

Biography

Erla S. Haraldsdóttir

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Photo: Kalle Sanner

Erla S. Haraldsdóttir works with painting, animation, video, and photomontage as a means to appropriate and restructure reality. An academically trained painter, she currently focuses on painting where the physicality of paint and color create space, light, and shadow. Her work combines figurative motifs, abstract color, and patterns with painterly finesse. The works often explore how memories, emotions, and perception interact. Methodology is central and Haraldsdóttir's process-driven work is often based on a combination of rules and restrictions, places or stories, and tasks assigned to her by other people.

She often extends these methods into her teaching and complex collaborations. These aspects of her work are described in publications like *Difficulty of Freedom/Freedom of Difficulty* (Reykjavík: Umeå Academy of Fine Arts and Crymogeia, 2014) based on workshops at the Living Art Museum (2013) and Verkligheten art space in Umeå (2014), as well as her latest book, *Make a Painting of Trees Growing in a Forest* (Reykjavík: Crymogeia, 2015).

A selection of places where Haraldsdóttir has exhibited includes: Lund Cathedral, The Crypt, (Sweden), Hallgrímskirkja, (Reykjavík, Iceland), Kalmar Konstmuseum (Sweden), Moderna Museet (Stockholm), Akureyri Art Museum

(Iceland), Kunstverein Langenhagen (Germany), Bielefelder Kunstverein (Germany), Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin), Berlinische Galerie (Berlin) and the Momentum Biennial of Contemporary Art (Moss, Norway). Her work is represented in public collections in Iceland (National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík Art Museum, Akureyri Art Museum, Así Artmuseum) and in Sweden (National Public Art Council, Moderna Museet). She has completed numerous residencies including Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin), Cité des Arts (Paris), and Ateliers '89 (Oranjestad, Aruba). Recent exhibitions include *Genesis* (Galleri Konstpidemin Göteborg) *Genesis* (Hallgrímskirkja, Reykjavík) *Make a Painting of Trees Growing in a Forest* (Kalmar Konstmuseum), 2016, *Just Painted* (Reykjavík Art Museum), *Project Metropolis* (Silesian Museum, Katowice), 2015, *Visual Wandering* (Listasafn ASÍ, Reykjavík), 2014, *(In)dependent People*, Reykjavík Arts Festival, 2012, and *Moment-Ynglingagatan 1* (Moderna Museet, Stockholm), 2011.

Haraldsdóttir studied at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm and the San Francisco Arts Institute with a degree from the Valand Academy of Fine Art in Gothenburg, 1998. Born in Reykjavík, she currently lives and works in Berlin. From 2011 to 2015, she was a guest professor at the Umeå Academy of Fine Arts, Sweden.

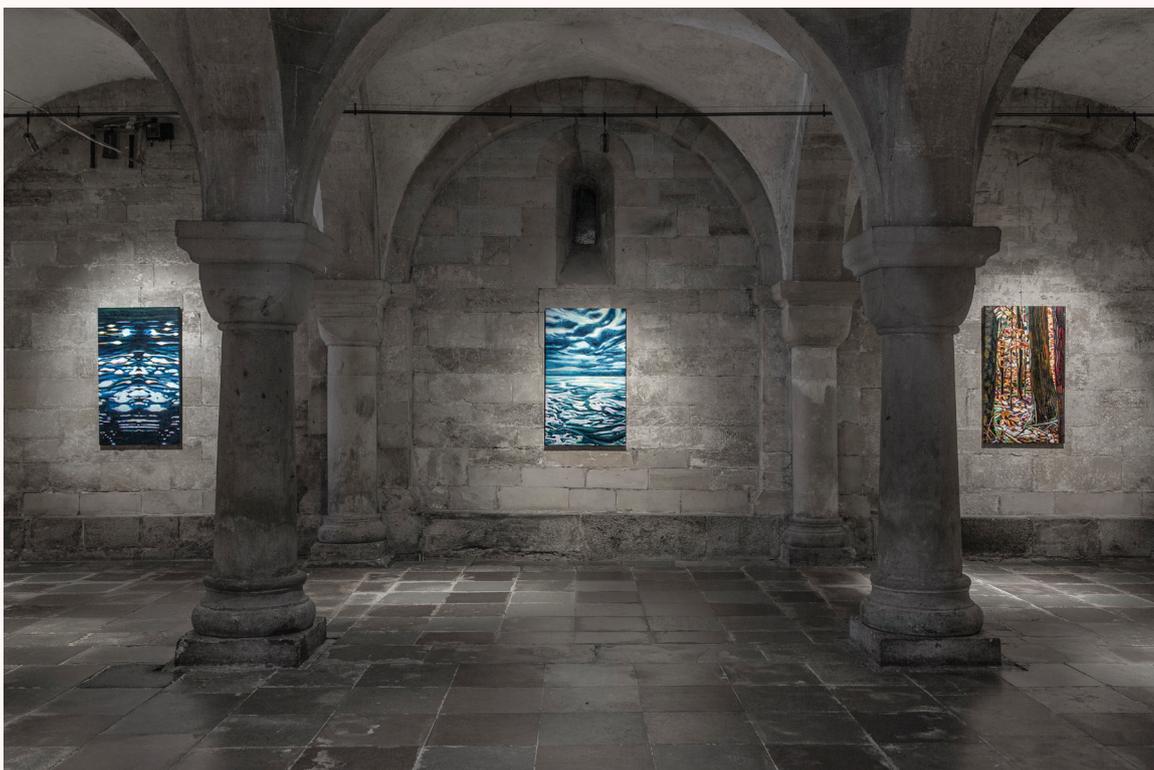


Genesis (2017)

12 paintings, Oil on canvas
Various sizes

Installation view. Solo exhibition. Lund
Cathedral, The Crypt, Lund, Sweden.

Photo: Kalle Sanner



Genesis (2017)

Installation view. Solo exhibition. Lund Cathedral, The Crypt, Lund, Sweden.

