

Press Information

Iceland. Fabulous!

A higher profile in Europe than ever before for Iceland's culture

39 Icelandic authors in Frankfurt

230 new releases related to Iceland

FRANKFURT, 11/10/2011 – Under the slogan Fabulous Iceland, this year's Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair will present its culture to a mixed German and international audience, while providing insights into its literary tradition and current writing. During the Frankfurt Book Fair (12 to 16 October 2011), approximately 300 events on Iceland will be staged at the exhibition site and around Frankfurt. In all, 400 events will take place this autumn throughout the German-speaking countries. Iceland's culture has never before enjoyed such a high profile in Europe.

An extensive programme of readings

Some 39 Icelandic authors will travel to the Frankfurt Book Fair. Among these are Hallgrímur Helgason, Einar Kárason, Jónína Leósdóttir, Andri Snær Magnason, Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir, Yrsa Sigurðardóttir, Sjórn, Jón Kalman Stefánsson, Kristín Steinsdóttir, and this year's winner of the Nordic Literature Prize, Gyrðir Elíasson.

The literary address to mark the opening on 11 October will be held jointly by the bestselling author Arnaldur Indriðason, and the successful young writer Guðrún Eva Mínervudóttir. Iceland's President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson will make the opening speech on behalf of the Guest of Honour.

The Iceland Pavilion (Forum, Level 1) will be the centrepiece for all the book presentations, readings and discussions. At the same time, many of the country's authors will also be present at the stands of publishers, newspapers and TV stations. For example, Arnaldur Indriðason and Steinunn Sigurðardóttir have been invited to a conversation on the Blue Sofa (in the passage between Halls 5 & 6). In its "101 Reykjavík" series, every day the broadcaster ARTE will welcome different Icelandic authors to discuss Icelandic topics. These will include Jónína Leósdóttir and Kristín Steinsdóttir, as well as Auður Ava Ólafsdóttir and Jón Kalman Stefánsson.

Outside the exhibition site there will also be a large number of readings by authors. At the Commerzbank building on Gallusanlage (12 October, 8.00 p.m.), Guðmundur Óskarsson will present his book, *Bankster*, which deals with the financial crisis and which won him the Icelandic Literary Prize. In the Evangelische Stadtkademie Römer9,

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Steinar Bragi, Sjón and others will present their works as part of the OPEN BOOKS series, organised by the City of Frankfurt's Culture Board (5 to 10 October).

Other highlights of the programme include events on the Nobel Laureate Halldór Laxness, such as a reading by Joachim Król (German National Library, 13 October at 7.30 p.m.), or on the Iceland's Atom Poets (Guest of Honour Pavilion, 14 October, 12.30 p.m.) and the Sagas of Icelanders (e.g. Guest of Honour Pavilion, 15 October, 1.00 p.m.).

Among the important members of the political and social scenes appearing in the Guest of Honour programme will be the mayor of Reykjavík, Jón Gnarr. Together with the writer Pétur Gunnarsson, he will present literary texts about Iceland's capital, which recently became the first non-anglophone city to be declared a UNESCO City of Literature. After Edinburgh (Scotland), Iowa City (USA), Melbourne (Australia) and Dublin (Ireland), Reykjavík is only the fifth city to have been given this title. On the evening before that event, Jón Gnarr will also meet the philosopher and bestselling author Richard David Precht in the Künstlerhaus Mousonturm for a discussion about democracy (12 October 2011, 7.30 p.m.).

On 12 October, at 1.00 p.m., a historical meeting will take place in the Guest of Honour Pavilion. The background: in November 1944, a German U-boat sank the Icelandic passenger ship, Goðafoss, at the entrance to Reykjavík harbour. To mark the publication of a book entitled Goðafoss (Ankerherz Verlag), a survivor from the ship and a member of the U-boat crew will shake hands for the first time in an act of reconciliation.

The Iceland Pavilion

The concept of the Iceland Pavilion is for it to be a place in which visitors feel at home in Iceland – as a country of literature and of magnificent natural beauty. "Most Icelandic households have their own small libraries," says Halldór Guðmundsson, director of Fabulous Iceland. "If it weren't for that lively interest in literature it wouldn't be possible for our independent publishing sector with around 30 publishing houses to sustain itself in such a small country. We're bringing the tradition of our home libraries to Frankfurt, and with it also the Icelandic readers themselves. So there's a double sense in which we're inviting people into our world of books."

This is achieved by using several hundred photos of Icelanders pictured in their own private libraries. As part of the campaign "Come with us to Frankfurt!", Icelandic readers uploaded their photos to a Facebook account (www.facebook.com/sogueyjan.island), or they sent them by post and e-mail to the Fabulous Iceland office in Reykjavík. Besides this, there are also video portraits of Icelanders reading from their favourite books. These separate, self-contained portraits

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add up to make a video installation lasting roughly 30 minutes. From the home libraries area, visitors can then enter the Iceland Panorama – an elaborate 360-degree film installation that brings home quite stunningly, the grandeur of the country's landscapes and natural phenomena.

