

Thor Stiefel

T.O.R.A

Portfolio
UMPRUM
spring
2021

Bio

Born March Reykjavik Iceland 1967.

BA Fine Arts Iceland University of the Arts

First solo exhibition Reykjavik 1991.

Member of The Association of Icelandic Visual Artists (SÍM) and The Living Art Museum Iceland (NYLO)

Working with the current questions: Can we really get it? and what is real?



Artist Statement

The only Concept in my Art is that there is no Concept in my Art

I make Art for myself, to understand myself because I want to

I was here – I made this!

It's all about size
Guash, pencil on paper
100x70cm.



For several years now I have been occupied with gender issues: Gender roles, gender norms, gender queerness. In my art I have been interested to investigate where the line lies between masculinity and femininity. This I have annexed into the issue of sexuality and the cultural norms and acceptability involved.

This semester I attended a class taught by Zuzana Štefková called "Conflicts and coalitions". This class was focused on feminism, motherhood, queerness and activism. Following these investigations I stumbled upon a somewhat forgotten gemstone in art history, namely Lynda Benglis' advertisement that appeared in Artforum magazine in 1974. I wanted to pay tribute to this act of art and appropriate it in my own narrative.

My aim is to look into the change in normativity that has occurred since this famous ad was posted by Lynda. I am old enough to remember this ad although being quite young at the time. I remember vividly how the attitude was toward this picture. It was regarded as pornographic and merely a cheap trick to gain attention by some. It was shocking and provoking. Although the picture can easily be read as Benglis was pointing out that in order to make it in the art world one has to have a penis and the bigger the better and as such it is a splendid statement and brilliantly set up as an artwork, it was too much for some - too graphic and provocative.

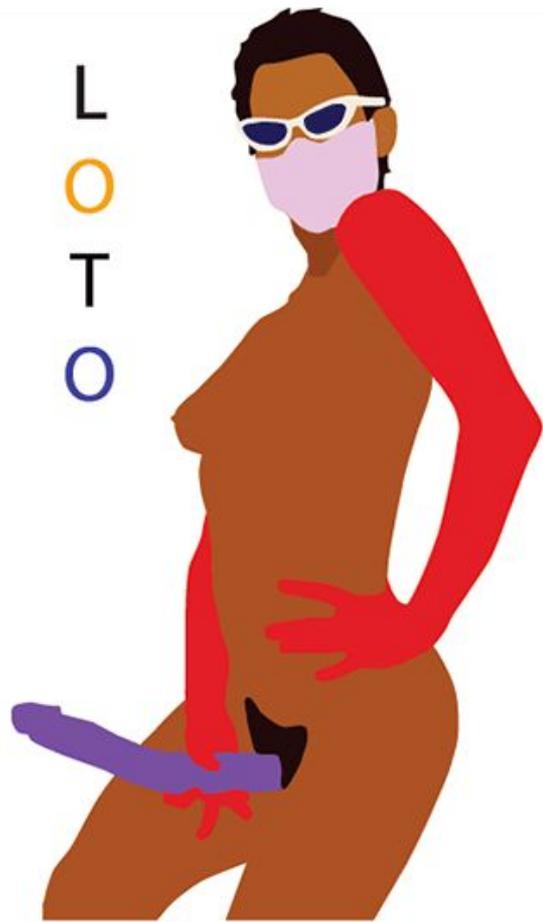
A lot of water has passed under the bridge since then. One crucial thing is that there has been a porn-revolution. Porn has been, to an extent anyway, normalized. One click away everybody has access to porn in the comfort of their living room. People are selling access to their sex and sex life through social media such as OnlyFans.com. When I was growing up in the era when Lynda posted her ad in the Artforum magazine, sex, sexuality and masturbation was a taboo. I remember following a serious discussion about female sexuality and the fact that women did indeed masturbate. All of this has changed dramatically with strong feminism, openness about sexuality, equality to all regardless of sexual orientation and we all know the strong current toward equality towards the LGBT+ communities around the world.

Lynda Benglis' ad would probably not have as huge of an impact today as it did back in the day. In all likelihood it would be but a one meme on social media. People are less prudent today about nudity and sexual orientation. In fact it has come to that when I show by painting based on Lynda's image some have asked casually if it was a depiction of a shemale.

