

**Steinunn Thorarinsdottir: ARMORS**

May 9 – September 13, 2018

Cloisters Lawn, Fort Tryon Park

*Opening reception with remarks from the*

*President of Iceland: May 9 at 5 p.m.*

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## **Icelandic sculptor to mount NYC public art installation on Cloisters Lawn using casts of 16th century suits of armor**

*Staged in collaboration with NYC Parks, ARMORS will entail three pairs of sculptures, each comprising a cast aluminum suit of armor that faces a nude, androgynous figure of the same material and human scale*

**New York, NY — April 30, 2018** — Visitors to Upper Manhattan’s Fort Tryon Park this May through September will be welcomed by *ARMORS*, a site-specific public art project in the park’s Cloisters Lawn for which Steinunn Thorarinsdottir has positioned each of three androgynous figures in humanlike dialogue with a suit of armor that was cast from a custom 3D scan of a carefully chosen suit of armor from The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s permanent collection.

The project’s incorporation of armor—a form that is both distinctly iconographic and foreign to the artist’s own hand—marks an aesthetic and conceptual divergence for Icelandic Thorarinsdottir, who in her home country is a celebrated pioneer (the first female sculptor to have two solo shows at the Reykjavik Art Museum, 1982 and 1987) whose androgynous figure installations have since 1976 been mounted in dozens of prominent sites around Reykjavik and beyond.



Renderings of *ARMORS*. Park photos: R. Garland / Beyond Central Park; renderings: Steinunn Thorarinsdottir Studio

The androgynous figures central to Thorarinsdottir’s practice and *ARMORS* are cultural composites, made to represent the general human psyche rather than a distinct sex or ethnic identity. Though the installation’s incorporation of armor unavoidably references the current global prevalence of war, *ARMORS* isn’t principally about any one war or even the concept of war. Rather, it uses the suit of armor as an iconographic tool; a collective symbol of guardedness and power standing antithetically to—yet in curious dialogue with—the nude, open spirit of the humanlike figure.

For the selection of armor, Thorarinsdottir consulted Donald La Rocca, a veteran curator in The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Department of Arms and Armor. La Rocca suggested three armors based on their quality and historical importance (each has spent decades on permanent display in the Museum) as well as relative variety and amenability to the 3D scanning process. With assistance from museum conservators, the armors were temporarily removed from display and meticulously scanned by The Met’s Imaging Department. The 3D image

files were then sent to be cast in aluminum at a traditional lost-wax-method foundry outside of Shanghai.

The androgynous figures in *ARMORS* are characteristic of Thorarinsdottir's sculpture practice since the debut of her first figural works in 1976. Previously, the figures have served alone as responsive interventions to their natural and architectural surroundings. For *ARMORS*, though, the artist first settled on the specific suits of armor before creating a figure in response to each.



Locations clockwise from top left: **Sandgerdi** (1986); **Reykjavik** (2004); **New York City** (2011); **British Columbia** (2014); **ibid**; **Reykjavik Museum of Art** (2000); **Copenhagen** (2015); **Chicago** (2013)

The conceptual framework for *ARMORS* came about several years ago when Thorarinsdottir was living in New York and spending a lot of time in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's arms and armor galleries—Gallery 371 in particular, from which all three of the installation's armors were ultimately chosen. Through her interest in the department, she started to develop the idea to incorporate arms and armor into her own visual world of the human figure. Said the artist:

“Ancient armors are in themselves sculptural forms. They were developed for war but they give a sharp insight into the psyche of man. The iconographical resonance that a suit of armor has taken on is a testament to how violence and the need to protect ourselves have been central to our lives for centuries; the armor is a materialization of man's aggression. I wanted to merge medieval armors and ageless, androgynous figures in a way that would speak to the human condition today and in the past.”

Thorarinsdottir's eldest son—who since 1997 has been the base model for the artist's figure casts—posed for *ARMORS* in a way that subtly emulated the resting posture of each suit of armor. The physical result is that each figure appears capable of fitting directly inside its empty armor, while their mirrored postures also subconsciously establish a firmer bond between each contrasting pair. The interplay and dialogue between the opposing forms is deliberately open to social interpretation.

Central to the early stages of development of *ARMORS* was the idea that it needed to be displayed in an easily approachable, open-to-all public art setting. “Because armors today are mostly viewed in glass cases,” said Thorarinsdottir, “a distancing has developed from the original purpose of the armor. My idea is to erase that distance so that the viewer can feel first-hand the formidable and intimidating effect of the armor. The installation is intended to remind us of man's uncanny strength in his helplessness against force, and I think anyone can relate to the concept of being the unarmed opponent in the face of a challenge.”

*Following an opening reception at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 9, ARMORS will be on view at the Cloisters Lawn in Fort Tryon Park through Thursday, September 13.*

*Major support for ARMORS comes from the Icelandic Ministry of Culture and Iceland Naturally, with additional support from the Roger Smith Hotel, WOW air, and Scott White Contemporary.*

*For more information on the artist, visit [www.steinunnth.com](http://www.steinunnth.com).*