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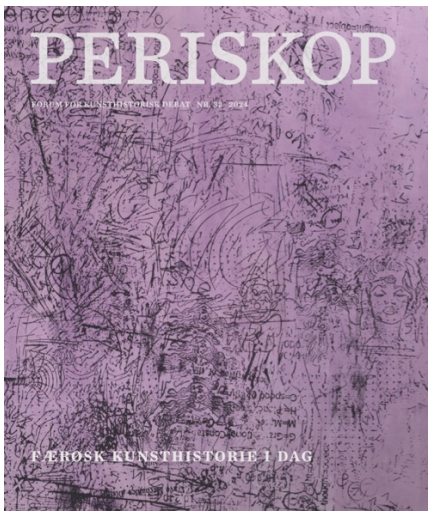

BART PUSHAW

Blue Puffins

The Avian Aesthetics of Díðrikur á Skarvanesi

In this essay, I offer some ideas about how to think about what are currently known as the earliest extant paintings in Faroese art history, a series of five gouache paintings made in the nineteenth century by the artist Díðrikur á Skarvanesi. In all the images, Díðrikur depicts a similar subject: different species of local birds arranged in profile view. My interest in these paintings is two-fold. On the one hand, I am interested in the historicity of these paintings. Since these paintings have no clear precedence in Faroese art history, I want to think critically about the social, political, and economic contexts that made it possible for Díðrikur á Skarvanesi to be able to create paintings in the 1830s and 1840s. On the other hand, I like birds. Part of my interest is simply aesthetic and reflective of my own avian affinities. In some ways, the gaze I bring to these paintings may seem all too stereotypical, but I think it warrants a more personal reflection on why I am writing on this topic here in *Periskop*.

First, a quick anecdote about my last time in Tórshavn. I was standing at the counter of the gift shop at Listasavn. In front of me was a small package nestling a fragile object inside. As I was waiting to pay, a door behind the counter swung open. Briskly stepping into the space was the then-director of the museum, Karina Lykke Grand. We had already planned to meet the following day, so our encounter that afternoon was unexpected. She glanced at me, then glanced at the box, and exclaimed, smiling, "Oh, I know exactly what that is." Despite not seeing what I had purchased, she assumed correctly. I had purchased a small glass puffin. My cheeks turned red. I was embarrassed in the moment because I was so predictable. I had not seen Karina in some four years, but she immediately connected my presence at Listasavn to puffins. She even described me to a fellow art historian she later met as "really enthusiastic – and he loves puffins!"

My penchant for the small seabird is far from unusual. In fact, it is so stereotypical that Icelandic scholars have coined a name for the outsider obsession with the bird, what Katrín Anna Lund, Katla Kjartansdóttir, and Kristín Loftsdóttir (2018) have called "puffin love." Describing the omnipresence of puffin souvenirs and gifts along Laugavegur, Reykjavík's popular shopping thoroughfare, Lund, Kjartansdóttir, and Loftsdóttir make note of a local shopkeeper who finds the tourist consumption of puffin paraphernalia to be "disgusting" (151). They analyze this response as indicative of the way many Icelanders find this foreign fanaticism with puffins to be as tacky as it is artificial. But for tourists, they argue (153), the puffins are attractive commodities not only because of their cute-

[1] Díðrikur á Skarvanesi: *Fuglar*, 1840. Listasavn Føroya.

ness, but also their awkward and clumsy gait, a human-like and thus endearing quality.

To a similar extent, many tourists in the Faroe Islands expect to see the charismatic clown-faced bird, and this expectation directly informs what outsiders want to see in Faroese art. As Solveig Hanusardóttir Olsen (2019, 213) rightly argues, "when foreigners come to the Faroe Islands, they want an authentic experience: puffins, the bird cliffs of Vestmanna, Mikines, fish, turf rooves, sheep, etc. It is the same when it comes to Faroese art, upholding this notion of [a monolithic] *færø-kunst*." I sympathize with the critique of this outsider desire for authenticity. It limits the possibilities for what Faroese art has been and can be, without any regard for the choices artists make. In an academic sense, I wholeheartedly agree. But as a tourist, I was excited to purchase the small glass puffin at the Listasavn shop. Nowadays, the puffin sits quietly in my office next to its friend, a glass oystercatcher I had bought on my first trip to the Faroe Islands. The glass birds bring me joy every time I see them. I open this essay on this personal reflection to draw attention to a tension I find unresolved. On the one hand, I want studies of Faroese art to be fresh, insightful, critical, and generative. On the other, I am keenly aware of the foreign position from which I write about Faroese art history, and my own desire for the very authenticity that so many writers—including the editorial board of this edition of *Periskop*—are tired of contending with. What I hope to offer here is, perhaps, a third way. "Puffin love" might undergird my visual interest in the paintings, but it can also be a tool to consider why, exactly, these birds are the first subject of extant Faroese painting, and to take seriously the historical and political conditions that informed why an artist would devote his oeuvre to them in the nineteenth century.