I feel like I have reached a new cycle elevated one round up. I am rendering an image of a woman with a dildo between her thighs. The artist did this as an act of rebellion and a powerful statement about the inequality within the art world and in the world in general for that matter. However, the current normativity and acceptance of persons that are women, but have male sexual organs, is at the time and place as it is no big deal and my rendering of the act is in fact mistaken for a trans person. And it is not really turning any heads - what a change of attitude and cultural acceptance! This fascinates me. I am in fact having a conversation with art history, addressing current social issues all the while I am celebrating the openness, acceptance and increased human right of queer people.

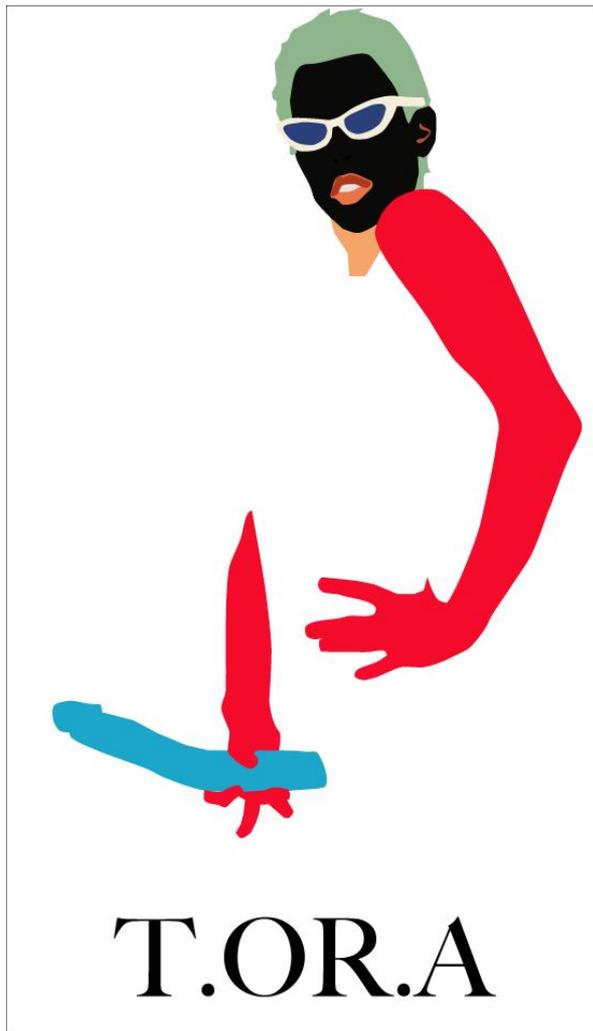
During the semester I have rendered several images based on Lynda Benglis' ad. I aim to utilize the image as an icon - make it into an icon in the realm of Mickey Mouse. I will continue to render it in various mediums, make it large and small - in fact I want to make it instantly recognizable as a logo.



