

Rekaviður - Driftwood, a Living Archive



Synopsis

Driftwood is omnipresent in Iceland's history and culture. It plays a central role in the Nordic creation myth and was one of the most important resources for centuries, without which the island most probably could not have been settled permanently. Driftwood is a true globetrotter that hitchhikes with sea ice thousands of kilometres across the Arctic. The driftwood on Iceland's coasts originates from boreal forests in Eurasia and North America and represents a living archive—during its travels it has logged detailed Arctic climate records since the end of the last ice age 12,000 years ago. Driftwood reveals the climate conditions at the tree's home forest as well as changes in oceanic currents, sea ice coverage and sea levels. But while old driftwood is still piling up on Icelandic beaches, new arrivals have decreased significantly over the past decades. A recent study concludes that due to predicted sea-ice loss under anthropogenic global warming Iceland's driftwood supply will terminate by 2060.

The aim of our ongoing artistic research project „Rekaviður“ is to raise awareness for climate change in the Arctic region via the journey of driftwood as well as for driftwood's vital role in Iceland's history and culture. The project consists of an exhibition, a project website and a 45min documentary film about our driftwood research.

„Rekaviður – Driftwood, a living Archive“ was initially conceived by [Kollektiv Lichtung](#) and is realized in partnership with [NES Artist Residency in Skagaströnd](#) and in cooperation with the [University Centre of the Westfjords](#). The project was funded by [Loftslagssjóður – The Icelandic Climate Fund](#).

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Documentary Film „Iceland’s Stranded Forest“

- > 45min documentary about our driftwood research
 - > featuring interviews with Valgeir Benediktsson, Halldór Björnsson, Patricia Ann Burk, Catherine Chambers, Ólafur Eggertsson, Björn Gu ðmundsdóttir, Lísabet Guðmundsdóttir, Alexandra Jóhannesdóttir, Kristín Ósk Jónasdóttir, Jón Jónson, Hans Linderholm, Erlendur Finnbogi Magnússon, Christine Pamer, Kristin Schram, Valtyr Sigurðsson, Aðalsteinn Sigurgeirsson, Þórunn Þorsteinsdóttir, Laura Alice Watt
- > **Screeners:** vimeo.com/641157826, pw: RekaviPrev2021



Exhibition

- > can be adapted according to available space
- > combines informative texts on different aspects of driftwood with multimedia art works and various driftwood objects
- > is available in Icelandic, English and German
- > the following pages include exhibition views and present a preview of the exhibition's modules



Exhibition Tour & Film Screenings

2024

> August 3 – October 13 || Exhibition and Film Screening at Haus der Wissenschaft (House of Science), Bremen

2023

> November 1-10 || Exhibition at Berlin Science Week, Berlin/Germany

> June 7-11 || Exhibition at Environmental Photography Festival "horizonte", Zingst/Germany

> June 9 || Film Screening at Festival "else! Treibhaus", Múnnerstadt/Germany

> April 14 || Film Screening, Q&A at "Café Scientifique" by Mayday Hills Art Society, Beechworth/Australia

> March 3 – April 2 || "Into the Blue", EMOP Berlin – European Month of Photography, Exhibition at Neue Schule für Fotografie, Berlin

2022

> December 8 || Film Screening, Q&A at the Symposium "Stories from the Crevice Communities" by the Creative Practice Circle (CPC), Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga/Australia

> November 19 || Film Screening & Talk with Dawn Elise Mooney (Archeologist, University of Stavanger) and Þröstur Eysteinnsson (Director, Skógræktin) at Cultural Center Herðubreið, Seyðisfjörður/Iceland

> October 29-31 || Exhibition at International Marianne Brandt Award (nominated in the category "project"), Exhibition at Industriemuseum, Chemnitz/Germany

> October 20 – November 20 || Exhibition at Cultural Center Herðubreið, Seyðisfjörður/Iceland