Díðrikur á Skarvanesi took birds seriously. As far as we know, birds were the only subject he deemed worthy of recording in pigments and inks on paper. It was only upon close examination of Díðrikur's paintings in person that I began to consider that he might be doing something besides simply representing his avian kin. In what fol-

lows, I argue that Díðrikur á Skarvanesi painted local birds with political and cultural motivations that critique the conditions he and his community found themselves in. First, I pursue a close visual analysis of his paintings and elucidate some of their surprisingly complex pictorial qualities. Then I consider the strange sense of temporality that has structured how many understand these images. After doing so, I focus on specific historical contexts in the early nineteenth century, with particular attention to social history of ornithology and collecting. Doing so is an important step in considering the artist's choice of motif, and his consistent choice to represent birds as if they were individual specimen. Afterwards, I focus on the materials of the paintings by thinking about their wider economic histories that challenge notions of Faroese isolation under the period's trade monopoly. I conclude with an argument about why we should not consider his paintings to be outliers of Faroese history, but instead rightful inheritors that understand birds as metaphors to understand and reflect on society.

Looking at the Paintings

Facing the same direction, the birds do not interact with each other **[1]**. Instead, they appear static and silent, as if they were scientific specimens. The artist's decision to portray each of the birds as posed ever so stoically on small round pedestals resembles a state of taxidermy. Carefully collected, Díðrikur's birds occupy a schematic space of observation, juxtaposition, and comparison one might expect in images of natural history. In one painting, three distinct registers organize the birds, a compositional choice that creates a sense of order and control so common to the kind of knowledge production of scientific illustration. Díðrikur's avian aesthetics appear to be didactic and striking in their clarity.

Upon closer inspection, however, the images reveal other painterly preoccupations. Note how the birds are arranged. Yes, they face the same direction, but their feathers also overlap to create a dynamic rhythm of patterns: speckled black and brown tail feathers appear next to a crisp contrast of black and white, mottled feathers appear against the jet-black plumage of another. If we read the birds from right to left, the repetitive visual form of overlaid feathers, and thus overlaid patterns, creates a series of upward lines, not unlike the crescendo of waves. When we follow Díðrikur's patterns, swooping from the rectangular shape of the tailfeathers up the body of each bird, we can see dynamic curvilinear forms. Note the sinuous, almost serpentine curves that twist in the body of the oystercatcher (*tjaldur*) and the puffin (*lundi*) in the upper left-hand corner. Along that same top row, Díðrikur depicted a guillemot (*lomviga*), second from the right, with a comparatively sharp, even jagged linear language. Directly below on the second and third registers, respectively, the artist painted the bodies of the red-breasted merganser (*toppont*) and the pied raven (*hvítravnur*) as if they were miniature compositions of surrealist black organic forms on a white monochrome background. One could describe Díðrikur's aesthetics here in the service of avian authenticity, as he renders the mottled coloration of each bird as it appeared to him. But given the artist's clear interest in pattern and composition, it is just as plausible to read the painting not so literally, and instead playfully.

