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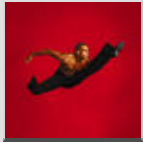
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Magnus Sigurdarson at the Dorsch: Rotating camels and a blond Bedouin in Opa-locka

By **Carlos Suarez De Jesus** Thursday, Feb 2 2012 Comments

Magnus Sigurdarson stands on the corner of Ali Baba and Barack Obama avenues in Opa-locka while holding a cardboard sign that reads, "Occupy My Innocence."

"The 'Other' is in the **White House**," cracks the Icelandic artist, who has appropriated the Moorish-themed municipality as the conceptual stomping grounds for his show opening February 10 at the Dorsch Gallery in Wynwood.

He plans to exhibit photos and a video piece documenting what he calls his "protest" in front of Opa-locka City Hall. There will also be a rotating camel and computer drawings of scenes inspired by French colonial-era postcards depicting life in a Saharan oasis, nomadic encampments, and camel caravans departing for trade on the Silk Road.

In some of his images, the artist appears at various locales throughout Opa-locka, such as city hall and a train station, holding signs that say, "Occupy My Dreams," "What's in It for Me?" and "Fundamentally Right."



Magnus Sigurdarson in Opa-locka.

Location Info
Dorsch Gallery

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Sigurdarson, who stormed Opa-locka as an occupying army of one, was the solitary voice in the wilderness because other protesters "didn't get the memo," he jokes. "Hey, I'm not making fun of anyone other than myself," he adds seriously. "I'm turning my sights inward, not out."

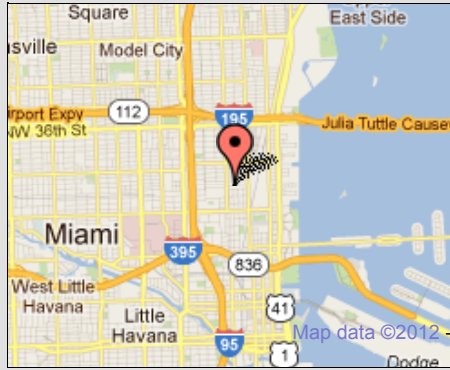
His exhibit "1001 Dreams of Occupation: What's in It for Me?" conflates issues of postcolonialism and the transient nature of exoticism in a globalized world via the Occupy movement, the Arab Spring, and his own sense of feeling like a nomad since arriving in Miami seven years ago.

Sigurdarson, whose MFA thesis at Rutgers University dealt with the origin of the "Native," typically explores issues of identity in his multilayered, performance-based work.

In the past, he's had himself photographed as a sobbing, half-nude, and seaweed-covered Goth Viking washed up on South Beach by the tides. He has also dressed up as an English beefeater and documented his antics while riding public transportation amid London's befuddled rush-hour crowds.

For Sigurdarson, our city's schizy cultural DNA and the equally exotic nature of Scheherazade's classic tales provided a fertile backdrop. *New Times* recently joined Sigurdarson for a tour of some local landmarks he says were part of the inspiration for his current body of work. "Driving through Miami, it can be difficult to orient yourself," the artist says as he navigates his battered Jeep Cherokee west along a stretch of NW 20th Street. "This city is flat and full of strip malls, where you see the same gas station on a corner next to a market or CVS over and over again. I like to look for markers to get my bearings and familiarize myself with the territory."

He pulls up to the Miami Bakery Café on the



Dorsch Gallery

151 NW 24th St.
Miami, FL 33127

Category: Galleries

Region: Out of Town



Details

"1001 Dreams of Occupation: What's in It for Me?": February 10 through April 7 at the Dorsch Gallery, 151 NW 24th St., Miami; 305-576-1278; dorschgallery.com. Tuesday through Saturday noon to 5 p.m.

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corner of NW 20th Street and 22nd Avenue and parks under a towering signpost topped with a rotating statue of a life-size camel. "This is not the first animal that comes to mind when you are in Miami," he says before mentioning that the incongruous dromedary is one of his compass points in town.

He signals toward the Eurasian Hair Ornament and Susy's Maternity Shoe shops. "For me the landscape here is my own exotic desert in a fascinating sort of way," Sigurdarson says. "The beauty of Miami is that it has so many faces. It's like living in another world."

Under the bakery's teal-and-pink awnings in front of a sign announcing, "Vendemos Tortillas, Churros y Carne Asada," a ray of afternoon sun frames Sigurdarson's bearded face, giving the impression he is wearing a turban of light.

Soon he begins sounding like a contemporary blond Bedouin on a quest. "I'm more inspired by **Sir Richard Burton**, who was the original Lawrence of Arabia and the first Westerner to touch the black stone," he says of the British explorer and spy who entered **Mecca** disguised as a native and was the translator of *The Arabian Nights*.

"When I was a boy growing up in **Reykjavik**, I had a poster of an image by an Icelandic artist named Erro hanging over my bed which often induced a strange reverie in me," the artist remembers. "It featured a reclining Moorish man smoking a water pipe while a giant satellite flew above him in a star-filled sky. For more than five years, I stared at it every night dreaming of the world beyond **Iceland**."

As he pulls his Jeep out of the parking lot, he informs, "I am having this spinning camel re-created for my show." After adjusting his visor and rejoining the four-wheeled black-top caravan, Sigurdarson drives to a warehouse near an I-95 overpass on the outskirts of Allapattah.

We drop in on **Karl Vohwinkel** at his studio, where he is carving a **Shetland**-pony-size replica of the camel out of **Styrofoam**. "This guy is like a magician with this stuff," Sigurdarson says excitedly as Vohwinkel juggles a hot wire and several sculpting knives to give the animal form.

Sigurdarson plans to paint the finished sculpture white and exhibit it on a slowly rotating platform at Dorsch.

After returning to his studio, Sigurdarson grows animated as he talks about the recent uprisings in the Middle East and the Occupy movement in the States.

"Last year the democratic uprising in **Egypt**, **Tunisia**, **Libya**, and **Syria** was daily news, and that part of the world is changing faster than we can react. At the same time, the Occupy movement gained steam. I like that... people have had enough with corporate abuses and intrusions against civil liberties," he explains.

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