

PRESS RELEASE



JUMANA MANNA WILD RELATIVES

FOGO ISLAND GALLERY

December 23, 2018 to April 27, 2019

Exhibition Opening

Sunday, December 23, 5:00-7:00PM

FOGO ISLAND GALLERY
Fogo Island Inn
210 Main Rd, Joe Batt's Arm
Fogo Island, NL

GALLERY HOURS
11:00AM – 6:00PM daily
Free

fogoislandarts.ca
fogoislandinn.ca
shorefast.ca

The Fogo Island Gallery presents *Wild Relatives* (2018), a feature-length film by Palestinian artist Jumana Manna. Following a transportation of seeds between the Arctic and Lebanon, *Wild Relatives* unfolds a matrix of people and plant lives between two distant spots of the earth.

In 2012, an agricultural research centre in Aleppo was forced to relocate to the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon due to the escalating war in Syria. Unable to move its gene bank, the centre, known as ICARDA, created a duplicate by withdrawing their back up seeds from the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway and painstakingly re-cultivating their collection, before returning seeds to the vault. With striking imagery and often meditative sequences, the film maps this network of exchange between three countries and teases out the broader geopolitical context which enabled the transaction.

Wild Relatives subtly infers the backdrop of international policies and practices from the 1960s on that facilitated a move towards industrialized farming in developing countries, one that privileged high yielding crops over local wild varieties, and in many cases has placed farmers in subservience to state or corporate interests.

The film also foregrounds the lives and livelihoods of individuals, from the young Syrian refugee women who work in the fields to local farmers who have been forced to transform their arable land into more economically viable refugee camps, to those pursuing alternative, “ground-up” planting practices with heirloom seed varieties.

Wild Relatives grew out of Manna’s interest in archives and, in particular, taxonomic approaches to nature that have “accelerated material and social changes to the life cycles of plants and their allies, small farmers.”¹ Prevalent in the nineteenth century, such methods were ostensibly an imposition of colonial mechanisms of control over the “unruly” landscapes and flora of the Middle East. They are the precursor to contemporary gene banks and, as Shela Sheikh has noted, also facilitated the extraction and transfer of plant resources to the West.²

Manna explores the dual nature of the archive as a mechanism of preservation that may also precipitate erasure: a ‘fixing’ or freezing in time of a particular body of knowledge or, in this case, collection of seeds placed into a state of limbo. Despite many significant developments made with the goals of alleviating poverty and hunger, the pursuit of high yielding seeds in the work of organizations like the ones featured in the film has also resulted in a diminishment of biodiversity.

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Jumana Manna, “A Small, Big Thing,” in *Wild Relatives* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2017), 50.
Shela Sheikh, “Planting Seeds/The Fires of War,” in *Wild Relatives*, 26.

A timely and important work, *Wild Relatives* offers no easy answers but opens a field of inquiry into the entanglement of the Syrian crisis, the impacts of various agricultural histories and practices, as well as the movement of people, resources and capital across national boundaries.

The Fogo Island Gallery is curated by Alexandra McIntosh, FIA Director of Programs and Exhibitions, and Nicolaus Schafhausen, FIA Strategic Director.

Artist's Biography

Jumana Manna is an artist working primarily with film and sculpture. Her work explores how power is articulated through relationships, often focusing on body and materiality in relation to narratives of state building and histories of place. Manna received a BFA from the National Academy of Arts in Oslo and an MA in Aesthetics and Politics from California Institute of the Arts. She has exhibited at Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, and Henie Onstad Museum, Norway (2018); Mercer Union, Toronto (2017); Malmö Konsthall (2016); Beirut Art Center, Lebanon (2015); Chisenhale Gallery, London (2015); SculptureCenter, New York (2014); and Kunsthall Oslo (2013). She has participated in group exhibitions such as Centre Pompidou and Satellite 10, Jeu de Paume, Paris (2017); Nordic Pavilion, 57th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale (2016); Kunsthalle Wien (2016); Liverpool Biennial (2016), Marrakech Biennale 6 (2016); 20th Biennale of Sydney (2016); and Jerusalem Show VII and VIII, Al-Ma'mal Foundation (2014, 2016). Manna's films have been screened in festivals such as Viennale International Film Festival and the Berlinale Forum (2016, 2018); CPH: DOX, Copenhagen (2018); BAFICI, Buenos Aires, and International Film Festival Rotterdam (2013, 2017). Manna is the recipient of the New:Visions Award from CPH:DOX 2018; ars viva Prize for Visual Arts 2017; Sandefjord Kunstpris, 2015; and the A.M. Qattan Foundation's Young Palestinian Artist Award 2012. She lives and works in Berlin. Manna participated in a residency with Fogo Island Arts in 2018.

About Fogo Island Arts

Fogo Island Arts is a residency-based contemporary art venue for artists, filmmakers, writers, musicians, curators, designers, and thinkers from around the world. Since 2008, FIA has brought some of the most exciting emerging and renowned artists of today to Fogo Island, Newfoundland, to take part in residencies and to present solo exhibitions at the Fogo Island Gallery. FIA also presents programs in cities across Canada and abroad, including the Fogo Island Dialogues interdisciplinary conversation series, as part of its international outreach. FIA is an initiative of Shorefast, a registered Canadian charity with the mission to build economic and cultural resilience on Fogo Island.

Fogo Island Arts graciously acknowledges its Patrons, including members of the Founders' Circle, FIA Partners and FIA Friends for their essential support of residencies, programs and exhibitions.

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FOGO ISLAND ARTS

49° 37' N, 54° 12' W

