

## Stepping-stones to the Edge: Artistic Expressions of Islandness in an Ocean of Islands

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**Abstract:** Since the earliest of times, islands have captured the artistic imagination—and, often, for the artist who finds his or her muse in being ‘islanded’, the smaller the island the better. Archipelagos offer an ideal setting for artists who take their inspiration from place: on small islands off islands they can experience an intensity of island living they might not otherwise have on a main island: boundedness *and* connection, isolation *and* community. This paper examines expressions of islandness by artists who live on islands off islands that are poles apart—‘archipelagos’ of the Canadian North Atlantic and the Great Southern Ocean. It draws upon interviews with those artists and writers to consider the nature of humans’ attachment and attraction to islands, exploring through the lens of phenomenology what Stratford et al. call the “entanglement between and among islands”.

**Keywords:** archipelagos; artists; Bruny Island; Fogo Island; Grey Islands; insularity; islandness; Newfoundland; resilience; Tasmania

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### Introduction

Thank God we’re surrounded by water...  
—Tom Cahill, folk singer, Newfoundland and Labrador

The allure of islands goes back to the most ancient of times. “The importance of islands,” writes geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, p. 118), “lies in the imaginative realm. Many of the world’s cosmogonies, we have seen, begin with the watery chaos: land, when it appears, is necessarily an island”. The ‘island drive’ endures as islands continue to be regarded as exotic, otherworldly, *the* place to ‘get away from it all’. While tropical islands lure people to their shores for the sun, sand, and sea, temperate islands are equally attractive for their perceived isolation and pared-down lifestyle. It is not difficult to find suburban refugees—including artists—who have chosen to escape the twenty-first century chaos to make a life for themselves on an island.<sup>1</sup>

The physical journey to an island may mirror the psychological if, as Tuan (1971, p. 181) writes, geography is “a mirror”; an observation further described by Relph (1976, p. 4) as “reflecting and revealing human nature, and seeking order and meaning in the experiences that

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, statistics show that the ‘AIC’ postal code of St John’s, on the island of Newfoundland, has an artistic concentration four times higher than that of the rest of Canada, and the second densest concentration of artists in Atlantic Canada (Lepawsky et al, 2010). Tasmania’s tourism website markets its island thus: “While we may have less than three per cent of Australia’s population, we are home to nine per cent of its artists” (Discover Tasmania, 2011, np).

we have of the world”. Islands are thus a mirror with an emphatic frame, with boundedness accentuating the experience and intensifying their perceived unity. To be on a physical island often makes real and everyday what has long been regarded as a central metaphor for Western civilization (Gillis, 2004, p. 3); and some would say *the* central metaphor.

For many, to be surrounded by water is a blessed state: the defined edge, the demarcated yet liminal space found at the shore and in our interactions with it; the deliberate choice we must make to cross to and from an island; the isolation it brings; relative ease of access to nature and the possibility of living in tune with the rhythms of the ocean and land; its distinction from ‘the other’; the existential nature of the sea; the infinite horizon; the ocean as the subconscious or hinterland for creativity and the imagination; the symbol for restlessness and changeability, God, evolution. Indeed, the lyrics of a popular Newfoundland<sup>2</sup> folk song, ‘Thank God we’re surrounded by water’, sum up one attitude toward living on an island: “The sea, oh the sea, the wonderful sea, Long may she roll between people and me” (Tucker, 2010). Yet, in direct contrast is John Donne’s more famous *Meditation XVII* from the year 1624: “No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main”. As with many of humankind’s great truths, both are accurate: being islanded is about boundedness *and* connectedness, prison *and* paradise, insularity *and* resilience—along with a whole complex spectrum in-between—as juxtaposed with the continental mainland.

Islands draw artists, too: the creative spirit finds resonance in the state of being islanded. Artists find they make art they otherwise would or could not by living on an island. The reasons, as this paper will show, are varied; from the psychological to the spiritual to the practical. There is often a dynamism or ‘edginess’ that comes from living on the edge, which writers and painters, photographers and musicians tap into.

But we add another dimension to island living when on an archipelagic island, one that is generally smaller than the main island and often another step removed from a continental mainland. Here, the realities of archipelagic living, for artists and non-artists alike, might be more distilled, intense, and nuanced than they are on the main island. Thinking about configurations of islands is a topic worth exploring, like stepping stones to the edge—or ‘degrees of islandness’, if you will.