His painting *Mánadúgvur* **[2]** depicts seventeen pigeons of the same species yet renders them in a dazzling, almost kaleidoscopic array of patterns and bright colors—brilliant yellows, striking blues, radiant reds. Such vibrant colors hardly typified the birds Díðrikur knew in the Faroe Islands, and instead are more reminiscent of birds in warmer, tropical locales. Even more so than in his *Fuglar*, *Mánadúgvur* evinces how the plumage of each bird is a miniature painterly world unto itself. *Mánadúgvur* insists on the fantastical, not least through the artist's Danish inscription, "maanens duer", a label that lingers between languages, between natural and supernatural. In Faroese, a mánadúgva is a wood pigeon in English, what Danish speakers refer to as a *ringdue*. While maanens duer is a literal translation from the Faroese name into Danish, it also implies a subtle semantic shift. Rather than being simply "moon doves," *maanens duer* signifies the notion

[2] Díðrikur á Skarvanesi: *Mánadúgvur*, 1840. Listasavn Føroya.

of "doves of the moon," as if to imply these birds belong to a different celestial domain and are, indeed, otherworldly. If Díðrikur does suggest something supernatural in *Mánadúgvur*, he also anchors the birds to the earth. As in *Fuglar*, Díðrikur portrays each of the mánadúgvur upon a pedestal, continuing those visual markers of taxidermy, scientific specimen, and natural history collection.

Adding to the supposed mystery are the tears and rips of the paper surfaces of the paintings. In one extant painting of chickens, only half of the image remains. All the paintings have endured clear pigment loss. At one point, someone carefully excised the head of a seagull, leaving a ghostly void in its place **[3]**. Just as it is complicated to discern what is artistic intent and what is simply the ravages of time, it is as if Díðrikur deliberately resists any dichotomy of fact or fiction, and instead insists on both.

Temporality

The paintings of Díðrikur á Skarvanesi are the oldest artworks in the museum's collection. For many, the images are intriguing simply due to their existence in the historical record. Created sometime in the 1830s and 1840s, the works are the earliest extant paintings attributed to a Faroese artist. Díðrikur's birds therefore assume another mantle: they are the beginning of Faroese art history. While that achievement is remarkable, the creation of artworks in the Faroe Islands in the first half of the nineteenth century usually merits a reflection on the long temporal gap until the emergence of the next known Faroese painters, such as Niels Kruse (1871-1953), Jógvan Waagstein (1879-1949), Bergithe Johannesen (1905-95), and Sámal Joensen-Mikines (1906-79). By comparison to the oils of the early twentieth century, Díðrikur's paintings are almost archaeological. Lest "archaeological" seem too dramatic a descriptor, it is worth noting that at least one artist today makes a deliberate juxtaposition of Díðrikur á Skarvanesi with cave painting. In 2023, the artist Edward Fuglø (b. 1965) opened a new light installation *Díðriksdúgvur og aðrir dýrgripir: Hellismyndir í nýggjum ljósi* ("Díðrikur Doves and Other Hidden Treasures: Cave Paintings Reimagined") in the new tunnel that connects the islands of Streymoy and Sandoy under

[3] Díðrikur á Skarvanesi: *Fuglar*, 1840. Listasavn Føroya.

the sea, an homage to "the colourful birds of the imagination that Díðrikur let loose as he unleashed Faroese visual arts" (Guttesen 2023). I draw attention to Fuglø's installation here because it frames Díðrikur á Skarvanesi as a primordial figure of Faroese art history, one whose emergence is as clandestine as ancient cave paintings made thousands of years ago.

By transforming the 1830s and 1840s into an archaic, prehistoric time, Fuglø's work, and the writing about it, reproduce a strange temporality that often haunts Faroese art history, an insistence Faroese art is somehow delayed, out of synch—or, in contrast—up to date with, just as relevant as, in conversation with and responsive to other artistic trends from elsewhere. Whether defensive or apologetic, this framework presumes that the country's geographical location in the North Atlantic is synonymous with a devaluation of its cultural production. Instead of understanding Faroese art against a standard or canon, it is crucial that art historians evaluate Faroese art on its own terms. Rather than presuming that the early nineteenth century was, pardon the pun, ensconced in some impenetrable cultural fog in the Faroe Islands, we must understand what conditions might have motivated Díðrikur to paint in the first place. In order to do so, I argue it is critical to locate his images within specific social and political conditions of the period, namely the history of ornithology.

