

Alexandra McIntosh: AN ISLAND WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

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A shorefast is the line and mooring that tethers a vessel to the shore. When eighth-generation Fogo Islanders Alan, Anthony and Zita Cobb conceived of a foundation with a mission to preserve and stimulate Fogo Island's culture and economy, they named it Shorefast, evoking the traditional fishing term's connections between land and sea, community and culture, individual and place.

Like all Fogo Islanders, the Cobb family's livelihood and well-being depended on the fishery and its firmly established system of assigned roles and trade. Men fished from June to September on small wooden boats called punts, casting off from the community wharf and staying out for hours on the open water. At the end of each day, fish were cleaned and filleted in fishing stages—small wooden sheds built on stilts over the water—and the guts and carcasses tossed back into the sea. Women and children had a hand in drying and salting the cod, which would eventually be traded to local merchants for credit. Fishermen were offered a price by the pound for their catch that was set by the merchants, who then exported the fish to Europe, the Caribbean, and North and South America. This exchange situated Fogo Island within a vast triangular trade network across the globe that flourished from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Along the journey, Fogo Island saltfish was traded for sugar, molasses and rum, once-exotic materials that became intertwined with local fare. Over the winter, boats, nets and other equipment were repaired and maintained in anticipation of the next season, and the cycle would begin again.

This way of life remained in place for 400 years, until the 1950s, when a process of industrialization of fishing began, setting cod on a course for extinction and decimating Fogo Island and Newfoundland's economies in the process. The advent of offshore factory trawlers—large ships with on-board freezing and processing capabilities—and gillnetting, meant that vast quantities of cod were fished from the seas around Newfoundland, the Grand Banks, and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. With dwindling fish stocks in their local coves, Fogo Islanders moved from a local, inshore fishery further out to sea, requiring bigger boats and new techniques. Overfishing and ever-diminishing catches continued through the 1960s and subsequent decades until 1992, when the Canadian government imposed a moratorium on cod fishing, closing the once-rich waters to all. Almost overnight, a stable and sustainable way of life ended with no recourse in sight.

Until this point, Fogo Islanders had fished according to need, taking enough to eat during the season, and enough to see them through the winter. When the cod fishery collapsed, Zita Cobb's father, like other fishermen, was told to make the transition to catching different species, a task that proved impossible without the capacity

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to read or write. The Cobb family moved to Toronto in 1975. “It wasn’t the fish that let us down,” Lambert Cobb told his daughter. When Zita was old enough to attend university, she studied business, seeking to understand what had happened to her family and to her island.

Zita Cobb was born in 1958, the only girl among eight siblings. She has described her experience as one of growing up in three centuries. Her childhood was situated in the nineteenth century, on an island with no electricity or running water and parents who couldn’t read or write. With the advent of bottom-dragging trawlers and the extreme intensification of fishing over three decades, she was squarely in the twenty-first-century, with its unfettered pursuit of profit and resource extraction to the detriment of natural and human costs. Cobb eventually pursued work in the technology sector.¹ Towards the end of her thoroughly twenty-first century career she became increasingly motivated to find new ways of creating capital without the destruction of community and environment.

Cobb retired in 2001, at the age of forty-two, and returned home to Fogo Island with “more than her fair share of money,”² and the intention to help her community. Shorefast was formed as a registered Canadian charity in 2007 to “build economic and cultural resilience on Fogo Island.”³

Using a holistic approach to development, Shorefast encompasses a suite of interconnected social businesses—deploying business strategies toward socially beneficial ends—and charitable programs.

Surpluses from Shorefast’s social businesses, chief among them—the Fogo Island Inn—are reinvested in the community of Fogo Island through charitable programs that include art, geology and academic residencies; microlending; ocean sustainability and resource management initiatives; vernacular architecture and boatbuilding heritage programs; and an economic development partnership between key local stakeholders.

The largest and most visible of Shorefast’s charitable programs is Fogo Island Arts, an international contemporary art organization that operates an artist residency program on the island as well as a series of interconnected programs and initiatives.

The Fogo Island Inn was conceived to be the main economic driver of Shorefast activities. Opened in 2013, the inn was funded primarily by Cobb’s assets from the fibre optics industry, along with comparatively modest contributions from the governments of Newfoundland and Canada.

The inn is a form of contemporary philanthropy, a business without a board of trustees, or shareholders seeking a return. With all surpluses returned to Shorefast for reinvestment in the community, Fogo Island as a whole is the “beneficial owner” of the inn. The philosophy and values of Shorefast are woven into the very structure of the inn



¹ Cobb became CFO of JDS Fitel, and then senior vice-president of strategy for fibre optics manufacturer JDS Uniphase.

² Zita Cobb, D3 video presentation, Association of Professional Fundraisers, Toronto, 2014.

³ Shorefast website: www.shorefast.org. The Charity was first incorporated as Frangipani Foundation in 2004, and the name was changed to Shorefast Foundation in 2007. In 2018, the name was shortened to Shorefast.



and its furnishings, built into every architectural component and material detail. All construction and interior materials were sourced from Fogo Island where possible, and then from Newfoundland and the rest of Canada, moving out in concentric circles to the island's traditional trading partners, and always from places with basic labor and environmental protection laws. As much as possible, furniture and other objects are made on the island by local craftspeople.

Shorefast's projects as a whole balance the preservation of local knowledge and culture with a search for ways to connect to the world beyond. The inn builds on Newfoundlanders' innate hospitality and history of exchange with other parts of the world. Equally for Shorefast's other businesses and charitable programs, this balancing of preservation and connection has been a question of renewing the relevance of certain activities and ways of being. For example, an artisans' guild was established to maintain the standards of quality and uniqueness of Fogo Island's textile traditions. Quilting, rug-hooking, knitting and other activities were driven for years by necessity and undertaken with leftover or repurposed materials. As such, they risk being lost to subsequent generations who have options beyond making their own pieces.

