

ELDER

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Abstract

Elder is a collection of branches from a family tree long overgrown. A travelogue of a quest to uncover the legacy of the Vikings and how their influence affected the Celts and other civilizations on their path throughout history, *Elder* looks at one view of a group of people and considers the multiplicity of identity stripped from it. On the journey, the film follows the Vikings' presence throughout Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Iceland, extracting their memory from each site and coupling it with less dominant cultural memory.

A pilgrimage to both a history of a people and a history of essay cinema, *Elder* begins with the trimming of an Elder tree in a family backyard, then traces the significance of the act through a history of superstition and cultural memory that travelled from Scandinavia to the Celtic territories, before finding a home in North America. Following this journey, the film explores the construction of history and how it records only a specific view, interrogating what narratives are left behind. It is this mechanism of obstruction of truth that the film is most concerned with; the ability of history to obscure its own truth by focusing on only one visible aspect. Obstruction becomes a constant underlying concern of *Elder*: how is a search for identity, for a history that is only an echo of its original veracity, either elusive or futile? In what ways is it covered up, or obscured from view?

Drawing from the tradition of essay film, *Elder* regards and responds to a variety of techniques and navigates its form as a diary essay, richly steeped in history. The film is structured and chaptered using the ancient Viking alphabet. Each letter holds a dual function – as functional component for language structure, and as a container for the mythology that the letter symbolizes. Using this readymade narrative, *Elder* follows an autoethnographic and non-linear narrative through Scandinavia, obsession with film history, and the dissolution of history's fictions.

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Elder has been in development for several years, and began taking form after meetings with Lea Marin and Justine Pimlott at the National Film Board. I was grateful for these experiences; It was not during, but after these meetings that I began to understand that the formal structure of my work diverges significantly from both formalist experimental film and documentary structure. This was key to my understanding that the work I have created so far in my career can be described in many ways with regard to its genre, which liberates me from adherence to specificity and enables me to work within a more broad, borderless space.

I must first acknowledge and thank Phil Hoffman, who has long supported my artistic practice from my undergraduate study period to current time. After his encouragement, I applied as a candidate to the MFA program at York University, and through his support I completed a long-troubled short film *Famous Diamonds*, and my thesis film, *Elder*. This time and process has been fraught with difficulty both personal and technical, and Phil has been a steadfast ally in navigating the challenges that arose during the research and production phases of *Elder*. I will forever be grateful for his efforts and influence in my artistic practice, and will continue to benefit from his advice and wisdom for the duration of my career.

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Artistic Process and Evolution of Elder

Conceptualization

Like its namesake tree, *Elder* has had many evolutions, grown wild, expanded beyond its space, and required careful pruning and care. This is yard work I was unprepared for as I found myself standing in a thick brush of vines, uncertain of the path outward. Originally proposed as an exploration of the Vikings and how their genetic legacy trickled down into my family, I had intended to explore these “real” figures and how they concretely affected lands and peoples throughout the ages. I had hoped to explore an identity understood by history, but provide an underexplored view of the influence of a people.

The process began as an exploration of the Viking alphabet – the runes of the elder futhark – looking at the structure of the letters in place and their meanings. Each rune has a function as a letter, as a part of the alphabet to form words. However, there is a second function behind each letter – they stand as memorials for their meaning. Long used in occult circles for divination, the meaning behind each symbol ranges from significant trees, to occurrences in nature, to gods. I began to see that the alphabet held its form as a readymade non-linear narrative, one that could form the spine of a film exploring the legacy of this alphabet through time and culture, originating with the Vikings themselves. Having an academic background in art history from my undergraduate degree, I knew already of the legacy of the Vikings among the Celtic territories and their well-known raids. I wanted to further explore this impact of the Vikings and how it continued on to Iceland, Greenland, then North America, eventually settling into my family today.

When embarking on the creation of the project, I first took a research journey to Iceland to peel through their well-documented cultural history and visited several Viking museums. Geared both at tourists and at amateur historians, each site documents the Viking age within Iceland through artifacts, dioramas and retellings, and reconstructed settlements. My research continued from here as I plotted my filming and research trip for the fall. I aimed to have a holistic view of the Vikings and their path, so I endeavored to explore their trails through most Scandinavian countries: Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Iceland. I booked travel for these, and began to build my aims for research, and the list of destinations to film and research in. This is where the thrill of research transformed into something more crippling – in the process of acquiring, gathering, and planning, I began to lose what I require for properly interfacing with a work. Instead, I began to gather obstructions.

On Obstructions

Alongside the growth of possibility and potential, the paths of disaster and destruction breed. Faced with a wealth of research, I first began to have difficulty limiting the scope of the project in the summer before I embarked on the research and shooting travel for *Elder*. As research swelled, so did the potential for the project's visual style and structure, and I began to workshop a path through this. It was a time of great difficulty in my family as well as myriad personal struggles – a reality I had been familiar with during the production process for *Lion* (2014). My desire to uncover the lives of the Vikings became obscured by the more real, immediate concerns of my own life. The absorption of my mental acuity and lack of calm space began a period that continued as a black cloud hovering over the research, shooting, and travel for the project, and continued well into my third return to Iceland (months after my research trip, to complete a pilgrimage and gather final images).

While in Scandinavia and during the shooting phase of the project, I began to have repeated difficulties acquiring the footage I had planned or hoped to get. The first obstruction to this was the weather. Each day I had planned to shoot a landscape in Oslo, a thick fog rolled in and caused me to reschedule. A not-forecasted rain storm would make my movement with recording equipment impossible. The wind would increase and prevent a still shot. This was the first leg of my journey, and this weather followed me to Sweden, then to Denmark, and came to a climax in Iceland. Shooting around this weather became exceedingly difficult and further unraveled my approach to capturing images, already something I was having difficulty conceptualizing.

While continuing my research outside of shooting, I began uncovering research that unexpectedly unraveled my concept of Vikings. I found a people that were occasionally warriors and explorers (much like many peoples throughout history), but were also farmers, lovers, artists, and poets. I found ingenuity and invention, creativity and humanity. The Vikings-as-horned-warrior fiction began to disintegrate. As it turned out, this fiction of the Viking I had believed and based research on was actually obscuring the veracity of a people with a legacy. This, alongside obstruction, became the main exploration for the project – the things we assume and believe about ourselves are often selective histories and they cover the more invisible realities that exist alongside what we believe. I began to realize I was searching for something that did not really exist. I was, however, following a path that the Vikings were familiar with – one fraught with obstacles from family life, from blinding hope, from the wind.

On Filming

*“One day she got the idea of drawing up a list of 'things that quicken the heart.'
Not a bad criterion I realize when I'm filming...” – Sans Soleil (Marker)*

The obstructions I encountered when working on and developing the project blossomed into a full creative block by the time I embarked on my flight to Europe. I had been trying to distill all of my research and creative direction into an actionable way forward, so that when I arrived in my first destination I would be able to begin capturing the images I wanted. In reality, I arrived in Norway not knowing what to record. So, in an either romantic or desperate decision, I chose to rely on advice from those I have exalted in my mind as idols – manifesting one such piece of advice from Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* (1983) into being.

Prior to *Elder* I had been focusing mainly on working with found footage, believing firmly in Godard’s approach of taking images to another place and narrative¹. Filming *en plein air* was a practice I had not visited since my travels to Chernobyl when making *Lion* (2014), and beyond. This added another level of anxiety to work through, as I knew that the images that would be most sensible would be not found footage in the sense I had been working with, but instead footage found in the ruins of Viking settlements, landscapes they inhabited, and empty spaces of memory. I sought to capture these spaces, and then later activate them with new fictions, new narratives expanding within. Beyond space, my interest became “the figure” – how do we observe and identify people and bodies? I wanted to look at a known historical figure such as the Vikings, observe how we identify them with physical characteristics, and present instead the concept of them without these

¹ Jean-Luc Godard’s notion of the origin of source material being unimportant, and the priority should be on the new narratives developed with it.

identifying characteristics. As history remembers mostly the male subjects of the Vikings, I wanted to repurpose the gaze upon them, and instead show their shadow in time.

