



The drawings making up the exhibition in the Hallgrímskirkja narthex originate in the nineties, back when I was searching for motifs in medieval literature for stained glass windows for the church in Reykholt. The road took me from or perhaps alongside the so-called visions in medieval work (there is also an example of a vision in The Revelation of St John in the New Testament) to the tradition of the doomsday pictures of the Catholic church. The resonance between the father's moral invocation to the son in *Sólarljóð* (The Song of the Sun) and the opposites of good and evil in the doomsday pictures is obvious.

Also, I work in reference to a part of the poems where a powerful, nature-inspired picture is drawn of the divide between life and death. The power of nature in the poet's trance arises in the verses about the Sun. We are placed in the otherworld, entering the scene of death. Man is thus situated in an unfathomable and uncertain world, where the waking state is transformed to a state of consciousness between life and death. However, in the light of the poem's illuminations it also seems to be the other way round: That the in-between state becomes the waking state itself.

The drawings form a trace. The first step away from the originals was in the early 20th century when preparations for the glasswork of the church windows began. Now those same drawings have yet again been transformed with the aid of the pencil's trace. A drawing made with the tip of a pencil is alive, the line is effective – and must therefore be treated with care. One drawing is placed on top of another and a kind of time axis forms when the coordinates of the line are layered, creating a new foundation and new norms.

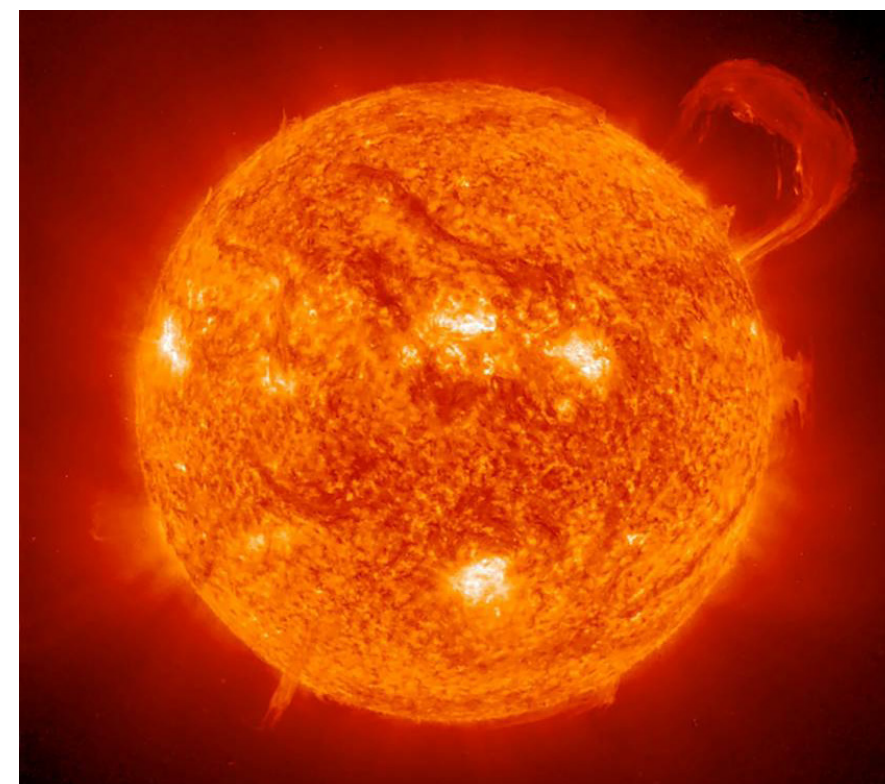
Valgerður Bergsdóttir

Valgerður Bergsdóttir studied at the School of Engineering and Natural Sciences at the University of Iceland, the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts, the Academy of Arts (former Statens Kunstakademi) in Oslo, and later at the School of Humanities at the University of Iceland. From 1974–2004 she taught at Reykjavík School of Visual Art, directing a programme for eight years, and also taught at the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts and the Icelandic Academy of Arts. She has had numerous solo exhibitions and participated in group exhibitions with drawings and graphics at graphic exhibitions in Iceland and internationally. She has works in museums in Iceland and abroad. She has received honors for graphics, won competitions with drawings as a theme/proposals for creation of glass windows for churches, and been nominated for prizes. She has received artists' awards and fellowships for exhibitions and residence in studios and ateliers.

Photos: The Icelandic Astronomical Society. The Icelandic Institute of Natural History.