> October 14-16 || Exhibition with Guest Artist Patricia Burk at Outvert Art Space & Edinborgarhúsið, Ísafjörður/Iceland

> October 15 || Film Screening at Pigeon International Film Festival, Edinborgarhúsið, Ísafjörður/Iceland

> September 9 – November 7 || "anmut ist eine frage der strömung", Festival and Exhibition with Miek Zwamborn, Esther Kinsky, Andrea Guterres and Annegret Mayer-Lindenberg, Neues Kunsthaus, Ahrenshoop/Germany

> April 8 || Film Screening, University of Iceland, Reykjavík/Iceland

2021

> December 6 || Film Screening, University Centre of the Westfjords, Ísafjörður/Iceland

> October 30 – November 3 || Exhibition and Film Screening with Guest Artists Andrea Weber and Vivienne Marie at Nes Artist Residency, Skagaströnd/Iceland

> October 2&3 || Exhibition and Film Screening at Artist House Lukas, Ahrenshoop/Germany



The Family Tree: Where does Driftwood come from?

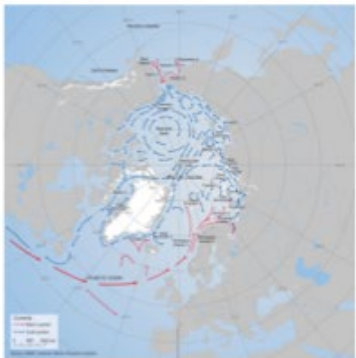
"Jón Jón Þorgrímsson, a poet and magician from the 19th century, assumed driftwood came from underwater forests - and when trees died, they would drift to the ocean's surface." – Kristinn Scheum, University of Iceland



Driftwood on a beach. Photo: iStock.com/Markus G. G. G.

Driftwood is a true global traveler that travels thousands of kilometers from forest forests in Russia and North America before reaching Icelandic shores. There are two types of driftwood logs: buoyant trees from the forest that have lost their bark and needles and contain oils and waxes that make them float, and trees with porous wood that were model naturally from tree trunks.

The boreal forest carries the driftwood into the Arctic Ocean where it gets frozen in sea ice and is transported by oceanic currents and wind. The main currents governing sea ice drift in the Barents Basin are the Transpolar Current and the Beaufort Gyre, a clockwise circulation north of the Beaufort Sea.



Driftwood on a beach. Photo: iStock.com/Markus G. G. G.

Siberian driftwood is directly transported into the Transpolar Drift through the Fram Strait between Greenland and Svalbard. Further east along the east coast of Greenland, it can travel across the Arctic within two to three years, but a typical driftwood journey takes between twelve to fifteen years, as it can be caught in eddies and currents.

Wood from Canada or Alaska might travel even longer if it gets caught in the Beaufort Gyre first. It can stay in this circle for many years before eventually being carried into the Transpolar Drift. When the ice melts in summer, it releases the embedded wood which then drifts in open water until it lands on a beach - unless it sinks before reaching it.

Driftwood on Icelandic shores mainly consists of conifers (pine, spruce, larch), but some broadleaf species can also be found. Today, most of the driftwood in Iceland are pine logs from the forest industry in Siberia that were lost during timber floating in the 19th century. Driftwood is very common in Greenland and Svalbard as well, in an ever-beach heap around the Arctic and drift as far as Scotland.

Each tree species has a different look, smell and oil structure which gives scientists already a rough idea of the tree's origin. For example, pine grows in Europe and Asia, larch further east in Siberia. Scientists also study the tree rings of driftwood which are composed of large, light-colored formed in the beginning of the growing season and smaller, darker cells formed in late summer.

The width of each tree ring mainly depends on the summer temperature - the warmer the summer, the wider the tree ring. The different tree rings will thus form a fingerprint-like pattern. Scientists compare the tree ring pattern with reference chronologies which you could find in an Arctic library of tree rings - if they find a match, they know exactly from which forest the driftwood started its journey.

