

# Concrete in Flight



**This exhibition of sculptures by Sigurjón Ólafsson at the Búrfell Power Station is arranged in cooperation with the Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum in Reykjavík on the occasion of the centennial of the artist in 2008.**

Sculptor Sigurjón Ólafsson (1908-1982) was born in the village of Eyraþakki in South Iceland. Trained as a house painter, in 1928 he entered the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, where he finished his studies in 1935. He received several awards in Denmark, for instance the Royal Academy Gold Medal in 1930 and the Eckersberg prize in 1939 for the portrait bust My Mother. During the years 1941 – 44 Ólafsson was commissioned two monumental granite sculptures for the town square in Vejle, Denmark, which caused a great commotion in the town. Ólafsson returned to Iceland in 1945. As one of the leading artists of the country, he was entrusted with numerous challenging commissions, portrait busts and free standing statues. He also created modernistic works for public buildings and open spaces. He is represented in museums and private collections in Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, Italy and the United States. The largest collection of his works is to be found in the Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum in Reykjavík.

Sigurjón Ólafsson's sculpture, which he called The Racket Troll, welcomes the guests visiting the Búrfell Power Station. The sculpture was executed by the sculptor himself, who cut out the forms in copper-sheets and had them welded together, a method he also used in many other works at that time.



**The Racket Troll**

1967–68, copper, 350 x 101 x 91 cm



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The bas-reliefs made by Sigurjón Ólafsson in the late 1960s for the façade of the Búrfell Power Station were at that time the largest and most remote work of art created by an Icelandic artist.

Sigurjón Ólafsson's reliefs can be read in terms of a story or narrative of a transformation of natural forces, even as an allegory, with its formal allusions to man and technology versus nature.

The corner-stone of the plant was laid in 1968, and the plant was formally opened in May 1970. The Búrfell reliefs are about five metres high and 66.8 metres long, covering an area of 334 m<sup>2</sup>. The depth of the reliefs is 17 cm.

**I** Most of Sigurjón Ólafsson's works, including the Búrfell reliefs, refer to the human scale, i.e. human proportions are built into the work. An example of this is the first relief in the first panel. Two curved shapes, two crescents or wings, are balanced on either side of a vertical axis or column. From the top of this central axis or body, horizontal shapes, or limbs, radiate. The reference to the human body may seem far-fetched, but the same motif was used by Sigurjón Ólafsson in a work of oak and copper, *The Saint*, in 1965. In the same panel there are sprocketed shapes, ambigu-

ous combs, all sorts of hi-tech shapes, which are derived from the artist's work *Cardinal Points* dating from 1963.

**II** The second panel of the relief contains two huge shapes, massive figures: one angular with a sequin head (the largest figure in the relief, about five metres tall), the other softer and more oval, with a gigantic moon-head reaching down to its "knees". Male and female figures are a leitmotif of Ólafsson's work, so to perceive the two figures as a pair of trolls,

echoing the *Racket Troll* sculpture and the trollnames in the surrounding countryside, can hardly be regarded as an over-interpretation.

**III-IV** In the third and fourth panels are four large shapes of similar size, characterized by chaotic motion. At first glance, they might represent an archipelago. At a closer look, they are more like water: unharnessed, fast-flowing water.

**V** The fifth panel is more organized and regular, with its arrangement of rectangular shapes. To continue the metaphor of the previous sections, the flowing water has here been brought under control and harnessed. This panel also shows a familiar motif from a previous work, *Composition* from 1965. The motif has a human dimension: a vertical axis – a figure sitting rather than standing – with four teeth or branches protruding.

**VI** In the sixth and last panel of the work, the famous Screw appears. This motif was later to be transformed into the four metre high free-standing sculpture *The Screw*, which has been erected outside the Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum in Reykjavik. The upper part of the last panel, above the screw motif, is somewhat similar to the central panel in terms of motion and rhythm, but is less tense, and more balanced. The shapes have dissolved, and glide freely, away from the work, away from the wall.