Ornithology and Scientific Specimen

Díðrikur painted each of the thirty-nine birds who populate his five extant paintings as posed atop a small pedestal. Since all of the birds stand against an empty background, the small pedestals are the only elements that anchor the birds in pictorial space. Scholars have interpreted these pedestals as potential signs of the artist's process. Did Díðrikur create his paintings from working with models of real taxidermied birds? Some of the most detailed sources about Díðrikur stem not from the nineteenth century, but rather from the mid-twentieth century, when the Listafelag Føroya acquired four of the paintings and displayed them to the public for the

first time in the 1950s. In that moment, copious postal correspondence revealed a robust oral history. One letter penned by Svanhild Joensen (quoted in Joensen 1970, 281), a resident of Tvøroyri, where Díðrikur's paintings were "rediscovered", claimed that Díðrikur "had painted shot birds". Others attested to a different, but intriguing narrative. In 1970, Hanus Debes Joensen (281) summarized the common story iterated across many letters by different authors: "Díðrikur would take an old horse out to Stóravatn, shoot it, and leave it there as a lure for birds." Afterwards, the artist would "be in the vicinity and draw the [birds that came]". This narrative about enticing birds with carcasses to serve as models certainly added to the historiographic reading of Díðrikur as unusual, to say the least.

The earliest art historical writing on Díðrikur á Skarvanesi speculates that the artist must have conceived of his paintings in conversation with scientific illustrations. Hanus Debes Joensen penned the most thorough investigation of Díðrikur á Skarvanesi and his bird paintings in a 1970 edition of *Fróðskaparrit*. Joensen finds a compelling case for one particular illustrated book as a possible model for Díðrikur: Johann Ernst Christian Walter's elaborate illustrated volume *Nordisk ornithologie*. With its last volume published in Copenhagen in 1828, the same time the twenty-six-year-old artist traveled to the imperial metropole, the book featured large colored illustrations of local bird species endemic to Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, as well as Kalaallit Nunaat.

In the eighteenth century, Europeans began creating large-scale publications that claimed to reproduce flora and fauna with inimitable accuracy. Artists played a pivotal role in this scientific imaginary, claiming their works were "trustworthy" and based on firsthand observation. The impetus for such books was an interdisciplinary response to the popularity of species classification by Linnaeus and others in the eighteenth century. This drive to catalog and order reflected a larger period imperative to classify and thereby control knowledge, especially in contested or distant geographies under colonial rule (Bleichmar 2012). A certain visual style emerged that juxtaposed an animal or a plant against a plain backdrop, that empty space pivotal for the viewer in divorcing flora and fauna from their ecosystem of origin. By collating images of specimens into albums, the resulting books manifested imperial power relations, where scientists from the metropole observed, managed, and controlled knowledge of—and therefore reinforced foreign power over—the colonies.

The colonial history of scientific illustration is relevant for the images Díðrikur may have seen while in Copenhagen. After all, the very notion that birds of the Faroe Islands should be juxtaposed, analyzed, and explained together with birds from Kalaallit Nunaat, Iceland, and Denmark is itself a colonial gesture. But in the Faroe Islands in particular, the ability for foreign scientists to study birds depended upon specific navigation of a colonial bureaucracy that deliberately limited how the Faroese could access the outside world, and how the outside world could in turn access the Atlantic nation. Despite these barriers, the archipelago was known to foreign scientists and budding ornithologists as a country "well stored both with Land- and Sea-fowl" since at least the seventeenth century (Birkhead 2022, 164). In 1655, the Danish physician Ole Worm, famous for his Copenhagen Wunderkammer, the Museum Wormanium, kept a great auk (*gorfuglur*) as a pet, as well as at least two specimens of Faroese pied ravens (*hvítravnur*) in his collection (Simonsen 2012, 97-99; Birkhead 2022).

The status of Faroese birds as collectibles, so desired by outsiders, dramatically shaped the country's ecosystems over the following centuries. By the mid nineteenth century, the great auk was extinct. The pied raven, a black raven with a genetic color aberration of white mottled feathers, was unique to the Faroe Islands, and recorded there since at least the Middle Ages (Botni 1952). Their rarity transformed the birds into hot commodities. Over the nineteenth century, wealthy collectors arranged for the hunting and acquisition of pied ravens, both as specimens to be taxidermied, others

specifically for their unique patterned skins. This hunting intensified so quickly that it drove the specific gene pool that created these distinctive ravens into extinction by the early twentieth century (Van Grouw and Bloch 2015). Over the course of many centuries, then, we can trace an ongoing thread of Faroese birds themselves as the object of resource extraction from the Faroe Islands by and for foreign interest.

