



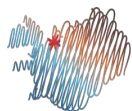
Imagining Iceland 2022



A landscape photograph showing a town with several buildings, including a prominent yellow one, situated along a river. In the background, there are mountains with patches of snow. A bright rainbow arches across the sky, starting from the mountains and extending towards the right. The sky is filled with soft, grey clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

## Imagining Iceland 2022

*ARTE 398/660/850 Special Topics: Imagining Iceland* is a multi-level, cross-disciplinary course initiated and led by Dr. Kathleen Vaughan of Concordia University's Department of Art Education. The Iceland Field School came to be thanks to the generosity, engagement and support of our hosts at the Icelandic Textile Center and the essential assistance of Concordia International, Concordia University's Department of Art Education, and the Faculty of Fine Arts. **[icelandfieldschool.ca](http://icelandfieldschool.ca)**



TEXTÍLMÍÐSTÖÐ ÍSLANDS  
ICELANDIC TEXTILE CENTER

Catalogue design by Tina Carlisi  
2022

## ***At rainbow's end: the Iceland Field School after [?] a time of pandemic***

Our time at the Iceland Field School (IFS) was marked by rainbows, great arcs of colour lobbed across the sky, spanning the Blanda River and reminding us of the miracle of being a group of 17 Concordians, in Blönduós, for the full month of June 2022. Our session had twice been postponed by COVID-19 shutdowns, the implementations of 2020 and 2021 just not possible. By the time 2022 rolled around, we were longing not just to travel, to think and make and be with Iceland and the Icelanders in this small northwest textile-rich town, but also to experience a residency together, to live and create art alongside each other, in person. After all, much of our university experience for the previous two years had been online out of public health necessity. We were more than ready for IFS IRL. And Iceland did not disappoint.

The Iceland Field School is a place-based learning initiative for Concordia University students from BFA to PhD, designed and led by me in collaboration with our hosts at the Icelandic Textile Centre in Blönduós, and with the exceptional support of Concordia International and colleagues in the University's Faculty of Fine Arts (FOFA). The Iceland Field School operates on the model of an artist's residency, for which students apply with a

plan for their month's making, and once accepted, have an exceptional interval of freedom from other commitments and to focus on the specifics of place and their own art practices. This year's cohort included 3 PhD students, 5 MA/MFA students, and 8 BFA students from various Fine Arts departments of the University. Students' practices included textiles, text, performance, video, photography, filmmaking, animation, bio-art, drawing and painting: they were free to work as they saw fit, within the framework of shared studio spaces which excluded volatile solvents, chemical dyes, or messy powders.







Our emphasis was on textiles: all participants explored Icelandic wool via workshops in spinning (led by local farmer and master spinner/knitter Jóhanna Erla Palmadóttir), tapestry weaving (facilitated by artist and author Ragnheidur Björk Þórsdóttir, whose own work was featured at the neighbouring Icelandic Textile Museum), and natural dyeing (expertise shared by Scottish artist and researcher, Deborah Gray). We had demonstrations of and access to the digital textile tech of the Centre's TextileLab (by manager Margrét Katrín Guttormsdóttir), where the feltloom and digital embroidery machine enchanted many of us. We had the opportunity to see unfurled the full 46-metre length of the Vatnsdæla Tapestry – modeled on the Bayeux – a stitched version of a locally-sited saga, whose multi-year, community co-creation is overseen by Jóhanna. We visited the Ístex wool washing facility in town, where 99% of Iceland's wool is washed before milling, and took part in and helped set up the Knit Fest, a three-day line-up of workshops, talks, and marketplace, organized by Svanhildur Pálsdóttir of the Icelandic Textile Centre. We loved rubbing shoulders with and learning techniques from handcrafters and yarn producers from all over Iceland. We shared our delight in our experience via a IFS takeover of the FOFA Instagram account, with some of those images included here.

Our emphasis was also on sustainability: we considered the ethics of traveling to the fragile Arctic environment of Iceland in this time of climate emergency and species extinctions, the question of making 'smarter' and more environmentally friendly material choices as artists and designers. A Zoom talk with renowned Icelandic author (*On Time and Water*) and filmmaker (*Dreamland*) Andri Snær Magnason emphasized the importance of art with purpose in these challenging times and offered some hope about the arts' capacities to connect people and support change. At the end of the month, every IFS participant was asked to produce a 'sustainability statement' about their own passage in this special place.

