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The exhibition *Saga-Sites: Landscapes of the Icelandic Sagas*, on view at Scandinavia House from September 2012 through January 2013, offered a unique look at the great, medieval narratives of Iceland through 19th-century watercolors of British artist W.G. Collingwood and the personal, documentary photographs of renowned Icelandic artist Einar Falur Ingólfsson.

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The first of its kind in the United States, the exhibition explores the inimitable visual dialogue forged between Collingwood and Ingólfsson—working over a century apart—and highlights the significance of the sagas within Iceland’s literary heritage and their enduring cultural inspiration.

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Presented by The American-Scandinavian Foundation and organized by The National Museum of Iceland, “*Saga Sites*” was curated by Thorbjörg Gunnardóttir, and was accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, published in Iceland by Crymogea.

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Known collectively as the *Íslendingasögur*, or the *Sagas of Icelanders*, this unique body of Medieval European literature contains narratives based on historic events that took place in Iceland in the 9<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, during a time known as the *Saga Age*.

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A central pillar of Icelandic literature, they relate the lives and struggles of the early settlers of Iceland, and are known for their realistic prose.

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During the summer of 1897, the British artist and antiquarian W.G. Collingwood spent three months touring the sites of the Icelandic sagas, with Icelandic literary scholar Jón Stefánsson. Collingswood’s goal was to create a visual background in which to imagine the sagas.

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Over their travels, Collingwood created more than 300 watercolors, which were later published in an illustrated account of the expedition, titled “*A Pilgrimage to the Sagasteads of Iceland*.” More than 200 of Collingswood’s watercolors are now in the collection of the National Museum of Iceland.

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More than 100 years later, photographer Einar Falur Ingólfsson retraced Collingwood’s steps over a three-year period from 2007 to 2009, using Collingwood as a guide to produce new visual works of the saga sites.

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Said Ingólfsson of his series, “At first I wanted to compare Collingwood’s watercolors and my photographs and see how objective he had been in his approach. In that process I began to admire the artist’s views more and more, his fascination with the land and the sagas and how honest he strove to be.”

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The exhibition comprised more than 60 of the original watercolors and contemporary photographs, all drawn from the artists’ respective journeys.

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Works show how the locations were viewed by two different artistic sensibilities, such as in these two views from Mt. Helgafell, as painted by Collingwood in June of 1897 and captured by Ingólfsson from the same vantage point in 2009.

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Viewed side by side, the artists’ works form a dialogue between the past and present, both between the eras in which Collingwood and Ingólfsson have created their works, and with the Sagas themselves as they were written centuries ago.

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The works on display were accompanied wall text about the Sagas and the stories, enabling visitors to learn about such tales as the Saga of Kormak the Skjald, about an ill-fated love affair doomed by the spell of an angry witch.

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Throughout the exhibition, Scandinavia House offered related programming such as a lecture by scholar Emily Lethbridge, and a series of Pratt educator-led family workshops, Discovering Iceland through Art and Story.

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“Saga Sites” offered visitors a rare opportunity to view the physical environments of the saga narratives, revisited and reinterpreted centuries later.

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As Collingwood wrote in the preface to his book about the 1897 expedition, “We went out to see the very places where events so familiar in books occurred in reality; and we found that for every touch of human interest in the sagas — pastoral, romantic or sublime — there was, as still remains, a landscape setting no less sweet, or strange, or stern.”

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