Similarly, concerned for the disappearance of knowledge required to make the wooden fishing punts that are characteristic to Fogo Island and neighboring Change Islands, Shorefast commissioned a new vessel from each of the few remaining boatbuilders. It also initiated "The Great Fogo Island Punt Race—To There and Back," an annual boat race that has drawn attention and competitors from locals and visitors alike.

Through boatbuilding, the guild, and the commissioning of quilts and soft furnishings for every room of the Fogo Island Inn, Shorefast has not only helped preserve specific skills but generated a broader interest in and celebration of these forms of knowledge and material culture. Significantly, this has translated into sales of textiles to inn guests and other visitors, bringing revenue to the island and creating opportunities for some makers to sustain a living through their practice.

What is key to Shorefast's mission and initiatives is that Fogo Island's challenges are not unique. Rural areas around the world face similar issues of a loss of economic independence, aging populations, outward migration of young people, and a struggle to find a place within the global economy. Shorefast projects can be taken as potential models for elsewhere, templates for action that may be reimagined according to other communities' specific needs.

What Shorefast aims for, echoing the philosophy of Gill-Chin Lim, is to move towards a global network of intensely local places. Driving all of its initiatives is the fundamental conviction that individuals are shaped by place, that our knowledge, culture and capacity to relate

to one another depend on the specificity of our surroundings. Before we belong to the world or develop any sense of global connectedness, we belong to what is local, to what is *here*.

BELONGING TO A PLACE

So what is here, now? Fogo Island is situated in the North Atlantic; it is an island of fewer than 2,500 inhabitants whose ancestors came from Europe and settled to wrest a livelihood from the sea. It is important to note that at the time of European contact in the sixteenth century, Fogo Island and Newfoundland had been home to the Beothuk, Algonquian-speaking hunter-gatherers. The year-round settlement of French and English migratory fishermen in the seventeenth century signalled a drastic change. Increasingly isolated, prevented by settlers from accessing the natural resources that had sustained them for thousands of years, and likely ravaged by European disease, the Beothuk population was decimated. The last known Beothuk, Shanawdithit, died in St. John's, Newfoundland in 1829.⁴ Fogo Island had been a summer home to the Beothuk, and archeological traces and artifacts have been uncovered in numerous sites across the island.

The contemporary society and culture of Fogo Island, largely homogeneous, has been shaped by centuries of living in close proximity to the sea. Proper to any population closely entwined with its surroundings are forms of knowledge derived from and embedded within the environment. As John Durham Peters has noted, "There is a heavily folded genius to both nature and things. There is intelligence in every form of matter. As in earthworm practices, so in those of human makers. Gathered in a single clock, knife, or shoe are many lifetimes of practical knowledge."⁵ The capacity of fishermen to navigate by landmark, to read ocean currents, predict the weather and the proclivities of fish were essential tools of both surviving and thriving. The skills required to select an angled tree root that defines the shape of a punt, to drive wooden shores for a fishing stage into the seabed, or to piece scraps of material into a warm and visually creative quilt emerged as practical responses to necessities but became markers of specificity. Such forms of knowledge are preserved and communicated from one generation to the next through practical application and tuition as well as music, storytelling, art, and language.

Indeed, language is fundamental to the expression and delineation of identity. Newfoundland-based artist Marlene Creates has compiled an inventory of over eighty terms specific to the province that convey close observation and a sustained engagement with the land and the sea.⁶ Some of the terms derive from seventeenth-century English brought by settlers, while others are specific to fishing and other occupational activities. Her film *From the Ground Tier to a Sparrow Batch: A Newfoundland Treasury of Terms for Ice and Snow*,

⁴ Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage website: <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/aboriginal/beothuk.php>. The Canadian Encyclopedia website: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/beothuk/>.

⁵ John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

⁶ Marlene Creates was artist-in-residence with Fogo Island Arts in 2017. Her solo exhibition, "To the Blast Hole Pond River," was presented at the Fogo Island Gallery the same year.





Blast Hole Pond River, Winter 2012–2013 maps the diversity of terms over a season, and denotes a precision and richness of language in relation to place. A distinction is carved out with language that is used across Fogo Island and in some cases, the specific language used by the community of Joe Batt’s Arm. Creates’s film demonstrates that we are entangled with the landscape, deriving meaning and a sense of identity from our environment.

Working to preserve such forms of knowledge is a question of identifying what is at risk of being lost and seeking ways to find relevance within our contemporary setting. In this way, Shorefast’s philosophy and business model draws from Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), an approach to sustainable development that identifies and builds upon a community’s existing strengths.⁷ Or, in the words of Cobb, “what do we have, what do we know, what do we love, what do we miss, and what can we do about it?”⁸

“Let’s let people know what we are capable of doing, and what we know, otherwise we’ll never be known.”⁹

So how do we hold on to what we know and what we have while embracing what lies beyond?

The answer, for Shorefast, lay in art. Understood as a way of knowing and belonging to the world, art provided new ways of thinking through Fogo Island’s struggles and celebrating its uniqueness. Fogo Island Arts was founded in 2008 as an international artist residency program on Fogo Island, and a cornerstone of Shorefast’s cultural and economic resilience initiatives. Today, FIA continues to welcome exceptional emerging and established contemporary artists, filmmakers, writers, musicians, curators, designers, and thinkers from around the globe. The organization also curates exhibitions, produces a publication series, and presents public and educational programs on the island, in cities across Canada, and abroad as part of its international outreach.

