

The Human Scale

At the same time as Icelandic artists were focussing on the landscape as a theme, in the 1930s many of them were also turning their attention to the human figure and social reality. Those were times of change in Icelandic society. People were migrating in their thousands from rural Iceland into towns and villages and many were hard hit by the Great Depression, especially farmers, the working class and the poor. Artists, both young and old, addressed this new social reality and many adopted a more subjective approach in order to bring out the Zeitgeist. A new generation of artists, making their debut around 1930, had taken in international artistic trends such as Expressionism and late Cubism. They included Gunnlaugur Scheving, Ásmundur Sveinsson, Sigurjón Ólafsson, Jóhann Briem, Jón Engilberts, Snorri Arinbjarnar and Þorvaldur Skúlason. Icelanders were also embarking on art training as never before. Among them were young women such as Nína Tryggvadóttir and Louísa Matthíasdóttir, who had absorbed new ideas in Copenhagen and Paris in the 1930s. Just as landscape art had opened up a new perception of nature, artists now sought to depict everyday life, both in its beauty and in its darker aspects. Artists applied new aesthetic principles in their depiction of the themes, e.g. with respect to the role of colour and form.