What drives people to go to, or stay on, islands off islands, to live on the edge of the edge to create? Until the middle of the last century, with the advent of the factory freezer trawler, it might have been so they could be closer to the fish. Often they were shipwrecked or sometimes, like Robinson Crusoe, abandoned. Perhaps they were imprisoned, like William Buelow Gould, a real-life nineteenth-century artist brought back to life in Richard Flanagan’s novel *Gould’s book of fish* (2001). Perhaps they are misanthropes like the protagonist in D. H. Lawrence’s ‘The Man Who Loved Islands’ (1928). Perhaps, like biologist and writer Bob Kull, who spent a year on a tiny Chilean island to “study the animal whose behaviour he knows best—himself” (Kull, 2004: 2), they are on a spiritual or some other kind of quest. Or, like Shelagh Fielding in Wayne Johnston’s novel *The custodian of paradise* (2006), to confront the ghosts of the past they may be escaping to an island—in her case, the resettled Loreburn Island. Or possibly, like artists relocating to remote islands, they go because housing costs may be lower, they like the lifestyle, they return to family and/or to create a community, and they can make their own kind of art, unfettered by the dictates of the perceived centres of the art world: Toronto, Montreal, New York, Sydney, Melbourne, Paris, or London. Perhaps they

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this study, I focus on the island portion of the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador, on Canada’s east coast, which has traditionally been called Newfoundland.

agree with the aphorism made famous in the business world: “If you’re not living on the edge, you’re taking up too much space”. As Newfoundland poet John Steffler writes of his sojourns to the Grey Islands, off the coast of Newfoundland: “A way to corner myself is what I want. Some blunt place I / can’t go beyond. Where excuses stop” (Steffler, 1985, p. 9).

In such light, this paper draws on research undertaken among artists on islands that are poles apart—archipelagos of the Canadian North Atlantic and the Great Southern Ocean. I reflect on expressions of islandness by artists who live on islands off Newfoundland and Tasmania, and draw upon interviews with those artists and writers. The intention is to explore the nature of island identity on archipelagic islands, adding to the work of others who “seek to understand how those who inhabit the archipelago, or how those who contemplate its spatialities, view, represent, talk and write about, or otherwise experience disjuncture, connection and entanglement between and among islands” (Stratford, Baldacchino, Farbotko, MacMahon & Harwood, 2011, p. 124).

### **Newfoundland’s small islands**

The water is our clock.

—Winston Osmond, Painter, Fogo Island, Newfoundland and Labrador

To this day, history and settlement patterns in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador inform the art being made on the main island and on the small islands off its coast. Before 1497, when John Cabot claimed it for the English, the island of Newfoundland had been inhabited seasonally by the Innu and Inuit. In the eleventh century it was used as a staging ground by Leif the Lucky, from which the Vikings sailed south to find the fabled Vinland. In the 1500s, English, French, Portuguese, and Basque fishermen began fishing North Atlantic cod to such an extent that Newfoundland was referred to in the 1700s as a “great imperial ship moored near the Grand Banks” (Felt and Locke, 1995, p. 202). Eventually seasonal fishing turned to year-round settlement around the coast, and since the little islands around the big island were even closer to the fish, people settled on them as well. Over the centuries, Newfoundland’s coastline and offshore islands became dotted with ‘outports’ accessible only by boat.

The Grey Islands were one such grouping of outport islands. Located off Newfoundland’s Great Northern Peninsula, between 1946 and 1975 the islands were abandoned as part of the provincial and federal governments’ ‘resettlement’ policy that saw over 28,000 people removed from 307 outport communities (Maritime History Archive). They were resettled ostensibly so government would no longer be required to provide these remote places services such as transportation, electricity, health, and education. Developing industries would have a ready-made work force for the new industrial ‘growth centres’ that were being created in the middle of the island to diversify the economy and lessen reliance on fish. Community and kinship webs were changed irrevocably as resettlement hauled people—many of whom had hauled their houses with them—into the industrial world of the twentieth century, leaving, for many, grief and loss in their wake. The “seamless progression of time [was] snapped” (Hay, 2006, p. 33), leaving many to suffer the loss of their homes, their land, their livelihoods, their communities, their identity.

On the Grey Islands, government moved the people off and a herd of caribou on. Over two summers in the early 1980s, poet John Steffler (originally from Ontario but then teaching at Memorial University in Corner Brook) spent several weeks on the deserted and bleak islands; his book, *The Grey Islands*, published in 1985, is a series of poems documenting his journey of self-discovery. He writes: “how well do you know yourself? / the various people / waiting inside” (p. 49). His poems capture the islands’ ‘scapes’—land, sea, sound, and time—and provide glimpses into its former inhabitants’—mainly fishermen’s—ways of life. In confronting the ghosts of the island—the people who had been forced by distant policy shifts to abandon their lives and their place—Steffler confronts the truth of ‘placelessness’ (Relph, 1976) for former inhabitants and for himself. In the end, he feels he has *become* the island: “I’m not just a man anymore. I’m an island. The wind and the smell of the place and the animals moving through” (Steffler, 1985, p. 145). Steffler articulates this intense phenomenological experience through his poetry, demonstrating a deep psychological and spiritual attachment to a place on which he has had “particularly moving experiences” (Relph, 1976, p. 43). It provided him with a unique story to contribute to a larger narrative, allowing him to feel more of a sense of belonging on the larger island of Newfoundland (Steffler, 2013, np), and, in the end, intensifying his relationship with it, with the Grey Islands, and with his own writing practice.