Shorefast’s decision to open a series of interconnected social and economic programs with an artist residency program was not unfounded. In 1967–68, people on Fogo Island were immersed in an artistic initiative that would have a profound effect on Fogo Island. Between 1967 and 1980, the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) created Challenge for Change / Société Nouvelle, a participatory project that used film as an instigator of social change. Filmmakers and filmmaking equipment were sent to rural and urban places across Canada, providing disenfranchised communities with the tools and means of expression to address vital concerns such as poverty, unemployment, access to education and health care, Indigenous self-governance, and social activism.

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See John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community’s Assets*, 3rd ed (Chicago: ACTA Publications, 1993).

8
Zita Cobb in conversation with the author, September 6, 2018.

9
Colin Low, *Andrew Brett at Shoal Bay*. National Film Board of Canada (NFB), 1967, 14 min.

In 1967, the NFB partnered with Memorial University of Newfoundland Extension Service to send celebrated filmmaker Colin Low to Fogo Island. The outcome was the Fogo Process, a collection of twenty-seven short films that document Fogo Islanders' way of life and shared concerns. Despite little interaction between the island's ten communities at the time, all struggled with the loss of the inshore fishery, welfare dependency, and the looming threat of resettlement to the main island of Newfoundland that was faced by many outport communities across the province.¹⁰ The Newfoundland government first initiated a community resettlement program in the mid-1950s in response to the province's economic woes and diminishing populations in rural areas. Over the next twenty years, 300 communities would be abandoned and almost 30,000 people moved to centralized growth areas such as St. John's and Corner Brook.

Filmed with minor intervention and screened across the island, the Fogo Process films range from conversations about the fishery, adult education, consolidating the school system and the roles of women within the community, to family gatherings and celebrations. The films spurred a series of larger collective discussions about the challenges facing Fogo Island and where its future lay. Significantly, *The Founding of the Cooperative* (1967) records the founding meeting and unanimous vote to establish the Fogo Island Ship Building and Producer Cooperative. While the creation of the cooperative was the culmination of years of work by the Fogo Island Improvement Committee, as Susan Newhook has noted, the film nonetheless marks a turning point in a process through which locals developed a collective approach to managing the fishery and ultimately took ownership of Fogo Island's economy.¹¹ Community members would also vote against resettlement and remain on Fogo Island.

In its capacity to build consensus and spur collective action, the Fogo Process empowered the island's separate communities to overcome their differences and act together to determine their future. To this day, it is celebrated as a groundbreaking example of community-based filmmaking and its potential as a tool for social activism and participatory democracy.

Cobb, who appears as a nine-year-old in the film *A Wedding and Party* (1967), was deeply affected by the films and their powerful influence on Fogo Island. "We went from a situation of total despair, with no one asking any questions and accepting their fate as inevitable, to suddenly having people soliciting opinions and asking what *might* be possible," recalls Cobb. "Almost overnight, there was a change in how it felt to be alive."¹² The decision to structure Shorefast's first initiatives around art is thus rooted in her experience as both witness and party to art as an instigator of social change.

¹⁰ "Outport" is the term given to small coastal communities in Newfoundland and Labrador; they are some of the oldest European settlements in Canada.

¹¹ Susan Newhook, "Six Degrees of Film, Social, and Cultural History: The Fogo Island Film Project of 1967 and the 'Newfoundland Renaissance,'" *Acadiensis*, vol. 39, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2010): 48–69.

¹² Zita Cobb, September 6, 2018.





Fogo Island Arts was conceived from the outset as an international program, with the intention to bring diverse artists from around the world to live and work on Fogo Island for months at a time. Having surveyed the best practices of artist programs around the world, Cobb and her team drew a key distinction between a residency and an artist colony or retreat. As a residency, participating artists would be offered the potential to engage with community and place. An immersion in the nature and culture of Fogo Island was essential to creating meaningful and productive experiences for artists. Of equal importance was establishing a framework in which Fogo Islanders could encounter divergent perspectives and cultures resolutely not their own.

The international nature of the program was essential to fruitful exchange, a cross-fertilization of perspectives, and crucially, to participating in a global conversation. Contemporary art is both language and currency within an interconnected world. While it may not offer solutions to the very real problems of unstable economies, forced and voluntary migration, environmental degradation, and human rights abuses, among so many others, art can offer alternative perspectives or ways of understanding our shared plight. As a way of knowing, learning, and making sense of the world, art is an essential form of knowledge production.

ARCHITECTURE BY DESIGN

To begin with art also necessitated a concerted investment in architecture and design. Norway-based architect Todd Saunders was commissioned to design six artist studios for Fogo Island Arts, four of which have been built to date. Originally from Gander, Newfoundland, Saunders was already celebrated for site-sensitive gestures and an inventive use of natural materials. The brief provided by Shorefast was to “take 400 years of lived experience and express it in a contemporary building.”¹³ The vernacular architecture of outport Newfoundland—saltbox houses, fishing stages, stores and sheds, flakes for drying salt cod—has been shaped by a deep-rooted knowledge of the landscape, climate, and available resources. Structures are built according to specific needs with materials at hand. Yet they are infinitely adaptable: if something exceeds its use value, it is converted, reused or altered to take on a new life and purpose.¹⁴

The Bridge, Long, Squish and Tower Studios are situated on hiking trails across Fogo Island.¹⁵ Each is a contemporary reimagining of traditional architecture, materials and building techniques as well as relationship to site. While the latter three studios are located along the ocean shoreline, Bridge Studio overlooks an inland pond. Its location pays tribute to Newfoundland’s culture of retreating from the sea and all its implications of labor and livelihood to be at leisure in small cabins that dot the island interior. The Bridge, Long,

¹³ Cobb, *D3*, 2014.

¹⁴ FIA alumnus Augustas Serapinas explored the adaptable nature of Fogo Island vernacular structures and the resourcefulness of builders in his project *Four Sheds*, commissioned by FIA and presented at the Fogo Island Gallery in 2016–17.

