

## A Letter to the Future / EKO 8

*A Letter to the Future* is an exhibition of the EKO 8 triennial, thematically evolved from a memorial plaque by the people of Iceland, marking a specific moment in time and the loss of the Okjökull glacier in Borgarfjörður. The words read: "Okjökull is the first Icelandic glacier to lose its status as a glacier. In the next 200 years, all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path. This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it." Championed by the Icelandic writer Andri Snær Magnason together with geologist Oddur Sigurðsson.<sup>i</sup>

It is a powerful plea. The eulogy to the glacier throws us forward into the future. It encourages us to use our imagination. These words speak to us in our precarious present. 2020 started with terrible forest fires in Australia (with conservative estimates of a 143 million mammals lost<sup>ii</sup>); it is now a year shadowed by the social and political impact of the Corona Virus pandemic.

Why now and why this time? While not created to be an artwork, the words on the plaque in August 2019 captured media attention, generated solidarity and resulted in community action. Magnason's words explore the implications of change, and the long-term ramifications of no human change. As many conservationists, activists, and writers note — there is a growing awareness that geological time is catching up with human time in unprecedented and unimaginable ways. "Earth's mightiest forces have forsaken geological time and now change on a human scale. Changes that previously took a hundred thousand years now happen in one hundred. Such speed is mythological; it affects all life on Earth, affects the roots of everything we think, choose, produce, and believe."<sup>iii</sup> It may be said we need new stories and new myths to allow us to comprehend this new predicament. Artists, in the widest sense, have a fundamental role to play in telling these stories.

Presented in May 2021 will be an assembly of international and Slovenian artists all alert to the question raised by the Letter. There will be screenings of experimental films from the mid 1960s that foretold the impact of industrial pollution together with contemporary observations on the extinction of animal species. The exhibition will develop along several interrelated themes: ecological awareness, consciousness raising projects, and propositions of the assembly.

Radiating themes for the full presentation will explore collective memory, haunted and enchanted spaces, parallel worlds of indigenous knowledge alongside practical and imaginative journeys. It will use historical images and archives from the site as a working textile factory, drawing on oral history and personal testimony. Sound and film installations of an expanded natural world will be presented alongside projects that address species extinction.

As part of EKO 8, the exhibition *A Letter to the Future* is also a plea to think beyond the present. To bring together works that span generations and expand our understanding. The plaque commemorating the loss of the glacier throws us forward into the future and reminds us of our shared past. We examine if it is possible today for an assembly of artists' voices, visions, and works in a place where thousands of workers once wove textiles, to

entwine profound ecological questions. Which observations of a broader community contribute to a better understanding of that which unites us and binds us together?

**Alessandro Vincentelli**, Artistic Director of EKO 8 / International Triennial Ecology and Art

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<sup>i</sup> Andri Snaer Magnason (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/14/glaciers-iceland-country-loss-plaque-climate-crisis>), accessed 15 August 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> The Australian bushfires in early 2020 consumed 143 million mammals. (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jul/28/almost-3-billion-animals-affected-by-australian-megafires-report-shows-aoe>), accessed 16 August 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> Andri Snaer Magnason, *On Time and Water*, Serpent's Tail, UK, 2020, p. 9.