

# GRÍMUR

Gøran Ohldieck & Kjetil Berge  
Curated by Dr. Ynda Eldborg



# GRÍMUR: Introduction

Dr. Ynda Eldborg, Curator

**Nineteen eighty-three was an important year in the culture and history of LGBTQIA+ people around the world. It was the year that the first cases of HIV appeared in Iceland, scientists having only identified the AIDS virus two years previous. Hidden dangers lurked in the shadows, while in town squares and on streetcorners, the forces of hate gathered momentum, wielding the Bible and ignorance as their weapons.**

In 1983, it had been five years since the founding of Samtökin '78, Iceland's National Queer Organization, and Icelandic society had yet to regain its balance. Although punk, new wave, and rock 'n roll had been disrupting the traditional gender binary for the better part of a decade, in Iceland, those ideas did not reach much beyond a progressive subset of young people, despite the international visibility of artists such as David Bowie, Boy George, and the feminist punk band The Slits on full display.

Looking to the realm of photography, Robert Mapplethorpe had risen to prominence by 1980, and Sunil Gupta spent the 1970s photographing gay men in New York. One might also mention Nan Goldin and her photos of queer people in New York and Boston. It is also important to cite film director Jack Smith whose work is of a piece with the photography of Norwegian visual artists Kjetil Berge and Gøran Ohldieck.

Part of this international melting pot of queer artists emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, Gøran and Kjetil came to Iceland in 1983 to stage their show *Masker* at Nordic House, works that were very much a part of a rich queer discourse and aesthetics.





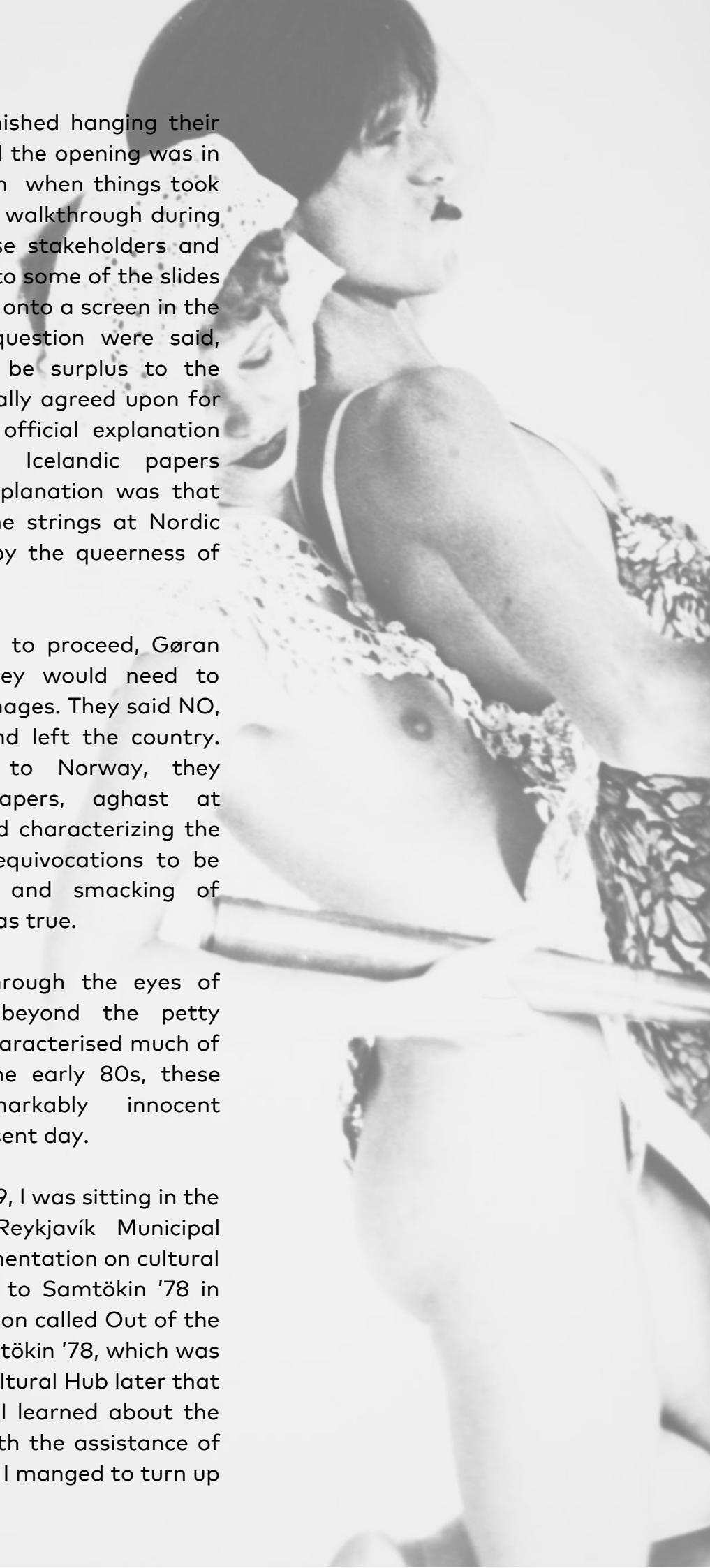
But what happened next?