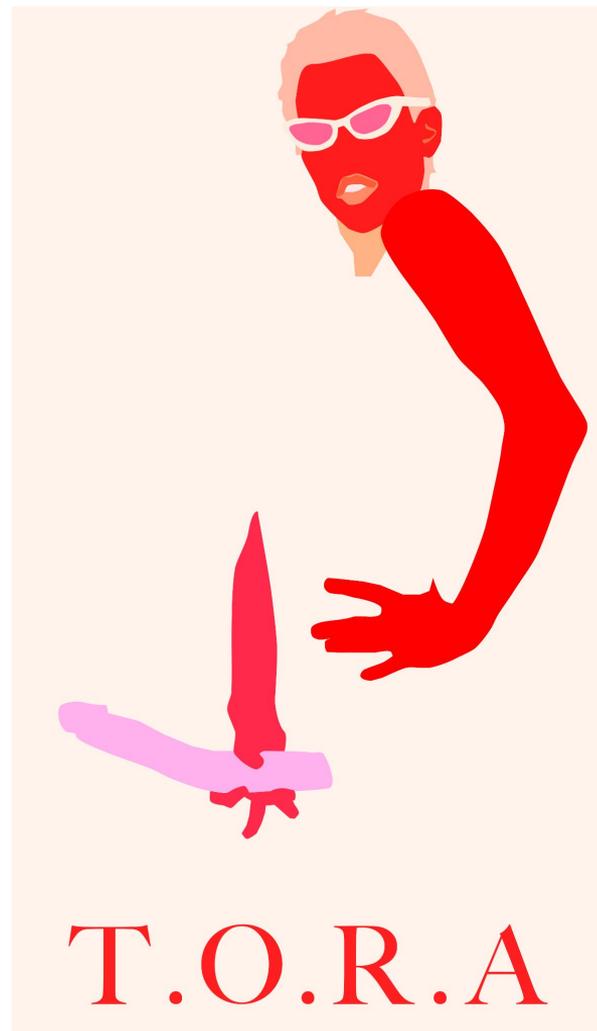


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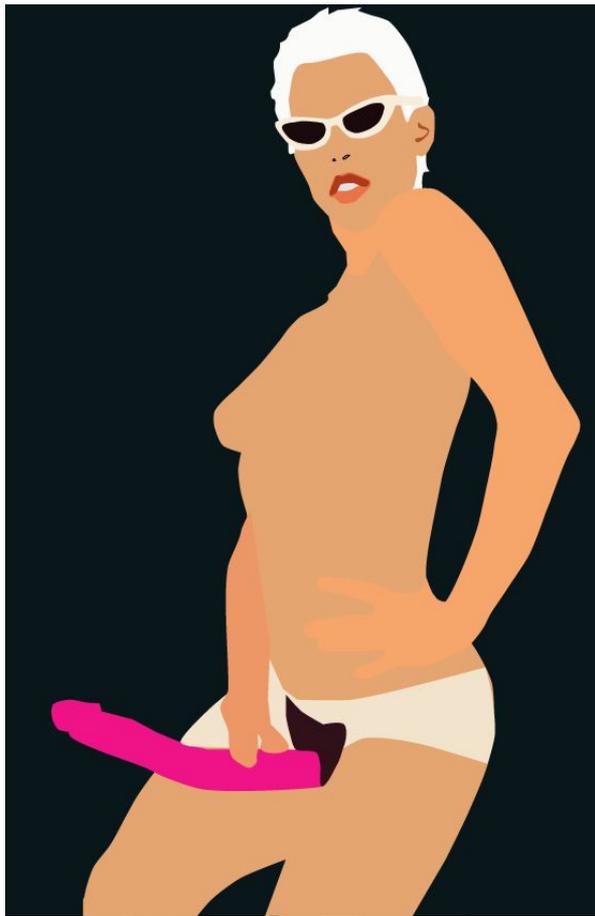
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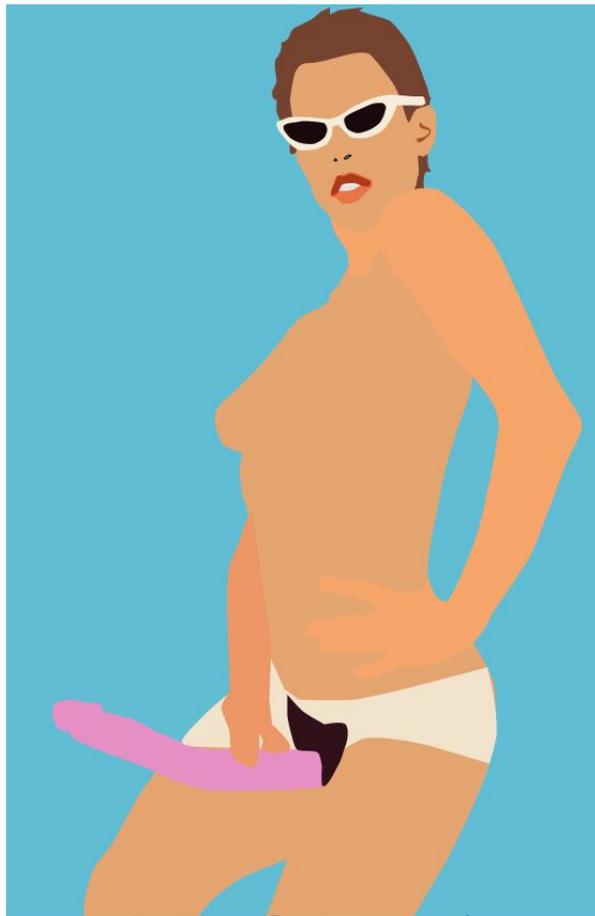
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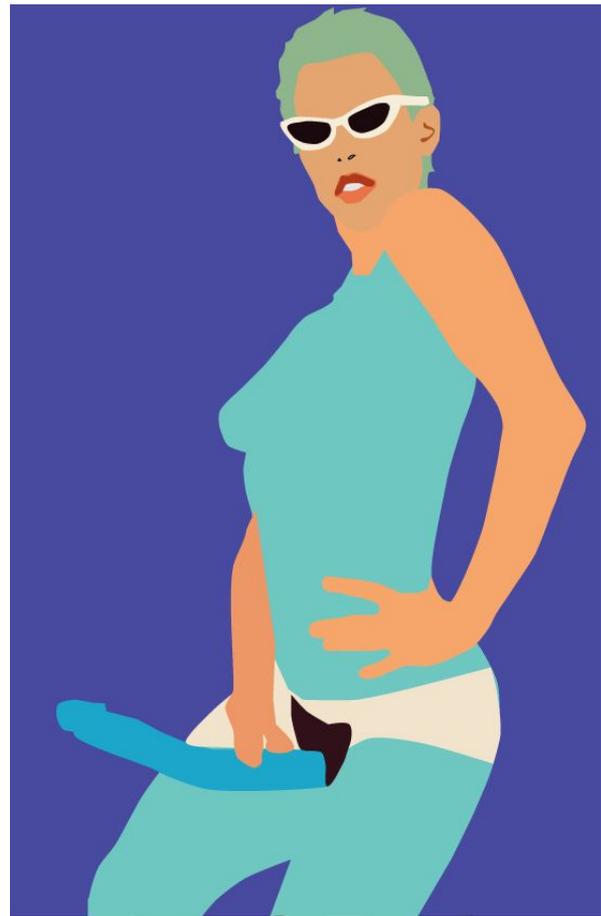
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Being an international student in a foreign country I am impelled to study local history. Prague and The Czech Republic has a fascinating long history, full of conflicts and coalitions.

