

# #8 Ragnar Kjartansson: The End—Rocky Mountains

## Audio Description Script by Debbie Hippler

“The End—Rocky Mountains” by Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson, collaborating with David Pór Jónsson, was created in 2009 and is a parody of both folk culture and the narrative of the American “Wild West.” According to the artist, this work “questions how people build and mediate their relationships to nature.”

In a large dark room about 30 feet square, five videos play on five different screens. Each screen is about 10 feet wide by 8 feet high. Two screens are on the left wall, two on the right wall, and one on the wall you face when entering. Each screen has two speakers mounted above. A 12-foot long backless leather bench sits in the middle of the room, perpendicular to the entry. Sitting on the floor in the front left corner of the bench is a black subwoofer.

Filmed in the snow-covered Rockies outside of Banff, Alberta, Canada, sometimes in

-20⁰ weather, Ragnar and David play different instruments in each video. When played simultaneously, the videos form a single, somewhat disjointed 30-minute bluegrass/country instrumental piece.

Ragnar is about 6 feet tall, David about 5’9”. Both have full reddish beards and moustaches. Each wears a fur hat reminiscent of Davie Crockett and Daniel Boone, Ragnar’s with a longer tail made out of fox, David’s out of raccoon. Both wear blue jeans, boots, wool scarfs, and brown coats. Ragnar wears a second camel colored thigh length coat; David’s second coat is a dark brown shin length.

On three of the screens, the view is close enough to see facial features. On the other two, our view is from a greater distance. In each case, the camera remains in a fixed position, so our view does not change. All screens are black in the beginning and are staggered when starting and ending. I will describe them clockwise from left to right as viewed from the doorway.

The first video shows an amplifier and microphone sitting in snow in front of a tree. The land slopes down to the left to what appears to be a snow-covered riverbed. Mountain peaks and blue sky are visible in the distance. David plays the guitar while Ragnar smokes and drinks bourbon while leaning against the tree. A bottle of bourbon becomes a common theme in these videos, and David occasionally stops playing to join Ragnar for a sip or a smoke.

The view on the next video is a long shot of Ragnar banging on a full set of drums with a boom mic overhead. David stands with his bass guitar on the right, a large clump of snow in front of him which he often rests his foot on or kicks. His amplifier is some distance away to the right, on which sits a shared bottle of bourbon. Behind them we see a sparsely wooded slope ending in a large boulder, while distant mountains are vaguely visible through fog.

The third video, whose screen is at the end of the room, shows an up-close view of a snow-covered wooded area and some fallen trees; no sky is visible. There are four microphones with thick fuzzy covers: two in front of David playing an acoustic guitar on the left, and two in front of Ragnar playing a banjo on the right. They intermittently share a bottle of bourbon stashed in the snow in front of them.

The fourth video shows a white snow-covered plain leading to nearby rugged snow-topped peaks against the smoky blue sky. Centered in the flat land looking very small is a black grand piano with a bench. Initially Ragnar and David walk to the piano from the left of the screen. Ragnar sits at the piano, sometimes flailing his arms wildly and flinging snow. Sometimes he drops to his knees, or he stands to strum the wires inside the body of the piano. Having stood by a few minutes, David continues on toward the mountains, becoming so small he is no longer visible. At the end of the video, Ragnar also walks away towards the mountains.

In the last video, the camera again is close enough to see facial expressions. Backed by a hillside, Ragnar rests against a rock with his guitar, while David stands in front of a large tree to the left with his, a bottle of bourbon halfway between them in the snow. Each man intermittently rubs, blows into, or covers his hands with gloves. At the very end of the video, David climbs up the hill off-camera and lets his guitar fall back into the snow below.

While you may not wish to stay for the entire 30-minute performance, take a seat and listen to how the music unfolds from the five screens, as the performances solo or harmonize together.