Information Boards (series of 6, 70x90cm each)

1. The Family Tree: Where does Driftwood come from?
2. Living Archive: What does Driftwood tell us about Climate Change?
3. Character Actor: What Roles does Driftwood play?
4. Seeing the forest for the trees: What Roles do Woodlands play?
5. The Sea remembers everything: Can we solve the Plastic Crisis?
6. Out of the Woods: Favorite Driftwood Stories

Preview (left): Layout Information Board „The Family Tree: Where does Driftwood come from? Text content: following pages

The Family Tree: Where does Driftwood come from?

“Jón lærði Guðmundsson, a poet and magician from the 17th century, assumed driftwood came from underwater forests - and when trees died, they would drift to the ocean’s surface.” – Kristinn Schram, University of Iceland

Driftwood is a true globetrotter that travels thousands of kilometers from boreal forests in Eurasia and North America before reaching Icelandic shores. There are two types of driftwood logs: harvested trees from the forest industry that were lost during river transport and contain obvious saw cuts; and trees with preserved roots that were eroded naturally from river benches.

The boreal rivers carry the driftwood into the Arctic Ocean where it gets frozen in sea ice and is transported by oceanic currents and wind. The main currents governing sea ice drift in the Polar Basin are the Transpolar Current and the Beaufort Gyre, a clockwise circulation north of the Beaufort Sea. Siberian driftwood is directly transported into the Transpolar Drift and through the Fram Strait between Greenland and Svalbard further along the east coast of Greenland. It can travel across the Arctic within 2-3 years, but a typical driftwood journey takes between 12-15 years, as the sea ice might slow down, drift in circles or pile up. Wood from Canada or Alaska might travel even longer if it gets caught in the Beaufort Gyre first. It can stay in this circle for many years before eventually being carried into the Transpolar Drift. When the ice melts in summer, it releases the embedded wood which then drifts in open water until it lands on a beach – unless it sinks before reaching it.

Driftwood on Icelandic shores mainly consists of conifers; pine, spruce, larch, but some broadleaf species can also be found. Today, most of the driftwood in Iceland are pine logs from the forest industry in Siberia that were lost during timber floating in the 20th century. Driftwood is very common in Greenland and Svalbard as well, it can even beach hop around the Arctic and drift as far as Faroe Islands.

Each tree species has a distinct look, smell and cell structure which gives scientists already a rough idea of the tree’s origin. For example, pine grows in Europe and Asia, larch further east in Siberia. Scientists also study the tree rings of driftwood which are composed of large, light cells formed in the beginning of the growing season and smaller, darker cells formed in late summer. The width of each tree ring mainly depends on the summer temperature – the warmer the summer, the wider the tree ring. The different tree ring widths form a fingerprint-like pattern. Scientists compare the tree ring pattern with reference chronologies which you could call an “Arctic library of tree rings” – if they find a match, they know exactly from which forest the driftwood started its journey.



Artworks (Selection)

1. Askr and Embla, 18 photographs, 20x30cm each
2. Driftwood Sounds, video, 7:22min
3. Memorial of, 18 photographs, 20x30cm each
4. The Mother of Logs, book (28 pages)
5. In Plain Sight, 2 flags, 70x290cm each

(left & next page): Askr and Embla

Birch bark, which presumably originates from Siberia like most driftwood, is found very often on the beaches of Iceland. In the past, it was collected, dried, and used for lighting fires. The twisted and knotted pieces of bark seem to be alive in an almost audacious way. As miniatures, they remind of the Nordic creation myth, according to which the first humans were created from two pieces of driftwood by god Oðinn and his brothers. Askr and Embla received a gift from each of them: Oðinn gave them life, Hænir understanding and from Loður they received their senses and appearance.





Driftwood Sounds

Driftwood farmers used to judge the quality of the timber by its look, touch, smell and sound. One method was to listen to the wood. You needed two people, one to knock on one end of the trunk with a stick, a piece of iron or a stone and another to listen on the other end. Solid wood has a high-pitch and rotten wood a darker sound.