I contend that this social history of foreign ornithology is critical to understanding Díðrikur's creative choices in *Fuglar*. Already in 1970, Joensen (291-292) argued that "we know enough about how normal it was in those times to send birds and birdskins from the Faroe Islands abroad," but concedes that Díðrikur's name never seems to be mentioned in the records by the scientists and collectors who amassed birds. It seems telling that Joensen presumes that Faroese readers were well aware of how commonplace it was to send local birds and birdskins abroad in the nineteenth century. The Danish Royal Trade Monopoly made outside access to the country so difficult in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that the appearance of any foreigner must have been noteworthy. In small villages where people's livelihoods were intimately intertwined with bird colonies, it must have been impossible *not* to know about the ornithologists and collectors there. The very same isolation emphasized about the Faroe Islands time and again may be precisely why Díðrikur knew of the potential fate of some birds, whether he met with ornithologists or not.

By portraying all of his avian figures on pedestals, Díðrikur invites associations of taxidermy, but, more importantly, he also invokes a fraught social history of foreign collectors decimating local bird populations. Understood through this lens, his paintings therefore become critical documents of an age of avian extinction and extraction in the Faroe Islands.

Blue Puffins

What does it mean to paint a puffin with a blue face **[4]**? I first asked this question to the audience who had gathered at "Confronting Coloniality," a seminar I convened with Anna Vestergaard Jørgensen and Vár Eydnudóttir at the Nordic House of the Faroe Islands in Tórshavn in March 2023. A unanimous answer emerged from the audience: the blue pigment we see today in Díðrikur's paintings must have been a discoloration over time, concealing an original color more akin to gray. It is true that puffin plumage changes color with the seasons. We are most familiar with the white plumage at face and stomach, and bright orange bill and webbed feet because that is when puffins share landscapes with people in the summertime. In the fall and winter, after puffins have left their summertime colonies and live on the open water, their plumage changes from white to gray and even black. Regardless of season, juveniles always sport this black and gray facial plumage, and it is these colors that usually distinguish younger birds as non-breeding birds, critical knowledge that informed historical Faroese relationships to puffins (Birkhead 2022). This context about the shifting colors of puffin plumage created a reasonable explanation to my question. Díðrikur painted blue, or perhaps created a bluish gray pigment, precisely in the pursuit of scientific accuracy.

After the seminar, I returned to Listasavn to look at Díðrikur's paintings more closely. Upon detailed inspection of *Mánadúgvur*, for instance, I took note of how the artist painted with saturated blue pigments to paint iridescent feathers in crescent shapes against a faint yellow body. The materiality of Díðrikur's gouache is clear **[5]**. See how the watery base of the pigment pooled beyond the space where Díðrikur placed his brush. Before the paints had fully dried, the blues and yellows had their own rendezvous on the paper surface. Creating a barely visible hue, neither blue nor yellow, this encounter of pigments produced the most delicate green. I linger here on these material traces of pigment, water, and paint because they provide insight not only into the artist's process, but also the actual materials he had at his disposal. Until further technical analysis is completed, it nevertheless remains difficult to know for certain whether Díðrikur did use blue pigments or not.

[4] Detail of the puffin's blue face in Díðrikur á Skarvanesi: *Fuglar*, 1840. Listasavn Føroya.

[5] Detail of Díðrikur á Skarvanesi: *Mánadúgvur*, 1840. Listasavn Føroya.

Since the puffin appears to sport blue facial plumage today, why was the seminar audience so skeptical about blue being an intentional choice of the artist? Their unanimous desire to explain the blue as a discolored gray likely reflects a desire to confirm the scientific accuracy of his paintings. *Fuglar* seems so concerned with order and juxtaposition, as if it was a visual roll call of the avian inhabitants of the Faroe Islands. For this reason, few have framed *Fuglar* through the same inventive lens Díðrikur deployed elsewhere, as in the vibrant patterning of his *Hani og høna* **[6]**. In Díðrikur's other paintings **[3]**, he portrays subtle details that indicate an interest in the fantastical. Take a look again at the second oystercatcher (*tjaldur*) along the top register of the painting. He painted the bird with slight variations from its neighbor of the same species, one closely corresponds with reality, the other does not. What might have motivated Díðrikur to insist on the liminal, between naturalistic and fantastical?