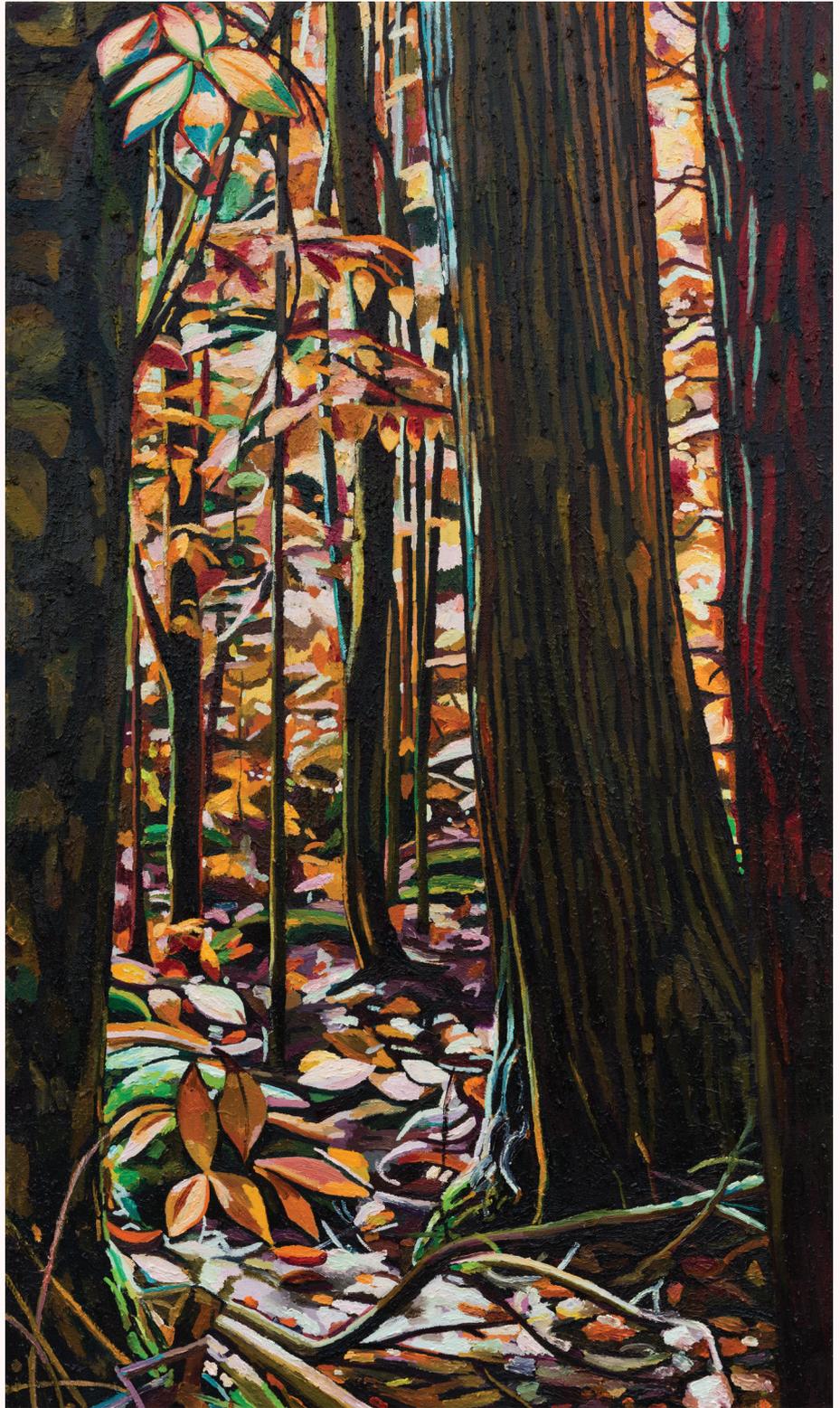
Photo: Kalle Sanner



Genesis (2017)

Installation view. Solo exhibition. Lund Cathedral, The Crypt, Lund, Sweden.

Photo: Kalle Sanner



Forest in Maine (Third day) (2017)

Oil on canvas
120 x 70cm



Binary Solarsystem (Fourth day) (2017)

Oil on linen
120 x 70cm



Colored Raven (Fifth day) (2017)

Oil on canvas
120 x 70cm



Unicorn (Sixth day) (2017)

Oil on canvas
120 x 70cm

Genesis

Lena Sjöstrand, Cathedral Chaplain,
Lund Cathedral, Sweden

In conjunction with exhibition "Genesis" at
Lund Cathedral, The Crypt, Lund, Sweden.

Erla S. Haraldsdóttir's paintings for Lund Cathedral take as their starting point one of the stories of creation from the Book of Genesis (*genesis* is the Greek word for "beginning" or "origin").

The structure of Haraldsdóttir's work follows the seven days of creation, while its form draws inspiration from a series of medieval drawings by Icelandic artists. As is common for her work, Haraldsdóttir approaches the subject matter at hand via the work of anonymous colleagues. By setting up a series of rules for her own work, she then tries to reach deeper, gradually moving inwards towards the core of the subject.

The paintings made for Lund Cathedral are more abstract than the artist's first series on the theme of creation. It's as if she had shifted from contemplating a scene to painting the subject from within the point in the biblical text where light comes into being, where water is separated from water, where dry land emerges and the earth brings forth plants. What we see is a meeting between the Creator and the creative artist in which the story of creation unfolds through the image of man. The ability to create is part of our likeness with God, part of the connection between man and God.

The Hebrew word used for the Creator's achievement can mean both "create" and "play". In play, we use our imagination to test, deepen and transform reality. Haraldsdóttir's return to the subject of creation is clearly marked by the exploration and experimentation characteristic of play.

Through the act of painting, Haraldsdóttir accesses images and moods that otherwise remain concealed. The paintings hold traces of her own

story, merging with Icelandic landscapes, myths and symbols.

In *Lund Cathedral*, Haraldsdóttir's paintings appear alongside other representations of the biblical story of creation, for instance on the canopies on the northern side of the choir and in sculptures by anonymous artists from the 1300s. Experiences from different eras are thus woven together. Visitors discovering the works in the crypt thus take part in the process of creation, in a work in progress.