Completion

When faced with the prospect of gathering my footage and research into a more concise form, the realizations of a project developing strikingly different than planned came flooding forward. I understood that there were two key components to my research and work: travelogue/diaristic experience, and research/discovery. I distilled my research and travel into component parts, and began to fit them into the readymade narrative of the elder futhark runes. I then separated footage into three visual treatments: digital video for travelogue and landscapes to capture their beauty and current place in time, aged colour film for artifacts and museum objects to add a visual and physical layer of separated viewership, and black and white (high contrast sound print film) for the theoretical and diaristic portions to replicate how my memory functions and affects my understanding of the world. I began to structure the piece as a collection of space to be activated by the body that existed in memory, weaving them carefully between each other to achieve a conflation of identity and concept that form within a viewer's mind instead of on a timeline.

On Voice

Out of this final phase came my understanding of both the film and my research. I now understood it first as a pilgrimage, a diary, and travelogue – the secondary characteristic was the research and identity of the Vikings. This reframing allowed me to complete the work as an essay in the style I have been conceptualizing in my work for several years – a coalescing of the first-hand travelogue I have been exploring in *The Weight of Snow* (2014) and *Epilogue* (2015), and the poetic diary of *Famous*

Diamonds (2016). Within my work, the narrator has played a key role in the communication between viewer and filmmaker. This relationship can be managed without the direct address from the maker, but in my particular practice, I have found my most successful method of communicating information to a viewer is with honesty and directness. While I am experimenting with form, I find more formalist works often separate the work from the viewer and require them to analyze and dissect the work, often diluting the work's original communicative aim. Where travelogue and first-person cinema is concerned, a direct appeal to the viewer allows a more immediate connection first, then allows the viewer to muse upon and consider the larger issues at play. This is not unlike the narrative traditions of essay cinema, exemplified with *Sherman's March* (1986) and most recently in *The Royal Road* (2015). In each of these works, the narrator is responsible for the progression of the work, bringing the viewer into a space that exists somewhere between concept and experience. It is within this crucial space that *Elder* exists, reaching out to each of these poles.

In *The Weight of Snow*, the centerpiece essay film in *Lion*, a series of experimental works focusing on radiation, I navigated a dual narrative within a spoken essay that formed the text of the film. The subjects were a travelogue to Chernobyl to research the project, and the decline in health and death of my grandmother. In this, I carefully balanced personal diary from travelogue experience with observed fact, finding the most appropriate voice in the form of a poetic, personal narration. Having previously worked with poetry as the basis of narration, this was the continuation of exploring text in this way – I had previously approached diary narration in my first post-school short film, *The Reason Why*. For *The Weight of Snow*, I began to fold in both research and travelogue into the text.

Prior to completing *Elder* my most recent film work was *Famous Diamonds*, a film in which I wrote a narration from prose poetry, steeped in diary and research into the economy of diamonds. This was a more refined and constructed approach to spoken film text and required a vocal performance I

workshopped over the course of several months to achieve the correct inflection. From this experience, I knew that the most successful approach to film narration for *Elder* would be a hybrid of both a poetic and diaristic approach focusing on my journey as primary structure, and augmenting it with historical context as the film travelled from location to location.

Underpinning *Elder*: History as Wallpaper

The Vikings as Pilgrims

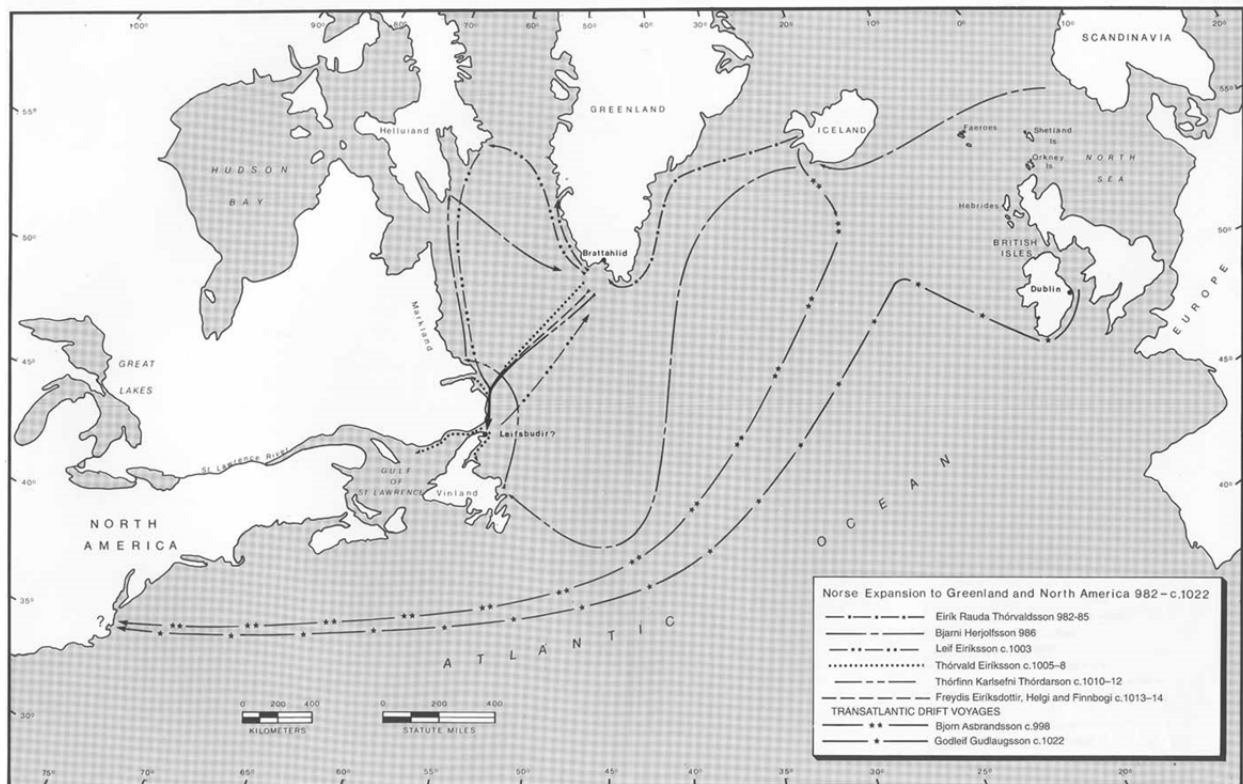


Image 1: Norse Expansion to Greenland and North America 982 - c.1022 (*The Saga of Eric the Red*)

Evidence of the path of the Vikings is littered throughout Scandinavia at many sites and uncovered settlements; some is detritus and some sizeable monuments taking the form of ships. In Oslo, near the sea, sits the most complete ship unearthed in Scandinavia². Buried with the ship was a hoard of artifacts that at once included jewels, precious metals, furniture and art objects, and, notably, silk tapestries that still retain some of their original pigmentation. Like the Egyptians, it was custom to be buried with a wealth of possessions to shuttle the dead into the next world. Possessions, worldly

² From the text at the Viking Ship Museum

goods, food, supplies - all were gathered into a ship and covered in a mound, a monument for the dead. This idea of plenty, of abundance, meant that one would be well-prepared for their new role in Valhalla³.

Beyond Valhalla, another widely believed the Promised Land was that of Vinland⁴. The cultural promise of Vinland was, perhaps, a manifestation of the more religious promise of Valhalla. A great hope for those killed in battle, they were to go join those who have gone before, the great stags of men, the glorious dead. This warrior class reached for Valhalla as they would their sword, their shield; this glorious end wasn't a consolation but a fire burning. Of the many views of a people, this is but one. What of those less inflamed? What of those more numerous and crucial parts of a civilization, those who dare to exist in the face of history's disinterest?

The quest for both glory in Valhalla and paradise in Vinland is evidenced by both the wars fought by Vikings and recorded in history, as well as the cross-continental searches for Vinland over generations. Erik the Red was credited as the first person to discover Greenland, naming it something favourable and creating the fiction of possibility there (The Saga of Eric the Red). His son Leif is credited as the earliest known European to discover North America⁵. Is the greatest Viking tragedy that they never found *exactly* what they were looking for? If they had all found and stayed in Vinland, what would have happened?

