

PRESS RELEASE



ABBAS AKHAVAN SCRIPT FOR AN ISLAND

FOGO ISLAND GALLERY

October 12, 2019 to February 16, 2020

Exhibition Opening

Saturday, October 12, 6:00-8:00 pm

Abbas Akhavan, Alexandra McIntosh and

Nicolaus Schafhausen in Conversation:

Sunday, October 13, 2:00-3:00 pm

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

GALLERY HOURS
12:00-9:00 pm daily
Free

fogoislandarts.ca
fogoislandinn.ca
shorefast.ca

The Fogo Island Gallery presents *script for an island*, a site-specific exhibition and outdoor installation by Montreal-based artist **Abbas Akhavan**. Drawing on the languages of theatre, gardens, and sacred and vernacular architecture, Akhavan creates an open-ended site for reflection and engagement that speaks to our desire for rituals and collective mythologies.

During his 2013 and 2016 residencies with Fogo Island Arts, Akhavan was struck by the Fogo Island Gallery's resemblance to a theatre, with its single-storey space opening to double-height and overlooked by a window from the second floor. In researching the island's vernacular architecture of fishing stages—elevated wooden sheds for landing and processing fish—the artist also noted overlaps with the language of theatre (stages, stores, trapdoors, docks, rigging, etc.), as well as the use of sailing terminology in theatre. These commonalities became a point of departure for an investigation into the specificities of site and community as a living, fluid entity.

In *script for an island*, a thin platform resembling a theatrical stage bridges the full width of the gallery, seemingly suspended above the floor. Bowed slightly in the middle, the platform appears precarious and somewhat neglected, as water from a hose pools on its surface before spilling over into a shallow pool beneath. Nearby, a garden hose lies in large loops, partially unspooled from its reel. The whole is enveloped in a warm yellow glow cast by stained glass installed in the second-floor window. The glass itself mimics strand board, a type of structural panel made of compressed shards of wood, and yet conveys a reverential atmosphere.

In parallel with the gallery exhibition, Akhavan has conceived of an outdoor installation on Brown's Point in Joe Batt's Arm. A 20' x 12' black velvet curtain repurposed from an actual theatre runs a length of scaffolding erected along the shoreline, facing the water. Open to the elements, the work creates a billowing counterpart to the stark solidity of Fogo Island Arts' Long Studio, which stands like a two-dimensional plane across the bay. The curtain appears freestanding when viewed from the water and renders the island as a stage in anticipation of a performance.

The theatre, much like the church, as an archetype suggests a collective encounter, a space for shared beliefs or the suspension of disbelief. But any communal feeling is tenuous and fleeting, dependent on shared cultural references and an individual's willingness to engage. In this way, the exhibition evokes our desire for overarching rituals or mythologies: common ground through which we might find ways to act together.

Scaffolding stands in for three-dimensional space, the stage in the gallery is constructed as a set or a prop, and a garden hose suggests the presence of a snake. The gallery space itself is illuminated by light that filters through stained glass made to replicate a material substitute for

wood, one that might otherwise be used to board up a broken window. The power inherent in such symbols belies their makeshift character. These are elements that approximate rather than explicitly reference larger symbols or archetypes, inviting viewers to complete their own version of the narrative.

Drawing oblique references to theatre, architecture, religion and gardens, *script for an island* opens a field of enquiry into how we gather as a community and the shared symbols that bind us as a culture. The exhibition and installation create spaces that are held in (dramatic) suspension, rife with the potential for collectivity or contemplation.

script for an island is curated by **Alexandra McIntosh** (Director of Programs and Exhibitions, Fogo Island Arts) and **Nicolaus Schafhausen** (Strategic Director, Fogo Island Arts).

Artist's Biography

Abbas Akhavan's practice ranges from site-specific ephemeral installations to drawing, video, sculpture and performance. The direction of his research has been deeply influenced by the specificity of the sites where he works: the architectures that house them, the economies that surround them, and the people that frequent them. The domestic sphere, as a forked space between hospitality and hostility, has been an ongoing area of research in his practice. More recent works have shifted focus, wandering onto spaces and species just outside the home – the garden, the backyard, and other domesticated landscapes. Recent solo exhibitions include *cast for a folly* (2019), CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco; *Folly* (2018), Vie D'ange, Montreal; *Variations on a Landscape* (2018), The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto; *Not titled* (2017), Museum Villa Stuck, Munich; and *They hit a tree with an axe* (2017), SALT Galata, Istanbul. Akhavan is the recipient of the Sobey Art Award (2015), The Abraaj Group Art Prize (2014), and Kunstpreis Berlin (2012).

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 and Abbas Akhavan are grateful to Kingman Brewster, Jonathan Bursey, Earl Cull, Stephen Coles, Stephen Grant, Janet Langdon, Linda Osmond, Bruce Pashak, John Penton, Mahshid Rafiei, and Brad Rowsell.

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

shorefast

FOGO ISLAND ARTS

49° 37' N, 54° 12' W

Abbas Akhavan, *script for an island*, outdoor installation, Joe Batt's Arm, Fogo Island, 2019. Repurposed theatre curtain and scaffolding, 20' x 12'.