Well, Gøran and Kjetil finished hanging their work at Nordic House and the opening was in full swing on January 15th when things took an unexpected turn. On a walkthrough during the opening, Nordic House stakeholders and their guests took offense to some of the slides that were being projected onto a screen in the gallery. The images in question were said, among other things, to be surplus to the works that had been initially agreed upon for the show. This was the official explanation that was published in Icelandic papers afterwards. The other explanation was that the people who pulled the strings at Nordic House were threatened by the queerness of the works.

If they wanted the show to proceed, Gøran and Kjetil were told they would need to remove the undesirable images. They said NO, packed up their work, and left the country. When they got back to Norway, they contacted local newspapers, aghast at Iceland's provincialism and characterizing the Nordic House director's equivocations to be prejudiced, homophobic, and smacking of censorship—all of which was true.

Viewed in retrospect, through the eyes of anyone who can see beyond the petty Christian morality that characterised much of the Western world in the early 80s, these works enter a remarkably innocent conversation with our present day.

One day, back in early 2019, I was sitting in the reading room of the Reykjavík Municipal Archives looking for documentation on cultural activities and art related to Samtökin '78 in preparation for an exhibition called Out of the Parentheses: Art and Samtökin '78, which was to be held in Grófarhús Cultural Hub later that summer. That was when I learned about the Masker exhibition and, with the assistance of the staff at Nordic House, I managed to turn up additional sources.



Gøran and Kjetil were also generous in sharing their experiences. It was a real windfall when they accepted my invitation to take part in the Grófarhús exhibition and thus did we lay the foundation for establishing their place in the history of queer art in Iceland.

