



Imagining Iceland

2024



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ARTE 398/660/850 Special Topics: Imagining Iceland is a multilevel, 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/



Catalogue design by Tina Carlisi
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From snow to plenty of sun: the Iceland Field School 2024

Snow. Across this Arctic country, the month of June – the time of the summer solstice and almost 24-hour daylight, the Knit Fest weekend celebrating Icelandic yarn and handwork techniques, and Iceland's national holiday – started with snow. This is not normal, the shocked Icelanders exclaimed. The unaccountably wintry weather meant travel warnings and road closures, worrying snow accumulations over terrain where ground nesting birds expecting spring had already laid eggs that would freeze, and a general hunkering down of all species. Thankfully, the 16 Fine Arts students from Concordia University and I had already arrived in Blönduós when the weather turned. Ensconced, we could access the studios of the Icelandic Textile Centre, our host. And the nearby pool, of course. Part of Iceland's extensive swimming culture, the community's outstanding 25-metre pool and 'hot pots' are fed by geothermically warmed ground waters and open year-round, whatever the weather. In the worst kind of blow, some swim and soak in wool hats, savoring conversation and free coffee. In retrospect, I couldn't have arranged for a better beginning to our 2024 edition of the Iceland Field School. We were instantly Icelandic.

That means that we were feeling unusually attuned to the natural world, consulting with people around us about how to best move forward, adjusting plans with flexibility when the weather required, and particularly enjoying the warmth of Icelandic wool and material practices when climes were intemperate!

After week 1, the sun returned and temperatures climbed, eventually enabling outdoor sessions as we learned to spin Icelandic fleece with Jóhanna Erla Palmadóttir; visited the new spring lambs at Jóhanna's nearby sheep farm; and sustainably scavenged early flowers and bark from fallen branches to use as sources of natural dye under the expert eye of Deborah Gray. Indoors, acclaimed author and artist Ragnheiður (Ragga) Björk Þórsdóttir taught us the basics of tapestry weaving, and of course the extraordinary collections of the Icelandic Textile Museum (next door to the Residency) inspired us.



Our activities were all part of the Iceland Field School curriculum, which is about learning with ‘place’ and the locals who know it best. We learned ‘with’ and in a spirit of reciprocity, contributed ‘to’. For instance, we helped with set-up and refreshments during the Knit Fest, which was organized through the Icelandic Textile Centre and hosted hundreds of visitors to the small northwestern town of 900 individuals. In the second half of June, designer Guðbjörg Thóra Stefansdóttir taught us to use the digital textile tools of the Textiel Lab: the FeltLoom, drum carder, digital embroidery machine, and TC2 digital jacquard sample loom. Students created art, building on their own creative practices as well as their Field School learning. A group of four MFA participants who constituted the Table Collective also hosted a participatory weekend event in nearby Akureyri, as a sidebar to their Field School work. Towards the end of June, all Field School participants showcased their accomplishments in our own exhibition, *Love Letters to Blönduós | Ástarbréf til Blönduóss*, exhibiting for the locals artwork that celebrates some of the many beloved features of their town. I was inspired and moved by the students’ engagement with the landscape and Textile Centre that I love so much,



delighting in their energy for hiking at midnight to distant coves where seals romped, for cooking up collective meals with local ingredients including rhubarb from the Textile Centre garden, and for sharing textile knowledge and skills. Students’ reflections on their own experiences can be found on the blog of the Iceland Field School’s website: icelandfieldschool.ca/blog/.



Our time in Iceland was transformative and, inevitably, too short. We are forever changed and profoundly grateful – to the landscape, to the sheep, horses, birds, and seals around Blönduós, and to the team of the Icelandic Textile Centre, led by director Elsa Arnardóttir and project manager Katharina Schneider. This catalogue of students' artwork and images of our time there represents our love letter to Blönduós, and our fondest wish that we might some day return and experience once again the pleasures and challenges of becoming instantly Icelandic for a little while.

Kathleen Vaughan, Professor,
Department of Art Education, Concordia University
Program designer and course instructor,
The Iceland Field School – ARTE 398/660/850
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What is the ISF (Iceland Field School)? **icelandfieldschool.ca/**

The Iceland Field School is a mixed-level, transdisciplinary university credit course conceived and designed by Dr. Kathleen Vaughan of Concordia University (Montreal, Canada), held at the Icelandic Textile Centre in Blönduós.

Following her own artistic residency at the Textile Centre in June 2016, and with the collaboration of the Centre and Concordia University, Kathleen designed a residency-style field school for Concordia students, which had its first iteration in 2018 with 13 students. For the full month of June, they worked on site to explore aspects of arts, community, environmentalism, tourism, and museology, often with a textile inflection. Building on this first success, Kathleen returned to implement the Iceland Field School in June 2022 and now June 2024, with 16 students each.

