

"A SUNNY NIGHT ON FOGO ISLAND"

THE TELEGRAM NEWSPAPER

A sunny night on Fogo Island



Rory Middleton stands on the pond near Kelly's Pit with his building supplies and tools ready to begin creating the structure for his project. — Photo by Kay Burns/The Pilot

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[Kay Burns](#)

Fogo Island — Rory Middleton, an artist from Edinburgh, Scotland, is creating a new site-specific artwork on Fogo Island as part of the Fogo Island Arts Corp. artist residencies.

Middleton is a filmmaker and installation artist with a particular fascination for outdoor contexts for his work, created in response to his temporary immersion in a new place and a new community.

Middleton is on Fogo Island for three months in total — he arrived at the beginning of December and is leaving on Feb. 28. Prior to his departure he will invite the people of Fogo Island to attend his video screening/installation, which is taking place on a structure that he is building on a frozen pond in the interior of Fogo Island near Kelly's Pit.

Remote, rugged, and cold landscapes are not new to Middleton. He has undertaken residencies and art projects in northern Iceland, the Rocky Mountains and Croatia. His work is an exploration of architecture, landscape, and cinema.

“I have a thing for place, I'm drawn to these kind of places and this kind of rugged terrain,” he says.

Alluring

Part of what really interested Middleton about the Fogo Island artist residencies were the modernist studio structures in which the artists work. Much of his work loosely alludes to modernist architecture. But what really inspires Middleton is place, in terms of both the physical attributes of its landscape and the patterns and processes by which people dwell in that place.

“Before coming I had this vague plan to create some kind of cinema in the centre of the island,” he explained.

“I had heard that in winter, the island interior is a really important place where people go to hang out at their cabins; they go on Skidoo. That was all very alluring to me.”

This seasonal migration interested him as an aspect of the place that relates to the practices of the people who live there. These cabin sites offer a different kind of ruggedness than the coastline, greater isolation, and an alternative kind of dramatic landscape.

“I was really lucky; I was introduced to the community in Tilting when I first got here,” he said. “I was introduced to these great guys in Tilting and they welcomed me and said, ‘If you want to go in the woods then we’ll take you in’. We went out to the cabins and it was such an eye-opener, such a great lifestyle.”

Middleton will be using 2 x 4s to build an open, linear structure 32’ wide and 8’ high by 8’ deep, standing on stilts on top of the frozen pond by Kelly’s Pit. The structure will become a projection surface for screening a video he has created.

“I have filmed a sunset, out of focus, but focused in on the sun,” he said. “It’s very abstract, and it glows.

“It’s amazing the colours that you get here. The sunsets and the moons is what I’ve been observing since I got here. I did the film shooting while out on Skidoos towards the centre of the island at one of the highest points and we were standing on the roof of someone’s cabin to do the shooting. And I’m thinking of using underwater sounds as an audio element for the piece. It’s very experimental because once I have the structure built I want to put netting over it. Then I’m going to cut a hole in the ice on the pond, put a water pump down and then constantly spray water on the structure till it freezes, and hopefully it will gradually build up with a coating of ice. And then the structure will be kind of like an out of focus building because the ice will start to thicken around the framing and distort it. Then I will project the sunset film on it as darkness falls, so it will be like a second sunset.”

Finding the site for his installation involved exploring a lot of locations.

“I wanted to do it much further in but then I was thinking about people being able to access it for the event,” Mr. Middleton stated.

Originally he had an idea to make the piece for a location that would take 45 minutes to walk into. As an alternative to the more distant location he chose to build it by Kelly’s Pit, which is only about a 10-minute walk from the road, but you can also drive in quite close.

Midnight sun

His working title for the project is “Midnight Sun,” as he plans to bring the setting sun into the darkness of the site at night through the video projection. In his work he describes “the landscape as being the central character.”

For this project he works with the transient nature of ice as a temporary transformation of the place, created to explore ideas about this community’s integral relationship to the land in which they live.

In this project, the structure that Middleton has created at the pond echoes the modernist architecture of the studio space he has been using on the coast. But in the case of his project, placed on a frozen lake, coated in ice to form a projection screen for this video of a sunset, it alters time and site to speak about the place as he has experienced it.

“My work has a lot to do with place, and initially that was to do with landscape but I think here, the overall work is about the place, but that includes the people,” he said. “So spending time here I’ve been able to get to know people and something about the way of life, the intricacies.

“And also walking to the studio I am connected by touching the ground; it’s a kilometer walk each time I go there. And it can be completely different on the way in and the way out, the morning and the night. You’re really in touch with the island. And because of that you become more aware of the life of the islanders and how things have progressed. How they remain in touch with the past, but are very forward thinking in terms of what they’re doing here.”

The date for the screening of his work is still to be determined. When near completion, Middleton will be watching the weather for a suitable opportunity and will announce the date as soon as he has decided. It will bring the community together in a different context, as a way to celebrate their connection to the interior spaces of this beautiful island.

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