Genesis (2016)

7 murals, 7 figurative paintings, 7 abstract paintings.
Oil on canvas, acrylic on wall

Installation View, Galleri Konstpidemin, Göteborg



Genesis (2016)

Installation View, Galleri Konstpidemin, Göteborg



Day One (2016)

Mural, acrylic on wall
200 x 180 cm



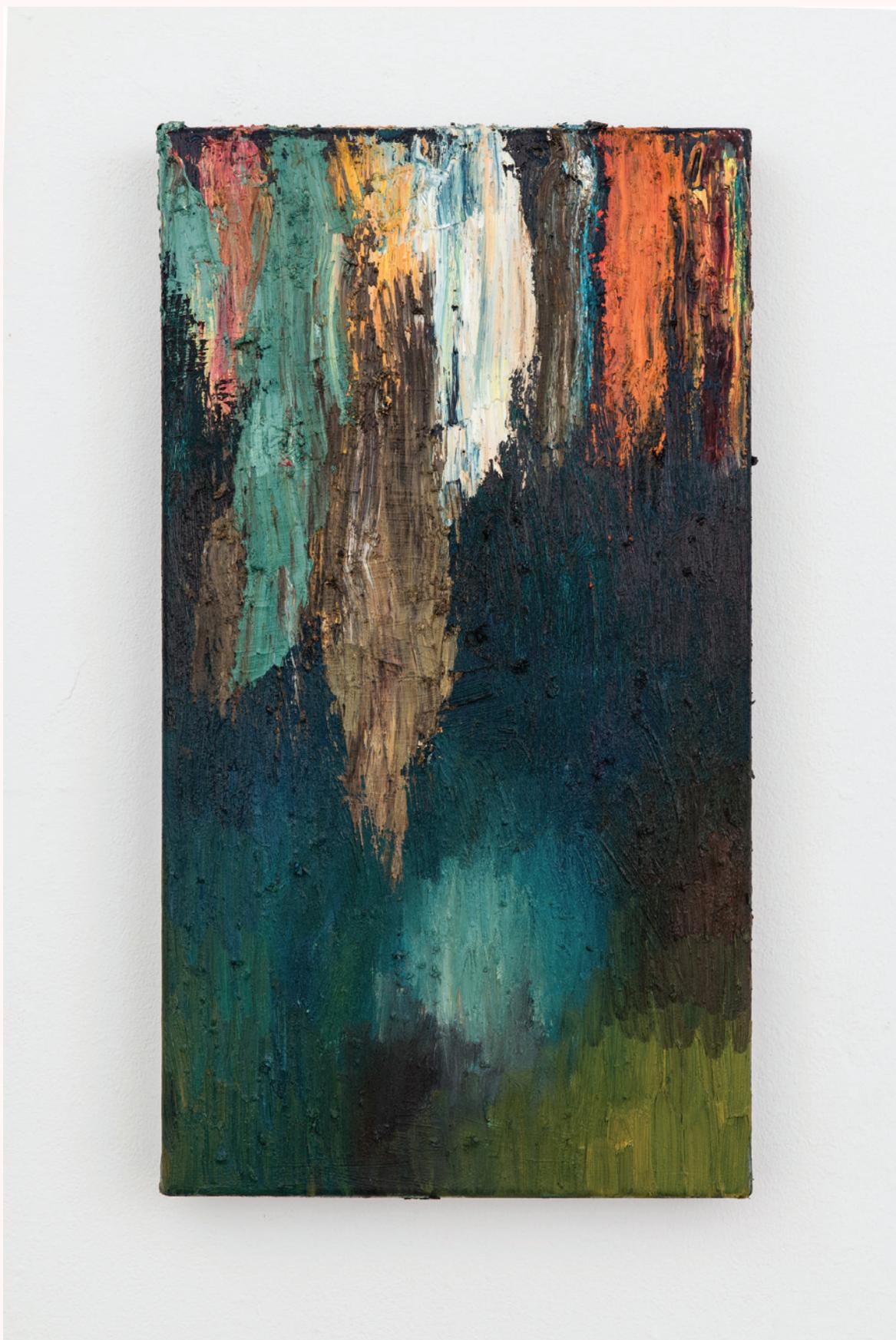
Day Four (2016)

Mural, acrylic on wall
200 x 180 cm



Day Seven (2016)

Mural, acrylic on wall
220 x 180 cm



Spill Six B (2016)

Oil on canvas
30 x 50 cm

GENESIS

Jonatan Habib Engqvist

Folder in conjunction with Exhibition *Genesis* at Galleri Konstepidemin in Göteborg, Sweden, Iceland

The question of creativity is a recurring theme in the work of Erla S. Haraldsdóttir. One might say that she ceaselessly questions the idea that an artist can create *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) and the romantic notion of 'divine inspiration'. For many years she has been creating fictional systems as tools for her artistic processes, as is perhaps most evident in her paintings. This process consists essentially of creating a space of artistic freedom through self-imposed restrictions such as instructions given to her by friends or specifically devised systems. The themes of her works can be described as a sampling of art-historical references that implicitly questions the hegemony of Western art. This exhibition is no exception. As the title suggests, it draws on the story of creation as portrayed in the monotheistic Abrahamic religions. A well-known theme in the history of Western church art, it is a common subject of commissioned and self-determined work by artists and artisans throughout history.

The starting point of this exhibition is a compilation of medieval iconography from drawings made by Icelandic draughtsman between 1330 and 1500. Most artists in the Middle Ages and in early Renaissance compiled model books, or *exempla*. However, few of these books have survived, with only thirty such medieval manuscripts known in Europe today. In Scandinavia only one of them survived, *Islenska teiknibokin*, or *The Icelandic Model Book*, which was recently compiled and re-published. The series of paintings that forms the core of Haraldsdóttir's exhibition is based on the seven drawings describing the seven days

of the story of creation as found in this book. In *Genesis*, Haraldsdóttir appropriates both the subject matter of the drawings and the pattern surrounding them – a 'frame' that replicates early Islamic art and can also be found on Tarot cards. Using this frame as an instruction for her series, she articulates her own story of creation, while also reflecting on her own creative processes. Haraldsdóttir's paintings merge the pattern of this frame with a pattern used by the Ndebele people in South Africa in beadworks and murals. As with most of the artist's works, they incorporate numerous associative and seemingly eclectic art-historical references, including to Art Nouveau, ancient Egyptian reliefs, Jewish mysticism, frescos by Michelangelo, woodcuts by Katsushika Hokusai, as series of mystical watercolours by William Blake and the landscapes of the Icelandic painter Þórarinn B Þorláksson. Several of these references can also be found in the artist's paintings of recent years and seem to form a kind of meta-narrative layer throughout her practice. *Genesis* consists of six paintings of equal size (150 x 90 cm) and one larger canvas (150 x 180 cm). They depict recognisable elements from the story of the Genesis of the Earth but also from the artist's formal vocabulary: reflections, water mirrors, tropical plants, falcons and fish are combined with iconic motifs from art history, Icelandic landscapes and personal snapshots. Using a characteristically bold palette of thick paint, each motif is articulated on a complementary sublayer so as to achieve an effect of glowing from within reminiscent of stained glass windows.