Why is it in Blönduós and at the Textile Centre?

Blönduós, a small town in northern Iceland, has a rich history of sheep farming and wool processing. The Icelandic Textile Centre, established in 2013, is housed in a former women's college and focuses exclusively on

textile research and innovation. The Centre plays a crucial role in valorizing wool's importance, especially as sheep farming faces economic challenges. By collaborating with local farmers and artisans, the Centre fosters innovation and builds connections and research collaborations across Iceland's textile industry and internationally. Led by Elsa Arnardóttir (director) and Katharina Schneider (project manager), the Centre serves as a hub for education, research, and sustainable textile practices.

textilmidstod.is/en
creativehubs.net/article.php?id=90

What is place-based sustainability?

Place-based sustainability emphasizes the importance of local context, resources, and cultural practices in fostering environmental and social resilience. It focuses on understanding the unique ecological, cultural, and social dynamics of a specific location, via which communities develop sustainable practices that align with their natural environment. By integrating traditional knowledge, local



materials, and community-driven initiatives, place-based sustainability promotes solutions that are not only ecologically sound but also culturally meaningful and economically viable, creating long-term sustainability rooted in the specific needs and strengths of the place. We manifest our inquiry through the research-creation works in this catalogue.

Keywords

Textiles, research-creation, community, water, land, food, hikes, long walks, birds, sheep, horses, wind, snow, cold, midnight sun, absent sunsets, social life, swimming, foraged materials, attunement, listening, being with nature, quiet, oceanside and rural smells, breath, air.





Thank You for Being is a wearable tapestry by **Catherine Faiello** (BFA student, Art Education), a Montreal-based artist, illustrator, and educator. Known for bright colors and rich textures, Faiello's work explores social norms, femininity, and humanity's relationship with nature. This piece, made from wool, cotton, polyester, and locally dyed materials, reflects Iceland's landscape and the experience of being a guest in a new place. The artwork honors Iceland's nature and the profound experience of being immersed in its beauty.

Vanessa "Van" Randall's (MA student, INDI) *origins of things* reflects in her creative process, which is often inspired by wool. In Iceland, she learned to separate the tog from the þel, using the long, strong outer hair of the tog for weaving and the soft downy inner þel for felting with the Felt Loom at the Blönduós Textile Lab. Inspired by Anna Yates's book, *The Viking Discovery of America*, Randall created a wearable textile map that guides viewers through the Sagas that recount Vikings' contact with Greenland and Turtle Island over a millennium ago. Despite evidence of settlement on "Vinland" (now Newfoundland) and knowledge of Viking navigation

techniques, conclusive proof of what might have been extensive exploration is still lacking. What endures are the stories of Vinland, embodied in Van's artwork.





Dale Crockett (BFA student, Photography) focuses on photography and printmaking, exploring botanical drawings as both archival records and forms of activism. While documenting flora and fauna near lakes, rivers, and oceans, she became increasingly aware of the impact of widespread plastic pollution. In Iceland, Crockett collected plastic waste, fishing nets, seaweed, and bird bones to integrate into her art. She created experimental cyanotypes in nature using the Blanda glacial River and the Black Beach in nearby Sauðárkrúkur, where natural elements like wind, water, and found materials interact unpredictably with chemicals and canvas.



Pramila Choudhary's (PhD student, Geography, Urban, and Environmental Studies) textile practice explores the deep connection between women and nature. Using natural materials such as wool, *Nurturing Nature: Women's Stewardship through Generations* honours the legacy of women who have safeguarded the natural world with wisdom and care. This project pays tribute to the delicate balance these stewards of the land have maintained, highlighting their role in shaping cultural identity and ecological resilience. *Nurturing Nature* invites viewers to reflect on our shared responsibility to protect the planet, inspired by the wisdom passed from one generation of women to the next.

Crockett and **Choudhary** collaborated on *Frozen Hands*, an installation that examines the fragile balance between nature and human activity, integrating video of frozen hand-like shapes as they melted and foregrounding plastic waste, consumerism, and humans' detrimental reach.





Renee Kennedy Barnes (BFA student, Art History and Studio Art) created multiple works in both wool and wood, both celebrating local features and highlighting subtle, often overlooked and sometimes dark impacts of human actions. *Lamb's Head* takes the form of a G-string woven from unwashed raw wool. When hung on the wall, it symbolizes the softness of a lamb, but becomes a provocative spectacle when worn in public – as Barnes did for a photo session. Her *Húnafljörður* Loom is inspired by the Icelandic landscape, staves, and folklore. The imagery for the loom came from Húnafljörður Bay, a place above the town of Blönduós that became a cherished spot for the cohort. Some mornings, while running to the point, she'd see horses and birds running alongside her, expressing the magic of the Icelandic environment. Her loom remains in Iceland, a gift to weaving expert Ragga Thórsdóttir.