To enable people to get together in a more relaxed, "Icelandic" atmosphere, within the hurly-burly of the Fair, Fabulous Iceland will host a Happy Hour at the pavilion every day at 5.00 p.m. This will include Icelandic authors and music, as well as the island's national drink, Brennivín.

Events and exhibitions hosted by Frankfurt's cultural institutions

The cultural institutions of Frankfurt are presenting a programme of events of unparalleled diversity and density, with individual shows and thematic group exhibitions by contemporary Icelandic artists, architects, film producers and designers.

Gabríela Friðriksdóttir has created a space for the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt entitled "Crepusculum" (Twilight or Sunset). Here, medieval Icelandic parchments coexist with the artist's own enigmatic system of symbols, as well as a newly produced film depicting a mystical landscape. This is the first time the handwritten texts, which form part of Iceland's most important cultural heritage, have ever left the island. The Schirn is also devoting a solo exhibition to the Icelandic artist Erró. (Both exhibitions run until 8 January 2012.)

The Frankfurter Kunstverein is showing, among other things, the first large-scale solo exhibition in Germany by Ragnar Kjartansson. This includes more than 15 video pieces, picture series and installations by the famous Icelandic artist (until 16 October 2011). The Museum für Angewandte Kunst is presenting an exhibition "On the Cutting Edge – Design in Iceland" (until 19 February 2012), while the Deutsches Architekturmuseum Frankfurt provides an overview of the country's architectural history in its exhibition "Iceland and Architecture?" (until 13. November 2011). To mark the new translation of the Sagas of Icelanders, the Archaeological Museum of Frankfurt is showing artefacts dating from the period of the sagas (until 30 November 2011). Meanwhile, until 31 October 2011, the German Film Museum will be showing a selection of Icelandic feature films and documentaries in its new premises. Among the performers appearing at the Künstlerhaus Mousonturm will be Icelandic composer and electronic music producer, Valgeir Sigurðsson, who has previously collaborated many times with the musician Björk (12 October, 9.00 p.m.).

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New Releases about Iceland

Some 111 German-language publishers have issued a total of 230 new releases from or about Iceland, which give an impression of the storytelling styles and richness of genres in Icelandic literature. The majority of the translations fall into the fiction category (90 titles). Ten anthologies also testify to the great interest now being shown in Icelandic literature. Among the highlights is the new translation of the Sagas of Icelanders – Iceland’s contribution to world literature – which is published by S. Fischer Verlag.

Commenting on the activities of the German-language publishing houses, Book Fair director Juergen Boos says: “Inside all of us, there is a hunger for good stories. Few countries demonstrate this as clearly as Iceland does, where the people are immersed in their stories, from the medieval sagas to the contemporary, multi-medial cultural scene. As the wealth of new releases shows, the German audience evidently shares this desire for good stories.”

Publishers outside the German-speaking world are also showing great interest in Icelandic literature. Just recently AmazonCrossing acquired the English rights to ten Icelandic titles, the translations of which are to be released soon. This project will be presented at an event in the Iceland Pavilion on 12 October, at 3.00 p.m.

The catalogue “Fabulous Books from Iceland” provides an overview of the new German-language releases. This contains short descriptions of all the new Icelandic titles, from new releases to medieval sagas and eddas, with classics of modernist and contemporary literature alongside non-fiction works, illustrated art books and travel guides. The catalogue is available to download at the Fabulous Iceland website.

Printed copies of the catalogue can be obtained from those booksellers participating in the window display competition organised by Fabulous Iceland and the Frankfurt Book Fair. The printed version is also available directly from the Guest of Honour Pavilion at the Book Fair itself. The catalogue is designed in the style of the Christmas catalogue which the Iceland Publishers Association distributes to every household each year. This is highly prized by the Icelanders as a useful aid when composing their Christmas wish-lists and gift-lists.

Like hardly any other nation, Iceland really lives with its literature. On average, each of Iceland’s 318 000 people purchases eight books per year, and few countries can match the number of writers measured as a percentage of the population. In Reykjavík, the bookshops remain open longer than most other businesses. Iceland’s literature and language are the unifying link for the island nation. The language has barely changed since the Middle Ages, which means all Icelanders are capable of reading the original versions of their country’s early writings, including the sagas, and they can all trace

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their history back to the roots. As Vigdís Finnbogadóttir – president of Iceland from 1980 to 1996, and patron of the Fabulous Iceland society – explains: “Literature is one of the most important things there is for us. Stories and books have warmed up this country in the far north for centuries.”

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