¹⁵ The studios opened in 2011, with the exception of Long Studio, which was completed in 2010.

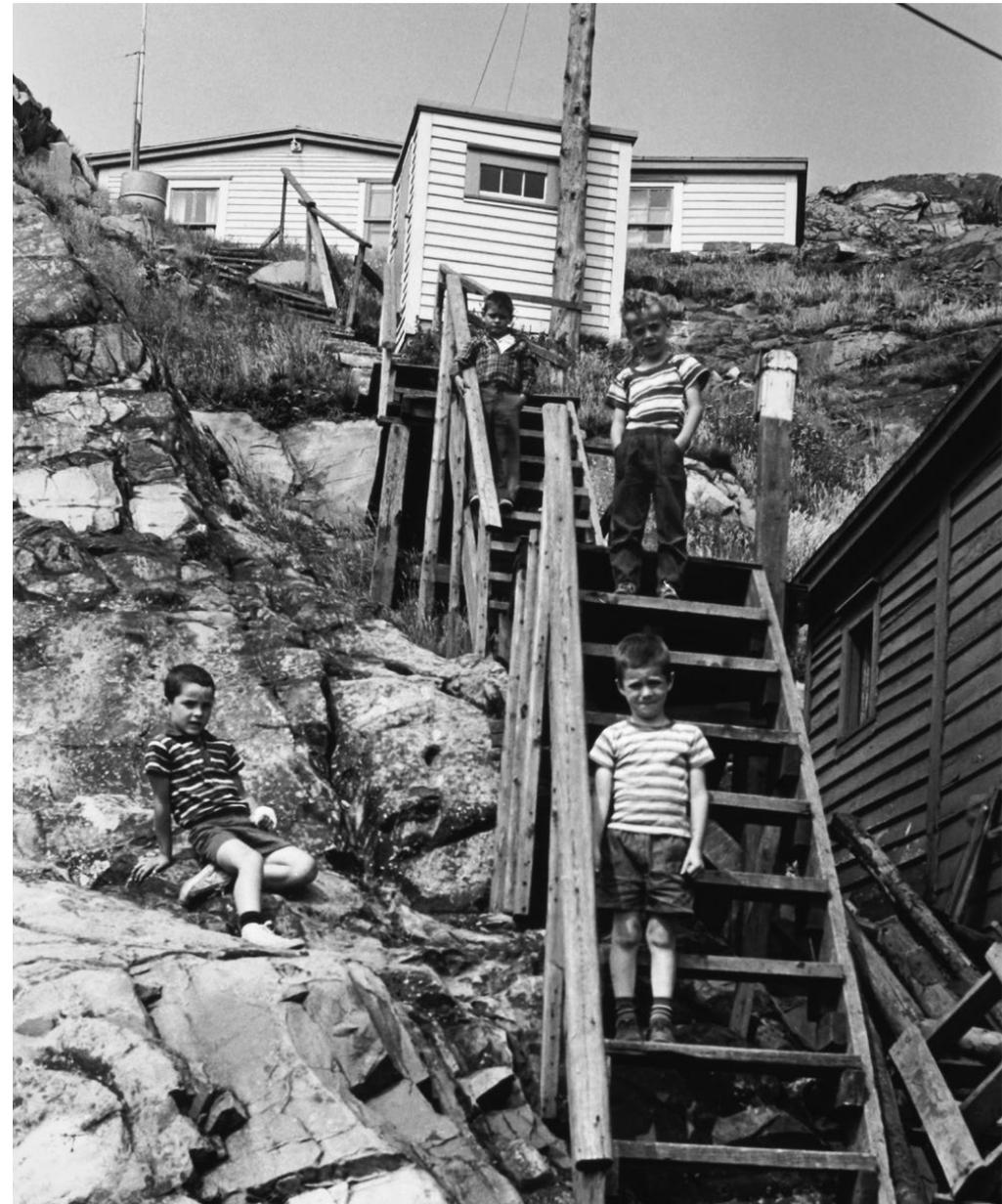
and Squish Studios make use of shores, traditionally wooden posts used to prop up fishing stages over water or on uneven terrain. All of the studios are clad with wooden boards on the exterior and interior in reference to the aesthetics and materials of vernacular buildings. Resolutely contemporary, the studios are nevertheless in conversation with history; the new makes sense in relation to the old. Saunders would later return to Fogo Island to design the Fogo Island Inn, which employs similar strategies in homage to the traditional outport Newfoundland aesthetic.

As bold geometric forms that sit lightly on the landscape, the studios are at once striking and simple, otherworldly and rooted to place. They were (and continue to be) powerful strategic tools to infiltrate global networks. In the months following their construction, the circulation of heroic, breathtaking imagery of the studios in print and online platforms resounded across the globe. Quite suddenly, Fogo Island had a place within the collective imagination.

Architecture, design, tourism and lifestyle imprints rushed to feature the studios as examples of a bold creative vision, seductive aesthetics, or desirable destination. While some articles featured a nuanced explanation of the initiatives and intentions behind the studios, countless others traded images like currency. Indeed, in several instances, photographs of the studios and the Fogo Island “brand” as a whole have been co-opted to favorably color commercial merchandise by association. FIA continues to receive requests from retailers for fashion shoots, and inquiries about holding weddings and private parties in the studios, all of which are respectfully but firmly denied.

The use of architecture and design as a strategic conveyer of intent, then, has its dangers. With such iconic imagery and its easy circulation comes the risk of reducing Fogo Island Arts, Shorefast, and the island as a whole to an image. The stark, elongated black and white form of Long Studio set against a dramatic rocky shoreline with crashing waves is easily and readily consumed, subject to the whims of taste and popularity, next-best-thingism, and Instagrammable moments. Less readily discernible is the fundamental mission of Fogo Island Arts as an instrument to build cultural and economic resilience. Nonetheless, the contemporary architecture of the studios was essential in establishing awareness of FIA and Shorefast. Like a scaled-down version of the Bilbao effect, the studios and inn have brought attention to the island, and they persist as landmarks and destinations for visitors.