Sharmistha Kar's (PhD student, Art Education) studio practice explores concepts of mobility, temporality, memory, using hand embroidery and other textile practices to subversively highlight identity, colonized/

decolonizing realities, and transnational connections. With her dissertation research-creation exploring cultural heritage practices of cultivating and working with indigo both Canada and India, in Iceland, Kar experimented with the TC2 digital jacquard loom, creating woven versions of archival Indian indigo plantation photographs, as well as exploring local dyes and wool.

From Land to Hand and Back Again, crafted by **Sylvie Stojanovski** (MA student, Art Education), is a tapestry that reflects the process of creating place-based art in Iceland. From engaging with the natural landscape to foraging, spinning, dyeing yarn, needle felting, and mark-making, the piece showcases the skills Sylvie acquired from residency mentors Jóhanna Erla Pálmadóttir (spinning), Ragnheiður Björk Þórsdóttir (weaving), Deborah Gray (dyeing), and Thóra Stefansdóttir (felting). Inspired by the intention to “make the way a river flows,” Sylvie found that the tapestry took on a life of its own when was cut from the loom, with the warp threads relaxing into gentle waves reminiscent of the Blanda River.





Woven hair jewelry made from **Emilie Kvist's** (MFA, Studio Arts) own collected hair and the special loom with which she weaves it, were shown alongside handmade pillow covers (created using the TC2 digital jacquard loom) and found objects, all *Tokens of My Memory*. Inspired by the Victorian tradition of weaving hair into mementos, Kvist's practice integrates print media, sculpture, installation, and performance, focusing on themes of time, memory, loss, and decay.

During her residency, **Gabrielle Lacoste** (MFA student, Fibres and Material Practices) focused on two projects. The first, a collaborative double exposure film photography project, used a shared camera to prompt diverse image-making reactions to the same environment, blending shared experiences. Her second project, *Ode to the Pool*, is a colourful tapestry celebrating the town's geothermal pool as a symbol of her connection to Blönduós. Made from Icelandic wool, donated materials, and natural dye samples, the project allowed her to reflect on her bond with the place through time-intensive techniques.





Skotthúfa and *Upphlutur*, by **Rebekah Walker** (BFA student, Art History), explores the connection between Iceland's textile history, people, and national costume. Through hands-on research and input from Elín S. Sigurðardóttir of the Icelandic Textile Museum, Walker created *Skotthúfa*, a traditional 19th-century tassel-hat, which was knitted using Icelandic wool, along with an embroidered lace-fronted bodice, *Upphlutur*. Both pieces draw on Iceland's material culture and highlight the significant role textiles play in shaping the nation's identity.

The Selkie and Her Suit, a collaboration between **Sophie Desmarais** and **Izzy Troxler-DeAcetis** (both BFA students, Art Education), is a stop-motion animation featuring felted characters from Celtic and Norse folklore. Selkies, half-women, half-seal creatures, can change shape by putting on or removing their selkie coats. According to legend, selkies walk among humans on the summer solstice. In this story, the selkie embarks on a journey to find her selkie coat, represented as a bathing suit. Along the way, she learns about the transformation of wool and yarn into woven fabric with the help of her friends, mirroring the artists' experiences in Blönduós.





Nicole Crozier (MFA student, Studio Arts) explored the concept of identity with her hand-crocheted hood, *How to Be No One*. Typically, putting on a mask allows a person to adopt a new persona, stepping into someone else's shoes. But in this project, Crozier asks, what if instead of becoming someone else, you became no one? This project investigates the idea of merging with one's natural environment, blurring the line between figure and background, subject and space. Returning to crochet for the first time since her teenage years, Crozier's work continues her exploration of masquerade and the transformation of self into image through photography.

Solstice Shadow and *Imprint* are two projects created by **Sabrina Maisonneuve** (BFA student, Studio Arts), a painter, textile artist, and geology enthusiast. Inspired by Iceland's unique geology, she explored the connection between the land and its inhabitants. The painted series, *Imprint*, highlights the individuality of each rock, shaped by years of pressure and chemistry, with colors chosen to reflect the minerals within. *Solstice Shadow* incorporates the Icelandic Salon Rose weaving pattern, capturing





the shadow of a rock on the solstice, symbolizing the relationship between Iceland's creative identity and the land. As a gesture of respect for the environment, before leaving Blönduós, Maisonneuve returned her rocks to their original locations.

