

WE'RE SORRY



Introduction to *We're Sorry*: An Artwork Sparking Global Discussion on Corporate Responsibility and Artistic Freedom

In 2023, as part of my graduation project for a bachelor's degree in Fine Art at the Iceland University of the Arts, I created a concept- and performance-based piece titled *We're Sorry*. The project subsequently became the foundation of my artistic research during my MA in Fine Art at the University of Bergen, and it now forms my ongoing PhD research in Fine Arts at Texas Tech University.

We're Sorry is a dynamic **social sculpture** that directly addresses **corporate wrongdoing** by the Icelandic fishing company **Samherji**. The artwork replicated the official Samherji website but prominently featured a bold apology, "We're Sorry," placed front and center. The site also included a fictional press release in which the company apologized for its **wrongdoings**, offered restitution, and pledged cooperation with authorities. The project was inspired by the **Fishrot Files scandal** of 2019, in which Wikileaks published 30,000 documents exposing Samherji's alleged corruption in Namibia, including **bribery** and **exploitation**. These actions caused significant **social and economic harm**, marking what is considered the **largest scandal** in both **Icelandic** and **Namibian history**.

The **human cost** of this corruption cannot be overstated. Tens of millions of dollars in bribes were paid, often to high-ranking government officials, to secure lucrative fishing quotas. According to recent reports, over **90% of fisheries workers who lost their jobs due to Fishrot corruption** have been unable to return to work, highlighting the devastating toll of grand corruption on vulnerable communities.

The artwork has garnered significant **global attention**, igniting meaningful social discourse on **corporate responsibility** and **freedom of expression**. It has been featured in prominent art news outlets such as **ARTnews**, **Artnet**, **Hyperallergic** and **The Art Newspaper**, as well as major publications including **The Guardian - Observer**, **Reuters**, and every major news and media outlet in Iceland. Coverage has also extended to **The Namibian**, the **Windhoek Observer**, and national broadcasters across the Nordic countries. Furthermore, it has been spotlighted in leading fishing industry magazines such as **Undercurrent News**, **Intrafish**, **Seafood Source**, **Fiskerforum**, and others.

We're Sorry extended beyond the website into a **10-meter mural** displayed at the **Reykjavík Art Museum**, featuring the same bold blue text, "*We're Sorry*," amplifying its message in public spaces. The project serves as a **powerful critique of corporate malfeasance** and challenges the lack of accountability frequently seen in global business operations.

Although Samherji is currently under investigation in multiple countries—with individuals already in detention awaiting trial—they chose to take legal action against me. This resulted in a **high-profile case** in the **High Court of London**, where I faced claims of copyright infringement, malicious falsehood, and passing off. The court issued a judgment against me by the end of 2024, finding that I do not have real prospects of success in opposing those claims, and that there should not even have to be a trial. While this judgment represents a legal loss for me, it raises profound questions about the **limits to artistic freedom**, and corporate influence over public discourse.

Through *We're Sorry*, I aimed to **highlight the role of art in exposing and confronting injustices, sparking necessary conversations about corporate responsibility and transparency**. The subsequent legal battle has further expanded the artwork's scope, incorporating discussions on **freedom of expression** and the **chilling effect** corporate powers can have on it.

Art makes waves, and it has rocked the boat of my **unintentional collaborators in art**, Samherji. Their continued efforts to amplify *We're Sorry* have ensnared them in the very critique they sought to silence, putting an even greater spotlight on their wrongdoings internationally.

This is one of art's most powerful features: its ability to **challenge power, question structures, and spark conversation**.

We're Sorry has already claimed its place in history; no other Icelandic artwork has been taken to court like this, let alone to the **High Court of another country**, dragged there by a company exposed for wrongdoings in multiple ways. It has arguably become **Iceland's most well-known contemporary artwork**. Prominent voices and institutions have called upon Samherji to end its legal pursuit against me, underscoring the **public interest** and **societal value** of this commentary. World-renowned artists such as **The Yes Men**, **Nadia Plesner**, and **Ragnar Kjartansson**, alongside organizations like the **Federation of Icelandic Artists**, the **Association of Icelandic Visual Artists**, the **University of Bergen**, and more than **25 leading whistleblowing, free expression, and human rights defending organizations**, have all offered letters of support.

These organizations stand by the right to freedom of expression—which allows us to examine moral and ethical choices and consider how power operates, whether political, social, or economic.

A judgement in the High Court in London risks setting a troubling precedent with dire consequences for **society, freedom of expression, and public critique**. Judgment enforces the **will of a corporation** and casts a **chilling effect** on those who would dare to publicly criticize Samherji. It threatens to silence not just artists but also activists, journalists, and citizens who wish to engage in public debate. It has the potential to deter an entire generation of creative thinkers from using their platforms to address societal issues, restricting public discourse in favor of corporate interests. This underscores the critical importance of keeping **Samherji's actions and corruption on the global agenda** and seeking accountability in cases where justice has been delayed for far too long.

We're Sorry's role in pushing social discussion is far from over, and its message will continue to resonate, inspiring dialogue about **accountability, artistic freedom, and human rights**.



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