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/807567638/592b99fde5?share=copy>



(left & next page): Memorial of

In an abandoned house in Skagaströnd, I found slides from a Russian press agency. The collections featured, among other things, technical achievements, portraits of inhabitants of Siberian villages, sculptures in Moscow, and wildlife in national parks. For the series, I used the slide frames, preserved parts of the captions, and related them to flotsam and other materials found in Skagaströnd. The images function as a humorous and poetic journey through Iceland's magical and endangered environment.





Mother of Logs

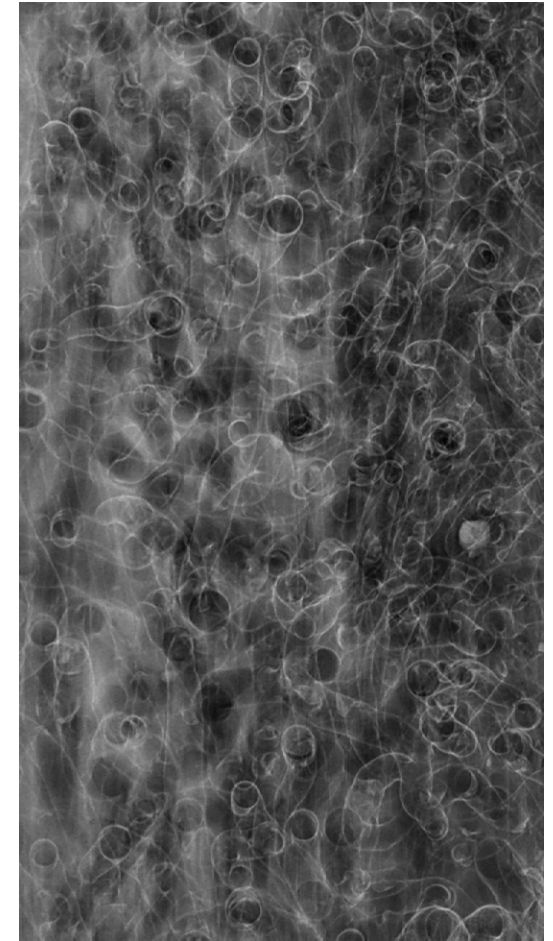
The term „Mother of...” is used in Icelandic culture for various natural resources. The attribution celebrates the regenerative power of the country’s livelihoods, while cautioning us to treat them with respect. The book „Mother of Logs,” is inspired by the story of a family in the Westfjords. Text and photographs bend over each other, tracking the driftwood that Iceland is losing to climate change and telling parable-like of the destruction of our livelihoods.

When the ice melted in summer, it released the Arctic travelers and one after another washed upon our beach.



Piles of driftwood as far as the eye could see.