³ Known burial traditions passed down culturally, as well as theorized by archaeologists at dig sites in Oslo, specifically the Viking Ship Museum.

⁴ Spoken of by many in Scandinavia in the Viking Era. (Danver)

⁵ According to Viking lore, compared with European history. (Little)

Vikings Making Magic

Some of the runes were used for protection... When people use some kinds of runes to try to let a certain girl fall in love with you, or to harm your enemy... something like that. That seems to be something that happens not just in one night. It was because the Catholic church, Christianity- the runes were connected to the heathen gods, to the past. That's when the letters we use today started to come in... The priests, bishops, the pope, they tried to make the runes look dubious..

(Biering)

A folk history becomes known best through oral tradition. In the ways that Gods evolved from weather phenomena, we attempt to explain away the unknown and control it with appeasement. Iceland which is notable for a largely peaceful history, faced a transfer of religious power in historical proximity to the fading of the Viking age. Legend states that the high priest isolated himself to consider what could happen with the impending Lutheran Christianity brought by the Norwegians and their king. He emerged days later and declared that everyone in the country should convert, to avoid the inevitable conflict that would occur if they did not (Vésteinsson). In this religious transfer, Icelanders never made a clean break from paganism. Leftover were texts and records from a previous age, carefully detailing the new "old ways".

In another paradox of intention, the Christianity that sought to make all holy and good created an opposite problem. A new alphabet became de facto, tossing aside the runes that served and grew with the culture. Suddenly, having books with these older symbols became blasphemy, became evil. Those who remembered the old pagan ways became, naturally, akin to witches. An alphabet was given a power it had not wielded before, now full of secrets and sorcery.

Old English	Old Norse
ƿ <i>feoh</i> 'wealth'	ƿ <i>fē</i> 'wealth'
ŋ <i>ūr</i> 'aurochs(?)'	ŋ <i>úr</i> 'drizzle' (Icelandic) <i>úr</i> 'slag' (Norwegian)
þ <i>þorn</i> 'thorn'	þ <i>þurs</i> 'giant; demon'
ǣ <i>ās</i> 'mouth'	ǣ <i>áss</i> 'god' (Icelandic) <i>áss</i> 'river-mouth' (Norwegian)
ᚱ <i>rād</i> 'journey, riding'	ᚱ <i>reið</i> 'riding' (Icelandic) <i>reið</i> 'riding' (Norwegian)
ᚦ <i>cēn</i> 'torch'	ᚦ <i>kaun</i> 'sore, ulcer'
ᚷ <i>gyfu</i> 'gift'	
ƿ <i>wynn</i> 'joy'	
ᚱ <i>hægl</i> 'hail'	* <i>hagal(l)</i> 'hail'
ᚠ <i>nȳd</i> 'need, affliction'	ᚠ <i>nauðr</i> 'constraint' (this is a cognate of <i>nȳd</i>)
ᚦ <i>īs</i> 'ice'	ᚦ <i>ís</i> 'ice'
ᚦ <i>gēr</i> '(good, fruitful) year'	ᚠ <i>ár</i> '(good, fruitful) year'
ᚠ <i>ēoh</i> 'yew'	
ᚦ <i>peorð</i> (meaning unknown. Various suggestions have been made, but none is convincing).	
ƿ <i>eolhx</i> (<i>secg</i>) 'a kind of sedge-grass'.	
ᚠ <i>sigel</i> 'sun'	ᚠ <i>sól</i> 'sun'
ᚠ <i>tīr</i> 'a guiding star or constellation'	ᚠ <i>Týr</i> 'the god Týr'
ᚦ <i>beorc</i> 'birch'	ᚦ <i>bjarkan</i> 'birch-twig'
ᚠ <i>eh</i> 'horse'	
ᚠ <i>man</i> 'man, person'	ᚠ <i>maðr</i> 'man, person'
ᚠ <i>lagu</i> 'water'	ᚠ <i>logr</i> 'water' ᚠ <i>ýr</i> 'yew' (compare the Old English name for ƿ).
ᚠ <i>ing</i> 'the hero Ing'	
ᚠ <i>eþel</i> 'land, ancestral home'	
ᚠ <i>dæg</i> 'day'	

Image 2: The Elder Futhark (Findell)

The runes had existed long before this new occult status they now held. First outlined in the three 'rune poems', each stanza of these historical documents outlines the letter's unique signification beyond its function as a letter. These became translated over time into different theories yet their underpinning remained the same. For example, in explaining "wealth", the first stanza offers a poetic interpretation of origin: "Feoh [wealth] is a comfort to everyone; but each person must give it

away freely, if he wants to receive glory in the sight of the Lord.” (Findell 73) Another rune poem offers that wealth “is family strife and men’s delight and grave-fish’s path”, another states that it “causes trouble among relatives; the wolf lives in the forest.” (Findell 73)

This multiplicity in understanding something as facile as a letter became of interest to me in the process of structuring my research. Akin to the development of religious concepts, the process of giving something meaning through cultural feeling is the very mechanism of creating superstition. Even the earliest religious attempt to explain the causes behind destruction and plenty, and our beliefs get placed onto objects, plants, and phenomenon that are nearby either in time or place. Our belief attaches to things, and they are forced to bear the weight of our fear.

The Elder as Mother

My lifetime fondness for the fragrance of elderflower first peaked as obsession in Denmark, in 2012. I was brought to an old bar in Copenhagen by my dear friend Ellen, who introduced me to a proper elderflower cordial. A drink can be innocuous and fleeting, yet this was a significant impact on my memory and seemed to transport me to childhood and beyond. It was not until years later when provoking my mother into telling me stories about farm life that I realized that the Elder has had a prominent place in my family history, existing on nearly every property we have owned. My grandfather was warned by the original caretakers of his land (the new world in North America was not new and had many nations in place) to never cut down the Elder tree that was on his property. This began my search for superstition attached to the tree and it manifested in the Celts, in the Pagans, and in the Vikings. Used for hundreds of years as folk medicine, its berries are used for respiratory ailments, treatment of allergies, and boosting immunity. It is easy to understand why this tree became sacred, and storied among religions and peoples. Most interesting in my mind and most

notable for my grandfather standing in his field was the immovable quality it was given by history.

It was said that “If an elder tree was cut down, a spirit known as the Elder Mother would be released and take her revenge. The tree could only safely be cut while chanting a rhyme to the Elder Mother.” (Howard 134-135)

Before I embarked on the travel for *Elder*, my parents followed the neighbourhood trend of tree cutting, and began to trim the Elder trees in our yard. Insignificant to them, this act gave me a visceral reaction and struck fear into me. I filmed them in the process, much to their frustration. I realized that the two viewpoints we held were divergent, and real to both of us. Mine was, perhaps, more romantic and steeped in superstition; I realized that this impulse of belief would follow me in my travels to Scandinavia.

On Monuments and Maleness

In Oslo stands Vigelandsparken, the world's largest single-artist sculpture park. Housing hundreds of Gustav Vigeland's life studies, the park was a self-designed monument to showcase both his artistic prowess and his considerable resources. The figures are dominantly male and often entwined in positions frozen in time, at once erotic, carnal, and serene.

Stone is a material tradition. Perhaps the Celts taught this to the Vikings, their practice in Ireland trickling down into runestones. Struck as monuments for the dead - either at sea or in battle, these remind those who live. Stone as memorial achieves the opposite of its intention. Tasked with shuttling the living from existence into mere memory, stone instead creates a nearly permanent, physical form of something drifting away. Rather than carve their physical likeness, they chose identity. A distillation of truth, each stone marks an ideal echo. We carve into history as we do into stone - only the desirable qualities remain, the rest become dust. History is a monument much like a statue, both appear permanent, both hope to possess their subjects.

The tradition of stone sees us trying to cast memory in permanent form. Whether they be mementos from grandmothers or monumental sculptures, they attempt to pull the visceral from our dimension and encapsulate it, always attempting to possess the fleeting. This, like that of the Vikings, is an incomplete history of stone. A longer view sees the wind and rain erode even the greatest monument to grains of sand, islands dissolving into the sea.