GENESIS

Jonatan Habib Engqvist

Each of the seven paintings is accompanied by a smaller, vivid and abstract composition (30 x 30 and 30 x 50 cm, respectively). These abstract painting experiments were made with residue paint from *Genesis* series. Together with four art students, Haraldsdóttir also executed a series of mural paintings based on *Islenska teiknibokin*. These are applied directly on the walls of Konstepidemin. The palette used here, and more explicitly the colours used to portray the hand of the creator that appears as a large patch of colour in the background, point to another recurring theme in the artist's work, namely, the *sephirot* colour scheme. This scheme is depicted in the Tree of Life, a composite symbol representing the cosmos in its entirety and showing how it relates to the human soul. Colour symbolism plays a defining role in the Tree of Life diagram (and in all systems of magic): the colours each represent a human concept as well as the stages of creation and how things come into being. Haraldsdóttir's abstract paintings also remind us that the pioneers of early and mid-twentieth century painting (Kandinsky, Klimt, Malevich, Mondrian, Pollock, Rothko, Rozanova . . .) shared a common spiritual motivation to develop an art that expressed a reality beyond the material, a consciousness similar to that of a meditative state in that it transcends everyday reality.

There is a lot of information in Haraldsdóttir's images, and a lot of information that can be drawn from them. But contrary to traditional depictions of *Genesis*, they radiate a sense of tranquility. In the *Islenska teiknibokin* and in Blake's *And God Blessed the Seventh Day*

and *Sanctified It*, God on the seventh day of creation appears as a sanctifying figure, and in Michelangelo's six paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, he is never shown resting. Haraldsdóttir, in turn, makes the seventh day the most prominent painting of the series: at twice the size of the other six paintings, it becomes an 'altarpiece' of sorts. The motif of this centrepiece is based on a smartphone photograph of the artist's legs, taken while she was lying in bed. It is framed by a pattern composed of what appears to be tubes of paint, and encompasses a wide spectrum of colours. While the rainbow symbolises the second creation, the sign of the covenant between God and all life on earth (Genesis 9:17), it is the background that immediately catches the viewer's attention: here we see the vernacular depiction of an untidy apartment with a paintbrush stuck in a vase and a lopsided frame on the wall.

Theological discussions generally contrast the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* with that of *creatio ex materia* (creation out of some pre-existent, eternal matter) and *creatio ex deo* (creation out of the being of God). With this final painting in her series, Haraldsdóttir proposes to combine the three. Kazimir Malevich once claimed that laziness has been branded the mother of all vices when, in fact, it should be regarded as 'the mother of life'. Mladen Stilinović ends his seminal text *The Praise of Laziness* (1993) with the words: 'There is no art without laziness.' Similarly, Haraldsdóttir seems to suggest that the seventh day is not a well-deserved rest after a job well done – it is ultimate creativity.



Genesis (2016)

Oil on linen

90 x 150 cm, 150 x 180 cm

Installation View, Hallgrímskirkja, Reykjavik Iceland



The Third Day (2016)

Oil on linen
150 x 90 cm



The Fourth Day (2016)

Oil on linen
150 x 90 cm



The Seventh Day (2016)

Oil on linen
150 x 90 cm



Make a Painting of Trees Growing in a Forest (2015)

Solo exhibition. Kalmar konstmuseum, Kalmar, Sweden



Make a Painting of Trees Growing in a Forest (2015)

Solo exhibition. Kalmar konstmuseum, Kalmar, Sweden



Make a Painting of Trees Growing in a Forest (2015)

Solo exhibition. Kalmar konstmuseum, Kalmar, Sweden



Haraldur with his Nanny Ásta, 1948 (2015)

Oil on linen
200 x 120 cm



Trip (2015)

Triptych, Oil on canvas
Each: 200 x 90 cm

Installation view, *Just Painted 2*
Kjarvalsstaðir, Reykjavík Art Museum,
Reykjavík, Iceland