Blönduós is a town of about 900 people, a four-hour bus ride north from Reykjavik. In an area of sheep and horse farming, one of the town's core industries is a slaughterhouse. The town has grown up along both sides of the Blanda River, which is a summer nesting ground for numbers of bird species. During the long, long Arctic summer days (we had 'dusk' between 1 and 3 a.m., but otherwise the sun was bright in the sky), we would at all hours walk the streets and hills, forage (responsibly) for dye plants, give wide berth to the protective, hissing graylag geese and dive-bombing,





trilling Arctic terns, enjoy the sociable Icelandic horses and sheep out to pasture, and go to the pool. We love(d) Iceland's swimming culture and in particular the facilities at Blönduós, which include not just a 25m length pool but also various temperatures of 'hot pots' for soaking and socializing. Most of us swam daily, before and after our extended happy hours in the shared studio, the dye shed, the TextileLab. We were very comfortably housed in the Textile Centre's facilities: some of us in the Kvennaskólinn or Women's School, which had offered advanced education for Icelandic women in textile and farm management practices for almost 100 years before being reborn as the Residency; others in the next-door House 33 (for instructors) and House 35 (for students). The Icelandic Textile Centre's director Elsa Arnardóttir and Ós Residency manager Katharina Schneider were welcoming hosts and inspired us with details of the Centre's many research and collaborative projects, regional and international. And of course mascot Lubbi, Elsa's sweet, friendly Havanese puppy, spread effortless joy!

We indeed felt that we had stumbled upon the delights at the end of the rainbow when we came to Blönduós, with the day's changeable sequences of sun and wind and rain

often gifting us with a glorious, colourful arc during a long golden evening's lull. We are grateful for and transformed by our time in Iceland, and share in these pages some of our creative work. More was shown at a June '22 Open House in Blönduós and October/November '22 exhibition in Montreal. Digital versions of our material practices can be found on the Field School's website, and, in particular, on its blog pages, written by participants while near the Arctic Circle. I am inspired by what the students created and so thankful for the opportunities of the Iceland Field School.

*Takk fyrir, Ísland, home of my heart. Þangað til við sjáumst aftur.* Until we meet again.

**Kathleen Vaughan**, MFA, PhD

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Just Futures

<http://icelandfieldschool.ca/>

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**Alex Bachmayer** (BFA student, Computation Arts) discovered that great hidden labour goes into preparing cellulose fibres (linen and cotton) for dyeing. She spent her time in Blönduós exploring alternative milk mordanting and making dye baths to draw colours from locally-foraged plants. Painting onto linen quilt squares with diluted dairy, egg, and soy products yielded patterns, invisible once dry, that revealed themselves in slow baths of rhubarb root and lupin flower. The most effective mordant paint turned out to be Icelandic *skyr*, validating her drive to work with hyperlocal materials and inspiring her to continue experimenting with locally-sourced natural products in her bacteria-dyeing research at Concordia.

**Charlotte Little** (Independent MA student) creates textiles and wearables, with her Icelandic collection being a reflection on the self when removed from the familiar: she created an exterior persona that would allow her to forge a place for herself among the fantastical landscape of Iceland, yet remain as a guest, both visually and practically. The different types of Icelandic wool informed her making, with the finished pieces being (mostly) unconscious reflections on the nature of the materials. MFA Studio Arts student **Daniel Rumbolt** also worked with local landscapes

and materials, creating watercolours that he then versioned with the digital embroidery machine of the TextileLab into satin-stitched pillows, objects of comfort he integrated into outdoor local photos. He commented that this process raised several questions for him, notably, Why he feels the need to 'capture' the landscape as a way to connect with it? For the fall 2022 exhibition of Iceland Field School works, Daniel chose to showcase a textile work of naturally dyed wool that is resonant of fishers' nets.

"To earth oneself. What does it mean?" This was the foundational question behind much of the work in Iceland by **Gen Moisan** (Independent PhD student). She describes her time in Iceland as being about reconnecting with her artistic self via the means of discovering a new place. Learning new textile techniques from the local specialists. Finding out about Iceland history by embroidering a tapestry of the Vatnsdæla saga. It was about community, as she was also able to share some of her considerable textile knowledge. She stated, "This project made me feel whole again in a way that needs to be experienced to be believed. Just like grounding oneself while walking barefoot on the black sand of an Icelandic beach."