Vigeland was perhaps commemorating himself and his own existence in a form less fleeting than that of a genetic legacy. Genes left behind form a living monument, carved of flesh. Like that of its originating source, genes are an echo of the DNA that they are spliced from. It is in this way that

genetic legacy becomes similar to statues left behind. It is here that maleness enters into my discussion of monuments: struck in stone are the ideal qualities remembered of a subject. In the history that records the Vikings, they are culturally known as fierce, ruthless, masculine men. The Nazis attempted to exploit this cultural capital⁶ to bolster their own army, a failed attempt to get Scandinavian soldiers to join their ranks. While filming, I became aware of the overly present maleness on display in the many versions of history I had been sifting through. Ironic, as I later found, was the reality of history and the Vikings. The largest ship ever found in Scandinavia, was built and buried for a powerful woman, a leader commemorated by a ceremonial burial. No such memorial now exists for a man.

⁶ The Swedish National History Museum has several artifacts from this time period, featuring various advertisements and propaganda that was distributed throughout Sweden.

An Echo on Film – *Elder* as Thesis Film

Elder begins with a prologue of a journey, a hinting of the pilgrimage to come. Opening in Iceland, we travel from landscapes inland and go towards the sea, to glimpse the first attempt to view the Westman Islands, an ill-fated endeavour. From this introduction, the film begins its essay in Oslo, starting with current time. Exploring artifacts and Viking objects in a museum, I wanted to contrast the abundance of the dead against that of the living. Introducing my family and the Elder tree trimming, the film's first chapter introduces a point of terminus of legacy and history, to be explained in the coming minutes. From this origin, we explore the legacy of the Vikings as evidenced through travelogue, sites, and artifacts left behind. Introduced at this stage are the key narrative concepts that I revisit through the film: the pilgrimage, the monument and its function, superstition and cultural fiction, and legacy – genetic or historical. Navigating through the established structure of the elder futhark, each of these concepts appears and reappears throughout the progress of the work, as appropriate.

The concept of pilgrimage, first introduced in the prologue, is examined as it applies to both the personal essay, as well as the legacy of the Vikings. Initially an effort to research and record an accurate history, I soon discovered in my research that I had endeavoured to chase an ideal concept. Much like a pilgrim chases the divine (see: *The Pilgrim's Diary*), I sought something ungraspable. My research journey swiftly turned into a pilgrimage to retrace the steps of a people built into gods by men. This introduces the next crucial subject: the monument. An attempt to capture the divine on earth in a more permanent way (more concrete than lived experience), the construction of monuments became a practice throughout history, both in art and in practicality. Humans have long captured the human form of the gods they worshipped, an attempt to give a face and identity to the impossible-to-contain qualities held by these deities. Human form became a trend, too – capturing

the ideal body, the ideal beauty of each time the sculptor existed within. The Vikings however, opted for a more practical monument and constructed rune stone markers across Europe to mark death, memorials, conquests, and ownership – choosing not to capture the human aspects of us, but the fantastic aspects that would inspire or provoke. The function of the monument, *Elder* examines, becomes that as a permanent site of memory.

Alongside monument and pilgrimage, the dual concepts of legacy and superstition are enveloped in plants, trees, places, and artifacts scattered across Scandinavia and Europe. Exploring the origins of ideas and how they get passed down and transferred among a people, *Elder* focuses first on plants as an heirloom. Echoing the concern I had from the beginning of the essay, trimming the Elder tree in our yard, I explore how superstition becomes attached to an object and how that legacy travelled in time as though it were something as concrete as an engagement ring. Genetic legacy follows this path; akin to this is the indirect genetic legacy of the Vikings, their physical markers on a people, and identity after a millennium of time. At the end of the film, we return to the museum and the yard. Expanding on a search for a single identity and finding multiple, *Elder* concludes by considering the matter of perspective when looking at a history – veracity is in the eye of the beholder, and the process is as important as the result.

On Process Cinema

Important in my artistic practice has been my understanding of “the process” dictating the completed work. Learned in my undergraduate study period, I became familiar with the idea that the imagery and material I was working with would, when paired with concept, begin to diverge and gather within itself, creating a finished work that responded to its component parts, ever aware and ever connected. This process, in my experience, becomes most pronounced when working with

found footage – a practice I had been exclusively working within for several years before beginning the process for *Elder*. When working with a clear set of limitations of footage length and available imagery, the mind works to tunnel separate ideas together, linking them in a network that spreads out and self-propels.

In *Elder*, I understood the process would dictate the result, but knew that I was working with an entirely different method for image and concept creation. Rather than work with existing footage, I was embarking on an attempt to capture the footage found in the world, and translate it and the research I completed into a network that functioned the same as work I was familiar with creating. As expected, the process was fraught with obstruction, expansion, and difficulty of acquisition. This created a vast catalogue of footage, research, and narratives, all which had to be conformed into a structure that functioned together. The path towards this was as complicated and long as the research journey itself, dictating its form as it distilled.

On Memory in Cinema

“I’ve been filming the landscapes of San Francisco since just a few years after I arrived here. In capturing these images on film, I’m engaged in a completely impossible and yet partially successful effort to stop time. I now own the landscapes that I love. I preserve them in the amber of celluloid so that I might re-experience these visions of dappled sunlight, the calm of a warm afternoon and the framing of an alley as it recedes into the distance. These images serve as a reminder of what once was and as a prompt to appreciate what now is.

*In some kind of poetic, cinematic justice — as the city possessed Madeleine,
I possess it in return.” (J. Olson)*

The memories we possess are a trend of scientific study. Described to me most recently was the idea of memory as a precious, fragile object kept in a box. Each time you open it, it changes. Each time

you view it, its form diverges. This object can be replaced - through suggestion, through experience, through trauma. Sometimes it can be lost. Today we argue about the function of memory, why we evolved to carry an archive tucked away in a malleable container, one that warps and transforms its contents. The subjectivity of memory pales to the real, visceral experience of human touch, the thrill of a near miss, a summer breeze. This subjectivity also cripples us while we attempt to hold on as though our memories were stone, sightless to their flickering and sputtering.

In cinema, my approach to recording memory is similar to that of Jenni Olson's quest to possess an immeasurable, ephemeral thing. It is also similar to the concept of a monument capturing something impossible to hold. In cinema, something as free as light is transmuted and captured onto a celluloid frame or a digital chip, each reacting to the radiating energy of the real world and attempting to hold it still for an eternity.

Celluloid as Record – Elder and Technique

The Runes as Chapters of a Film Essay

The ordering mechanism of *Elder*, as explained earlier, is built on a readymade structure found in the elder futhark, the ancient Viking alphabet. As each letter has a symbolism attached to it, I used these concepts as an experimental, non-linear approach to ordering my research into a narrative. As each of these symbols hold multiple meanings, I decided the wisest and most functional approach for the work would be to include each interpretation.



Image 3: Chapter card in Elder

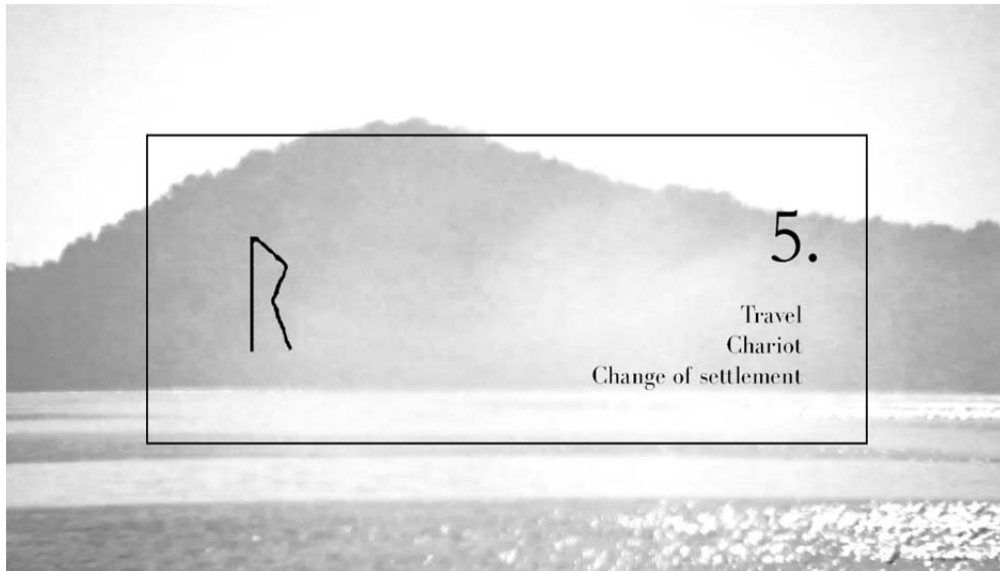


Image 4: Chapter card in Elder



Image 5: Chapter card in Elder

This enabled a multiplicity of connection between visual material and written subject within the film's text. This text was formed as a poetic travel essay, written in order to combine research with lived experience and consideration on issues present. The resulting product encapsulated a brief history of the Vikings as well as my difficulty and discovery during the production process (see *Appendix C*).

