158 forøvrig? Kan den nyere multikulturelle historien få plass på et bygdemuseum? Hvilken rolle skal Akershusmuseets mange avdelinger spille i spenningen mellom gamle dager og nye tider? I forhold til bokprosjektet som helhet blir spørsmålet hvor den historiske selvrefleksjonen bringer museet, og om denne refleksjonsprosessen vil bidra til å forme utviklingen videre. Kan en slik form for selvrefleksivitet bidra til å skape nye måter å formulere og løse utfordringer på?

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Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson.
Phallological Museum. Berlin: LIT Verlag.
2014. 191 p. ISBN 978-3-643-90470-6.

Ever since first opening its doors to the public in 1997, the Icelandic Phallological Museum (Icelandic: *Hið Íslenszka Reðasafn*) has garnered deserved attention across the globe for its collection of phallic specimens belonging to every species of mammal in Iceland. Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson, associate professor of Museum Studies at the University of Iceland, has in this timely volume published by German company LIT Verlag, aimed to demystify the Phallological Museum by portraying the various social, historical and cultural contexts in which it is situated.

In prose that is part academic tract, part popular history and peppered with interviews, Hafsteinsson divides his work

into five parts, with each section containing several chapters; the first of these, entitled "Context", illuminates the socio-cultural changes that occurred in Iceland in the 1990s that allowed such an establishment as the Phallological Museum to flourish, particularly the growth of neoliberal ideology within the country. Perhaps most interestingly, changes in attitudes towards sex in Iceland are also traced and contextualised, touching on debates such as whether the museum should be considered pornographic or not.

The second part, the shortest of the entire book, entitled "Collection" briefly describes the life and times of the museum's founder and curator, Sigurður Hjartarson. This chapter, amusingly entitled "I wasn't interested in collecting stamps", establishes his original objectives, goals and justifications for arranging the museum in its current format. Aside from interesting biographical notes on the fascinating character of Hjartarson himself, the museum's collections policy is outlined and the museum's physical topography fully explained.

The third installment ("Preservation") is more disparate in its contents; here notably, the relationship the foreign media has courted with the museum is explored, particularly its appearance on infamous British television show *Eurotrash*. Wider Icelandic attitudes towards male genitalia are also theorized, with an especially fascinating discussion of phallic architecture within Reykjavík. Certain museological considerations are also probed through an investigation into "silverteam"; this we find out, is a project Hjartarson worked on, consisting of fifteen clay-sculptured penises, spray painted in silver and enclosed in a wooden box with a glass front to celebrate the Icelandic handball team who won the silver medal at the 2008

Interior from the Phallological Museum in Reykjavik. Photo: Eva Silvén, 2014.

160 Beijing Olympics. Pertinent questions raised by the author include “what are the boundaries between the private and the public in contemporary times? What subjects and artefacts are appropriate for museum curation? What are the cultural forms of reproductive organs and when do they become political?”

The final two parts also follow varying diverse themes; the section “Research” primarily elucidates Hjartarson’s educational philosophy and the strong humorous element that runs throughout his approach to his work; here the collections of the Phallogological Museum are essentially thematized as a means of “exhibiting previously forbidden, stigmatized and unseen elements of Icelandic culture and nature” (145). Icelandic national identity is also interrogated; the construction of the nation’s complexion is commonly assumed to have formed under the influence of the German national romantic movement, pivoting around ideas of purity regarding the Icelandic language and cultural continuity stemming from the medieval past as written down in the Icelandic sagas. Hafsteinsson shows how the museum humorously attempts to deconstruct concepts of essentialised culture through parodying the ingrained and dogmatic hierarchy of Icelandic national material culture. With “Exhibition” Hafsteinsson covers new ground; of particular note, the final two chapters engage in a particularly stimulating discussion on the exhibiting of a supposed elves penis within the museum. In the author’s own words “the hidden man’s penis raises a number of interesting questions that go beyond the mundane experience of the majority of visitors to the Phallogological Museum who are not able to see the penis in the transparent glass jar”. These questions

include: “Are histories visible? Do social and cultural differences interfere with the perception? Are social and cultural beliefs a prerequisite to see or know appropriately? The hidden man’s penis becomes in that sense a trope for interrogation” (169).

Due to its popular yet intelligently written style and avoidance of overly heavy academic jargon as well as its entertaining subject matter and sometimes suggestive pictures, this volume will no doubt appeal to diverse audiences; this includes those interested in cultural theory, media studies, Icelandic sexual politics, popular culture as well as museum and tourism studies. Packed with fascinating insights into Icelandic culture and museums written by a true insider in a strongly humorous tone, there is much to enjoy in this book for both the academic reader and those wishing for a more lighthearted read. My one criticism of the book is that the final three sections often feel self-contained, with little clear overarching narrative uniting them, occasionally feeling like a collected volume of articles rather than a single volume. Yet despite this minor quibble, the publication is very welcome, as Hafsteinsson shows it’s possible to write intelligently yet humorously. Indeed, following in the words of renowned cultural critic Walter Benjamin and cited by the author, “there is no better starting point for thought than laughter” (114).

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