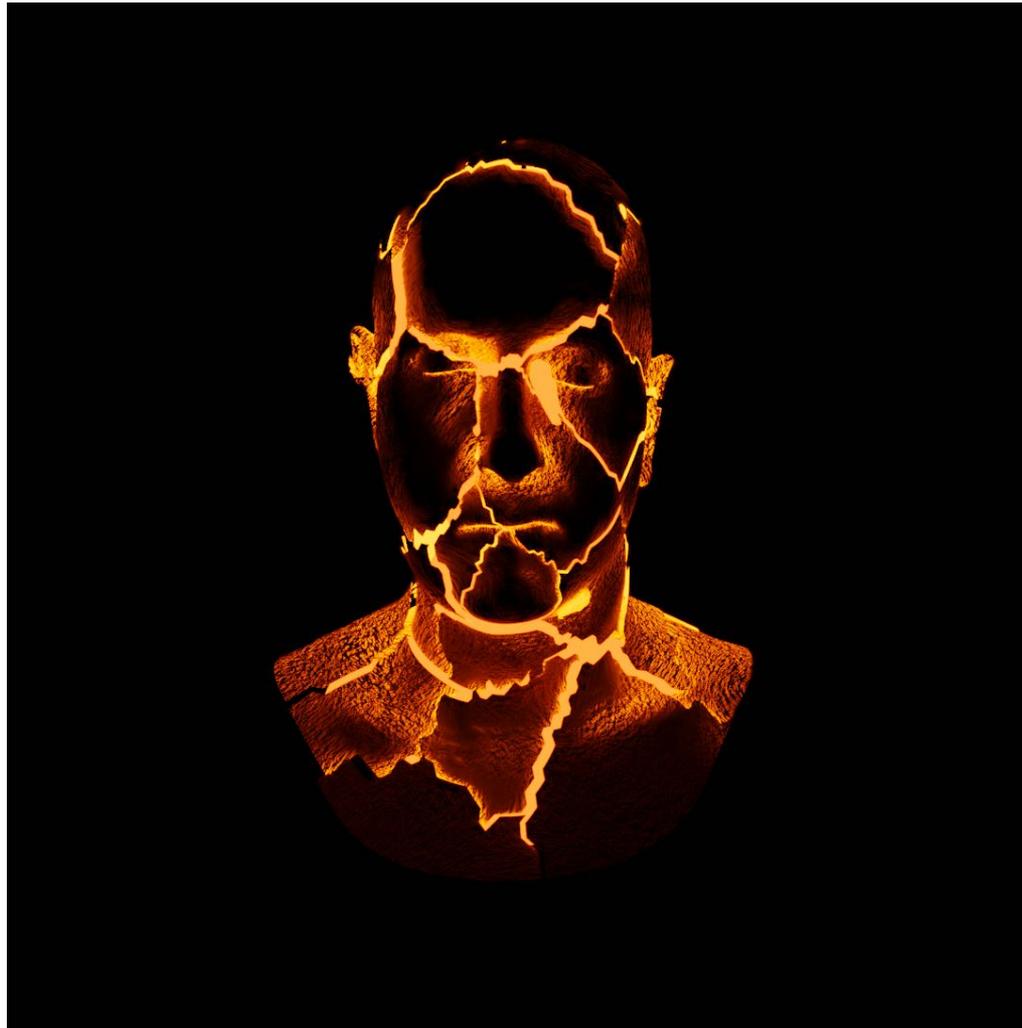
One of the most striking and horrifying events in recent history of the Czech people is the act of self-immolation by Jan Palach. Last semester I was working with fire and ice. My project was to emulate these elements in a 3D rendered world. The fire element was to address the fire deep down in Earth's core and render it as lava. Little did I know that only weeks after I finished the project a volcanic eruption commenced on the doorsteps of my city Reykjavik. I went there to experience first hand the enormous power unleashed from the depth of our Earth. How small one feels in front of burning rocks!