Film Choices

When considering how best to capture ancient artifacts, sublime landscapes, and work within imagery of memory, I realized that there were three distinct visual approaches necessary to capture each distinct concept. For the weathered character of memory and treacherous mental landscapes, I continued my practice of using high contrast sound print 16mm film stock, which provides a sharp drop of highlights into black. In my practice I have used this stock regularly as it is the only material that can properly replicate my experiences of memory recall.

For the antiquities I encountered, I knew that I wanted to add a layer of visual distance and call attention to the act of observation. I employed the use of aged, expired colour 16mm film, which begins over time to lose its fidelity and truth of image representation. Like archaeology, this film material provides an impression of what is filmed without acquiring all of the details – the rest are lost to time.

Most difficult to me was the capturing of the sublime landscapes that form the backdrop of Scandinavia. I wanted to record these in their complete fidelity, and on my travel I brought a Blackmagic Pocket Cinema camera with a set of C-Mount lenses. The images that resulted from this were distinctly digital and crisp, yet offered a visceral quality that was marked with the glass of the old lenses. I tested and worked with these images to transfer them to film and other video formats, but quickly realized that the images were complete as they were, unmodified. The process to this realization was the most difficult technical experience of working on *Elder* – having worked with video as a medium before, I have purposefully relied on similar techniques I use when working with film, so that I can add a layer of obfuscation to the video image. My moving image practice has mainly existed on film, and when I encounter video it looks both foreign and violent to my eye. The

choice to keep the video as it was became a rather strenuous technique decision, one which I approached with the fidelity of the image in mind first, and my formal concerns second. What resulted are landscapes that I feel truly represent the sublime quality that formed their creation – even if it was on a digital chip and not on celluloid.

Organic Developer, Image Structure as Record

An essential component in my artistic practice has been the crucial connection between medium and content. In previous work, this has meant developing or manipulating techniques during film processing to replicate a theory in an image artifact on the celluloid. During my work with *Lion*, I worked to create a series of techniques that replicated visible effects of radiation on celluloid, created by hand processing in the darkroom. This resulted in a suite of works that were both documents of their content, as well as physically and visually marked with their meaning. I have repeated this approach in my work since, most recently on *Famous Diamonds*. Rooted in fictions of romance and imbued with research into diamond mining and advertising, I worked with a variety of techniques to facet the image and separate, multiply, and transform the content across the frame.

Working with images in this way has resulted in a body of work that represents the way my research influences and informs my visual art practice. I have long defined myself primarily as an artist working with the medium of film, and when approaching *Elder*, I began to realize that my material approach would be no less important to resolve than during pre-production for other works. It was during pre-production that my curiosity into a burgeoning practice of creating organic photographic developers reached a peak. Caffeic acid, present in several plants, can interact with a film's emulsion and develop in a similar way to metal salts present in traditional developer. Working with a recipe I

developed and extensive testing (see *Appendix B*), I was able to create a recipe to process my black and white footage in.

The content of the black and white portions of *Elder* are rooted mainly in memory. As memory tends to be a web that connects to time and place, the desire to treat this footage in a meaningful way became overwhelming. To create this developer, I used elderberries that were hand-harvested from the trees in our yard in the fall of 2016. The caffeic acid present in these is strong enough to create the desired results, and yield a potent developer that works very similarly to my traditional developer of choice, Dektol. The mythology of elder trees and the emotion surrounding the trimming of the trees in our yard stood out to me as perfect meaning for imbuing the black and white memory-based footage with. Now, when seeing the film, a viewer actually *sees* the elder trees in my yard, pulling an image towards them from memory.

On Sound

My long-term collaboration with composer Mark Savoia has continued in *Elder*. Historically, Mark has adjusted his practice to mirror my own during a production process, which has led to him treating found footage and sound as source material and working from that point forward. He is a skilled musician but also a skilled technician, and understands that the transformation of source material is crucial to the overall success of the work. During his process, he often samples sections from found works and transforms them into digital instruments first, then composes a score from those created, unique instruments. Doing this virtually has created scores that are deeply connected with the imagery of my film work, and they become inseparable from the visual components.

For *Elder*, Mark continued his strategy of working with digital instruments, but as there is very little found footage present in the work, he echoed my approach to research and looked into the history of Celtic and Viking instruments. He discovered that not long after the Viking age, a system for writing down music was developed, and he began to experiment with the written notation system to explore non-traditional structures, resonance, and meter. When researching, he discovered several instruments and sounds:

Kulning: a type of call that Scandinavian vikings used to do to heard livestock

The Harp: Used in celtic music. Also using the instrument as an Aeolian harp (wind harp), a musical instrument that is played by the wind

Double recorder

*Ringing rocks: When struck, these ring a sound like a bell.
Idiophonic musical instruments also referred to as lithophones.*

Viking Instruments:

Lur

Lyre

Cow's horn

Pan flute

Balancing these instruments and methods in a score, the aural accompaniment to *Elder's* narrative essay and expansive imagery are rooted by a non-invasive soundscape that binds the work together. Tasked with the intention of pulling the landscapes and text apart, my desire for musical accompaniment is to transport the components into a viewer's memory and let the work exist within. By creating this aural component in the same way as the visual approach, the work blends seamlessly and passes forward without friction.

The Pilgrim's Diary

The Promised Land in Cinema

"Since the essayistic subject is a self continually in the process of investigating and transforming itself, one of the experiential encounters that most generally test and reshape that subject are, naturally and culturally, the spaces of the world." (The Essay Film: From Montaigne 104)

In his 1983 film *Sans Soleil*, Chris Marker brings us to Iceland three times. The first journey, on which he opens the film, he discusses the purity of happiness, captured in an image of three children walking hand in hand in the Westman Islands. This image is a sore thumb and never goes with anything. He resolves to couch it in black, saying that *"if they don't see the happiness in the picture, at least they'll see the black"*. (Marker) It takes us some time to return, and before we get there we are led on a pilgrimage of sorts. He discusses one in particular, a pilgrimage to San Francisco - following in the footsteps of *Vertigo*. It's brought up because it's the only film capable of portraying impossible memory and he had seen it nineteen times. Then, we get back to Iceland - all to discuss memory, science fiction, and the impossibility of the landscape.

He says this is the first stone of an imaginary film. Yet in this, he is talking about how he cannot make a work that he feels satisfies him and this desire to capture memory accurately - yet this is one of the most crucial, artistically successful and critically acclaimed works of the 20th century.

Cementing its status as archetypal essay film among artists and film lovers alike, it is one of the most well-examined explorations of memory, culture, and experience I have seen in my own life. And I must have seen it 19 times. It was the film that convinced me that filmmaking was not only a possibility, but a calling. It taught me that a narrative can exist beyond beginning, middle, and end.

By our third return, the volcano on the islands had opened up. And so, at the time, I believed that the only pilgrimage I took was to this town buried by ash. I was searching for an image that belonged to someone else, that existed only in cinema. Yet, like any other pilgrim, I set forth.

My first visit to the coast to see the islands resulted in me staring at the wind and rain that beat against the sea wall, the islands made invisible by a storm. I repeated this journey twice with different results: the next time I managed to see them with a dark cloud and rain fogging their view. The last time I saw the Westman Islands, I saw them as I had imagined them – glistening in the sun, near sunset, monuments in the ocean. When I reached the coast to film them, they were swallowed by the wall of a sea storm. What I searched for, a perfect vision of the islands shining on the sea, I only managed to capture with my eyes – an experience both subjective and unproveable. My result was now an experience only possible to share in an oral history, not a visual or concrete document. It was a continuation of the questions I had been trying to answer from the beginning of my research: how do you film a void? A memory? Something that already happened? Why was I so compelled to them?