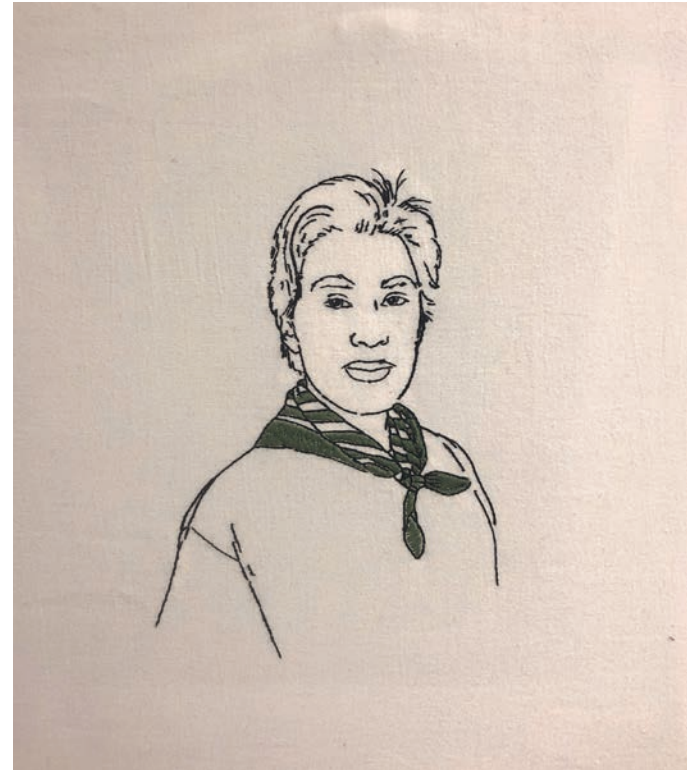


**Hannah Ferguson** (BFA student, Art History and Studio Art) worked in multiple textile media – laser-cut silk organza, cotton and lopi leno weave, rainwater bioplastics, window screen mesh, silk organza letters frozen in melting rainwater, cotton and lopi net, starched cheesecloth, lupin and mare's tail-dyed cotton fabrics – to explore the weather visuality of Iceland. Here, the saying goes, “if you don't like the weather, wait fifteen minutes.” In Blönduós, you can look in all directions and see windows of different weather unfolding in the distance. Here it is cloudy; there it is raining, and the edges of the clouds coming with the mountains. There the sun focuses on that grassy hill; here the wind is blowing the clouds – soft and billowing – across our field of vision. All these things are true at once, a simultaneity and paradox embodied in Hannah's works. While at the Iceland Field School, **Jacky Lo** (MA student, Art Education) was both engaging locally and searching across distance and time – for lost connections, histories, and new narratives to reconnect with his great-grandmother, a master embroiderer in China. Jacky's work of stitching representations of orange lichen on rice paper, which he then placed on the estuary's sea wall, is both performative and durational, as the rice paper and embroidery decompose and give back to the organisms, nature, and





the land, making his mark without disturbing the rhythms of nature. **Jacob Le Gallais's** (PhD candidate, Art Education) *Untitled (Iceland Field School Quilt)*, is an in-process textile artwork that documents Field School participants by way of motif of the Kvinnaskólinn class photographs of generations of young women who lived and studied in the building during its history as a women's college. Using digital drawing, machine embroidery, and re-purposed/upcycled textiles, Jacob is working on an IFS update of the old-style photo grids, each created with a series of oval cut photographs and meticulous hand-written calligraphy. **Julia Woldmo** (Independent MA student)'s main work in Iceland was *day before*, a wool weaving measuring 12 inches wide by 111 inches long, featuring a repeating pattern from the Kvinnaskólinn archives: "Midnight-sun energy is woven into an undulating, orbicular, echoing cloth. Cobalt blue threads make up the warp and natural Lopi brown, hand dyed with lupin and rhubarb the weft. I learned how to wind (and unwind and rewind) a large warp, string treadles, heddles, and beat and follow a pattern on a Scandinavian countermarch loom – gratitude for the seasoned hands and wisdom of Gen. I wove and wove, the setup took two days and the weaving took three – endless days that coiled into night. My weaving dreams





were made tangible here in Iceland, up in the loom loft of the Kvennaskólinn.”

