

**ACADEMIC RESEARCH ON CANVAS: HOW (AND WHY) DO I
ARTISTICALLY EXPRESS THE TRAGIC LIVES OF WIDOWS AND
FATHERLESS CHILDREN AFTER MARITIME DISASTERS ON THE SOUTH
COAST OF ICELAND IN THE LATE 19TH - EARLY 20TH CENTURY**

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an intersectional project where I, as an academic, connect transmission between a research project and my artistic pursuits—both as an academic and as an amateur artist. Over the past three years, I have been writing a book about the effects of maritime disasters on rural farming communities along Iceland’s Southeast Coast. Due to the lack of natural harbours and sandy coastline and lack of natural harbours, farmers relied on open rowboats for fishing under dangerous conditions, making these boats vital to their livelihoods. From 1841 to 1945, 126 people died in accidents involving open rowboats. In this book (in two parts), I share the stories of widows and children who lost husbands and fathers at sea and how they coped after losing their primary providers. Their stories reveal threats to survival, poverty, and hardship during times when public support was limited. In relation to these stories, I will create a series of six paintings (acrylic/mixed media on canvas) to capture the essence of these stories and interpret the grief and danger faced during those difficult times. I use storytelling as inspiration for my artwork, bridging my role as a scholar with my passion as an artist. The six paintings will depict the following scenes: 1) Mourning widows on the coast of Vík in 1910, waiting for their husbands’ remains to wash ashore. 2) A farmer drifting away on his rowboat, spotted by his wife and children just before he died off Dyrhólaey in 1871. 3) The grieving fiancé, who was gifted engagement rings after her fiancé drowned in a maritime disaster in 1941 before proposing; she carried the wedding bands for the rest of her life and never married or had children. 4) An image of three men, already deceased from cold and hardship during a storm in 1843, collected on one boat—while the other boat was used by survivors to reach land—and as they departed, one of the bodies raised a hand. 5) A young boy and his father watching from ashore as his two brothers drowned in an accident in 1941. 6) The courageous widow who lost her first husband in 1843 but took on manual labor from her somewhat weaker second husband. This series of paintings will be included as illustrations in the upcoming book.

Keywords: Art and trauma, maritime disasters, book illustration, 19th-century Iceland, resilience, rural communities, poverty and hardship

INTRODUCTION

How does an academic and an artist combine his/her/their two personal elements in a single project? To provide some historical and cultural context, let’s examine the historical background of the on-going research. The South Coast of Iceland is one of the