The Ephemeral as Fact

“He wrote me: I will have spent my life trying to understand the function of remembering, which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its lining. We do not remember, we rewrite memory much as history is rewritten. How can one remember thirst?” (Marker)

This phenomenon has been explored throughout cinema, in varying ways. In *Sans Soleil*, Marker speaks of his pilgrimage to San Francisco and obsession with *Vertigo*; this pilgrimage is obsessed over again in Jenni Olson’s 2015 film, *The Royal Road*. In these films, the makers embark on a journey of their own all while trying to capture an obsession that has been exalted to the divine in

their minds. This compulsion to make cinema *about* cinema is akin to a religious pilgrimage and its attempt to reconcile the divine to real life. “Like its forerunners, versions of this reflexivity in film both create and participate in their own aesthetic principles, overlapping the representations of other artistic and aesthetic experiences with their own cinematic processes and frequently reflecting those processes as a reflection on film itself.” (The Essay Film: From Montaigne 181)

Elder as Pilgrimage

My hope to see the Westman Islands the way I had seen them in *Sans Soleil* was an impossible task, akin to someone hoping for a vision of the divine while on a pilgrimage. One of the most vivid images that exists in my memory of cinema, I have for years been obsessed with the image of the town of Heimaey, buried in ash by a volcano opening on the island. It is an image where people walk on top of endless feet of black ash, in the horizon there are roofs of houses that have been buried. It is my own private paradise in cinema – a landscape at once violent and serene. I twinned this in my mind with the concept of Vinland – a beautiful land to capture out of memory and into recorded fact.

Years ago, my grandmother had embarked on a religious pilgrimage to Israel, and in the days before I boarded my flight to Europe, I found her scrapbook for this trip among a pile of old papers, buried in our basement. It wasn't until my return when viewing these that I realized that this journey to the Westman Islands had been my own “religious” journey within a larger pilgrimage. Beyond the islands, I had been following in the footsteps of the Vikings and their journeys across time. I travelled from their Nordic origins to their settlements in Denmark and Sweden, to their last conquest of Iceland. Like my grandmother searched for traces of Jesus, I looked for evidence of the

Vikings. The remnants became frames of ships, artifacts from burial mounds, all objects and debris suggesting but not confirming an identity of a people.

On the Invisible

If you can see disaster coming, can you change its course? What qualifies as a disaster? To the Vikings, the wind was an invisible companion, seen in its effects. The concept of navigation existed as the attempt to follow the sun and wind to find a path across the ocean, and flexibility had to be a key weapon in any explorer's arsenal. Ever-changing is the wind, the sun, the rain; unreliability is steeped into nature and as a result, our endeavours are unpredictable and constantly in flux. These qualities are ever present during the production process of any work I embark on, but were especially prominent during *Elder*. Due to the nature I was immersed in, I discovered that inflexibility and over-adherence to a plan resulted only in despair and an empty memory card – ironic as the specific trauma of each place are broiled into my own memory. The invisible shapes who we are, whether it be the wind, whether it be relationship and interaction, whether it be history and cultural influence. Our human endeavours transmute invisibility into things we see and feel.

Stripping Identity

“He can attest to the event, he says it happened, but he doesn't have the evidence to back up his claim because he didn't turn the camera on... He testifies to what was apparent to him, to the visible, to what was available to experience...” (Cartmell)

Originally, my intention for *Elder* was to remove most identifying characteristics from both landscape and figure, as an attempt to present only the most conceptual of histories on film. In reality, I filmed as best as I could to isolate the subject within the frame, attempting to remove

context or complication from the image. I eschewed the human figure as much as possible, hoping only to capture the echoes of humanity in topiaries, gardening, monuments left behind. The goal for the piece was to confuse identity in the work and create a conceptual space that was constructed only of impression.

To me, removing identity echoes archaeology. Sifting through remains that are often merely debris, scientists construct narratives to help understand or explain away questions about people, places, and cultures. Over time, new methods criticize the old ways, replacing their truth with a newer version. In *Elder*, I rarely identify where the landscapes on view are from. As part of the goal of creating an impressionistic space, I am conflating one place with another in an attempt to defocus its importance over another landscape. In many chapters, we travel across country boundaries with a simple edit, rather than a flight or a plane ride.

To take this concept of identity removal to an apex and approach (from a distance) a climax for a non-linear narrative, I wanted to isolate the viewer's sensory experience to only an aural stimulus. Telling the story of my last view of the Westman Islands, my religious icons, I described the thrill of the capture dissolving into loss. Like the Vikings, I had seen what I searched for, but lost my possession of it. Like the wind, this chapter is invisible but present.

Conclusion

Monuments are an echo of their subject; the film essay is an echo of lived experience. The critical experience of first-hand cinema in the form of travelogue and diary communicates something truer than the impulse of documentary—it attempts to transfer visceral experience rather than observation to the viewer. This is a treacherous endeavour; it is fraught with impractical methods and difficulty of communication, but the impulse behind it is not unlike our hope within human relationships. We seek to be truly understood by another, we pursue this transfer relentlessly.

The inevitable fiction of the transfer of experience is subjectivity, which contributes to the futility of this pursuit. Those hopeful to transfer this experience to another turn to devotion to accomplish this—religious pilgrimage, commitment to craft, pursuit of political power. Yet, like the creation of a monument, even the deepest devotion cannot capture a complete experience with human hands. Like monuments, we fail to transmute the un-capturable aspects of being into a consumable, transferable package. Like monuments, we omit the imperfections of experience and leave them as dust to be blown away by time. Like monuments, they are always just beyond our reach.

Our subjective experience becomes a choice; do we view it as immovable monument, as channeling of the divine, or, merely, flesh and blood?

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Appendices

Appendix A: Itinerary

My itinerary for the research of *Elder* began in Norway. While here, I researched at the University of Oslo and the Viking Ship Museum. From this point, I travelled to the National History Museum and explored the landscapes surrounding Oslo – the mountains, the cliffs among the sea, and the fjord. Travelling from there I arrived in Stockholm, and searched around the old city for notable monuments and artifacts. I researched at the Swedish National History Museum, as well as the memorial sites throughout the city. From here, I travelled to Copenhagen to research in the Danish National History Museum, as well as Roskilde. In this seaside town, the Vikings operated a defense base where they intentionally sunk vessels to act as in-water land mines against oncoming threats. The last leg of the trip was Iceland, where I had been before the research trip for a preview of what to explore. It was here I met with Helgi Biering, Bjorn Jonasson, and Roberto Pagani for interviews, and finished research at all Viking museums available.

Appendix B: Elderberry Developer Recipe and Test Results

Elderberry Developer

1 cup elderberries
1 litre water
1 tbsp ascorbic acid
80g / 80ml washing soda

Boil berries for ten minutes in water. Cool to room temperature and de-pulp with hand mill.

Mix in ascorbic acid, then gradually add washing soda. The colour of the solution will change from a purple hue to green-blue.

Tests

15 Minutes of Submersion: film base clear, image well developed and with sharp contrast.

20 Minutes of Submersion: film base darkens slightly, image well developed but with grey cast.

30 Minutes of Submersion: film base darkens significantly, image has notably less contrast (looks like Tri-X).

Appendix C: Film Essay Text (Pre-Truncation)

Prologue

While I was searching for them, I made a pilgrimage.

It was to a landscape existing only on film, a search for something not now visible. A town, buried in ash.

A sore thumb, this image sits among blackness in my own memory, as though I lived and breathed it in a rare moment of lucidity, as though it is part of my body. It is in fact someone else's, a first stone in an imaginary film.

I went to view it with my own eyes, to possess this image as my own.

The drive to the Westman Islands is due south from Reykjavik. The journey is one in which the pilgrim is dominated by the mountains that stretch forever. Each sight rewritten in my memory by the next; one geology concealing another, dwarfed just behind. The ancient being made invisible not by history, not by holes in memory, but by itself.