In the intervening years, FIA has purposefully curtailed the use of architectural images to communicate its programs. This stems from a desire to cultivate an awareness of the organization that moves beyond its exceptional architecture. It also aims to convey a fuller





sense of FIA as a comprehensive and salient program of exhibitions, publications, and public programs in addition to its foundation as an artist residency.

ART BY DESIGN

Fogo Island Arts Corporation, as it was initially known, was established in 2008 as a semi-autonomous entity of Shorefast. In this case, Cobb visited numerous artist residencies across the globe and sought advice on how to structure and program the Arts Corporation. Through her travels, Cobb met Elisabet Gunnarsdottir, who had previously led the Nordic Artists' Centre in Norway. As an Icelander who had lived in Scandinavia, Gunnarsdottir already possessed a capacity for insight into the related geography and culture of Fogo Island. She became the organization's first director and moved to Fogo Island in 2009 to oversee year-round operations and the program. Through Gunnarsdottir, Cobb would meet established figures from the field of contemporary art, such as curators Kitty Scott and Nicolaus Schafhausen. Both would later become board members and, in Schafhausen's case, strategic director to Fogo Island Arts.

In his role as strategic director of FIA, Schafhausen acts as a navigator, identifying both the needs of artists and what FIA should offer them. This requires an in-depth knowledge of individual artists and the shifting landscape of contemporary art, as well as the stakes and situation of life on Fogo Island. Accordingly, the strategic director is also involved with, and advises Shorefast and its tentacular initiatives.

At the outset, the Arts Corporation's principal focus was the residency program, which was split into residential and production or commissioning components. The first artists arrived in 2009 for site visits: stays of three weeks that would provide a sense of where they were coming to and what they might embark on during a longer residency. The residencies began in 2010. Seven artists hailing from Canada, Germany, India, Norway, Scotland, and the US came to the island for several months each.

Gunnarsdottir left the organization in 2011. Following her departure, the structure of the Arts Corporation evolved. Schafhausen, who was director of Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam at the time, took the lead in shaping artistic decisions, and Jack Stanley, who had previously joined the organization in 2009, worked to oversee on-the-ground operations and contributed to the artistic program. Toronto-based writer Rosemary Heather joined as director of communications in 2012, managing FIA's publication series and overall communications strategies. Under Schafhausen's direction, the parallel streams of residencies and production were folded into one, and "Corporation" was dropped from the title of the organization, becoming Fogo Island Arts.

The year 2012 signaled the start of a new phase in Fogo Island Arts' evolution. With the design and construction of the Fogo Island Inn well underway, FIA began planning for a gallery space that would be part of the new building. The gallery was intended to provide opportunities for solo exhibitions as well as major commissions from alumni of the program. The inaugural exhibition at the Fogo Island Gallery was New Zealand artist Kate Newby's "Let the other thing in," in 2013. The publication series, produced in collaboration with Sternberg Press, was launched in tandem, offering contextual and critical interpretation of an artist's work in a format that was exportable internationally.

The Fogo Island Dialogues were also initiated as a major interdisciplinary conference series to discuss issues related to the livelihood and renewal of rural locations. Held in partnership with international institutions, the first editions took place in Berlin (2012) on Fogo Island and in Vienna (2013), and brought together key artists and arts professionals, academics, economists, geographers, planners, and architects. Subsequent editions have been held in Toronto, Vancouver, St. John's, and Chicago. The Dialogues continue to bring together leading artists, thinkers, professionals and researchers from a variety of disciplines to address issues of crucial contemporary importance, such as sovereignty and decolonial practices, situating the meaning of "contemporary" in current artistic practice, and examining the intersections of art and money in rebuilding communities. Each edition of the Dialogues continues to focus on how art can influence social change, exploring the role that art and artists can play in such initiatives.

By mid-2014, Shorefast's financial situation had become somewhat precarious due to the Herculean efforts and resources required to build and operate the Fogo Island Inn. All Shorefast programs were tasked with finding additional sources of support and ways to become sustainable on a long-term basis. Stanley had also announced his intention to leave FIA. The organization thus found itself in a position of self-reflection, with a desire to refocus its mission and activities. I joined FIA in March 2015 as director of programs and exhibitions, a new position involving overseeing operations on the island as well as shaping residencies, exhibitions, publications and programs in close collaboration with Schafhausen. A significant part of my role at the outset was to participate in redefining the organization's structure and program in response to its history and current financial situation.

With a substantial budget cut in 2015, FIA scaled back residencies and programs and embarked on a sustained effort to solicit external private funding through individual patronage, and, while remaining independent, to develop corporate and institutional partnerships. The FIA Patrons Program was launched in 2016. Much of its initial





success was due to the efforts and support of advisory board member and Belgian-born, Toronto-based collector Elisa Nuyten, who was instrumental in creating awareness of FIA among influential circles.

As part of this process, FIA formally joined Shorefast as a charitable program, rather than an arm's length not-for-profit entity. This was in part motivated by the requirement to offer charitable receipts to donors. Of equal importance was the desire to consolidate the respective elements of Shorefast to encourage greater alignments and mutual support.

In FIA's current program model, approximately fifteen to eighteen artists from around the world come to live and work on the island for several months at a time. FIA's other programs have expanded, with the introduction of an annual "Artist Talk Series" in 2015, the "Emerging Artist Exhibition" program (Leander Schoenweger in 2015–16 and Augustas Serapinas in 2016–17), as well as off-site exhibitions ("Belonging to a Place," at Scrap Metal, Toronto, 2017, and the Art Gallery of the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C. in 2018).

