

Ebony, David  
“David Ebony’s Top 10 New York Gallery Shows for November”  
Artnet News  
November 26, 2016

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## David Ebony’s Top 10 New York Gallery Shows for November

Sweep away your post-election blues.

**David Ebony**

November 26, 2016



Ragnar Kjartansson, film still, *World Light: The Life and Death of an Artist*, 2015, four-channel video; looped / duration: 8 hours 27 minutes 22 seconds.  
Photo Courtesy Luhring Augustine.

### 4. Ragnar Kjartansson at Luhring Augustine

Among the most subtle of artists, yet with an outsize theatrical persona and sensibility, Ragnar Kjartansson once again delivers an astonishing New York gallery show. The two-venue extravaganza includes paintings, video pieces, and an epic film produced over the past two years. The New York exhibition coincides with a major survey of the Icelandic artist’s work at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Park in Washington, D.C.

Kjartansson’s peculiar brand of provocation appears in the group of paintings filling the main space in the gallery’s Chelsea branch, collectively titled *Architecture and Morality* (2016). The series of quasi-Impressionist paintings is populated with cartoonish cars but no figures. It turns out that these are renderings of Israeli homes located in contested areas of the West Bank. Under the auspices of the Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv, the forty-year-old artist painted *en plein air* on site in the West Bank from morning until dusk for two weeks. At first the paintings appear rather sweet and innocuous. But after becoming aware of the politically loaded situation of the setting, they suddenly seem volatile and a bit foreboding.

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Also in the Chelsea gallery, *Scenes from Western Culture* is a series of nine videos looped on medium-size monitors. Each piece presents an ordinary domestic scene with characters, but with no linear narrative. The most

ambitious and mesmerizing work, *World Light—The Life and Death of an Artist* (2015), on view at the gallery’s Bushwick space, is a four-channel video based on an Iceland epic novel, and is epic in length—at over eight hours. Each of the four components, projected simultaneously, one on each wall of the gallery, tells a different narrative in this low-budget blockbuster that is at once a love story, sea adventure, village folk tale, and high-school pageant. With the artist appearing in one segment as a kind of M.C. in a white dinner jacket, the work is campy, absurd, hilarious, and disjointed. But, as always with Kjartansson’s work, it’s difficult to pull yourself away from it.