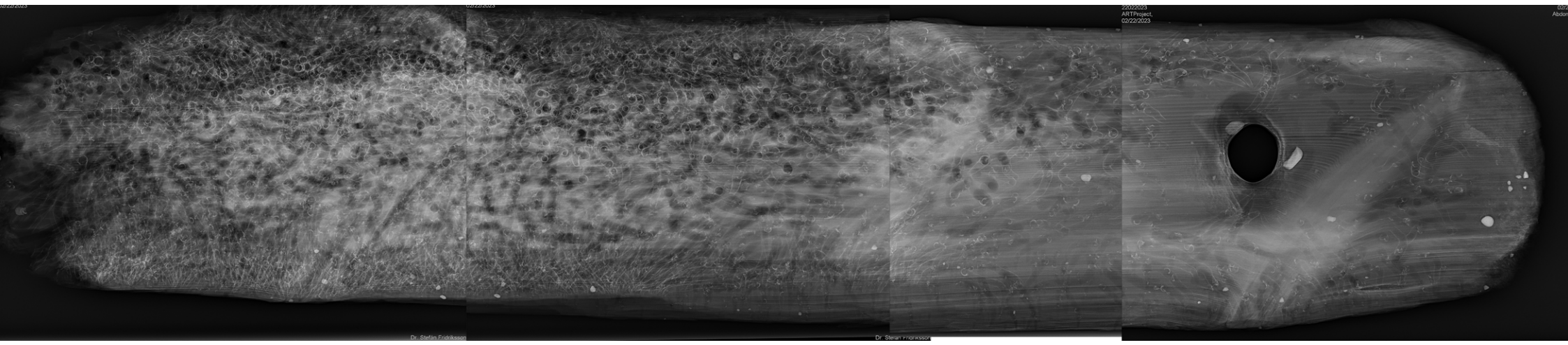
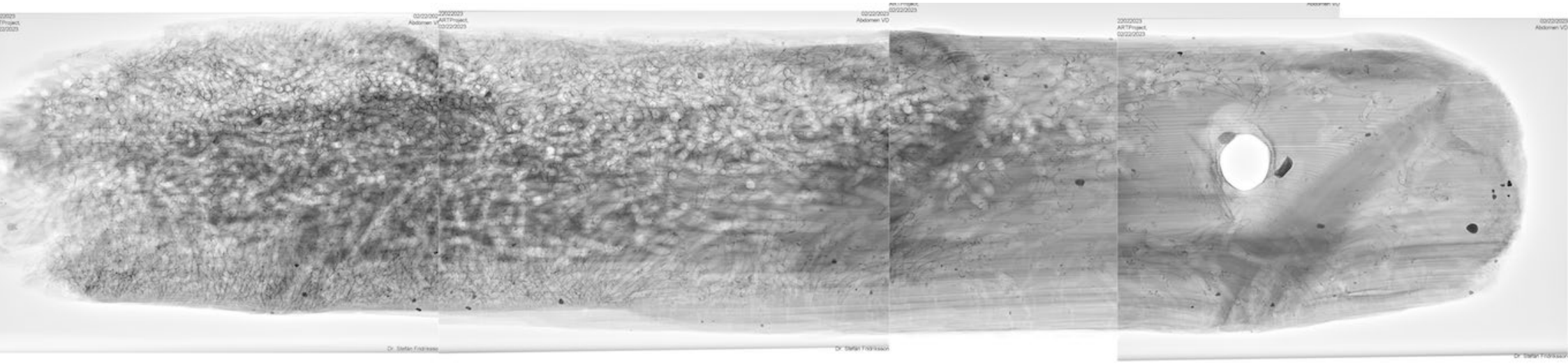
In Plain Sight

Detail

“In an age when oceans are plagued by plastic trash, driftwood reminds us that natural marine debris can be benign, even beneficial. It embodies the fragile ecological links between land and water, as well as the subtle beauty commonly hiding in plain sight.”

– Russel McLendon

The X-Rays reveal tunnels that naval shipworms bored into a driftwood log that washed ashore on Kálfshamarsvík beach in North Iceland. Naval shipworms are one of a large variety of organisms that profit from the presence of driftwood. The wooden globetrotter reshapes and enriches the environments along its travels from the rivers of Eurasia and North America, across the Arctic to the shores of Iceland and plays a crucial role for both freshwater and marine ecosystems.





Driftwood Objects

„Rekaviður“ is also an invitation for everyone to engage in the craft of making driftwood objects and to contribute to afforestation for climate mitigation. People are encouraged to become involved in the century-old tradition of making objects from driftwood such as cutting boards, hangers, key holders, spoons, bowls or even tables. If people decide to sell their self-made treasures, they are encouraged to donate a share of the profits to support Icelandic afforestation projects.

Candle holder



This puzzle becomes harder every time you play as it continues to break up into more and more pieces.

