

Ragnar Kjartansson

The Visitors, 2012



Ragnar Kjartansson, *The Visitors*, 2012 (still); nine-channel HD video projection with sound, 64 min., di-
variable; jointly owned by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and The Museum of Modern Art,
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Elísabet Davids, courtesy the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York, and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik



What a beautiful place to seek shelter, gather strength, and enjoy the company of friends.

A two-hundred-year-old landmark in upstate New York—a romantic setting of bohemian décor and seductive atmospheres—plays host to *The Visitors*, a title inspired by ABBA's final album before their breakup. Ragnar Kjartansson's band is an eclectic group. Eight musicians begin to

play, each in a separate room (with the artist himself naked in the bathtub), recording their separate tracks in sync in a single continuous session as others play and sing on the porch. Mansion turns living museum; film set becomes multitrack recording studio.

Music can arouse desires and emotions but it can also offer a retreat and safe haven in moments of despair. *Once again I fall into / My feminine ways*—the song’s lyrics, from a poem by Kjartansson’s ex-wife, Ásdís Sif Gunnarsdóttir, revel in melancholy. With each refrain, emotions go deeper, building dense layers of past feeling, and a collective lament. On the nine projection screens in this immersive video installation, threads of intimate views are woven into the lingering melody.

Incessantly repeating the same song signals a moment of emotional catharsis. The hour-long psychedelic loop slowly drifts toward a last movement, a gathering of friends and a communal walk out into the mansion’s open pastures, leaving this viewer with a sense of longing unfulfilled.

— Rudolf Frieling

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360° View

Scenes From the Production of Ragnar Kjartansson’s *The Visitors*



Scene from the production of *The Visitors*, 2012; photo: Elísabet Davids