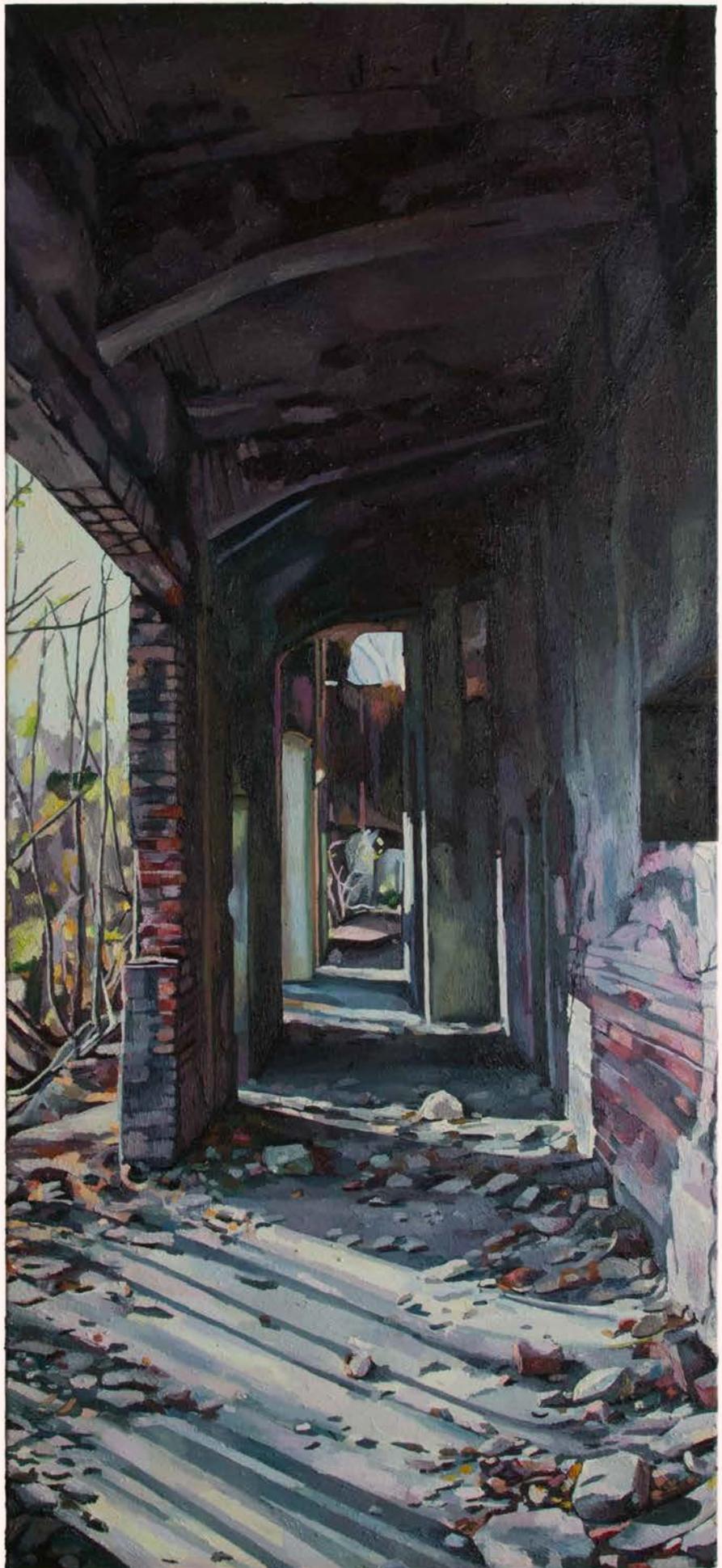
Task

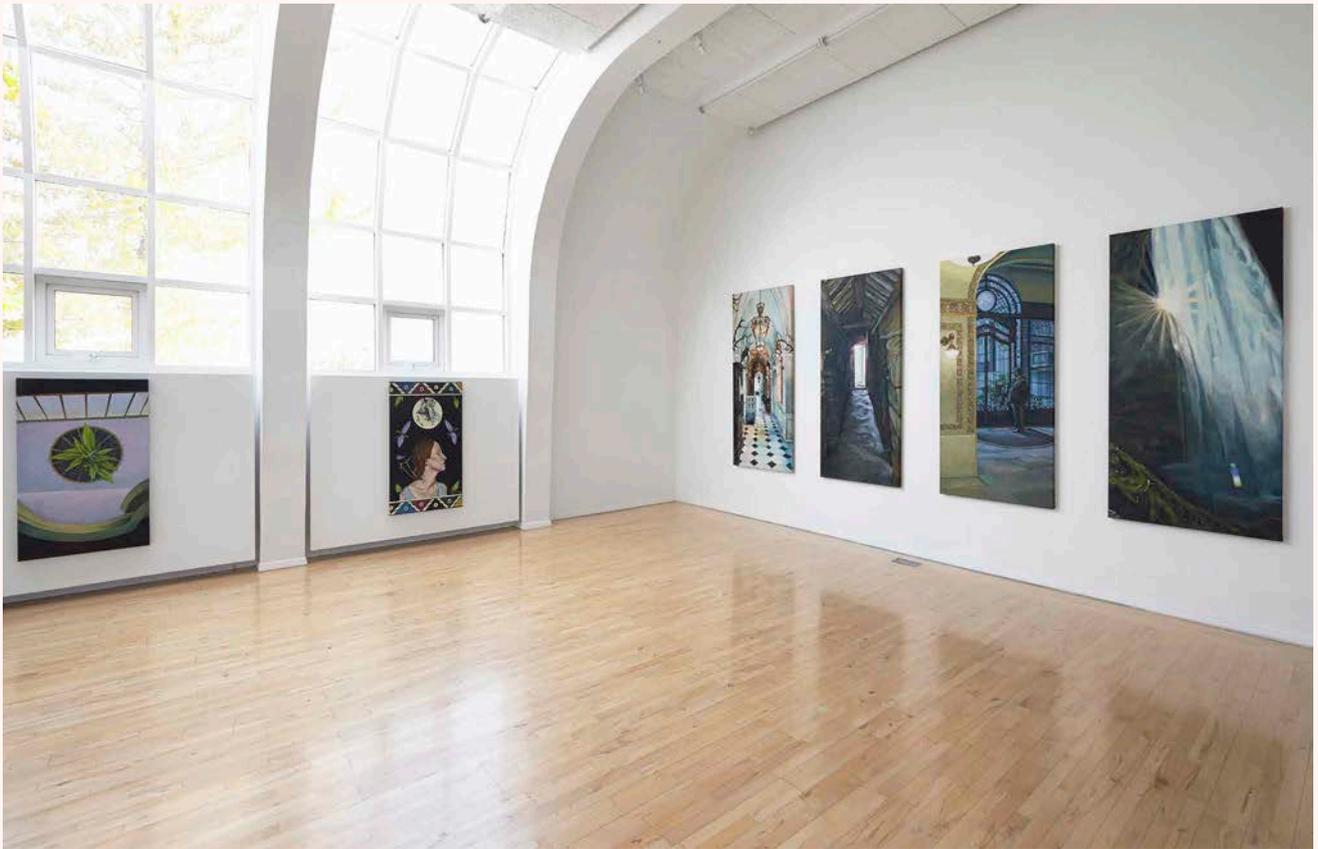
Make a triptych that shows three different kind of light from three distinct sources.

Moonlight, sunlight, electrical light. Memories and photographs. New York, Aruba and Poland. Motifs show colours; colours become luminous through light.

