse essere declamata da voci di soprano e baritono, accompagnate da pianoforte, doppio basso e un coro misto da camera. La composizione è stata eseguita per la prima volta in pubblico in Islanda, nel marzo 2008, sei mesi prima del crollo del sistema bancario del paese. Il video presentato a Venezia è una versione recente del lavoro, messo in scena alla Icelandic National Broadcasting Service Television, e trasmessa dalla TV nazionale islandese nel febbraio 2011. Il video è stato presentato varie volte, la prima delle quali il giorno in cui la neo eletta Assemblea Costituzionale si riunì per intraprendere la revisione della Costituzione islandese.

Exorcising Ancient Ghosts è un'opera audio in due lingue basata sulla ricerca di Castro e Ólafsson sul tema dei diritti delle donne e degli stranieri nella società della Grecia antica, prodotto a Napoli nel 2010. Il lavoro trae ispirazione dalla scoperta, ad opera degli artisti, di una legge ateniese della metà del sec. V a.C. che proibiva agli ateniesi di sposare o avere relazioni intime con stranieri. Castro e Ólafsson hanno lavorato con un gruppo di ricercatori per creare un drammatico "collage di testo", composto di vari estratti di antichi testi greci di politica, filosofia, diritto e letteratura. Gli artisti hanno quindi messo in scena due letture dei testi, pronunciate da due coppie durante un rapporto sessuale: una formata da una donna napoletana e un uomo balinese che leggevano il testo in italiano, l'altra coppia, della Nuova Zelanda, leggeva il testo in inglese. Per Venezia, gli artisti presentano il lavoro come un'installazione sonora sul tetto del padiglione, incorporando così l'architettura stessa del padiglione nel lavoro. Le registrazioni sonore sono trasmesse simultaneamente da un vaso di terracotta attraverso due set di auricolari.

#### Curatorial Statement



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#### Catalogue

Curators and artists work within the same realm and they often pursue the same interests. Although their respective modus operandi differs significantly, they together form part of the delicate construct of "exhibiting," which also comprises the artwork, the space, and the viewer. On the level of production, the artist invents forms for his/her subject matter, while the curator formulates an argument that communicates between different forms and factors. They both team up to create an arrangement of the artworks in space and produce the presentation which can be accessed by the viewer. All of these factors are necessary to bring the exhibition into being and to make it a lively space for experience and thought. The intensity with which the Icelandic Pavilion team entered the collaboration with the artists Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson and with which we all confronted our modes of thought and approaches to art hopefully filters through and can be sensed and experienced in the exhibition.

Diverse cultural and political backgrounds feed the Spanish-Icelandic duo's practice, which can be described as an attitude of active engagement with the world that surrounds them.

Influences from (neo-)concretism, conceptualism, institutional critique, and relational aesthetics shape their artistic strategies and allow them to interpret the topics they are interested in. They work in a variety of media, from photography to video, sound and multi-media installations, and performative interventions in the exhibition and public space.

Castro and Ólafsson's practice is both research- and reflection-based, and it is intuitive; their work, life, and other people's lives (and societies) are interrelated and enrich each other. Their central artistic strategies—the appropriation and reinvention of given structures, portraying reality, and humor and play—question each other and are important devices to subvert traditional power relations. The idea of emancipation and the wish to engage with the human condition and its paradoxes drives their investigations, so they are placed in relation to life and the in-between of art and life. They deal with emancipatory questions, identity politics or subjectivity, and with the economic, social, and historical conditions that shape our society and culture and our conflicts such as (immaterial) labor and migration.

Through the last ten years, Castro and Ólafsson's works have often been conceived in direct correlation with the sites the artists worked at, and they constantly renegotiated their relation to their collaborators and to the audience. Previous to their latest intense collaborations with the Icelandic composer Karólína Eiríksdóttir, they also cooperated with a choir, activists, asylum seekers, illegal immigrants, caregivers, lobbyists, and ministers.

Their installations are not participative in the sense that the audience would be directly involved in an activity, but rather that, within them, they debate the role of the spectator by confronting different spheres with each other. In this sense, the installation of Under Deconstruction is an invitation to the audience to discover the site, to appropriate the Icelandic Pavilion, and to make it each one's own.

Ellen Blumenstein, Curator of the Pavilion of Iceland at the 54th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

On the occasion of Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson's exhibition, Under Deconstruction, for the Pavilion of Iceland at the Venice Biennale, a 144-page, richly illustrated catalogue is published by Sternberg-Press and designed by jungundwenig, Berlin. Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson: Under Deconstruction is the first comprehensive overview of the artists' work throughout the past 10 years, and features three essays written by internationally renowned writers including Maurizio Lazzarato, Susanne Leeb, and Simon Sheikh. Each offers a different approach to Castro and Ólafsson's work. A conversation between the artists and Ellen Blumenstein, the exhibition curator, offers the artists' perspectives on topics such as the production of their new projects and recent social and political events in Iceland. Also included in the catalogue is a collection of 14 short texts, written by curators and writers from around the world, which cover many of the artists' major interests and inspirations. These writers include: Juan Antonio Álvarez Reyes, Adam Budak, Hallór Björn Runólfsson, Ive Stevneydens, Vasif Kortun, Antonia Majaca, Lucy Cotter, Jón Proppé, Hanna Styrmsdóttir, Markús Thór Andrésson, Hafthór Yngvason, Florian Zeyfang and Nathalie Zonnenberg.