I wanted to picture a man made of burning rock - lava. I wanted to pay tribute to the desperate act of Jan Palach but also to honor Jan's strength and commitment.

This is a work in progress.







Tíminn og vatnið

Tíminn og vatnið is a name of one of the most beloved poems in icelandic literature. It means “The time and the water” by the poet Steinn Steinarr.



Still from “Tíminn og vatnið”. Video, dur. 10 min. 19 sec. 2021.

I have been moving into time-based art and am pointing my artistic research into the phenomenon of time. As one gets older (at least in my case) I feel that time is running faster and faster. Christmas feels like every other month now, I just moved into my new flat but in fact it is almost a decade and a half ago. I am also increasingly aware of the fact that I have limited time here on Earth and it is running out.

Time - a fascinating subject.

The famous poem has touched almost every Icelander. It is strong and powerful like water, yet fragile also as water.

Water - a fascinating subject.

In 2019 an Icelandic writer and an environmental activist Andri Snær Magnason published a book about the challenges ahead regarding climate change. He chose the title "On Time and Water" referring to the famous poem by Steinn Steinarr. In his book Andri Snær is covering among others the issue of diminishing Iceland's glaciers. The glaciers are melting at an alarming rate, receding one hundred meters or so a year.

In this video piece I am investigating time. My method is to depict a dripping water from a melting ice. Gravity and temperature drive the narrative in this work. The ripples are to me a representative of time. Time has perhaps not been interpreted as waves, but to me it is evident when looking at ripples on a water surface. I am fascinated - mesmerized - looking at ripples traveling across a water surface, emanating from the center. This is a piece about time depicted as water. As the piece progresses the droplets become scarcer. Also it is rendered with living daylight. The hue changes as clouds occur and vanish in the sky - water in the sky travelling above us. As the droplets become scarcer I want us to think about the vanishing glaciers and, potential, future water scarcities.

These two life essentials - Water and Time along with gravity trigger the events in this piece. To accentuate the movement I take the water droplet and have it trigger an audio event. The overlaying audio event is manipulated into an echo - something that also gives the feel of time, as well as something running out; disappearing into the future.

<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/555622702>