VALGERÐUR BERGSDÓTTIR

Visions – between life and death



Five stanzas from Sólarljóð

February 14th - May 8th 2016

Hallgrímskirkja Friend of the Arts Society 34th season
listvinafelag.is

Works exhibited:

I Sun 39:

The sun I saw, true star of day, sink into its roaring home
(drawing on paper, 220 x 150 cm, 1992)

II Sun 45:

– for the mountain-waters closed over me
(drawing on paper, 220 x 150 cm, 1992 – 2015)

III Sun 46:

The star of hope, when I was born, fled from my breast
(drawing on paper, 170 x 150 cm, 1992 – 2015)

IV Sun 51:

In the Norns' seat nine days I sat, thence I was mounted on a horse
(drawing on paper, 170 x 150 cm, 1992 – 2015)

V Sun 56:

From the north riding I saw the sons of Níði, they were seven in all
(drawing on paper, 150 x 200 cm, 1999 – 2015)

I Sun 39:

The sun I saw,
true star of day,
sink into its roaring home.
But Hel's grated doors
on the other side I heard
heavily creaking.

II Sun 45:

The sun I saw,
never after,
since that gloomy day,
for the mountain-waters
closed over me,
and I went called from torments.

III Sun 46:

The star of hope,
– when I was born –,
fled from my breast away.
High it flew,
settled nowhere,
so that it might find rest.

IV Sun 51:

In the Norns' seat
nine days I sat,
thence I was mounted on a horse.
There the giantess's sun
shone grimly
through the dripping clouds of heaven.

V Sun 56:

From the north riding
I saw the sons of Níði,
they were seven in all.
From full horns,
the pure mead they drank
from the heaven-gods well.

Gísli Sigurðsson

Hindurvaka: Bridging the divide between life and death

Sólarljóð (The Song of the Sun) is one of the most singular works of medieval Icelandic literature – a thoroughly Christian vision poem with parallels in the New Testament Revelation of St John and Dante's Divine Comedy, but set in the metre and language of the traditional Edda poems, in particular the account of the pre-Christian cosmology in Völuspá and the anthology of wisdom verse known as Hávamál. There is an internal logic to this syncretism. Visionary literature opens doors between our world and the other worlds, either the future or the world beyond the grave: a being from beyond appears to a mortal human, perhaps in a dream, perhaps through solitary contemplation in an isolated place, and offers them a prophetic sight of the unknown. This is the case with the temptation of Christ, with Dante, and with the seeress in Völuspá, who is visited by Óðin, tempted with gifts, and eventually shown the history of the cosmos down to its Þnal destruction at Ragnarök.

In Sólarljóð it is a son who is visited by his dead father, who reveals to him the experiences and knowledge he has come to through death. He advises him to show generosity, integrity and humility here on earth and presents cautionary examples of those who have been blinded by pride and discord instead of putting their faith in God. The son should not be ruled by greed, since 'wealth has made monkeys of many'. He should be mistrustful of enemies – a warning with strong echoes of Hávamál; God, says the father, will punish treachery. The son should not simply allow fate to take its course but must strive actively and whole-heartedly for true virtue.

The father then recalls how mortality came to him and death appeared in a vision of the sun. Seven stanzas start with the words 'The sun I saw...', until his powers fade, the sun goes dim, and 'the mountain waters closed before me and I departed, called from tribulation'. He goes on to describe the things that met his eyes as his body lay stiff 'on straw'. He sees how men reap what they have sown in this life – in the Realms of Torment, where Þtting punishments are meted out to those who have been lured from the true path by worldly vanity, violence, greed, or carnal

passion, to the godless and the liars and the bearers of slander; and in the Realms of Victory, where those who have obeyed God's commandments, shown compassion, suffered hunger in God's name and fed others, and died innocent dwell in light. The Þnal section of the poem recalls Óðin, the undead in burial mounds, runes and ancient magic, until the father bids farewell with the wish that they may meet again 'on mankind's happy day. Good my Lord, give peace to the dead and mercy to those that live'.

Sólarljóð welds together the generations from father to son, the states of being from life to death, and the Christian age and the ancient beliefs that preceded it. But it also speaks directly to our own times with its urgent message of moral regeneration and the duty to strive to make life better here on earth through kindness to others, irrespective of religion. We still need to extend a helping hand to others, and even those who have lived only for themselves can follow the example of the miser who never offered food to anyone 'until a guest came walking weary and weak from the road'. The time axis from the past lies across the life axis of the present, and at the intersection of the cross the command remains fresh and new – unconditional goodwill to one's fellow man – and something to nourish us through life to our meeting with the sunlight of eternity.

Translated by Nicholas Jones

Hindurvaka is a name coined by Hermann Pálsson for the Þnal section of Sólarljóð, from the point at which the father starts to describe his visions of the afterlife. It suggests a state of consciousness between life and death.

Listvínafélag Hallgrímskirkju's (The Hallgrímskirkja Friends of the Arts Society) involvement with Sólarljóð stems from the choral work Óttusöngvar á vori (Songs of an Early Spring Morning) by Jón Nordal, which uses fragments from Sólarljóð, the text of a Latin mass and the 20th-century poem Sólhjartarljóð by Matthías Johannessen. The piece is particularly associated with the conductor Hörður Áskelsson, who directed its Þrst performance in Skálholt Cathedral in 1993.