The blue pigment may be key to this question. For centuries, blue signified elite access to distant trade. Harvested primarily from mountains in Afghanistan, lapis lazuli—an ancient deep blue gem—became a material marker of luxury, wealth, and power already 4000 years ago among the Sumerians. When ground into powder,

[6] Díðrikur á Skarvanesi: *Hani og høna,* 1830. Listasavn Føroya.

lapis lazuli was the basis of the pigment ultramarine, widely used and keenly coveted among European artists across the Middle Ages and Early Modern period. In the eighteenth century, Prussian blue, a new synthetic pigment, replaced the costly lapis lazuli and revolutionized the availability of the color across the globe. In one of its most famous uses, Prussian blue created the affective power of Katsushika Hokusai's iconic *Great Wave off the Coast of Kanagawa* (1831). At the time, Edo Japan's policy of sakoku, a closed state, strictly limited Japanese access to the wider world, not least by reducing what foreign products entered the country. Hokusai's use of the color was therefore a novel marketing strategy, revealing his access to clandestine merchants in the midst of East Asia's so-called "blue revolution."

Part of the mobility of Prussian blue was related to the globalization of trade routes. The British East India Company had introduced Prussian blue to China, and Chinese merchants made the material cheaper and more accessible to the Japanese. There is something relevant about Japan's policy of isolation that resonates with the restrictive state of the trade monopoly occurring simultaneously in the Faroe Islands. Both societies grappled with draconian restrictions on what products could enter and exit, and similar restrictions limited the movement of people beyond their home archipelago as well. Reflecting on this wider global history of Prussian blue provides an important model to speculate upon Díðrikur's access to the blue. We know that Prussian blue was also available in Copenhagen in the early nineteenth century, and artists used it at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (Filtenborg, Buti, Vila, and Wadum 2016). At precisely the same time, Tórshavn became particularly important as a locus of trade between Denmark and Danish colonies and outposts in Tranquebar, Ghana, the Virgin Islands, Kalaallit Nunaat and Iceland. As Jóan Pauli Joensen (2017) has explained, a transit trade initiated by the Danish merchant Niels Ryberg smuggled colonial commodities like tea, tobacco, and porcelain through Tórshavn and into Scotland, England, and Ireland, enriching Danish merchants in the early nineteenth century. Future research should examine whether or not Prussian blue reached

the Faroe Islands through the trade monopoly or possibly through contemporaneous smuggling efforts. At the very least, blue signifies a connection to a global economic network. Blue may therefore suggest that Díðrikur's paintings are not simply images of local subject matter, but material signifiers of the interconnectedness of the Faroe Islands with the wider world.

Bárður Jákupsson (2000, 8) remarks that the fact Díðrikur "got his hands on colors, brushes, and paper—those certainly weren't available in Tórshavn at all—remains a mystery". What Jákupsson hints at here is how the literal materials of painting indicate some kind of Faroese engagement with the wider world despite the reality of the restrictive trade monopoly. We know Díðrikur traveled to Copenhagen in the summer of 1828, and returned home at least by 1834, if not earlier (Joensen 1970, 276-280). Whether he acquired his painting materials in Copenhagen, at the trade post in Tórshavn, or even in conversation with others on the ship, remains difficult to ascertain without more archival research. Instead, we might be able to speculate about the social and cultural conditions that might have motivated what Díðrikur wanted to say with his images, as he painted flocks of Faroese birds with vibrant colors and patterns only acquired from—and thus reflective of—the wider world.

Towards a Social Reading

Faroese birds and trade monopolies have been long entangled in the Faroese imagination, not simply through the extraction and extinction of avian specimens by collectors and scientists but codified in the country's nineteenth-century literature. In 1806-1807, Nólsoyar Páll (Poul Poulsen Nolsøe) penned *Fuglakvæði*, a ballad that casts a searing critique of the restrictions of Denmark's monopoly trade that exploited and disenfranchised Faroese families. Told through characters of Faroese birds, the text features the brave oystercatcher (*tjaldur*) who defends smaller birds from the machinations of a threatening falcon, a metaphor for Denmark and the colonial trade monopoly. Kim Simonsen (2012, 233-237) argues that it is important to realize that Faroese projected an anachronistic national sentiment onto *Fuglakvæði*, beginning decades later in the 1890s. He concurs with other scholars that Nólsoyar Páll's role in the Faroese national imagination was more so symbolical than it was historical. In other words, he emphasizes that it is difficult to know of the immediate reception or influence of *Fuglakvæði* at the time of its publication. I find it tempting to ponder the correspondences between the ballad and Díðrikur's paintings, not least because Díðrikur, like Nólsoyar Páll, had experienced a bit of the world outside of the Faroe Islands.