Pauline B. Lomami's (MFA student, Studio Arts) residency in Blönduós was guided by the question, *How to not be from, and still become with the land I can learn from here and now?* Her audiovisual installation was inspired by the eerie, life-sized figurine of a woman in historical costume, sitting crafting in the glass corridor of the Textile Museum while looking out to the landscape. Similarly, Lomami's work – using furniture and tools from the Textile Centre – invites visitors to sit in a version of 'home', while a docufiction video plays on a screen before them.

The video reconstructs the survival strategies of Lomami's character, an astronaut, as she explores Blönduós in a silver spacesuit. The project also nods to Iceland's aluminum industry, with Lomami crafting a helmet from woven plastic and aluminum, sparking the legend of "The

Aluminum Lady" seen around Blönduós.

Florence Boucher's (MDes student, Design and Computation Arts) project focuses on the ubiquitous, invasive purple lupine (*Lupinus nootkatensis*) in Iceland, introduced to combat soil erosion but now threatening native ecosystems. While tourists often admire the flower, its impact on local biodiversity sparks mixed reactions among Icelanders. Through foraging, processing, and extracting fibers from the lupine, Boucher explores the tension between native and exotic species. By integrating lupine fibers into Icelandic wool through spinning, dyeing, and felting, she creates hybrid materials. Her practice examines our relationship with wild urban spaces, using non-extractivist methods inspired by Land art and craft traditions.

Texts by the artists, edited and assembled by **Pramila Choudhary** and **Kathleen Vaughan**, October 2024, Montreal, Canada





Image Credits

Cover: Looking across the Blanda River to the red-roofed buildings of the Icelandic Textile Centre. Photo: Kathleen Vaughan

Page 6: Under the warm brightness of the Icelandic sun, students learning to spin outdoors, with Jóhanna Erla Pálmadóttir (far right). Photo: Pramila Choudhary

Page 7: Iceland Field School cohort 2024. Photo: Ragga Þórsdóttir

Page 8: Between turf, sea, and sky: red-shod feet kick in exuberance. Photo: Sharmistha Kar

Page 9: Hiking silhouettes up on the bluff, with horses, in the midnight sun's golden glow. Photo: Dale Crockett.

Page 10: Sheep and new lambs graze under grey Icelandic skies, in Akur, outside Jóhanna Erla Pálmadóttir's family farm. Photo: Pramila Choudhary

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Page 17: Dale Crockett's cyanotypes-in-process on Borgarsandur, the black sand beach that stretches almost 4 kilometres, in the nearby community of Sauðárkrúkur. Photo: Dale Crockett

Page 18: *Nurturing Nature: Women's Stewardship through Generations*, seen against the green lawn near the Icelandic Textile Museum and across the Blanda River to old Blönduós. Photo: Pramila Choudhary

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Page 26: Double exposure black-and-white film photograph created by two anonymous collaborators from the Iceland Field School and others, in a film-based project facilitated by Gabrielle Lacoste.

Page 27: *Skotthúfa* (left), *Upphlutur* (centre), and artist's research text (on clipboard, right), all by Rebekah Walker. Photo: Rebekah Walker

Page 28: Left image: Left image: Sophie (left) and Isabelle (right) with their stop motion animation on the computer screen, and the felted characters they created to perform in their work. Photo: Renee Kennedy Barnes.

Right image: Still image from *The Selkie and Her Suit*, the stop motion animation by Sophie Desmarais and Isabelle Troxler-DeAcetis

Page 29: Nicole Crozier's *How to Be No One* in camouflage performance. Photo: Nicole Crozier

Page 30: Sabrina Maisonneuve's *Solstice Shadow* collaboration with a rock borrowed from the Blönduós landscape, the sun during the longest day of the year, and needle and machine felting, including reproducing the typical Icelandic weave pattern featured in Ragga Þorsdóttir's authoritative text on the history of Icelandic weaving, *Listin að vefa*. Photo: Sabrina Maisonneuve

Sabrina Maisonneuve, work from *Imprint*. Photo: Sabrina Maisonneuve

Page 32: Pauline B. Lomami, video still.

Page 33: Pauline's video installation, with textile components and aluminum helmet, under the eaves of the Kvennaskólinn's third floor. Photo: Kathleen Vaughan

Page 34: Florence Boucher's site-specific installation along the pathway between the Kvennaskólinn and the Blanda River, including handspun yarn and locally-foraged plant fibres. Photo: Florence Boucher

Page 38: The sunset's orange sky over the Húnaflói or Húna Bay of the Arctic sea, seen from the studio windows. Photo: Pramila Choudhary



