

MA proposal for Applied Arts at the Iceland Academy of the Arts – dept. of design and architecture

Presented at Cirrus teachers meeting in Reykjavík, Iceland January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010  
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# 1

To start a little bit of history

IAA started in 1999 and for the first 2 years design was taught within the dept. of fine arts. In 2001 the dept. of design and architecture established. Program in architecture started in 2002.

To start an MA program seems like a logical thing to do: Why so?

We are the only university to operate in the field of the Arts. We believe Iceland has something unique to offer in the fields of design. We have built up an experience within the school, we must remember at the start there were no teachers with any real experienc. With maybe the exception of graphic design. So the school started with an empty desk, a white sheet of paper which of course is something of a dream situation but also a challenge. Now to put this all into a true context we must bear in mind that Iceland is a society that counts just under 320.000 inhabitants, that live on a land that is 3x the size of Switzerland in area, an island out in the middle of the ocean up by the arctic circle. A nation with a very small industry.

Our economy depends heavily on the fishing industry, which still provides almost 40% of export earnings and employs 8 - 10% of the work force. Manufacturing products (mainly aluminium) count for just over 50%.

Except for hydroelectric and geothermal power, Iceland lacks natural resources. The economy is vulnerable to declining fish stocks and drops in world prices for its main

material exports:. Although the Icelandic economy still relies heavily on fishing, its importance is diminishing as the travel industry and other service, technology and various other industries grow. We have been trying to diversify our economy into manufacturing and service industries in the last decade, including software production, biotechnology, and financial services. The three investment banks collapsed in October 2008 taking down the entire financial sector, stock market, and currency with it.

The social structure of Iceland is very dependent upon the personal car. Icelanders have one of the highest levels of car ownership per capita: on average one car per inhabitant older than 17 years. Most Icelanders travel by car to work, school or other activities.

The so called "renewable sources" provide practically all of Iceland's electricity and over 70% of the nation's total energy, with most of the remainder from imported oil used in transportation and in the fishing fleet. Iceland expects to be energy-independent by 2050, yet Icelanders emit 10.0 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent of greenhouse gases per capita, which is higher than many European nations. This is due to the wide use of personal transport and a large fishing fleet.

## 2

An MA degree in applied arts (design and media) mirrors the distinctive character of a nation and its culture. Every man made object reflects its zeitgeist. It does not matter whether it is a chair or a table, a lettertype or a book. In reality our creative projects reflect to us Europe's history of ideas that develop a local character in its environment. This picture becomes very particular for Iceland due to its geographical location, because of our natural resources, because of our know-how, because of the way we adapt to our conditions from time to time. All major ideas of form within European culture float to Iceland like any driftwood. All major styles (renaissance, baroque, romanticism, modernism, post-modernism) have a starting point, but start drifting. They take on particular appearance in Iceland like they do in all other countries because of local development and execution

An MA program in applied arts (design and media) will be moulded on the particular appearance of Icelandic circumstances. It will be based on research on the local

concepts, re-creations and developments . This particular appearance has in some ways been investigated but needs to be explored a lot deeper. We have in last decades experienced a re-creation of the icelandic visual language because of a strong will for a local identity particularly in connection with the growth of globalism. We can tie this re-creation to the works of a small group of visual artists from the late fifties, early sixties. These artists have had significant effect on the works of among others Ólafur Elíasson and Roni Horn among others. This needs to be investigated a lot further and developed in every aspect.

One of the main goals of the program is to tie together different forces and needs of the society into a convincing context between the natural and the man made environment. It is vital to tie together the circumstances that exist in Iceland with international styles and trends in design and media. Despite good transport connections the location of the country and the lack of natural recourses requires clever management and clever strategies, it requires sustainable approaches, in particular in times as we are experiencing right now in our economy. We need a totally new approach in the remoulding of our society where applied arts will play a major role.

We want to make particular use of the size (or smallness) of the dept. and of the society. We know we can use simple and easy access to key persons both within the school and within the society even in the international global village which makes it easy for us to adapt the program to ongoing changes within the cultural scene and within the society in general. We believe such a flexibility is unique.

### 3

We want to use a society of easy access to the strategy makers, to the executioners of the strategies, build bridges between the metropolis here on the south west coast of Iceland and the dispersed habitations of Iceland. We want to connect with the various University centres around Iceland, the various innovation centers around Iceland, and of course the different icelandic centers such as the textile center, ghost centers, sorcery and withcraft centers, sheepcenters, whale centers, arctic fox center, sea ice center, etc. etc. globally and locally But most importantly we are

convinced that the fields of the fishing industry, of the icelandic tourism, the energy industry are unexplored for us designers. And together they make the most important economic impact in our present society.

Icelandic culture has its roots in Norse and Celtic traditions. Icelandic literature is popular, in particular the sagas and eddas which were written during the High and Late Middle Ages. Icelanders place relatively great importance on independence and self-sufficiency;

Bring to the front the particularities of applied arts in Iceland. They incorporate a particular methodology for pluralistic problem solving. This means research, analysis, ideas, experiments and explorations, execution, blessing of ideas and atmosphere of ideas as well as using creativity and intuition, the talent to see the unexpected yet the possible for innovation and transformation. It is our desire to formulate new and stronger connections and ties with other departments, professions and institutions both locally and internationally. By strengthening research tied education and by building up a stronger research unit within the field of design the dept. intends to strengthen its voice even further within the society, create a forum for theoretical approach and to build up a theoretical and critical research unit in the fields of applied arts – design and media.

## 4

The idea is to combine intensive theory and research seminars with rigorous studio classes where students are exposed to advanced exploration in their respective disciplines. The program admits a limited number of students each year to the program in applied arts – design and media. Students learn to locate their own practices within broader fields of inquiry through writing projects, critiques of studio work and presentations.

The main aim is of course to create a better society. The profession must gain respect that is based on sound professional and academic working methods where

we want to encourage everyone involved to take an ethical stand in all projects.

The MA will give us a much needed platform to cooperate with the industries, the local authorities, the government and the whole society since we have so far not been able to practice research on a large academic scale. Of course this also means we shall be able to participate in joint international programs for example with our Cirrus friends.

We intend to work with 12 students every year in our MA program. We would like the program to be a trans-disciplinary program where the meaning of the prefix of is beyond, through, across or over. (*inter* meaning *within or among*).

## Career prospects

*Economic meltdown. eco disaster. globalization. obesity. and a number of other concerns all offer dramatic confirmation that we need new ideas and new ways of thinking and doing. Perhaps we are entering the age where finally we can move beyond theory and meta-management?*

*Whatever the scenario that troubles or inspires- you are the best solution. The investment that you make in yourself is the capital that your post MA career will be built upon.*

*The future is literally yours to make and this is what our students tend to do.*