FIA Film (2016–17) was conceived by FIA alumnus Goran Petrović Lotina during his residency as a series of socially and politically engaged films that drew inspiration from Fogo Island's significant relationship to film. After two modest yet well-received programs, a new, more ambitious film series was launched in 2018 entitled Fogo Island Film: Resistance and Resilience. Curated by myself and Petrović Lotina, Fogo Island Film is devoted to international films that consider the diversity of relationships between nature and society.

The Fogo Island Dialogues, in some ways FIA's flagship international export, continues to expand. The 2018 edition in Chicago was the first of three North American Dialogues supported by Chicago-based philanthropists Vicki and Bruce Heyman that aim to highlight progressive ideas, social enterprise, and cultural and community building initiatives.¹⁶ Preparations are underway for a conference edition of the Dialogues in Portugal in 2019.

As of 2018, FIA has welcomed over 100 artists to Fogo Island for residencies, programmed eleven solo exhibitions at the Fogo Island Gallery, two off-site group exhibitions, seven volumes in the publication series, six Fogo Island Dialogues, and countless artist talks, film screenings, workshops, and related events on- and off-island.

POLITICS AND THE CONTEMPORARY ARTIST

FIA residency candidates are selected largely through invitation, a process involving the participation of the strategic director, the director of programs and exhibitions, and input and support from FIA's advisory board.¹⁷ A smaller number of artists are offered residencies through partnerships with foundations and corporations, and through a biennial open call.

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Bruce Heyman served as the United States Ambassador to Canada under President Barack Obama from 2014 to 2017. During this time Vicki Heyman acted as an American cultural envoy, leading cross-border programs related to the arts, social innovation, and youth engagement.

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FIA advisory board members are: Zita Cobb, Eleanor Dawson, Paul Dean, Fabrizio Gallanti, Elisa Nuyten, Silke Otto-Knapp, Willem de Rooij, Nicolaus Schafhausen, Kitty Scott, and Monika Szewczyk.

While FIA residencies are open to artists practicing in all disciplines and have few established parameters, partnership residencies in some cases have specific criteria. The FIA-Hnatyshyn Foundation Young Curator Residency program, for example, is intended for Canadian curators between the ages of twenty-five and thirty. FIA's partnership with the Kulturkreis der deutschen Wirtschaft im BDI e. V. (Association of Arts and Culture of the German Economy at the Federation of German Industries) entails the awarding of three residencies to the winners of the prestigious *ars viva* Prize for Visual Arts.

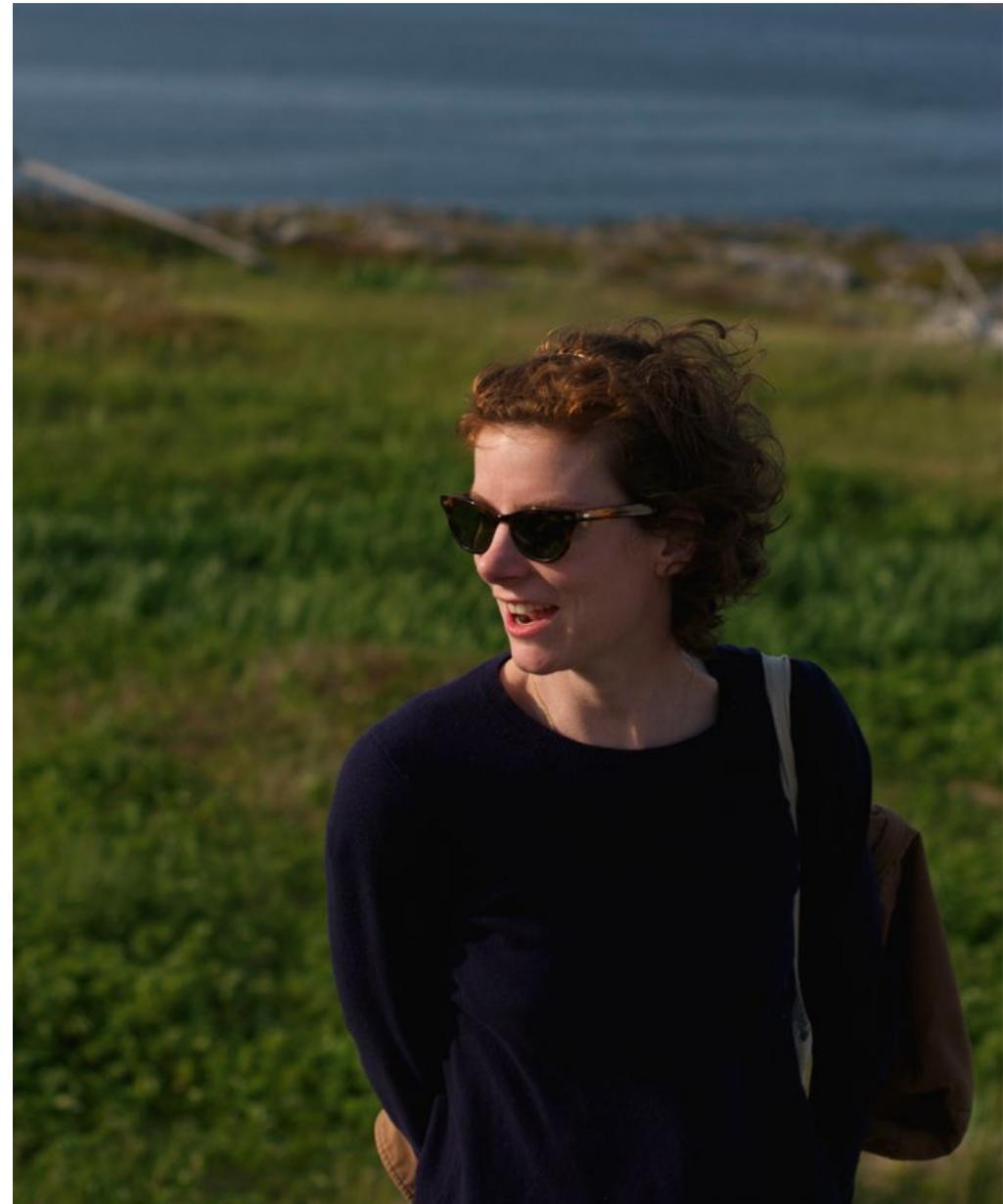
In late 2016, FIA initiated The Islands, a partnership with Art Metropole, Toronto, to encourage arts writing and criticism in contemporary art. The two-part residency offers arts writers and artists with a writing practice one month on Fogo Island, and two weeks on Toronto Island, followed by the development of a small publication produced by Art Metropole. The Islands was a new form of partnership that made use of both organizations' expertise and specific modes of operating, in order to create something greater than the sum of its parts.