In the summer of 2009, visual artist and ceramicist Michael Flaherty, a native of Newfoundland’s Random Island (now connected by causeway to the main island and NOT resettled), recreated Steffler’s journey to the Grey Islands. He sought to connect the strands of past and present, human and non-human, presence and absence, by melding pottery shards left behind by the old inhabitants with caribou antlers shed by the new ones. While on the island he built a kiln ‘inside out’, inverting the kiln’s design “to place the entire island conceptually inside it ... Firing the kiln would, at least symbolically, fire the island” (Wendt, 2012, np). As Flaherty explained:

My idea was a combination of these two things. The making of a conceptual kiln which can fire or contextualize an entire landmass as a piece of art, and a reenactment of the character, in some ways, from *The grey islands*. I had a ready-made island that needed to be fired (Flaherty, 2012b, np).

The islands’ physical size and geographical separation allowed him the freedom to experiment with his craft, while at the same time make a political statement. After a thirty-two-day stay in almost complete isolation, Flaherty returned home to the mainland island of Newfoundland and created the show, *Rangifer sapiens*, placing “the pottery surface on the antlers and deteriorated moldy antler surface on the pottery” (*ibid.*). The delicate blue Victorian-porcelain-style designs on the antlers carry the birth and death dates found on the thirty graves in the island’s cemetery. The act of traversing almost the entire island by foot, and placing cone packs at the highest, eastern, western, and southernmost spots, was integral to Flaherty’s project. As Flaherty notes,

In Steffler’s book there is a passage near the end where the character proclaims something like ‘I am this island’. I think that is what resonated the most for me, an integration of myself and the landscape. I think something finite, of a scale I could comprehend, was essential for this concept (Flaherty, 2012a, np).

At the same time, the Grey Islands' relative isolation from and storied relationship with the main island was an important element in his work. Newfoundland suffered for decades as the scapegoat for central Canada, paralleling one description of Tasmania as a "psychological sink into which the fears, self-loathings and insecurities of the larger nation are displaced" (Hay, 2006, p. 27). Thus it is ironic that the Newfoundland government should turn around and decimate its outport island communities, causing irreparable loss to thousands of its citizens. Indeed, it has been said that the Resettlement Program "marks a psychic boundary between two countries (Newfoundland and post-1949 Canada)... Resettlement is a subject deep-seeded within the collective (un)conscious of the place" (Johnson, 2001, p. 9). Steffler saw the results of this displacement firsthand when he met the family of the well-known Newfoundland poet Al Pittman. Originally from the resettled Merasheen Island in Placentia Bay, "they really were deeply conscious of this loss of place, and loss of a tradition and way of life. I saw how scarred and hurt and bereft and really in shock they and the people of Newfoundland were" (Steffler, 2013, np). As Flaherty noted, "It's been described as a cultural genocide, which I think is a bit of an exaggeration. But there's no doubt that it had a traumatic effect on Newfoundland culture and many individuals" (Flaherty, 2012b, np). As a result:

The entire journey, and the action of firing the island, could be read as a spatial and temporal engagement with loss ... the residue of both a history and living situation rich enough that a symbolic firing could only be read as a self-conscious gesture of representational failure, pointing to the vanity of any individual attempt at closure (Wendt, 2012, np).

Thus, Newfoundland's 'resettlement' story is an example of contested island places within an archipelago: how smaller islands can be at the bidding of a larger, controlling one, for the perceived political, economic, and cultural 'good' of the whole.

Fogo Island, southeast of the Grey Islands in Notre Dame Bay, presents a different story. Known to Canadians simply as 'Fogo' from the chorus of the classic Canadian folk song 'I's the b'y': 'Fogo, Twillingate, Moreton's Harbour, all around the circle', in the 1960s its populace resisted government resettlement efforts. Carol Penton, editor of the local newspaper, *Fogo Island Flame*, noted, "We were told by Joey Smallwood [the new province's first premier]: 'Burn your boats, sink or swim.' So we chose to swim" (Penton, 2012, np). The community took a different tack, with help from Memorial University's Extension Department (a member of whom had grown up on Fogo Island) and from a team of filmmakers led by director Colin Low. Twenty-eight films, some of which are available on the National Film Board's website (Low, 1967), were created as part of an alternative federal government initiative called Challenge for Change, which used film to help communities identify areas for social change. Of the project, vernacular architect historian Robert Mellin (2003, p. 8) has written:

Residents living in isolated outports were united through an innovative, experimental process of community development based on the communicative possibilities of film. Extension service fieldworkers made documentary films in each community, and these were later used to show the residents of Fogo Island that they had common concerns.

