

## Amy Teh – Iceland, Summer 2018

With the generous support of Pembroke, I was able to travel to Iceland for two weeks in July 2018 as fieldwork for my dissertation. Having submitted essay coursework in my second year on the role of painting in landscape design, as well as on the everyday in film, I hoped to extend my study of these themes in the specific context of Iceland. I set out to investigate the 'image' of the Icelandic landscape as represented in art, photography, the media, literature, scientific maps and compare this to the 'everyday' experience of the Icelandic people, as represented in film and observed from my fieldwork.

My trip began with three days in Reykjavik, where I enjoyed exploring the city's many galleries and museums, as well as iconic buildings, such as the Harpa Concert Hall and Nordic House, alongside the more organic wider urban fabric of houses, apartments, shops and administrative buildings. It was interesting to observe the somewhat strange interplay between parts of the city that were more metropolitan and in development, with parts that felt more small scale and local. I was particularly fascinated by an exhibition at the Reykjavik Art Museum called 'No Man's Land – Where Beauty Alone Reigns?' It explored the many ways that artists in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries had represented and responded to the specific region of the Icelandic highlands. I found the paintings, sculptures, photographs and films to be immensely thought provoking in terms of my chosen line of study as I began to question the meaning of the word "landscape" and wondered what I would find as I ventured out into the Icelandic "landscape" myself.

For the next ten days of the trip, we hired a car and travelled clockwise around the country's famous ring road, staying at a different location each night. It was thrilling to drive past looming black mountains, moss covered lava fields, vast expanses of green agricultural flat land, and red mars-like volcanoes. I became aware of the dramatic sense of scale of the place and the overwhelming distances between things. I was intrigued by our experience of driving itself and began to consider the road as something architectural.

Other case studies included some of the country's many roadside chapels – for example, I was moved by the little black church in Budir whose location close to a gentle part of coastline with a mountainous backdrop must have been a truly majestic place for its congregation. I also found the more banal infrastructures of the road interesting, such as a petrol station which was crammed with waterproof-donned tourists all congregating around the television to watch the world cup final. It was strange to come across the spontaneous sense of community in the middle of a sparse and isolated stretch of road. The Krafla geothermal power station, in the north of the country, made a particularly strong impression on me. I discovered how the majority of Iceland's energy comes from renewable sources, and also how architects had been involved in the design to suit the country's specific climate. The vast waterfalls of the cooling plant as well as the red geodesic bore hole caps dotting the valley were rather spectacular. I also visited some of the country's geothermal swimming pools which are at the heart of local social life.

This trip will allowed me to build up a more rich, personal and broad picture of Iceland which I hope will enable me to produce an ambitious dissertation, establishing an interesting and personal way of critiquing architecture in relation to the human experience of the world. I have never been able to undertake a trip such as this before, and so I am immensely grateful to Pembroke for my travel grant.