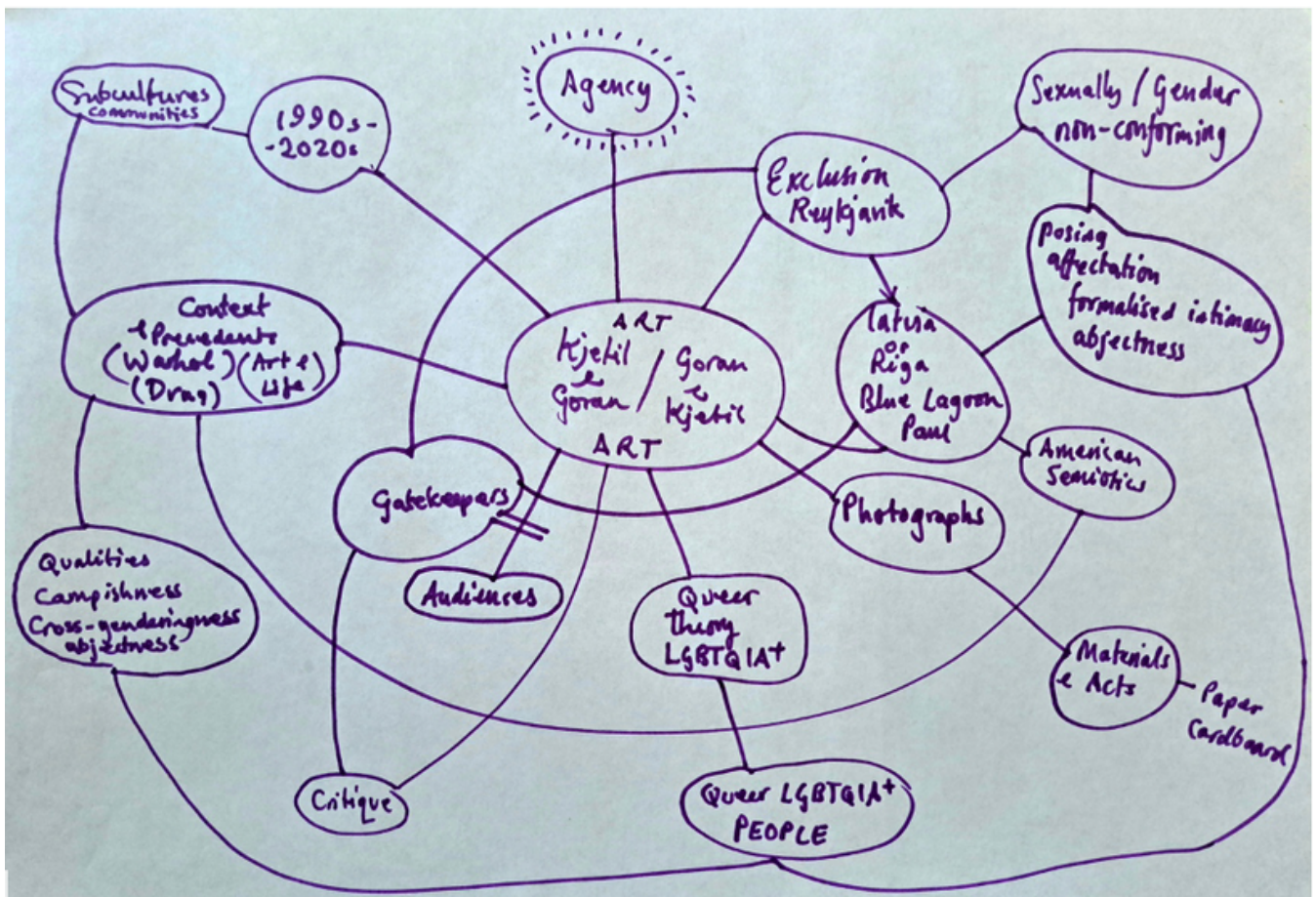
Part of our agreement was that they would be invited to restage *Masker* in collaboration with Nordic House, as the original show did not happen in 1983. I spoke to Nordic House director Sabina Westerholm about this important project in the autumn of 2022, which she was very open to, and by early 2023, the exhibition was confirmed.

Now, its time has come. Finally—after 40 years of waiting, and on the 40th anniversary of an exhibition that did not happen. The queer community still faces fear, threats, murder, beatings, and horrors that now are first and foremost directed at trans and nonbinary people. As such, Gøran and Kjetil's work still makes a vitally important contribution to public discourse on art, queer aesthetics, art history, and censorship.

What remains when we look back on this affair is not merely brazen censorship, prejudice, and homophobia, but also a decided lack of understanding about art and queer aesthetics, as well as the marginalization of queer people. This particularly applies to those who challenge the gender binary and disrupt established social norms, as can clearly be seen in the works that now adorn the walls of the Nordic House in this long-overdue show.