Known internationally as ‘the Fogo Process’, this novel approach to community engagement and capacity-building resulted in greater co-operation among communities, a strengthened identity, and initiatives that kept the island viable—including the creation of The Fogo Island Cooperative Society that operates to this day.

Fogo Islanders are now making a name for the place again because of Zita Cobb, to everyone on the island—and to many on mainland Newfoundland—known simply as Zita. A multimillionaire from Joe Batt’s Arm who returned in 2006 to lead an economic and cultural renaissance, Zita knows the island intimately. Repeatedly over years spent in the lucrative and fast-paced fibre-optics industry, she came home to “reset her compass” (Cobb, 2012, np). Now she is home to stay. Zita knows the island’s people: she is one of them. Along with her brothers, Anthony and Alan, she created the Shorefast Foundation<sup>3</sup> to position Fogo Island and the nearby Change Islands as a centre for sustainable fishery, and innovative artistic, cultural, ecological, and culinary pursuits “at ‘the edge of the earth.’ Our projects will build on the people, culture and ecology of the islands to create a leading destination for geotourism and to build another leg to the economy of this special place” (Shorefast, nd, np).

The centrepiece for geotourism on Fogo Island is a 29-room, five-star inn overlooking Joe Batt’s Arm, slated to open in the spring of 2013, and which is being marketed to geotourists from all over the world at anywhere from CAN \$1,800 to \$5,000 a night (CBC, 2012). Shorefast has also created Fogo Island Arts, which, among other projects, has built four art studios around the island. Designed by Newfoundland-born and Norway-based architect Todd Saunders, the studios are for local, national, and international artists and writers to capitalize on the island’s setting, while offering an opportunity to “foster dialogue and exchange with the community” (ibid.).

Another example of Shorefast’s projects focuses on the island’s boat-building heritage: “[My brother] Tony says we’re eight funerals away from never being able to build a boat on Fogo Island ever again. We’ve got to get the kids involved in this” (Cobb, 2012, np). Once the primary mode of transportation between and among Newfoundland and its outports,<sup>4</sup> as well as the key to survival in a life that depended on fish, boats were integral to their way of life, and building them was a prized skill. With the decline in the fishery, the rise of new boat-building techniques, and out-migration of younger generations to find work, boat-building in Newfoundland had become a dying art. In an attempt to reverse the trend, in 2007, a year-long program was instituted on Fogo in partnership with the local school, where students worked with a master boat-builder. Since then, the Great Fogo Island Punt Race to There and Back, an annual race from Fogo to Change Islands, helps to keep the tradition alive by providing a way for young people on both islands, as well as ex-pats who return in the summer, to use these boats in a competitive race that symbolizes, in a friendly way, the ongoing rivalry between these two islands (Fogo Island Regatta, nd).

Reenacting the tradition of haymaking on Fogo Island in 2012 became another instance of artists creating a fusion of old and new, and of locals mixing with visiting artists and newly settled ones (a reverse resettlement, if you will). *Reenacting* is the work of local self-taught

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<sup>3</sup> The word shorefast comes from the “line and mooring used to attach a cod trap to the shore. It is a strong symbol of the cod fishing heritage of the islands and a metaphor for being bound to place and community” (Shorefast, nd, np).

<sup>4</sup> A complementary study would be to compare Newfoundland’s boat tradition with how Newfoundland’s railway, which was built to solidify the island’s inland links in the late nineteenth century, has been lost entirely—replaced by roads and highways.

painter Winston Osmond, whose ancestors came to Shoal Bay in the 1700s (Osmond, 2012, np), and Vida Simon, an artist “come-from-away” from Montreal who moved to Tilting in 2010. By directly experiencing the labour involved with haymaking; by creating a series of paintings in response; and then by leading a workshop in knitting the net bags traditionally used to transport hay on one’s back, the two created new art from old ways. Explains Osmond, “Maybe we’re saving something before it’s gone. This will be documented, so the next generation will have it to read about and understand” (Burns, 2012, np). Simon observed:

Since I am a newcomer, mostly from an urban background, I’m curious how our approaches will cross. This project relates to my interests in salvaging handwork that may soon be forgotten, in a sense paying homage to that tradition but then translating/transposing that image to create something new (ibid.).

The size of Fogo Island, with its intimate connections over space and time, is crucial to a project such as *Reenacting*. Osmond enlisted the help of his eight-seven-year-old uncle, John Osmond, to teach them how to knit the bags, “lending authenticity to the act and to the historical relevance of the project” (ibid.), and serving to deepen and intensify the community connection to place. That the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council was able to support Osmond and Simon’s project under its Emerging Artists category was a bonus for the artists, and an important recognition from the provincial body that art on the island is worth supporting.