By the time I got there, they too became invisible.

1.

In Oslo by the sea, sit three ships.

Pulled from soil was a hoard of artifacts, jewels, furniture, faded silk. All were buried in a mound, to prepare the dead for the world to come. A display of plenty to the gods, a younger pyramid.

In our world, outside memorials, we were also faced with abundance. Each neighbour had cut down my favourite tree, barren patches of blue where green once reached. In our yard, my parents took to the Elder trees. I lamented.

They have no time for the superstition that I allow to occasionally cripple me; instead the white flowers that give way to dark berries mean that there's too much bird shit to hose away. History writes itself with what is left behind; the future judges by a combination of anecdotes and objects. If the gods are real, would a naked spray of branches stand out of the ground as a betrayal? All this potential, stripped from its trunk.

2.

In a forest, greatness becomes nothing, then springs up again. Struck down by time and illness, the forest eats itself and grows wider. A vast energy becomes tamed, then unravels with force.

We eat what eats the forest and in turn, it gives us the same regeneration. Romantic is each of our cells; through countless divisions they hold their legacy, abundant and endless. The surplus of this attaches to the objects and species in our wake. Through luck, some are present in plenty, some in

despair. The burden of these times is passed not onto us, but them. Some become good, some omens of evil.

In the case of the Elder, they become sacred, the mother tree, a monument never to be cut down. Woven, the branches gave the wearer true sight. When fermented, the berries helped us look beyond our world. Not content with its white blossoms to merely fragrance the spring air, we demanded more from it.

Our reverence for it spilled through the pagans, to the Celts, to the Vikings, to my grandfather standing in his field. Now, time wears thin for these medicines. Now, we leave the branches out every second week for yard waste collection.

3.

In Stockholm stands a monument. Head to the sun, singing, its arms reach to the sky. Stockholm itself stands as a monument. Legend tells of it as a new land, a replacement. The Vikings bound gold to a log and set it afloat. Where it settled into the riverbed, the city grew.

Legends, of course, unravel in the face of reality. There is a break in history here. Stockholm first appeared in written record far after the Viking age. The things we believe.

I came to Stockholm in search of another legend - of the Vikings themselves, tracing them from Norway to Sweden, next to Iceland. Followed by the rain as a constant companion, I stumbled to the bank of the river by accident, staring at the Sun Singer tall above, this legend unravelling too.

4.

While in Stockholm, I went to see an ancient stone.

The Vikings left behind a trail of stone in history marking the words of death, ownership, existence.

Each letter left behind formed an alphabet that evolved alongside our recording of history.

These letters, the runes, each letter held its functional place while echoing to the mythology that created it. They became a functional astrology, forming words separate from the sum of their parts.

Later, these narratives amputated to give way to our newer, concise signification. Ours is an alphabet divorced from its ancestors. The runes in stone, ours ready to burn.

Rather than carve their physical likeness, they chose identity. A distillation of truth, each stone marks an ideal echo. We carve into history as we do into stone - only the desirable qualities remain, the rest become dust. History is a monument much like a statue, both appear permanent, both hope to possess their subjects. Both are owned.

5.

The ships that carried the Vikings gave them speed. An incomplete history sees the Vikings explore Europe, trade for silks in Asia, and settle Iceland. Before pushing further to the sea, they found brief contentment among the Celts, among a land not unlike their own.

Marked within the genetics of today's Celts is this time. Spliced into their once tribal DNA became eyes the colour of the sea, hair the colour of the sunrise. In this time, it is said that the Vikings found

love. In those who were already there, did their hearts sing the same song? Later, with their Celtic wives (or slaves), they went to Iceland, to mark another land.

Genes left behind form a living monument, carved of flesh. My ancestors marked me with the sea and sunrise, they left behind the frame of a man in battle, without the sword and shield. Legacy is as treacherous to uncover as it is to prove. Does history bleed both ways? How many divorces before relation is lost?

6.

Beyond the end of the earth lay Vinland. Named for the vines of wild grapes and berries that grew bountifully in this new place - enough even for the dead. Passed down by those who believed, Vinland lived in their minds a container for all dreams, a beacon pulling them across the sea. It grew to be the promised land. Some returned having seen it, the only record a memory - the most fragile of heirlooms.

7.

Memory is one with belief. Memory is forgotten without record, it slips away, it can be re-written, it can be implanted. We build history from memory.

We record ourselves now as we did at any other time, yet with admittedly new methods. Does each frame we keep define who we are? What disintegrates and what remains? Just because you see it, is it there?

Most pernicious are memories that call to us from beyond our reach, pleading their own veracity. These are the memories that become legend, that become gods.

8.

In each city I visited, I found a pair of swans, as constant as rain. Long targets of my own distaste, they strike others differently, as symbols. The myth of the swan is the pair that proved the existence of the gods - their colour a manifestation of divine purity. It is said that each pair of swans descends from this one, each pair of swans wants only each other.

Swans, too, are migratory. Each year they leave the cold of the north for their own promised land; each year they find it and return virile, feathered, and with full belly. When looking to the open sea, when looking above, did we see air made visible, with birds soaring? Was this the start of shipbuilding, and of the sail? Who did we take into the wind?

9.

In the runes, a crisis is the same as the wrath of nature. In a more elemental world, it seemed that one's own created problems paled in comparison to the very real curses thrown by the earth. The weathered character of the landscape echoed in the people that inhabited it. The wind became a paradox. Bringing both sun and rain, it enabled richness and bounty. It lent itself to be harvested to propel a people across the water. It cooled, it brought renewal, it cradled the back of one's neck.

The wind is also obstruction. Blowing away seeds, ripping limbs from trees, tearing apart the human and natural landscape. The force felt outweighs its invisibility. Ever present and ever contradictory, the wind maintains both its invisibility and fleeting presence, all the while maintaining its foothold.

For some, worst was the wind's ability to drift an expedition off course, floating away on an open sea.

10.

For warriors, beyond the grave lay Valhalla, the home of the great stags of men who had gone before. They reached for it as they would their sword, their shield; this glorious end wasn't a consolation but a fire burning. Of the many views of a people, this is but one.

The search for Vinland launched many pilgrims into the sea. Leaving solid ground, they drifted into the horizon alone, eyes trained on the distance, the magnetic pole of belief guiding the way.

11.

The first pilgrimage I knew of was to a mountain, holy in four peoples. Those most resolved in their devotions complete it in 15 hours. Others perish in their attempt. Most poetic in my mind was the prohibition on climbing the mountain's summit. One condemnation of this stated "If we conquer this mountain, then we conquer something in people's souls..."

Years later, to my mother's chagrin, my grandmother began her pilgrimages. The first was her trip to Israel, a Christian senior bus tour. Brought back for me was a tiny box of stones, tread on by Jesus' feet. The next decade she travelled with a broken pelvis to the land of our ancestors, the Celts, to trace our history through graves. She brought back man-made stone in the form of a crystal clock. One memento a reminder of time passing, one of time past. Years later still, in Berlin, I saw handfuls of "the Berlin Wall", painted concrete. This was the first time I had considered the possibility of Jesus' feet not actually standing on the gravel I still had in a cardboard box.

Stone is a material tradition. Perhaps the Celts taught this to the Vikings, their practice in Ireland trickling down into runestones. Struck as monuments for the dead - either at sea or in battle, these remind those who live. Stone as memorial achieves the opposite of its intention. Tasked with shuttling the living from existence into mere memory, stone instead creates a nearly permanent, physical form of something drifting away. What of those less inflamed? What of those who dare to exist in the face of history's disinterest?

12.

No memorial is struck for a farmer. Forgotten are these Vikings as farmers, at peace. Less interesting to history are the trials of managing land, washing linens, tending to cattle.

In theory, the Viking age ended when the raids ended. The outcome no longer outweighed the effort and stability grew. Overtaken were the warriors, this time erased by the vacuum of subsistence. Time was kind to those in Scandinavia, and a new world developed and prospered, replete with traditions that trickled down enough to erode through centuries.

The fields kept healthy built an economy for kingdoms then democracy. Similarly, the Celts gave way to a modern people, marked forever by the Vikings. Their fields, however, became poisoned with the blight that invaded their soil. They too fled for a new world.