Lastly, I would like to thank both Gøran and Kjetil for their work and their participation, Nordic House director Sabina Westerholm for her invaluable support of this show, as well as the exhibition team, volunteers, technical staff, and other employees who have contributed to this endeavour.





Mind Map, 2023, Paul Ryan

# The Pictures Generation

Kjetil Berge, 05-19-2023

Perhaps the director of the Nordic House who stopped the slide projection Grimur, had a bad day, or feared losing her job after the exhibition opening, that cold January morning in 1983? She had a radical change of heart, at one point definitely. Neither the director nor anybody else had mentioned any concerns about the works' content as we were hanging the show. But when asked why the slide series weren't running that morning, the director said it was too homosexual.

Well, I have just learned that Gøran Ohldieck and I are of "the Pictures Generation", the ones that had grown up with television, therefore we were, in terms of homosexuality, perhaps not sub-textual in our work, but completely out. And at this time, the beginning of the Aids epidemic, this was too much. Manifestations from the margins can easily become 'too much' if you represent or have to represent the majority.

I met Gøran in Bergen on return to Norway in 1979 after my failed effort to save the world. He was way more entertaining and communicative than the people in the cooperative I had just left. Talking to him and his friends, the conversations and anecdotes flowed, and showed a world view, far more accepting than the one I had just tried to advocate. It made me go for my original plan of becoming an artist.

I rented a room in Gøran's parents' house. We started collaborating doing photographs. Some were performative and staged by us, and some were catching the incidental performances of chance encounters. The photos were taken in London, Hamburg, Budapest, Warsaw and Bergen. We printed the negatives ourselves and rinsed the prints in the bathtub. We applied for exhibitions and got shows in Norway, Germany and eventually Iceland.

Gøran Ohldieck was very generous with his knowledge and had courage and ambition for the work. The Nordic House was a prestigious venue and the largest showing of our work so far, and very exciting. We brought approximately 300 photos, of these 175 slides and the rest black and white prints and texts. The texts are mostly gone and what remains of our work is in the collection of KODE, Art Museums and Composer Homes in Bergen, Norway.

