



United Nations
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Organisation
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pour l'éducation,
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the presentation
of Erró's painting "Thor's story"**

UNESCO, 26 September 2008

Madam Minister,
Mr Ambassador,
Artist Erró,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you all to UNESCO Headquarters for the presentation of this outstanding contemporary work of art in the name of the Government and people of Iceland.

Madam Minister, I am particularly pleased to have this opportunity to thank you, both personally and on behalf of the Organization, for this gift in recognition of UNESCO's work and as a symbol of our partnership in pursuit of our common goals.

I should particularly like to mention Iceland's vital support, with the other Nordic countries, for teacher training and literacy under our capacity building programmes for Education for All, which is the priority of priorities as we work to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

I was able to see at first hand Iceland's rich cultural heritage on my visit in June 2002, when I was privileged to see the magnificent manuscripts of The Árni Magnússon Institute and to visit Þingvellir, the site of the first Icelandic Parliament. Þingvellir has of course since been inscribed on the World Heritage List.

I should like to thank Ambassador Tómas Ingi Olrich, who was then Iceland's Minister of Education, Science and Culture for his instrumental role in making that visit so successful. I should also like to express my heartfelt thanks to him for his outstanding contribution to deepening the relationship between Iceland and UNESCO, first as Minister and now as Ambassador.

Finally, I cannot let this occasion pass without a word of tribute to Mrs Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, President of Iceland from 1980 to 1996 and a valued UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador since 1998. In many ways, she personifies Iceland's energetic engagement with the Organization - working tirelessly to bring countries together in all domains, especially concerning women's rights, linguistic diversity and multilingualism, ecology, education and bioethics.

Dear Friends,

Born in Iceland, Erró's artistic career spans over 50 years. Living and working in Paris, Thailand and Spain his works are truly universal in scope and are rooted in the French narrative figuration movement. This work in particular, based on the Nordic God, Thor, and populated by mythological, historical, religious and political references depicted through contemporary iconography, is an apt expression of the complexity of our fast changing world. We are pleased and proud to include it in our permanent collection.

Iceland's donation of this painting is not only an expression of its friendship and support for UNESCO. It is also a tangible demonstration of its commitment to some of our top priorities: encouraging dialogue and mutual understanding among different cultures; promoting creativity; and safeguarding cultural diversity. This commitment has also been demonstrated by Iceland's ratification of the three key normative instruments that underpin UNESCO's work to safeguard cultural diversity: the 1972, 2003, and 2005 Conventions on World Heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage; and Cultural Expressions respectively.

In closing, let me take this opportunity once again to thank the Government of Iceland for its support for our work and for this most generous gift. We look forward to pursuing our close collaboration in the future. Thank you.