The Factory Ruin and The Sun (2015)

Oil on canvas
200 x 90 cm





Visual Wandering (2014)

Solo Exhibition

Installation view
ASÍ Art Museum,
Reykjavik, Iceland



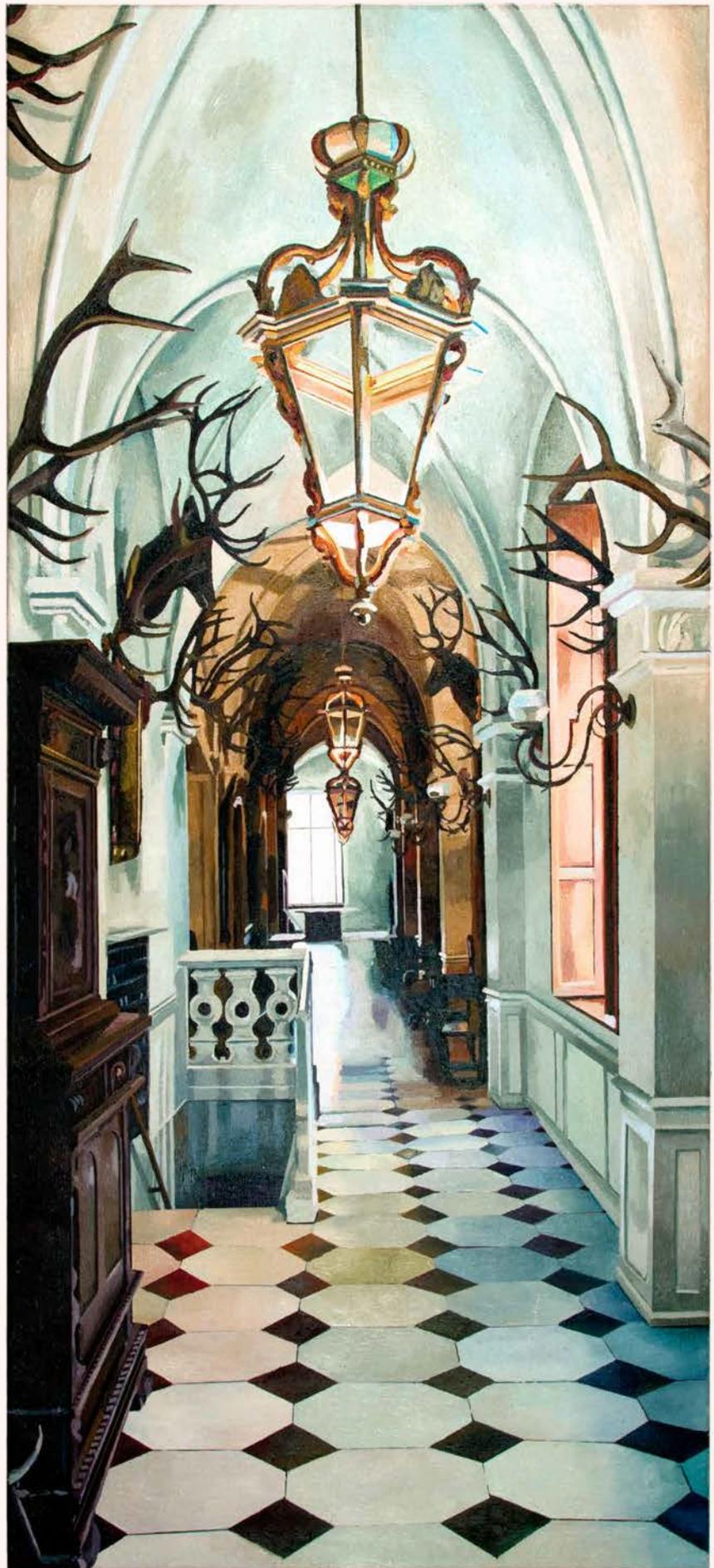
Visual Wandering (2014)

Solo Exhibition

Installation view
ASÍ Art Museum,
Reykjavik, Iceland

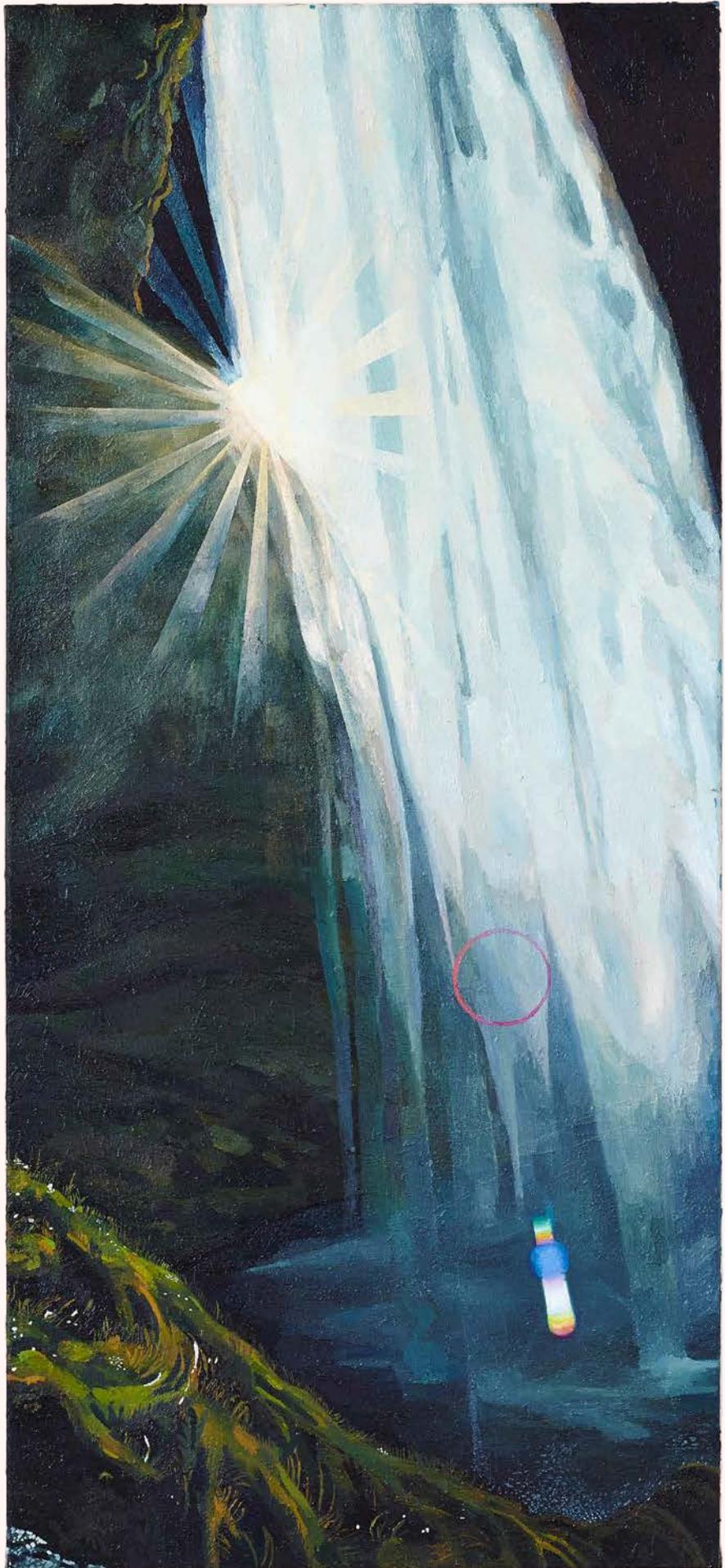
The Corridor in Pszczyna Castle (2014)