## About the Artists

Libia Castro (b. Madrid, Spain) and Ólafur Ólafsson (b. Reykjavik, Iceland), aptly referred to as “citizens of the world”, met in the Netherlands in 1997 and have been collaborating since. Exploring the relationships between art, everyday life, sociopolitical and cross-cultural issues, Castro and Ólafsson have built up a body of work using a variety of media, which includes documentary video, sound and multimedia installation, public performance, sculpture, and photography. They have developed a conceptual approach to art making that is characterized by a sense of play, transgression, and inventiveness.

Both artists received their M.A. in visual arts from The Frank Mohr Institute in the Netherlands, where their partnership was formed. From the onset, their work has garnered critical attention in the Netherlands, Germany, Iceland, and abroad. They have shown in international exhibitions at major museums, contemporary art centers and galleries around the world, and, in 2009, they were awarded third place in the prestigious Dutch art prize, Prix de Rome, for their video *Lobbyists*. Their work is included in such collections as CAAC in Sevilla, Spain, The National Gallery of Iceland, and The Kverneland Folgerø Sammling in Berlin, Germany.

## 6 Curator

Berlin-based Ellen Blumenstein (b. Kassel, Germany) is an independent curator and she joins with Castro and Ólafsson to create a dynamic, multi-national team for the 2011 Pavilion of Iceland. Blumenstein worked as a curator for Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin, from 1998-2005 and has curated various international exhibitions and projects in museums and galleries throughout Europe, the United States, and South America. These exhibitions and projects include *Regarding Terror: The RAF-Exhibition*, with Klaus Biesenbach and Felix Ensslin, at Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art in 2005; *The Human Stain—Conceptual Art from the Collections of CGAC* at the Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea in Santiago de Compostela in 2009; and *Gordon Matta-Clark* at BDA Gallery, Berlin in 2010. Blumenstein is also co-founder of the curatorial collective, THE OFFICE, through which she has curated several exhibitions and performances.

Ellen Blumenstein received her B.A. in German language and literature studies, musicology, and journalism from University of Hamburg, and her M.A. in German language and literature studies, musicology, journalism, communication studies, and art history from the Free University of Berlin.

## Commissioner

Dorothee Kirch (b. Erlangen, Germany) has served as Director of the Icelandic Art Center since March 2010. Prior to her appointment, she worked as a freelance curator and cultural worker on contemporary visual arts exhibitions, events and documentaries in Iceland and abroad. She served as co-curator, along with Markus Thor Andreson, of the Pavilion of Iceland in the 53rd International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia in 2009. She also worked as curator for *114 Steps*, Sassa Trülzsch Gallery, Berlin in 2009; *Stray Beacons*, as part of the *Reykjavik Arts Festival* in 2009; and *Reykjavik Experiment Marathon* with Hans Ulrich Olbrist and Olafur Eliasson in 2007-2008.

Dorothee Kirch lived in New York and Berlin before returning to Reykjavik in early 2010. Kirch graduated with a B.A. in studio arts from the Iceland Academy of the Arts in 2001, and an M.B.A. from Reykjavik University in 2005.

Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson, *Il Tuo Paese Non Esiste* (Venice) 2011. From the project *Your Country Doesn't Exist*, 2003–ongoing. Sketch, neon text intervention, facade of pavilion. Courtesy of the artists, Galleria Riccardo Crespi and Collezione Leggeri.



## Iceland in the International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia

Icelandic artists were first presented at the Venice Biennale in 1960 and, by 1984, the country had an official presence with a national pavilion. In the last decade, more funding and effort has been expanded to support and promote representation, reflecting the growing importance of international art events on artists' careers. Most recently, Iceland was represented by Ragnar Kjartansson (2009), Steingrímur Eyfjörð (2007), Gabriela Fridriksdóttir (2005), Rúrí (2003), and Finnbogi Pétursson (2001). All of these artists exhibit internationally and have developed strong reputations both inside and outside Iceland. Until 2005, the Pavilion of Iceland was often featured in a small pavilion designed in 1956 by Finnish architect Alvar Aalto in the Giardini di Castelli exhibition gardens. In recent years, however, the exhibitions were mounted outside the Giardini, in the Palazzo Michiel dal Brus on the Canale Grande in 2007 and 2009. This year, it is presented in the Palazzo Zenobio at the Collegio Armeno Moorat-Raphael in Dorsoduro.

## The Palazzo Zenobio

The Pavilion of Iceland is located within the Palazzo Zenobio, a late 17th century structure in the Dorsoduro section of Venice. Today, the Palazzo Zenobio is home to the Collegio Armeno Moorat-Raphael. The palace's broad façade and two wings that extend backwards make it an intriguing architectural example in Venice. Among its other notable features are trompe l'œil frescoed ceilings and a formal garden. The Pavilion of Iceland is located off the garden, in the building's former laundry house.