In another innovative example of utilising the arts to chart the future for a small island community, in the fall of 2011 Fogo Island Arts hosted a three-week-long master class by Canada’s National Arts Centre that focused on the plays of Henrik Ibsen. *The Ark* brought theatre professionals and students to the island, and gave the islanders an opportunity to interact with members of one of Canada’s cutting-edge theatre groups. The result: a dynamic fusion of global and local, modern and traditional, communicated through the language of theatre. This fusion contributes to the notion of a Canadian archipelagic identity—one that includes its mainland as well as its islands (Vannini, Baldacchino, Guay, Steinberg & Royle, 2009, p. 135).

Based in St John’s, Bojan Fürst is another artist/researcher engaging in artistic practice while examining the impact of the Shorefast Foundation and Fogo Island Arts on the communities there. By looking at Fogo and Change Islands through the lens of his native Croatian islands—as well as his camera—Fürst takes inspiration from island surroundings: “My choice of black-and-white film and traditional wet printing has as much to do with trying to ... connect to that environment as it does with ... slowing me down and forcing a ... contemplative way of working (Fürst, 2012, np). He sees lessons to be learned and adapted from an archipelago off one continent and transported to another archipelago off another continent, and is “drawn to small islands as places that can teach us a lot about resilience, adaptability and sustainability” (ibid.). Fürst uses his photographs to show absence as well as presence: “A traditional stage on Change Islands is devoid of its accompanying flakes [frame for drying or “making” fish]; fishing boats are missing from a harbour of a fishing village in Croatia” (ibid.). The comparisons between Fogo and Change Islands and the Croatian islands are strikingly similar and have inspired Fürst to be part of an inter-island pollination: an archipelagraphy that is scattered across “a world of islands” (Baldacchino 2007, p. 1).

It is noteworthy, too, that long before the Shorefast Foundation was established, the community of Tilting on Fogo Island's northeastern tip was combining its seafaring heritage, the arts, and tourism to create a dynamic blend of nineteenth-century vernacular with twenty-first-century living. In 1984 the Tilting Expatriates Association (TEA) was formed in St John's to preserve Tilting's history and promote community development, publishing a newsletter and journal that exist to this day. A few years later the community established the Tilting Recreation and Cultural Society (TRACS) with the goal to "preserve and restore all of the remaining vernacular houses and outbuildings in Tilting, and also to preserve landscape features like fences and gardens" (Mellin, 2003, p. 215), using authentic construction techniques and materials, and local volunteer labour. As David Clarke (2012, p. 176) writes, "A number of communities on the Isles have a local museum, but Tilting is practically its own living heritage display". Again, this recognition of the island's contribution to the province's heritage has not gone unnoticed by the central Newfoundland and Labrador—and Canadian—governments.

### **Tasmania's small islands**

The edge keeps my energy from bleeding away.  
—Peter Adams, Sculptor, Roaring Beach, Tasmania

On the opposite side of the world from the island of Newfoundland is Tasmania, off the south coast of Australia, at roughly the same distance latitude below the equator as Newfoundland is above (Tasmania and its satellite islands lie between 40 and 54°S; the island of Newfoundland and its surrounding islands lie between 46 and 52°N). Despite the islands being poles apart, there are striking similarities: size (Tasmania, 68,331 km<sup>2</sup>; the island of Newfoundland, 111,390 km<sup>2</sup>), shortest distance from mainland (Tasmania, 240 km; Newfoundland, 178 km), population (Tasmania, 510,600 [Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011]; Newfoundland, 511,722 [Statistics Canada 2011]), and their subnational jurisdictional relationship with their mainlands (Tasmania a state of Australia and Newfoundland a province of Canada). Both are large islands surrounded by small islands and islets: Tasmania has 1,000 (Geoscience Australia), while the province of Newfoundland and Labrador has 7,183 (Natural Resources Canada). Both were colonized by England at the expense of the original inhabitants and their cultures: the Aboriginals in Tasmania and the Beothuks in Newfoundland. Perhaps because of all this, these islands have been called 'mirror islands' (Polack, 2012). Both have strong Celtic affiliations and ancestries.

Like Newfoundland's small islands, Tasmania's, too, have played a significant role in its history. In the nineteenth century, the 'worst' of the transported convicts from the British Isles to Australia's penal colonies were sent to Van Diemen's Land (renamed Tasmania in 1856), and the worst of the worst, plus those who attempted escape from there, were sent to the even more remote Sarah Island, Macquarie Harbour's penal station off the west coast. In the late eighteenth century, migrant sealers lived on Flinders Island, off the north coast in Bass Strait; from 1830 to 1847 the Aboriginal population was exiled to its main settlement, Wybalenna.