**Levana Katz** (BFA student, Painting) was inspired by the concentrated and steady pace that was set by learning new textile skills – natural dye processes, tapestry weaving, and spinning in particular – which required patience and many steps of invisible labour. She views spinning as an extension of her drawing practice: the creation of yarn is similar to drawing on a page; controlling pressure determines the wavering thickness of the line. Back in Montreal, she plans to utilize her hand-spun yarn in sculptures that incorporate lava rocks, as a way to draw in three-dimensional space and metaphorically extend her time in Iceland. **Maggie Sigrid Wilde** (BFA student, Art Education) describes huge transformations during her time in Blönduós. Having expected an introspective month of slow process-based learning in a sleepy small town, she was met instead with intense learning, growth, and late nights in the weaving loft, new fibre practices including natural dyeing, tapestry work, machine knitting, wheel and drop spindle spinning, solar dyeing, cyanotype, and Fair Isle knitting. While she wasn’t obsessively knitting until her knuckles got sore, she experimented with and researched









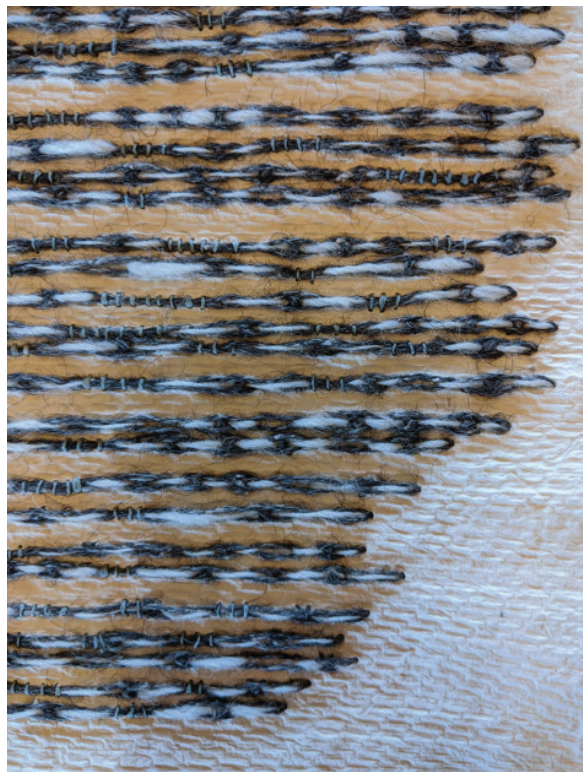
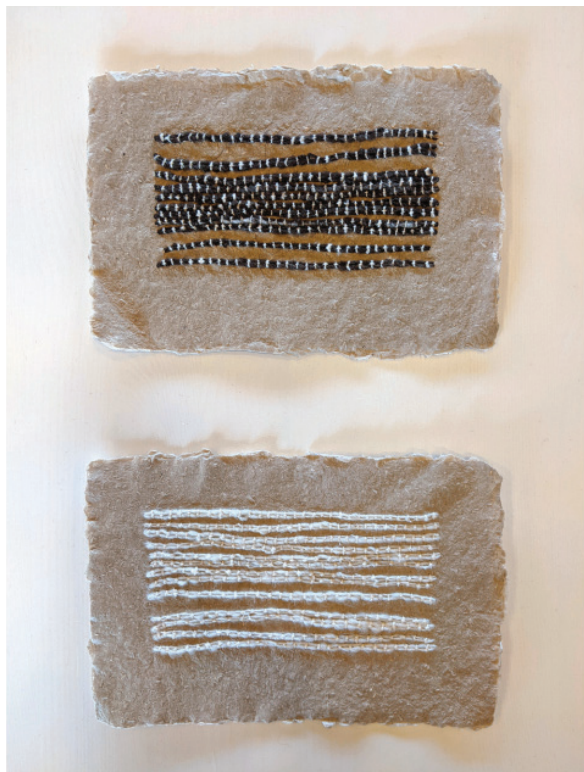


foraging and fermenting as tools for community building and connecting with the landscape and the locals who inhabit it. Her month culminated in an unforgettable large cake ceremony as well as a dinner party.

