

Icelandic cool comes to Melbourne: NGV presents Ragnar Kjartansson's first-ever Australian exhibition

Ragnar Kjartansson: Mercy | 26 June – 4 October 2026 | NGV International | Ticketed



10 March 2026: In 2026, the NGV presents the first ever Australian major solo exhibition of Icelandic artist, **Ragnar Kjartansson**, heralded as one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary art today. Drawing on a multitude of references from literature, cinema and pop music, Kjartansson's work offers a critical yet comedic commentary on contemporary life and culture.

Opening 26 June 2026 at NGV International in Melbourne, Australia, the world-premiere exhibition, *Ragnar Kjartansson: Mercy*, features eight new and recent video works that combine music, humour and spectacle. Striking a

balance between comedic irony and sincerity, Kjartansson's captivating video works explore themes of love, melancholy, masculinity and repetition – all with a toe-tapping soundtrack.

Key works in the exhibition include his acclaimed nine-screen installation *The Visitors*, 2012, which was named by *The Guardian* as the best artwork of the twenty-first century. Filmed at Rokeby mansion in upstate New York, the work features the artist and various musicians from the Reykjavik music scene, performing a song with lyrics written by the artist Ásdís Sif Gunnarsdóttir. Each room of the ramshackle mansion hosts a different musician; a drummer in the kitchen, a banjo-player in the library, Kjartansson on guitar in the bath. Filmed in real-time, the work presents a melancholic house party that the artist has described as a 'feminine nihilistic gospel song'.

The exhibition will also present the Australian premiere of the artist's most recent work *Sunday Without Love*, 2025, a single channel video work inspired by a postcard on the artist's fridge featuring people wearing matching folk costumes in a nameless, bucolic location. In response, Kjartansson and a cast of nine other performers are dressed in non-descriptive European folk costumes and sing the phrase 'You must learn to live without love'. Drawing on classical pastoral painting and traditional romantic ballads, *Sunday Without Love* is a painting-as-moving image work that forces a confluence of references into sonic and visual harmony.

The juxtaposition of both tragedy and humour is another thread through Kjartansson's work. In the ongoing video work *Me and My Mother*, every five years Kjartansson asks his mother, the acclaimed Icelandic actor Guðrún Ásmundsdóttir, to spit on him. The resulting moving images capture dramatic pauses, sideways glances, grimaces and stifled laughter. The work is a video portrait of a relationship between mother and son, over time, each acting out their tragi-comic part.

Alongside *Ragnar Kjartansson: Mercy*, the NGV presents the FREE children's exhibition *Children's Play: Ragnar Kjartansson* – the artist's first ever exhibition for children. As the son of an actor and a theatre director, Kjartansson grew up surrounded by rehearsals, scripts and backstage activity. This world-premiere exhibition invites young visitors into a playful and creative space inspired by the theatre. Kids can be an audience member, an actor or a creator, inventing and performing stories with friends and family on stage.

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Taking inspiration from the theatre tradition of 'dinner and a show', the exhibition also features activity tables with lavish banquet-style displays of food. Arranged like still-life compositions, these displays invite children to draw what entices them or perhaps what they imagine they would like to eat. And for dessert: soft, colourful upholstered cushions, perfect for small hands to stack and turn into topsy-turvy cake sculptures.

Kjartansson has had major solo exhibitions at the Reykjavik Art Museum; the Barbican, London; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen; and has represented Iceland at the Venice Biennale. In recognition of his contributions to Icelandic art, Kjartansson was honoured as the 2016 Reykjavik City Artist.

Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV said: 'This exhibition, the first of its kind in Australia, shares the idiosyncratic worldview of Ragnar with Australian audiences for the very first time. With tongue firmly in cheek, his works have truly captured the zeitgeist with their original combination of music, wit and performance.'

ABOUT RAGNAR KJARTANSSON

Ragnar Kjartansson (b 1976) works across video installations, performances, drawings, and paintings that draw on interconnected historical and cultural references often rooted in the comedy and tragedy of classical theatre. Kjartansson engages in the tension between beauty and banality, often using durational, repetitive performance as a form of exploration. He has held major solo shows including exhibitions at the Museo Tamayo, Mexico City; Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek; the De Pont Museum, Tilburg; the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Reykjavik Art Museum; the Barbican Centre, London; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Park, Washington D.C.; the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal; the Palais de Tokyo, Paris; the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich; the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; and the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; among others. Kjartansson participated in *The Encyclopedic Palace* at the Venice Biennale in 2013, Manifesta 10 in St. Petersburg, Russia in 2014, and he represented Iceland at the 2009 Venice Biennale. The artist received the 2019 Ars Fennica Award and was the recipient of the 2015 Artes Mundi's Derek Williams Trust Purchase Award and Performa's 2011 Malcolm McLaren Award.

Ragnar Kjartansson: Mercy and Children's Play: Ragnar Kjartansson will be on display from 26 June – 4 October 2026 at NGV International, St Kilda Road, Melbourne. Further information is available via the NGV website: [NGV.MELBOURNE](https://www.ngv.gov.au/exhibitions/ragnar-kjartansson-mercy-and-childrens-play)

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Images:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/q3k4zichz8tmgl0alou1b/ALm0_VgCXqO4_xilajcZfpM?rikey=pnbu9w3lwf2f2uxttcm368gsx&st=v686x5nu&dl=0

Image Caption: Ragnar Kjartansson *Me and My Mother* 2015, 2015 Single-channel video with sound Duration: 20:25 minutes © Ragnar Kjartansson; Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik

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