Bruny Island, one of Tasmania's satellite islands separated from the island's south coast by the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, is a popular tourist and summer 'shack' destination. While it is home to just over 600 permanent residents, the island received approximately

76,000 tourists in 2011–12 (Tourism Tasmania). The island was an early port of call for European explorers such as Captain Cook who landed at Adventure Bay in 1777, and William Bligh of HMS *Bounty* fame in 1788 and 1792. The island is also one of Australia’s “Important Bird Areas,” as it (along with Maria Island on the east coast) is home to the endangered Forty-spotted Pardalote (Birddata, 2012).

North and South Bruny Island are separated by a thin isthmus called The Neck,<sup>5</sup> with the two halves being quite different from one another in terrain and settlement patterns. North Bruny is more agricultural and is primarily populated with ‘shackies’ (non-permanent residents), while South Bruny is more rugged and is home to more permanent residents. While South Bruny is the location of the unofficial capital, Alonnah, the permanent residents and shackies there are more ‘individualistic’ (Boulter, 2011, np)—hallmarks of being farther away from the centre. Indeed, it was while on Bruny Island that I first heard of and experienced Tasmania as ‘the mainland’.

Both North and South Bruny are home to several artists. Originally from mainland Australia, painter Michaye Boulter grew up in Hobart, then settled on South Bruny Island when she married Rob Pennicott, owner of the very successful Bruny Island Adventure Tours based out of Adventure Bay. As the daughter of a seafarer and now wife of a seafarer, she has spent most of her life on or near the sea, sailing with her family from Australia to Canada and back again, first as a small child and then as a teenager. The time spent on the boat is a wellspring from which she draws her creativity. She says that for her, there has always been a link between boats and islands: “that feeling that it’s a little intimate space in this vastness, constantly pitched between those opposites, of intimacies and vastness” (*ibid.*). The interplay among the light and the water and the horizon fascinates her, as do the islands around Tasmania: “The point where the sea and sky meet is always very interesting to me, being as they’re such a reflection of each other” (*ibid.*). While the occasional outcropping of rock offers an anchor for the eye, water and sky are the predominant motif, with the horizon being the most prevalent focal point—imprinted on her painter’s eye from an early age. That she now finds herself making art on a small island is no accident. She compares the boat she grew up on to the island:

There’s something about being on an island that has an intimacy about it. There’s a sort of a connectedness that you feel with everybody on the island because you’re a Bruny Islander. It forges some identity for you, there’s some sort of pride in that. That’s who we are, and we’ve got something special that we all love (*ibid.*).

The scale and intimacy of Bruny Island are significant to Boulter: she is proud to have raised two children on a small island where they have been exposed to a life in nature. However, in 2011, faced with the choice of having their eldest daughter spend hours a day traveling by bus and ferry to high school on the mainland (Tasmania), having her board with a family on the mainland, or moving the entire family to Hobart, Boulter and her husband chose the latter; they now spend weekdays in Hobart, where both children attend school, and most weekends and holidays on Bruny. Boulter may have moved her painting studio into Hobart, but she still paints that which was imprinted at a young age: the ocean.

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<sup>5</sup> This Neck is not to be confused with Eaglehawk Neck and its infamous ‘dog line’ on the Tasman Peninsula, established to prevent prisoners escaping from Port Arthur’s penal colony.

Another artist who has chosen to live on Bruny is Victoria King, who arrived in 2006. Originally a painter from Kentucky, USA, King lived in England and the Blue Mountains near Sydney, Australia, before settling near Killora on North Bruny. Her art consists primarily of sculptures made from bits and pieces of discarded wood, rope, and metals she finds on the land and driftwood that washes up on shore. The farm, called Blackstone, is the site of George Augustus Robinson's first storage hut, built when he was starting his 'Friendly Mission' to round up Aboriginals on Tasmania in the 1830s and resettle them on Flinders Island.<sup>6</sup> With a keen awareness of the depth of history, the fragility of the planet, and the importance of living lightly on the land, King pieces together barbed wire, driftwood, bottles, old bits of machinery, and feathers to tell the story of Blackstone. Her poem, 'Vessel of Consequences', accompanies a sculpture of the same name, protesting the detrimental impact humans have had on the land:

A vessel of consequences  
*Les fleurs du mal*  
As early settlers' flowers  
bear seeds in once-sung  
but now forsaken places  
our eyes, too, disregard  
the barbs of rusted wire  
and the disparity they wreak  
on furred and feathered creatures (King, 2011).