FIA launched its first open calls in 2011 and 2012. The 2013–14 call, specific to artistic projects with an educational component, received 120 applications. The subsequent open call in 2015 received almost 1,000 applications—an unequivocal indicator of FIA's growing presence within the international contemporary art scene. The 2017 call received 900 applications from fifty-eight countries despite added constraints of designated time periods, and a modest application fee to cover administrative costs. Six candidates were selected for residencies in 2018 and 2019.

Notwithstanding the extremely low acceptance rate, and the challenges of assessing a high volume of applications, the open call has been deemed essential by FIA staff and board members as a way to reach beyond established networks, and offer opportunities to artists whom we might otherwise have never encountered.

The decision to invite the majority of residency artists, however, continues to be fundamental to FIA's model. This stems in part from a recognition that the conditions and location of the residency are not suited to all artists. The complexity involved in traveling to the island, the remoteness and homogeneity of its community, the slow internet speeds and limited amenities can be trying for some artists accustomed to the pace and variety of urban life. Of greater importance, the work of each artist is taken into consideration in terms of its potential alignment with FIA and Shorefast's overall mission, and the variety of experiences the residency has to offer.

Above all, we look for artists who are engaged in the contemporary world intellectually, aesthetically, and politically. This does not necessarily imply overt declarations or political statements, or the suggestion that artists must aim to "solve" the world's problems. Nor does it bely





opportunities for poetic or humorous work. Ultimately, our selection process is driven by the conviction that the most meaningful and relevant art of today engages in some way with the world around us.

PRODUCTIVE WITHDRAWAL

The value in taking part in an artist residency generally lies in the capacity to distance oneself from the day-to-day, to carve out space and time dedicated to reflection, thinking, and making, or thinking through making. In their ideal form, residencies can offer a productive, positive form of retreat or withdrawal, a rejection of cycles and markers of progress that allows for experimentation and exploration.

There are, of course, countless artist residencies around the world, many of which are in beautiful, unique places. What, then, makes FIA significant?

FIA residencies are not necessarily production-driven given the remote location, availability of materials and expense of shipping, but they are certainly oriented toward intellectual production and meaningful engagement with place.¹⁸ The programs offered by FIA also stand in opposition to the notion of “residency-hopping” that has become commonplace within contemporary artistic practice. Artists must have a resolute conviction to come to Fogo Island, as well as a desire to immerse themselves in the experience. It is not a question of “collecting” the exotic location and the perfect view, but of coming to terms with living in proximity to the sea and at the whim of the elements, and in engaging with a close-knit fishing community that is nonetheless shaped by centuries of exchange.

As each artist completes the parentheses of a FIA residency and returns to their daily existence, our hope is that a small part of Fogo Island and its story is woven into other parts of the world.

This desire for artists to engage with Fogo Island’s communities and convey something of our mission, however, must be tempered by an awareness of the risks of instrumentalization on all sides. Artists are not in the service of FIA, and nor are community members fodder for artistic production. We do not expect or direct artists to take on projects that directly involve community, but those that do so in meaningful, equitable ways are welcomed. Ultimately, we have no interest in artists whose approach may patronize or take advantage of locals, or romanticize aspects of Fogo Island culture. Rather, we seek to facilitate meaningful engagement that is based on reciprocal exchange.

To do so, FIA encourages organic connections between artists and community members through orientation and community host programs, whereby artists spend time with locals to learn about specific aspects, techniques, or activities proper to the island, such as hand-lining cod, quilting and rug hooking, geology, as well as native plants and fauna. A strong network of Fogo Islanders who are supportive of FIA

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Nonetheless, many FIA artists make objects of all scales and media, and FIA has commissioned major productions through its exhibition program.

programs, as well as the simple generosity and openness of neighbors has also been hugely significant in ensuring visiting artists feel welcomed and supported during their time in residence.

The local reaction to the presence of visiting artists on Fogo Island has changed over the course of almost a decade. After a few years of bemused responses, lack of attention or actual engagement with artists, there is a broader awareness, acceptance, and interest from locals in their presence. A wonderful indicator of this is that the profession of “artist” has been cited as a career option by local students, a distinct change from Cobb’s childhood when career day suggestions were limited to stereotyped gender roles such as a “nurse” for girls, and a “police officer” for boys.

For the artists themselves, FIA residencies have helped to propel numerous careers and expand international networks. Many have spoken about the transformative effects of a FIA residency, and the uniqueness of the program as a whole. New Zealand artist Zac Langdon-Pole noted during his 2018 residency that he felt no need to “perform” being an artist-in-residence. Contrary to previous experience at other well-established, “luxurious” residencies, he did not have the sense of being placed on a pedestal and beholden to certain expectations. Instead, he felt a sense of hospitality and interest from local residents towards him firstly as a human, and afterwards as an artist.