Project Website

> features background information and in-depth interviews

> www.rekavidur.com



REKAVIDUR

A Living Archive



Home About Us Action Exhibition Film Facts Interviews The Mystery Log



Halldór Björnsson: Iceland without Ice would be strange



Þórunn Þorsteinsdóttir: Fighting over Driftwood



Christine Palmer: Forests and their Fungal Friends



Hans Linderholm: The fragile Arctic Climate System



Valgeir Benediktsson: Growing up with Driftwood



Lísabet Guðmundsdóttir: A Resource you didn't waste



Bjarni Guðni Guðjónsson: I'm really lucky to be alive



Ólafur Eggertsson: Origin of the Arctic Driftwood



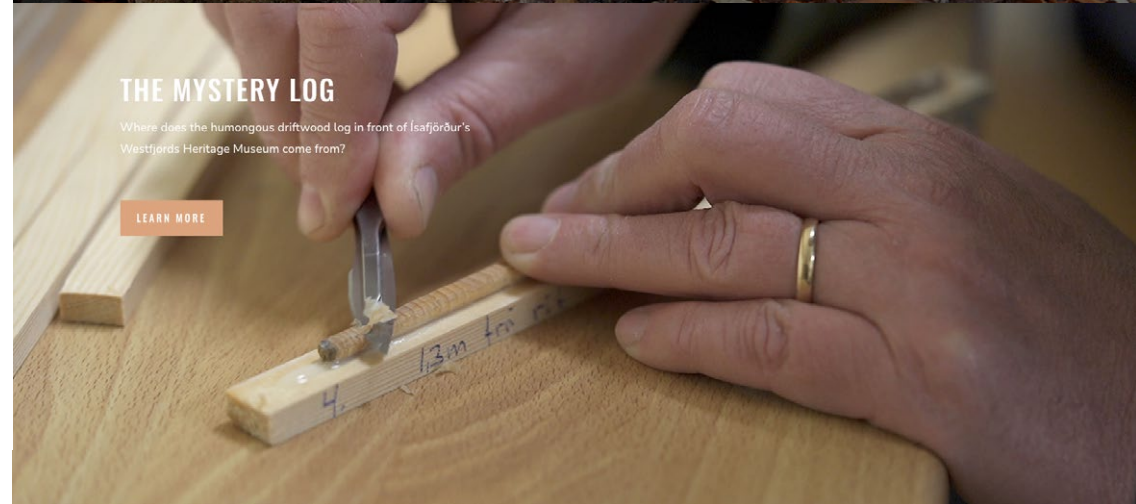
Kristinn Schram: Driftwood as a source of the Divine



Kristín Ósk Jónasdóttir: Everything drifts someplace



Catherine Chambers: Isn't Trash just Trash? It's not!



THE MYSTERY LOG

Where does the humongous driftwood log in front of Ísafjörður's Westfjords Heritage Museum come from?

LEARN MORE

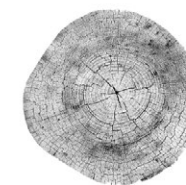
JÓN LÆRDI GUÐMUNDSSON, A POET AND MAGICIAN FROM THE 17TH CENTURY, ASSUMED DRIFTWOOD CAME FROM UNDERWATER FORESTS – AND WHEN TREES DIED, THEY WOULD DRIFT TO THE OCEAN'S SURFACE.

Kristinn Schram, University of Iceland

DRIFTWOOD TRAVELS THOUSANDS OF KILOMETERS ACROSS THE ARCTIC BEFORE IT REACHES THE SHORES OF ICELAND. THESE LOGS HAVE SOMETHING TO TELL YOU.



FACTS



INTERVIEWS



ACTION

About Kollektiv Lichtung

Ines Meier studied photography at the University of Fine Arts in Braunschweig and at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-arts in Paris. She is a board member of the International Academy for Photography in Berlin and works as an artist, journalist and producer.

Inka Dewitz is a filmmaker and producer. She studied international agricultural and development policy at the Humboldt University Berlin and production at the Filmhaus Köln/HFF Babelsberg. She worked for the BBC World Service and produced award-winning documentaries.

Together, we run the Berlin based production platform and collective Lichtung that focuses on environmental projects.
www.lichtung-berlin.de