King's poem is an example of her commitment to giving voice to the land she feels privileged to call home: "There needed to be some laying down, drawing of the line, that this land is a sanctuary now, and some respect needs to be paid" (ibid.). Her giving voice to the land is reminiscent of the Goethean principles of giving service to a phenomenon, "intuiting the responsibility that accompanies coming to know another being from the inside" (Cameron, 2005, p. 188). Like Boulter, she has formed an intimate relationship with Bruny Island; and, like Boulter, she feels a deep psychological connection to the island and wishes to communicate that for the good of the land. "This is the first time in my life I've really felt that the practice has come together with my life. It's so integrated, the content is not separated from myself" (King, 2011, np). For both artists, the size and scale of Bruny, separate from the large island of Tasmania, are essential to their ability to make art. Here, the archipelago's capacity to bring distance between islands is powerfully exemplified.

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<sup>6</sup> George Augustus Robinson's "Friendly Mission" was an attempt by Governor George Arthur of Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) to relocate, between 1832 and 1835, the Aborigines to Flinders Island peacefully and under Robinson's protection. But, as time would tell, this was anything but "friendly"; writes historian James Boyce, "The colonial government from 1832 to 1838 ethnically cleansed the western half of Van Diemen's Land and then callously left the exiled people to their fate. The black hole of Tasmanian history is not the violence between white settlers and the Aborigines—a well-recorded and much-discussed aspect of the British conquest—but the government-sponsored ethnic clearances which followed it" (Boyce, 2010, p. 296).

### **Thinking with the archipelago**

[N]o island is an isolated isle and that a system of archipelagraphy—that is, a historiography that considers chains of islands in fluctuating relationship to their surrounding seas, islands and continents—provides a more appropriate metaphor for reading island cultures (DeLoughrey, 2001, p. 23).

An archipelago is defined as a chain or spray of islands, compared to beads along a necklace or a rhizome; or it may be a cluster of islands, like Tasmania and Newfoundland: planet islands surrounded by satellites. In the case of clusters of islands, a number of two-way relationships are established between the planet and the satellites—with the main island controlling or being responsible for such services as transportation, governance, health, education, and commerce. In some cases, the satellites communicate with one another, perhaps serving as transportation stepping stones, either joined by bridges and causeways (for example, from the mainland of Newfoundland to New World Island to Twillingate) or ferries (for example, from Farewell, on the mainland of Newfoundland, to Change Islands to Fogo Island). For instance, in the case of Fogo and Change Islands, conversation with the locals from both islands illuminates generations-old attitudes toward one another, and these will shift, depending on who is perceived as ‘the other’—the other island, or the mainland of Newfoundland, or the mainland of Canada.

There can be a pecking order of islandness: the farther away you are from the main island, the more credibility you have as an islander. As Cobb (2012, np) says of Little Fogo Island, the now uninhabited island eight kilometres off the north coast of Fogo Island: “Little Fogo Islanders are the *real* islanders”. She calls it “the homeland, the real thing. It’s closer to the fishing grounds, and it’s more naked than here. Nature doesn’t have any artifice. Little Fogo Island—it takes a nanosecond when you’re out there to just—everything becomes clear” (ibid.).

But, as examples of artists’ works on these islands off Newfoundland and Tasmania demonstrate, living on an even smaller, more distilled island than the mainland island appeals to those who seek connection with place as inspiration for their art. As Cobb says, “I think the smaller the island, the more deep the knowledge can be. You can’t know Canada—not in one human lifetime. Your mind can’t really comprehend it properly” (ibid.). At the same time, the ruggedness of her island is significant:

Nature doesn’t have any artifice. It’s geology. Newfoundland, Fogo Island, especially, is really naked, it reveals itself to you all the time. Trees and grass, they cover up the rocks, they get in the way of knowing the place. Because I think Newfoundland is so naked, it draws that out in the people... Here you feel your own vulnerability so much more, and when you feel vulnerable, then you’re more open, you’re more you. Here, your character has more currency than your personality (ibid.).

This heightened knowledge and attachment to place and “heightened sense of physical containment” (Hay, 2002, p. 22) have an immeasurable imprint on humans:

The strong sense of island identity stemming from the sharpness of that wave-lined boundary is often said to consist in the community-defining bond of a shared sense of isolation that generates a unique sense of difference to other populations. Islophiles tend to extol this sense of insularity; to see it as a source of islander resilience and versatility, and a state of existence to be cherished (*ibid.*).

Relying on one's own skills and resources, yet being an integral part of a community, fulfills the need to belong yet be separate, which is mirrored in the relationship between the main island and the satellite island.

As I consider thinking with the archipelago, these centre-periphery relationships and the question of how people who live on islands off islands play multiple roles become increasingly important. Usually the residents on the island are thought to be peripheral and are looked down upon by continental mainlanders (such as Newfoundland in relation to the rest of Canada); sometimes the island *is* the mainland and the one looking down on the smaller island farther out (such as Newfoundland and Fogo Island); and sometimes island-to-island dynamics prevail, as in the case of Change Islands' ongoing and oftentimes perceived 'poor cousin' relationship with the much larger and wealthier Fogo Island.