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## Administration

The exhibition is organized by the Icelandic Art Center ([icelandicartcenter.is](http://icelandicartcenter.is)) in Reykjavik, Iceland under the commissionership of Dorothee Kirch, and with the assistance of the Icelandic Art Center committee members: Dr. Christian Schoen, Halldór Björn Runólfsson, Rúrí, Birta Guðjónsdóttir, and Gunnar J. Árnason.

Icelandicartcenter.is — Icelandic Art Center  
Hafnarstræti 16, IS-101 Reykjavík  
T: 00 354-562 72 62, F: 00 354-562 66 56  
[www.icelandicartcenter.is](http://www.icelandicartcenter.is)

**“Under Deconstruction” will travel to The National Gallery of Iceland after its presentation in Venice and will be on view from January 13 through March 4, 2012.**



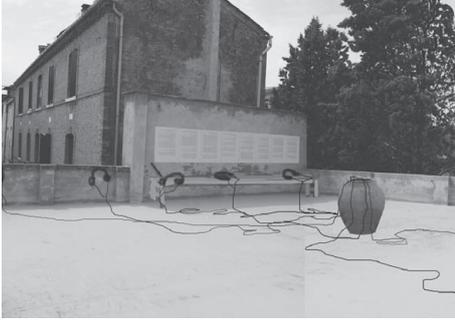
Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson,  
*Your Country Doesn't Exist—Do It Yourself*, 2011.  
Installed at the residency of the Icelandic Ambassador,  
Ambassador Gunnar Snorri Gunnarsson.  
Production photograph.  
Photo courtesy of Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson.

Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson,  
*Your Country Doesn't Exist—Do It Yourself*, 2011.  
Installation at the residency of the Icelandic Ambassador,  
Ambassador Gunnar Snorri Gunnarsson.  
Photo © Kristinn Ingvarsson,  
Courtesy of Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson.





Constitution of the Republic of Iceland, 2011.  
 Video, 45 min.  
 Performed and filmed at  
 The Hafnarfjordur Centre of Culture and Fine Art,  
 Hafnarfjordur, Iceland.  
 Photo courtesy of  
 Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson.



Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson,  
Exorcising Ancient Ghosts, 2010. Sound installation.  
 Photo courtesy of Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson.

Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson,  
Exorcising Ancient Ghosts, 2010. Sound installation  
 at the Pavilion of Iceland, sketch. Photo courtesy  
 of Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson.

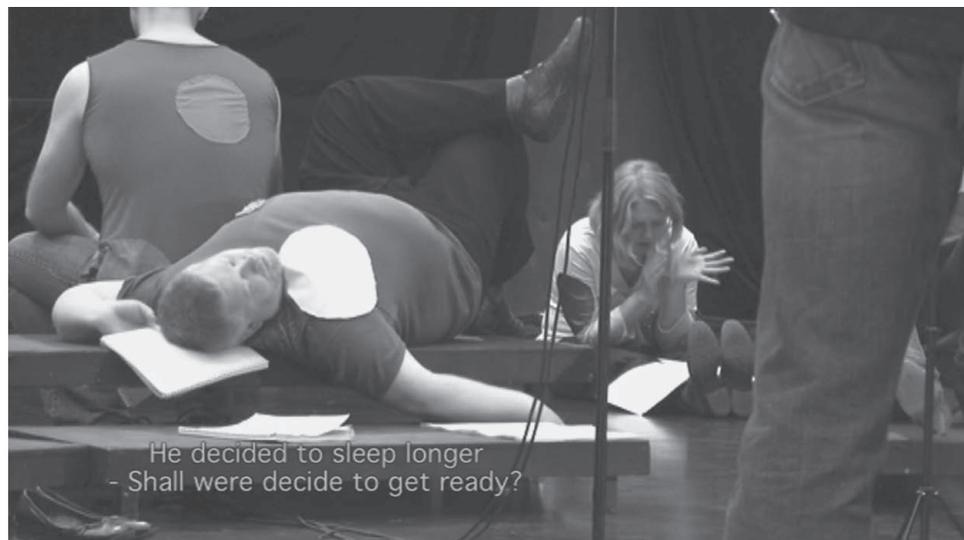


Public gatherings in the open may  
 be banned if it is feared that

The Icelandic Art Center realized *Under Deconstruction* on behalf of, and with the support of, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. *Under Deconstruction* was also made possible by the generous support of VIB—Wealth Management of Íslandsbanki, Landsvirkjun, CCP, The National Gallery of Iceland, Vilhjálmur Thorsteinsson, Collezione Leggeri, Galerie Opdahl, Fonds BKVB—The Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture, CBK Rotterdam—Centrum Beeldende Kunst/Centre for the Visual Arts Rotterdam, The Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Promote Iceland, Reykjavik Pure Energy, Viljandi, Innfjór, Restaurant Jómfrúin, Alcoa, IcelandExpress as well as anonymous supporters.



er kjörtímabil endar.



He decided to sleep longer  
 - Shall we decide to get ready?



design: jungundwienig, berlin