After several years of cultivating a sense of mystery, inadvertently or not, around access to FIA programs within Newfoundland and the rest of Canada, the organization has embarked on a series of initiatives that foster connections within the region and across the country. These include presenting events off-island and forging program collaborations with other provincial and national artistic organizations.

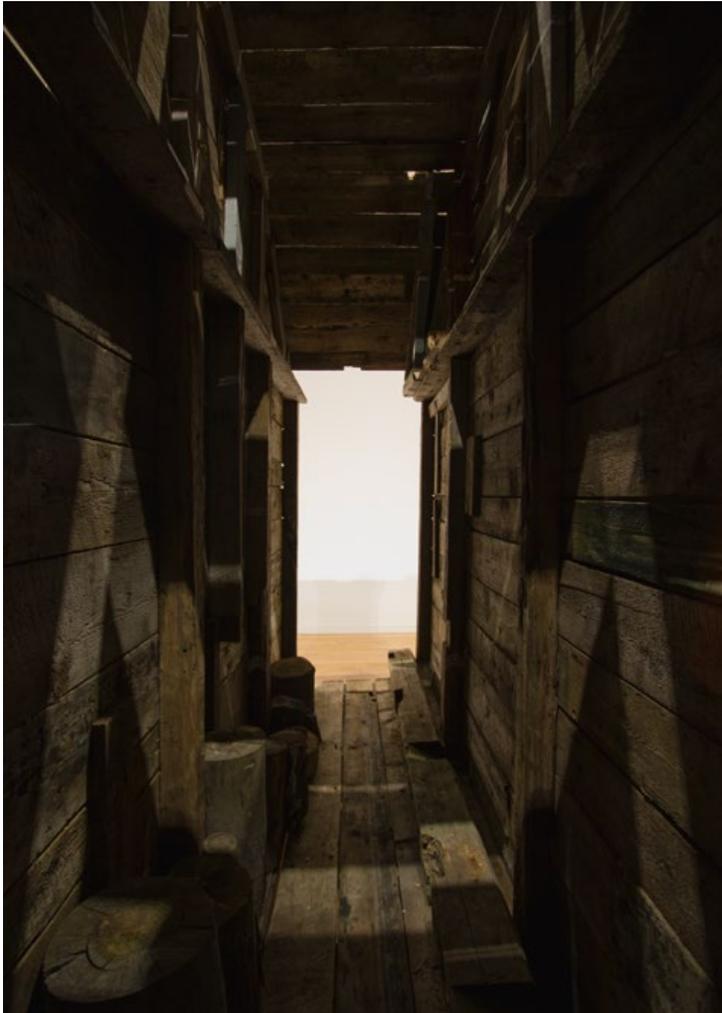
International awareness of FIA initiatives remains strong, particularly within Western Europe, but there is the continued aspiration for global outreach and connectedness through events and program partnerships. There is also a desire to broaden existing networks and reach beyond established centers of artistic and intellectual exchange. For example, we aim to work with more artists and ideas stemming from the Global South, as well as other areas subjugated by capitalist globalization. In this, there is admittedly much to be done.

What FIA aims for over the long-term is to establish a community of artists and thinkers who respond in some way to our complex and ever-changing world. Politically, economically, ecologically, aesthetically... This is perhaps what distinguishes FIA from other residencies around the world.

DEFINING THE QUESTIONS

FIA and Shorefast have a common goal to position Fogo Island as a site for ideas, and for our place-driven initiatives to serve as templates for action to ensure sustainable, thriving communities. We wish to





find a common ground and language among artists, academics, professionals, and business people, as well as those without academic or professional affiliations, to address issues of vital contemporary importance that affect each of us. Through the establishment of a “discursive landscape,” Shorefast and FIA aim to shape a momentum of resistance to forces that cast citizens as taxpayers and individuals as consumers, and that flatten cultural specificity in the name of global conformity.

How Fogo Island Arts should continue to contribute to this conversation and framework in meaningful ways, and how it should consider its future are ongoing, fundamental questions. Even our definition of “international” bears examination. The majority of FIA alumni to date have come from North America and Europe, as well as the Pacific region and the Middle East. So far, we have welcomed only a small number of artists from Asia, and none yet from Africa, but we hope to expand these networks. Our goal of working with individuals and organizations from the Global South, as previously stated, is a real one. The question of whether our programs hold relevance for all artists, however, and whether we can negotiate divides of language and cultural norms to create opportunities that are beneficial for all parties remains to be seen.

Equally important, should FIA expand? What does expansion mean and what are the measures of success?

During his 2018 residency, artist Thomas Bayrle spoke of his long-standing engagement with Portikus, the gallery of the prestigious art academy Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main, and its history as an institution. Over more than thirty years and three different locations, Portikus has remained modest in size, with a gallery space suited for one or two artists, and a small number of dedicated staff. In this Bayrle noted a steadfast refusal to conform to capitalist notions of progress and the idea of growth as expansion. Such goals were prevalent in arts organizations during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, when many museums in cities transformed into large-scale institutions bound up with tourism, a desire to increase attendance figures, and speak to the broadest audience possible. The alternative, pursued by Portikus and, I would argue, shared by FIA, is the sense of growth as maturity, a deeper, more sophisticated engagement with people and place.

In an era of increasing nationalism and political isolation, one could argue that many countries are mimicking the physical attributes of islands, cut off from their surroundings. And yet, the status of being an island, whether physical or metaphorical, can be beneficial if one chooses to celebrate specificity while remaining open to external influence. An expansion of FIA may mean sustaining and taking care of our initiatives on the island while creating engaging programs elsewhere as part of a focused global outreach, founded on a conscious awareness of what we understand to be “global.” Much like Fogo

Island's vernacular architecture that is shaped by use and altered over time, Fogo Island Arts should be nimble and adaptive, responsive to site and open to the world.