The relationship dynamics are nuanced and varied, with their roots in historical circumstances ranging from government policies instituted from afar to local family feuds. A number of factors are in play: settlement patterns, transportation and communication links, a government's economic situation, and its priorities at any given time. As demonstrated with the Fogo Process, sometimes it takes an outside threat to bring individuals together to fight a common enemy. In the case of the 2011 amalgamation of the communities of Fogo Island, it was an inside threat—a declining population and the concomitant deterioration of services—that brought residents together (Thompson, 2011, np). And sometimes it takes a wealthy hometown gal who comes home and decides to make a difference to her community: “the power of one”, as one newspaper columnist in Hobart put it when referring to Tasmania's noted philanthropists, Jan Cameron, “who spent \$25 million buying high-conservation-value native forests that might otherwise have been logged”, and David Walsh, “whose \$170 million private gallery MONA... is set to single-handedly rejuvenate Tasmania's battered 'brand' and revitalize tourism” (Neales, 2011, p. 25). But the roles are constantly shifting, and, as is evidenced time and again, the strength of islanders' identity and resilience—their ability to adapt to changing circumstances—is at the heart of why one island community thrives and another dies. As one Fogo Islander was overheard to say, “We've experienced change before. Change, that's not going to change who we are” (Cobb, 2012, np).

Thinking with the archipelago has been going on for a very long time, since “island studies was called seafaring” (Wright, 1991, np); indeed, this paper is an example of thinking archipelagically. As Stratford et al. (2011, p. 118) have written in what is among the first papers to propose “thinking with the archipelago”, archipelagraphy “has been at the core of the constitution of civilizations, collective identities and sovereign states, and central to much scientific discourse”. In recent years, organizations devoted to studying islands have emerged, including the North Atlantic Islands Program (NAIP), the North Atlantic Forum (NAF), the International Small Island Studies Association (ISISA), and the Small Islands Culture Research Initiative (SICRI), to name a few. They are based on island-island relationships, and by studying each other they learn from each other. These same people look at their own islands through the lens of other islands—*not* the mainland-island paradigm. Examples abound, such

as Tasmania's islands art festival, *Ten Days on the Island*, which arose out of then-Premier Jim Bacon's desire to celebrate Tasmania's islandness—a paradigmatic shift looking at Tasmania as part of a world of islands, and not just as an island all alone at the edge of the end of the world (Harwood, 2011).

### **Concluding thoughts**

What do islands give Newfoundland? We give it hope.  
—Zita Cobb, Director, Shorefast Foundation,  
Fogo Island, Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland's offshore islands have played a distinctive role in the island's storyline, a direct line—and for some an unbroken one—to a people's ancestry. Since the majority of the fishers who settled on the islands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were from the small islands off Ireland and Scotland, the tradition of being set apart from the main has, for some, continued into the twenty-first century—it is in their blood, as it were. One artist and frequent visitor to and painter of Fogo and Change Islands writes:

Fogo Island and Change Islands form a unique microcosm of rural Newfoundland. They embody something real, something more essential, something so very human, which is in my opinion the source of art. I think it is left to the artists to communicate all of what is Newfoundland to the outside world (Frère, 2008, p. 7).

Similarly, Tasmania's small islands are part of its story: as sites of banishment for convicts and Aboriginals; as locations for lighthouses that serve as sentinels against deadly coastlines; as refuges for shipwreck survivors; and as sanctuaries for wildlife, birds, and plants. Actor and ABC radio host Michael Veitch (2011, p. 27) writes about the islands of the Bass Strait in his recent book, *The Forgotten Islands*:

The more I learned, the more I realized this was an Australia I hardly knew. This was stormy weather Australia, an Australia of shipwrecks and sealers; of brutality and extermination; of folly and heroism; of wild weather and explorers in flimsy boats; of thousand-foot cliffs and amazing birds and strange vegetation; of places well-trodden and others believed never to have felt the impact of a human foot.

Through his writing, he echoes Frère's goal to bring knowledge of Tasmania's small islands to his fellow Tasmanians, and the outside world.

The title of Elizabeth DeLoughrey's (2001) seminal article 'The Litany of Islands, the Rosary of Archipelagos' encapsulates the role of archipelagos: they are a prayer for islands with stories being repeated over and over again; and they are the rosary: a metaphor for faith and hope. In many ways, islanders have turned the tide on decades of suffering from inferiority complexes; by effusing pride in their heritage, by uniting past and present through the arts and culture, they demonstrate to their mainlands that they are leaders. Thus, these islands can teach the world, and artists on these islands can teach the world, about living with openness, resilience, inclusivity and fluidity; about making the world a better place, one island at a time.

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