For the duration of her stay, **Mylène Boisvert** (MFA student, Studio Arts), committed herself to opening her senses to the grandeur of the Blönduós panorama. Working in the studio, she listened carefully to the sounds of the sea birds, the ocean and the wind as they intermingled and wafted through the half-open windows of Ós Residency. In her handwork, she let herself be guided by this graceful music and the constant June light that penetrated the studio. She strove to capture its ever-changing modulations through a play of lines and textures of wool, linen, and paper that she spins, weaves, and embroiders – embodied in her series *Mes oeuvres d'errance* | *My works of wanderings*. Part of **Nancy Long's** (PhD candidate, Art Education) practice in Iceland involved the viewfinder drawing tool that she had designed to allow herself to trace a landscape onto a transparent film – working with monocular vision (a patch on one eye) and standing totally still in place for as long as possible, up to 45 minutes. Despite Iceland's changeable weather, Nancy worked mostly outdoors, so











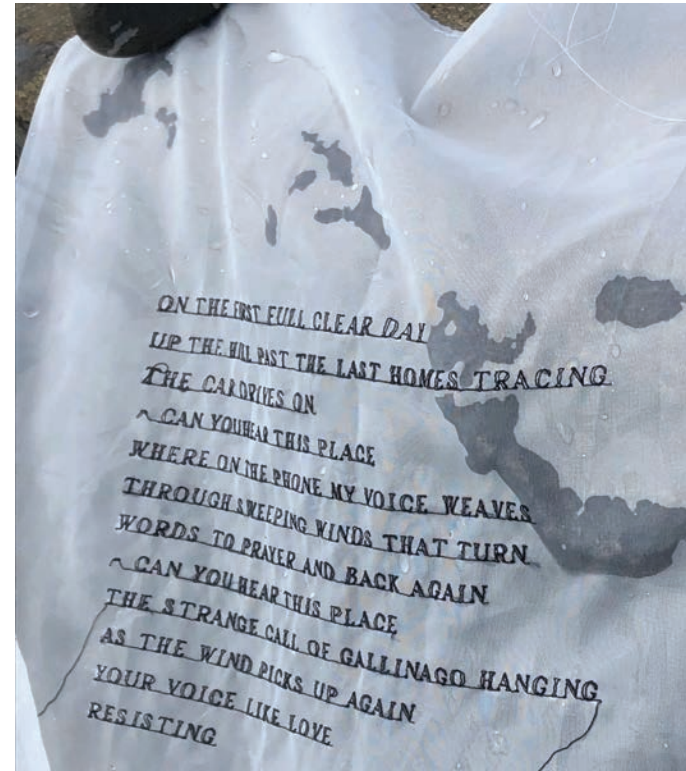


that an unbroken physical and mental connection was made between where she was standing and what she was tracing. She has found that this method of drawing solidifies places in her memory more so than photographs since she can experience the location through senses of sight and touch; she is looking at the landscape while her hand literally traces its contours. Nancy has experimented with adding watercolour and digital paint to these tracings – as well as making stop motion animation!

Facing the monumentality of the Icelandic landscape and the extravagance of the sky, constantly changing and often majestic and surprising, **Paule Gilbert** (MFA Studio Arts) wanted to focus on the 'small', to slow down, walk slowly, and feel the continuum between beings, animate and inanimate. She worked with rocks and with felting, which allowed her to bring two iconic local materials together, to add softness to the rocks, take their imprint, and envelop them in the softness of wool. Before leaving Iceland, Paule removed the rocks from their felt casings and left their weight behind, even as she continues to explore the residues of the relationship she created with the handspun and dyed wool artifacts.



**Teddy Desmarais's** (BFA student Fibres and Film Animation) describes himself as a trans gay modern magician, tender of his morphing well of costume, puppetry, film, and theatrics. His multi-faceted *Spright* project embodied that, "The spright is a hidden person, a fleeting fairy tale about grief. A spell for drifting beyond the cloak of matter to conjure a place of rest." Materials include Super 8 Film, newspaper, corn starch, glass, aluminum wire, aluminum chains, black silk paint, white fabric paint, Icelandic wool, lupin dye, silk, cotton, greylag goose feathers, aluminum grommets, Icelandic goat hide, ostrich plume, ostrich feather trim, and miscellaneous vintage fabrics. **Thomas Hagen-Veilleux** (BFA student Art History and Studio Arts) used text, digital embroidery, and site-specific and video installation to explore his experience in Iceland. He Google-translated his English-language writings into Icelandic, and then translated those back into English – creating a new text, new parameters to work with. His goal was to highlight the unpredictability of outcomes in places like Iceland by using an equally unpredictable and faulty AI. He then digitally embroidered these remade texts and brought them back to the landscape they were originally about to allow them to dialogue with place. **Tiana Atherton** (BFA student Fibres and Material Practices) came to Iceland thinking about