13.

In Iceland there was rich soil that needed only to be burned long enough to release its iron. The obvious choice for fuel to burn were the trees that sprung out of the rock and into the ever-changing sky.

Poison from tree may not come from poison in the soil. Elder contains cyanide. Like the iron in soil, you must distill it. But in that way, there's enough poison in anything if you look hard enough. The superstition, perhaps wisdom, of the forbidden destruction of the Elder makes sense when viewing Iceland today, and its lack of trees. Either it was too late when realized, or deliberate - it marked the lonely island with its inhabitants. With less resistance, was the wind angrier? Did they ignore this as divine punishment, and explain it away otherwise?

14.

Familiar to Iceland has been changing of the gods.

To avoid a war, the pagan high priest isolated himself to consider the impending Norwegians and their Christianity. Emerging days later he declared widespread conversion from paganism. In this religious transfer, Icelanders never made a clean break from paganism. Leftover were texts and records from a previous age, carefully detailing the new "old ways".

In another paradox of intention, the Christianity that sought to make all holy and good created an opposite problem. A new alphabet became de facto, tossing aside the runes that served and grew with the culture. Suddenly, having books with these older symbols became blasphemy, became evil. Those who remembered the old pagan ways became, naturally, akin to witches. An alphabet was given a power it had not wielded before, now full of secrets and sorcery.

15.

The Vikings' poetic tradition and particular paganism was documented in Sagas, poetic Eddas. The written word captures a culture's identity and makes it agile enough to be reviewed thousands of

years later by those who want to learn from it, or use its wisdom. A poetic tradition can be held in the hand, carried as a protection against the hardened heart.

History is also accessed by those seeking not wisdom but perversion. The Soviets used emasculation to shame men into conquering the radioactive shards of Chernobyl's reactor. Decades before, during occupation in Sweden, the nazis romanticized the memory of the Vikings as a cultural monument, the glorious dead, long past. Attempting to exhume nationalist pride, they hoped for a new day fighting alongside warriors of the most masculine and brutal, a disintegrated memory carried by tourists. This sun never rose.

16.

Intention does not divide result.

Sailing to parts known yet gone off course, the shores of Iceland were an accident, a fate better than disaster. There are those less lucky. A result apart from intention still produces an outcome. The promise of Vinland propelled exploration, expedition, sacrifice. Who assesses the value of each?

My Vinland were two invisible images, one from cinema and one from history. As I searched, the value I placed on each became greater as its truth became less. I gathered each scrap I could, still searching for the shore.

17.

In the field, archaeologists search for remains. A burial mound is to stay sealed.

Hopeful to reconcile past to present, we assume identity based on debris. What we research we actually create, joining a constellation of shimmering points. An identity through objects is tentative when considering what is not included. Forgotten are those less precious about the sacred, those who rob graves or raid tombs. We sweep these diversions away, leaving lonelier points to navigate by.

18.

The new world, replete with vines and tree fruit, was revealed to us from space, then later through blue glass beads and the occasional coin. Even in Sicily, the earth was scraped in a similar way. The new world we now live in tells of a history once thought impossible - those seeking it found what they were looking for.

Treacherous is the process of discovery. Electric for the pioneer, the mountain moved, the task then becomes the transmutation into believed fact. Found once and never again; seen before but not remembered. Dive your arms into a pile of cool sand, enveloping and moveable. Then try to take it from that place and carry it with you, grasp it as tightly as you can. Then feel it flow through the cracks in your fingers until there is nothing left but your hands gripping themselves, an entire mountain lost to the wind, grain by grain.

19.

Other monuments are moveable. Ships as artifacts reveal technical skill, ambition, and mastery of resources. In the runes, twinned with transportation is the concept of teamed work, the mastery of

man over machine, whether that machine be boat or animal. Rich was a people who could build a horse, who could buy a horse, for they would be remembered in history.

When they fled from their crops rotting in their fields, faced with starving to death, my ancestors came to the new world that was told to them. Here, just like in the old world, transportation was twinned with teamed work, the relationship between man and beast. Remembered by history are now these new people in their new world - forgotten by most is that this world was not new. This world had a people and legacy.

20.

The new world is never new. To leave behind a memory is to burn it into your future.

What we remember is a fragile object. Each time you open its container, it changes. Viewing it causes a diversion in form. Outside forces, the wind, can warp it. This object can be replaced, sometimes it can be lost. The subjectivity of memory pales to the real, visceral experience of human touch, the thrill of a near miss, a summer breeze.

The tradition of stone sees us trying to cast memory in permanent form. Whether they be mementos from grandmothers or monumental sculptures, they attempt to pull the visceral from our dimension and encapsulate it, always attempting to possess the fleeting. This, like that of the Vikings, is an incomplete history of stone. A longer view sees the wind and rain erode even the greatest monument to grains of sand, islands dissolving into the sea.

21.

The statue in Stockholm, of The Sun Singer, is a view of Apollo. It took ten years to complete to satisfaction, the model a famous actor. It stands as a monument of the divine. It conflates a human form, in its nakedness, with the hope of god within us. It is an attempt to possess immortality, to possess the essence of humanity, to own both. A hopeful perspective.

Apollo's real-life spouse, Ulla, was asked if she felt uncomfortable with the people of Stockholm being able to see her husband naked whenever they wanted, the statue belonging to them. Knowing the futility of possession and perspective, she said "You can see him in stone, but I see him in flesh and blood."

22.

Does knowing impending demise change whether you embark upon the path in the first place? The long process to complete The Sun Singer in Stockholm resulted in a shining monument emerging from stone. Then, cleaners who were ill-researched in art preservation washed it one day. The statue tarnished entirely, and they have been trying to restore its luster ever since.

In Stockholm, I had lost one perspective on a people, and was uncertain of how to build another. I had for so long held an image that launched a pilgrimage, a monument I felt disintegrate with each site I visited. I stared at one view of Apollo, lacking the knowledge of the model, his wife, his tarnishing. I stared at Apollo not knowing he had already transformed.

23.

My devotion made me a pilgrim twice more, twice believing in a new result.

As I hoped to view the islands I searched for, they covered themselves from my gaze; the wind and rain I carried with me reached over the hallowed ground I could not step on. They stood dark, but clear, across the sea from the shore with no boat to carry me over. Rain falling on my lens, they were an echo of the memory I had implanted in my own mind. Satisfied they were no longer invisible, I left.

I felt freed of them the next day. I headed south to the basalt columns in search of one last landscape, the sun replacing my old companions. There is an eye buried within storms. As I turned north, I saw the islands exactly as I had imagined them - at sunset, clear on the horizon, brightly speckled with sun. An innocuous icon to some, this was an end to a journey I thought futile.

I raced towards them, tensed and hopeful, embarrassed by my own excitement. I approached with the same speed as the wind. I reached the shore and looked up at the shimmering islands floating in the ocean. The wind met me and shook the car. From oblivion came the wall of a sea storm.

These monuments were restored to invisibility.

24.

In Oslo by the sea are silk tapestries, carefully woven a thousand years ago. Originally with a host of pigments to augment its design, only the red remains. It's one thread that has held on through a millennium of time. Holding a visual history, it displays the colour of sunrise, of sunset on the sea.

Similar to the hair of Viking warriors, similar to the Celts marked by invasion. Red is a subjectivity to view something by, the colour of a monument, a thread woven into flesh.

My pilgrimage saw summer turn into winter. Returning home to a yard more barren than usual, I lamented again the trimming of the Elder. Not exactly certain of my pilgrimage and its result, I thought of the diverging beliefs on display, mine romantically opposed to the practical. Both are lived and real, both are correct to their believer, but only one carves into reality.

History is controlled by the powerful, told in the monuments erected by the victors and in the genes of a people. It either prunes itself or we do, sometimes too heavily. Branches remain either blowing in the breeze, or discarded as waste. My pilgrimage, my grandmother's, a journey to a holy mountain - all are a search to collect them as fuel for the fire. Sometimes obscured is the objective, and sometimes the result. On the path it can disintegrate, it can fall away with every step. If you can't hold what you look for, is its search futile? What does a pilgrim see in the distance?

In front of Apollo do they see the monument, or flesh and blood?