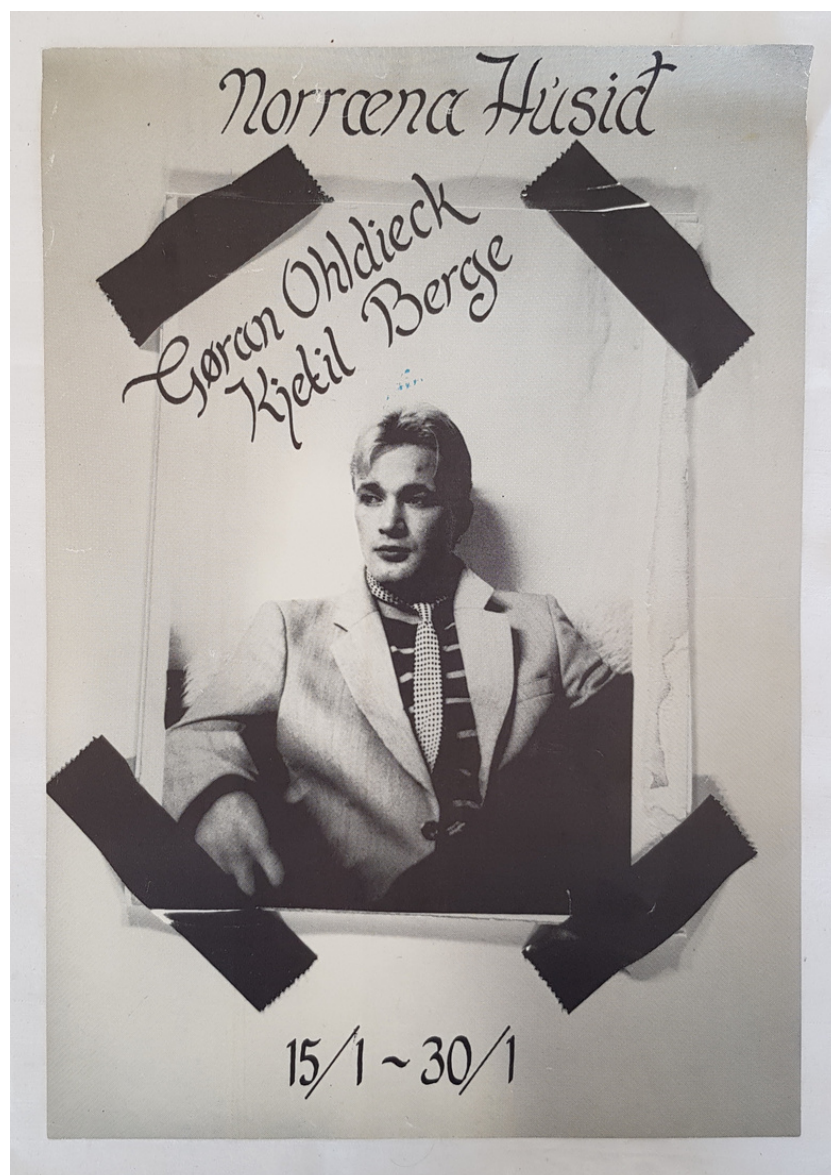


We didn't use the definition, but our approach was definitely camp:

In everything from staging, to selecting images and calculating printing-exposure. As people on the outside of the middle average, we celebrated the mistakes and slip-ups, i.e. the signs of truth as we saw them.

Our communal ground was low camp. And we searched with humour and irony, for the hidden message, and where waiting for when it could be snapped.

Christopher Isherwood said: "You can't camp about something you don't take seriously."





# Biographies

Gøran Ohldieck did printmaking and drawings when I met him, and had even published a book. I was doing printmaking and batik.

We both have continued with printmaking. Staging and impromptu catching of incidents, has stayed with me both in photo and video. There has been much pleasure gleaned from art-making, sculpture, installations, relational projects and collaborations. The opening event of ALYANS, a dance platform and stage made for the 9th edition of the Havana Biennial and all the contributions made, has stayed with me. As has the project Breaking the Ice, Driving from London to Kirkenes , Norway via Russia exchanging ice creams for conversation about the weather. Currently I am crocheting rescue blankets in London, and running my own vernacular art festival in Lofoten, Norway. And I am this years' curator of The Arctic Moving Image and Film festival, AMIFF in Harstad, Norway titled Bend It Maybe. It opens mid October.

Gøran Ohldieck took a step further with international adventures when he started the Foundation 3.14 with Sigrid Szetu and Jan Erik Willgohs. The Foundation became the vanguard of art exchanges, bringing artists from Mongolia and China and many other places to Norway. It provided a Norwegian audience with exposure to cultures outside of the mainstream, at a time when this was very difficult. The Foundation 3.14 also brought huge opportunities for Norwegian artists to show their work in other parts of the world. The organisation continues in Bergen as Kunsthall 3.14. Gøran Ohldieck now lives in Lithuania and keeps "finding" works by the forgotten artist Dogu Bankov and arranges continuous large manifestations of the artist's work. M.K. Čiurlionis Museum of Art by Kaunas Picture Gallery is amongst others, great supporters of his practise.

Kjetil Berge, 05-19-2023



NORRÆNA HÚSIÐ  
POHJOLAN TALO  
NORDENS HUS

- G R Í M U R -

KJETIL BERGE og GØRAN OHLIECK frá Noregi sýna ljósmyndir  
í sýningarsölum Norræna hússins 15. - 30. janúar 1983.

Sýningin verður opnuð laugardaginn 15. janúar kl. 16:00.  
Við bjóðum yður velkomin.

N O R R Æ N A H Ú S I Ð

Gildir fyrir tvo.





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10.08.2023 - 30.09.2023

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