What I find so critical about *Fuglakvæði* is that it exists as a crucial precedent within Faroese cultural expression. In the absence of local visual arts that could have informed Díðrikur and his painting style or subject, *Fuglakvæði* provides a touchstone that demonstrates how Faroese thinkers imagined local birds as allegories and metaphors through which they could interpret their current reality. Just as *Fuglakvæði* engages the consequences of the trade monopoly, so, too—I hope to have demonstrated—do the very materials of Díðrikur's paintings invoke a certain economic history.

Considering the cast of characters in *Fuglakvæði* illuminates an important fact about Díðrikur's paintings: there are no falcons or other local birds of prey. The same birds who stand in as allegories for corrupt Danish officials and monarchs never appear in any of the paintings. Of course, it is impossible to know if Díðrikur never painted raptors, if those paintings are simply no longer extant, or if he excluded them from his oeuvre deliberately. I want to emphasize that I do not think that Díðrikur's paintings directly represent *Fuglakvæði* nor do I believe that Díðrikur was even necessarily aware of the ballad. Rather than seeing Díðrikur's birds as literal embodiments of the ballad, thinking alongside *Fuglakvæði* can help us see the political and social potential embedded within the artist's avian aesthetics. If Nólsoyar Páll's birds represented an exploited class of Faroese society, Díðrikur's birds may represent a population unrestricted. Precisely those

spaces where Díðrikur deviates from naturalistic representation are instances where the artist renders birds that exist otherwise, beyond the current limitations of their species, and beyond the normative representations of scientific illustrations. Painted with materials and the artist's lived experience from the wider world beyond the Faroe Islands—and outside the economic restrictions of the trade monopoly—Díðrikur's birds could indeed be visual metaphors about envisioning possible futures, one, perhaps, of self-determination.

Conclusion

Almost every consideration of Díðrikur á Skarvanesi mentions the strangeness of his paintings, not so much in their style, but rather in their very existence. For Jákupsson, it is no less than a "mystery" that a farmhand could even finagle access to the very materials necessary to create paintings: mineral pigments, ink, brushes, and even paper. Implied in his commentary "those certainly weren't available in Tórshavn" (*hetta var als ikki at fáa í Havn*) is a reference to the status of the capital as site of trade commodities. In the early nineteenth century, the Faroe Islands were still subject to a restrictive trade monopoly, making free trade forbidden. Designed for the economic benefit of the Danish crown, the monopoly disenfranchised Faroese families, and strictly controlled what came in and out of the country. The colonial framework of the trade monopoly isolated the Faroe Islands, thereby making Díðrikur's ability to make paintings remarkable.

Once we move beyond the supposed incredulity that a Faroese person did, indeed, make paintings in the early nineteenth century, we can understand them better as cultural works reflective of complex social, political, and economic conditions. Here, I have attempted to place Díðrikur's paintings in a variety of contexts. His visual references to taxidermy and scientific specimens invoke the history of ornithology, foreigners transforming Faroese birds into collectible commodities, and the extraction and extinction of local bird species happening in real time at the moment Díðrikur produced these paintings. Clear as they may seem, the paintings also resist the same affiliation with the natural sciences that they evoke. The dynamic patterns, green tail feathers, and blue faces challenge any presumption of fidelity to nature. Instead, Díðrikur á Skarvanesi purposefully played with the boundaries between fact and fiction, insisting that his avian subjects, and their viewers, remain instead in the liminal. In that space, the artist could question the colonial structures of Faroese society under Danish monopoly, referencing the trade both by the status of birds as commodities to be taken, but also painting materials as themselves connected to global networks of economic exchange. In doing so, Díðrikur built on a tradition of powerful cultural metaphors already inaugurated in nineteenth-century Faroese culture by Nólsoyar Páll's famous *Fuglakvæði*. And he did so, I think, not least because the artist kindled his own avian affinities. Maybe, like me, he was also afflicted with "puffin love."

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