the mythical binary between felting and weaving. Weaving with its perpendicular grid system has been compared to geographical coordinates and written language. Felting is much less tangible, being the inevitable interlocking of wool fibres once they've been washed of natural oils and can be seen as akin to embodied knowledge. Naturally, Tiana started thinking of ways to break down this binary as she worked with multiple textile processes. She made several wool samples comparing patterns and ways of creating terry cloth loops in her weavings, including the rya knot and the Icelandic knot that have both been used in Icelandic textiles. She used these mini weavings to experiment with ways of incidental felting.

Working into the wee hours in midnight sun-brightened studio, the 16 participants of the Iceland Field School 2022 poured their creative energies into many slow processes, animating long days during a month that proved too short, too small, to contain the wealth of experiences, depth of meaning, and joys of camaraderie we all experienced. This catalogue gestures to some of what was accomplished and hints at what is yet to come.

Texts by the artists, edited and assembled by **Kathleen Vaughan**, October 2022, Montreal





We offer heartfelt thanks to our generous and tireless hosts, teachers, and friends in Iceland: Jóhanna Pálmadóttir, Ragnheiður Björk Þórsdóttir, Deborah Gray, Margrét Katrín Guttormsdóttir, Svanhildur Pálsdóttir, as well as Elsa Arnardóttir and Katharina Schneider. In Canada, Teo Blackburn and Maral Abajian of Concordia International, as well as Associate Dean Elaine Cheasley Paterson, were instrumental to creating the Iceland Field School and to keeping the faith despite repeated pandemic postponements.

Thanks to IFS doctoral participants Gen Moisan, Jacob LeGallais, and Nancy Long, who curated the Montreal exhibition of student works, October-November 2022.







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- Page 8: Photos from the IFS's FOFA Instagram takeover. Left: Mother horse and newborn foal at sunset on the hills above Blönduós. @danielrumbolt. Right: Hannah, Tiana, Julia, and Levana taking in the views. @hannahferg.etc @floralbed @julia.woldmo @levana.katz @bogbaby\_
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- Pages 22,23: Works from Mylène Boisvert's series, *Mes oeuvres d'errance / My works of wanderings*. Photos: Mylène Boisvert



Page 24: Coloured version of Nancy Long's landscape tracing, the pathway along the Blanda River leading to the Kvinnaskólinn. Photo: Nancy Long.

Page 25: Paule Gilbert's felted rocks (right) and rocks with bits of wool in situ along the Blanda, the red roofs of the Kvinnaskólinn and adjacent buildings in the background. Photos: Paule Gilbert

Page 26: 35 mm film photograph by Teddy Desmarais, from his *Spright* project, featuring the artist in performance in costume created from upcycled and found cloth.

Pages 27,28: Thomas Hagen-Veilleux's installation shots of translated (English-Icelandic-English) poetry, digitally stitched on organza, installed in situ in Iceland. Photos: Thomas Hagen-Veilleux.

Page 29: Works by Tiana Atherton, (left) felted insoles; (right) woven wool. Photos: Tiana Atherton.

Page 30: Photo from the IFS's FOFA Instagram takeover: tapestry weaving setup in the evening light of the Kvinnaskólinn studio. @hannahferg.etc

Page 31: Photo from the IFS's FOFA Instagram takeover: view of our houses and studio space taken from the hill above the Icelandic Textile Centre. Photo: Gen Moisan

Page 32: Photo from the IFS's FOFA Instagram takeover: naturally dyed yarn on the studio windowsill. @lothlo

Page 33: Lichen on railing, lupins on bluff above the Blanda River. Photo: Kathleen Vaughan

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back cover: Photo from the IFS's FOFA Instagram takeover: Experiencing our first incredible Icelandic sunset. Photo: Gen Moisan

Back cover: Rainbow over Old Blönduós, across the Blanda River. Photo: Nancy Long







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