Oil on canvas
200 x 90 cm



Seljarlandsfoss (2014)

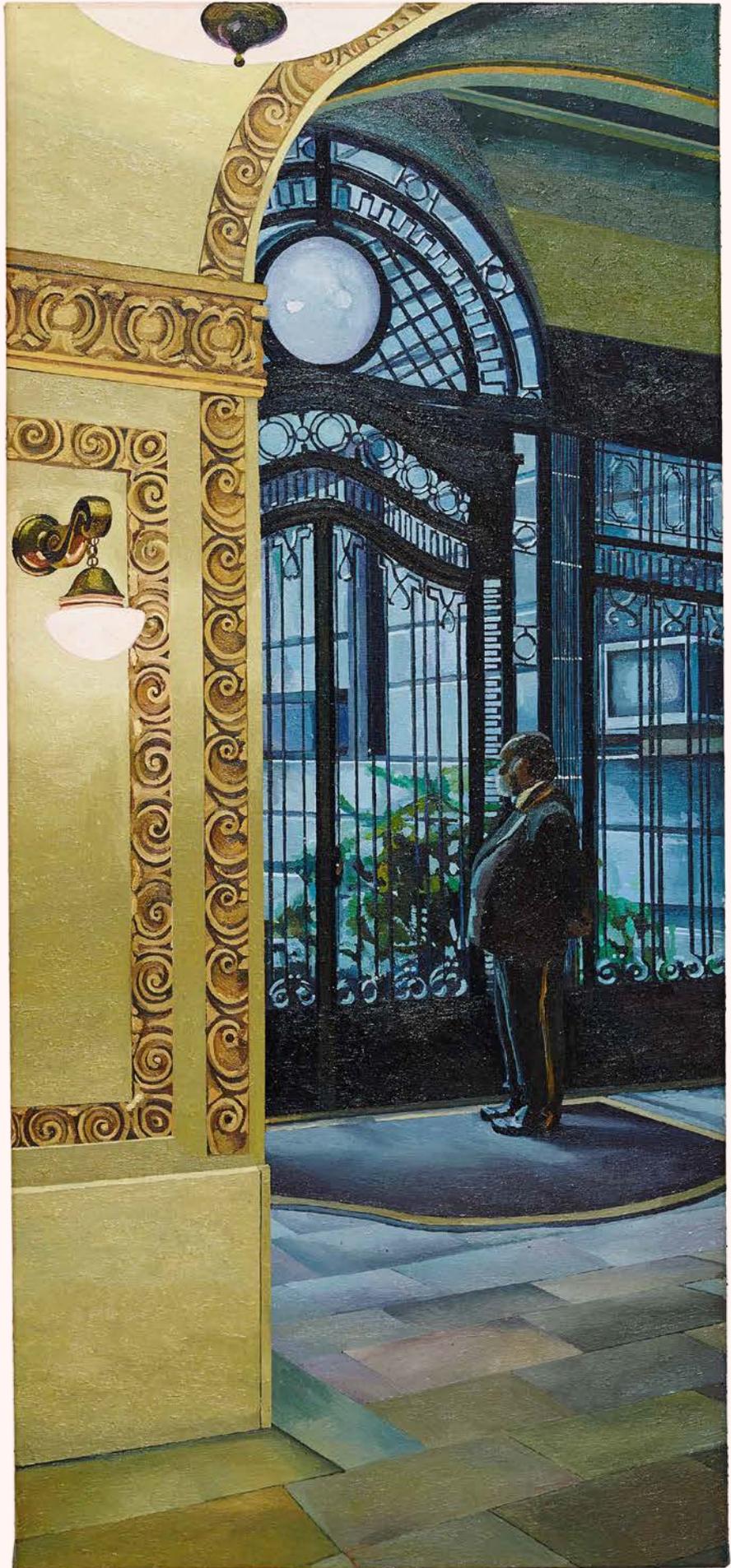
Oil on canvas
200 x 90 cm

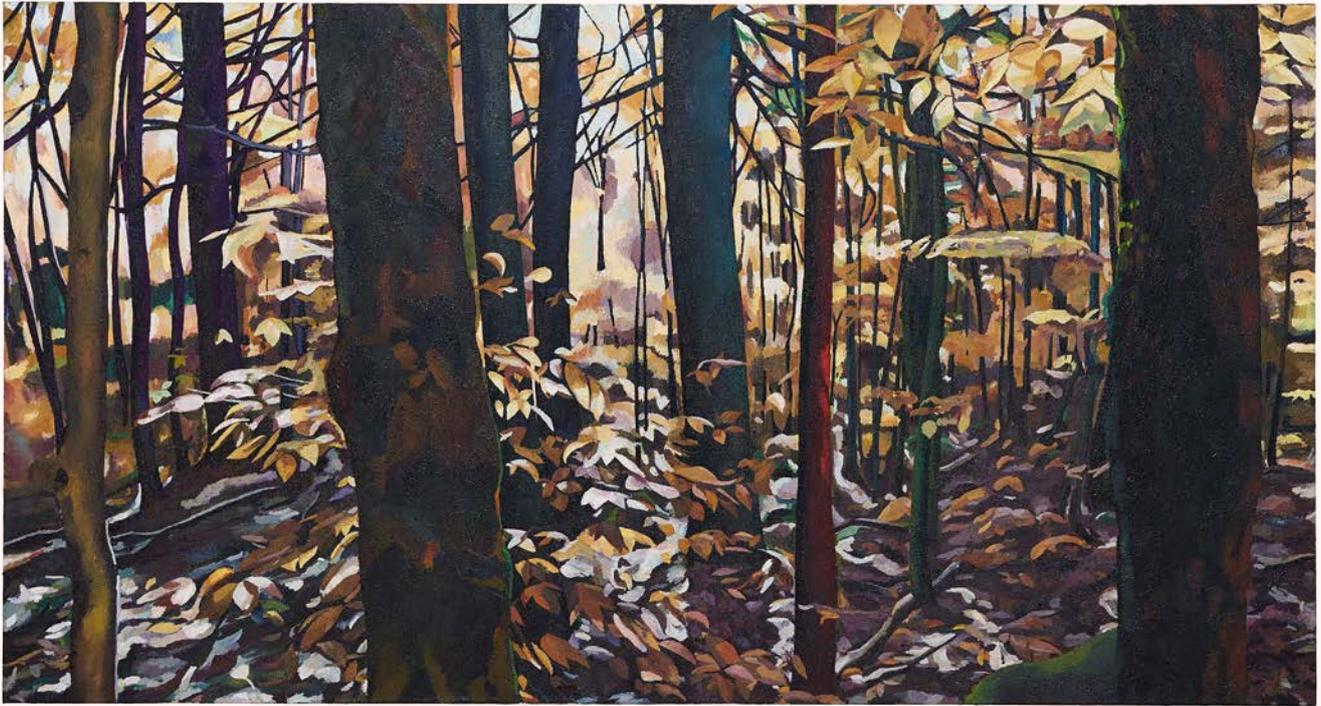


Erla S. Haraldsdóttir

**215 West 98th Street,
The Gramont (2014)**

Oil on canvas
200 x 90 cm





The Coloured Forest in Maine (2014)

Oil on canvas
260 x 140 cm

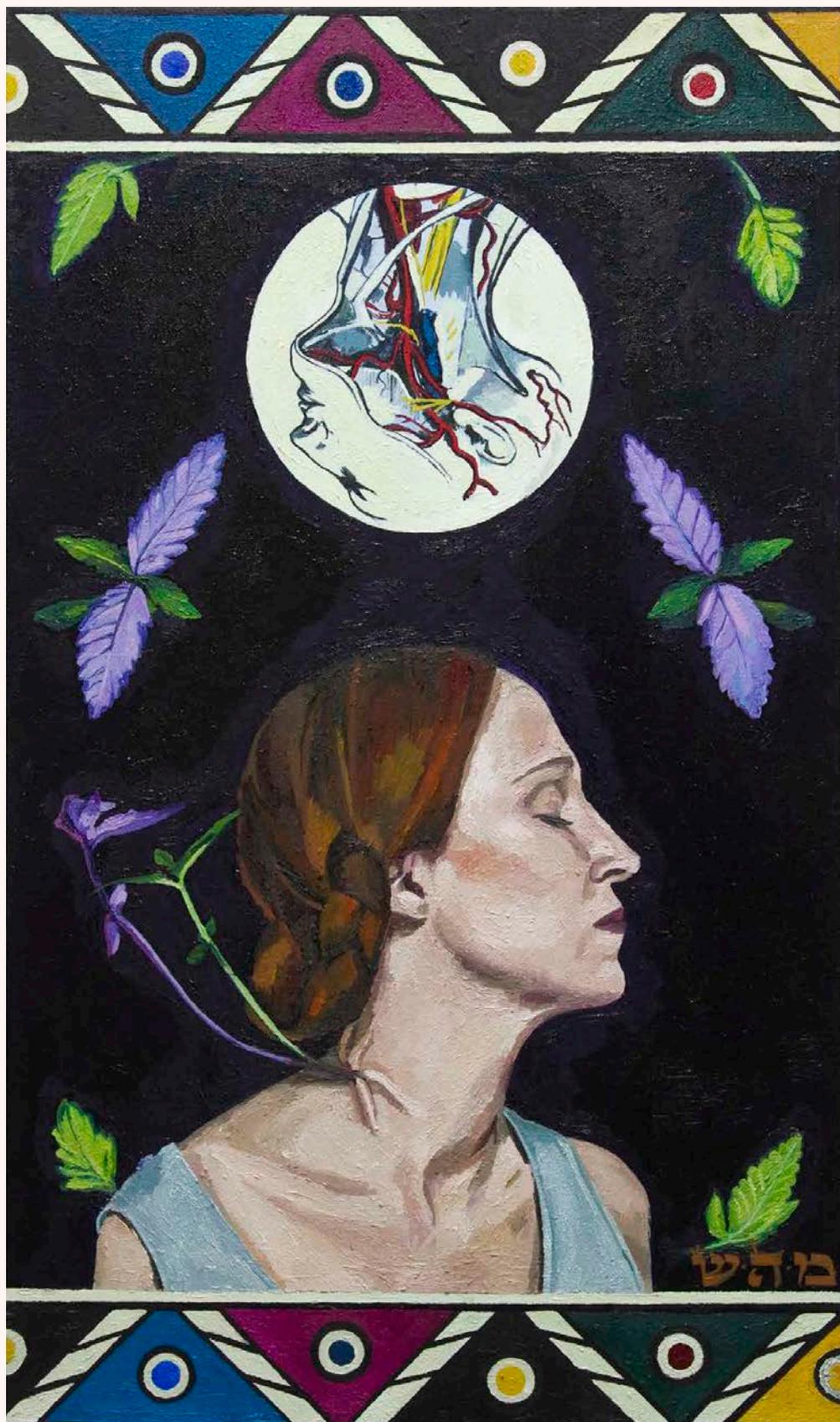
Task

Make a painting of trees in a forest, create a space between the trees through the colors.

There's an old forest in Maine, "Witherle Woods", close to the Canadian border. The story goes that it used to be a hideout for the Abinaki Indians in the 17th–18th century from the Dutch. The trunks closest to the viewer are in warm colors: yellowish ochre with traces of cadmium orange and different temperatures of red. The trees in the middle are greenish, going from cold blue green to a warm green. And the trees farthest away are in hues of blue, going from ultramarine blue to a more Prussian blue, to a Caribbean blue.

Two Different Species (2013)

Oil on linen
120 x 70 cm



The Ingredients of Hummus in the Ten Sephirots (2012)

Oil on canvas
120 x 90 cm



**Growing in
Guggenheim (2012)**

Oil on canvas
120 x 70 cm



**ANGELS –
What are They? (2012)**

Oil on canvas
120 x 70 cm

