

# PRESS RELEASE



## ISA MELSHEIMER THE YEAR OF THE WHALE

FOGO ISLAND GALLERY

March 9 to June 17, 2018

Exhibition Opening

FRIDAY, MARCH 9, 6:00-8:00PM

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GALLERY HOURS  
9:00AM – 9:00PM daily  
Free

The Fogo Island Gallery presents a solo exhibition of works by Isa Melsheimer. *The Year of the Whale* is the first presentation of the Berlin-based artist's works in Canada and features a series of gouaches on paper and a large-scale hand-embroidered curtain made during her time in residence with Fogo Island Arts in Fall 2017. The works on view capture the passage of time and seek to trouble the complex, ever-evolving relationship of humans to the environment, suggesting a rebalancing of power structures and permeable boundaries between species.

*Curtain (The Year of the Whale)* (2018), is a seven by three-metre hand-dyed and embroidered fabric curtain that hangs from the ceiling of the gallery, bisecting the space on a diagonal. Melsheimer's intricate embroidery depicts her view from Squish Studio on Fogo Island. Various elements of the landscape and the immensity of the sea are alluded to, rather than shown precisely: the outline of distant hills is barely sketched in, while a single wave crests over a rocky outcrop. Indigenous plants rendered with the exactitude of botanical specimens appear in the foreground. A codfish and humpback whale seem to float above the surface of the water, their presence heralded not as figures observed but due to their historical relevance to Fogo Island and its centuries of entanglement with the sea.

Melsheimer's landscape evokes traditional Eastern depictions of perspective, where elements that are furthest away are placed at the top of the image, creating a vertical sense of space and distance, while large areas are left open to the imagination. The layered, multiview-point imagery of the curtain creates an embodied sense of space that is an accumulation of experience, conveying a feeling of the ocean and landscape, as well as the passage of time. The curtain eschews not only the Western tradition of one-point perspective, but its implication of an all-knowing and domineering gaze over the landscape.

Four gouaches on paper depict iconic buildings encroached by rising tides and massive sea creatures. With dramatic darkened or red-infused skies, the gouaches show human structures amidst an environment that is at once threatening and enthralling. *Nr 437* shows the Fogo Island Inn and surrounding landscape enveloped in the tentacles of a giant octopus, one limb delicately poised as if to tap on a window. A group of humpback whales in *Nr 438* lie over the rocks beneath the Inn, seeming to merge with the architectural structure.

In keeping with Melsheimer's long-standing interest and engagement with Modernist architecture, *Nr 439* and *Nr 440* depict landmarks of Brutalism. Waves crash against the steps of City Hall in St. John's, Newfoundland, while an iceberg appears as an equally matched foe to the concrete ramparts of the Andrews Building, University of Toronto.

Melsheimer's depictions of human endeavours within an increasingly hostile natural world reflect larger concerns of the Anthropocene, the current geological epoch in which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate change and the environment.

Melsheimer was reading Donna Haraway while in residence, and her works are informed by the scholar's conception of the Chthulucene, a proposed alternative to the Anthropocene, which Haraway critiques for continuing to privilege humans as the principal actors of our age. The Chthulucene, conversely, is made up of "multispecies stories and practices," of contingent relationships between humans and nonhumans in constant evolution. As Haraway writes, "we are at stake with each other."<sup>1</sup> Fittingly, the rich greens and browns of the rocks in the Fogo Island gouaches portray lichen, a complex life form that is itself a symbiotic partnership between two organisms.

Melsheimer's works in the exhibition evoke ideas of permeable boundaries between species, foregrounding unpredictable encounters and networked, "tentacular" thinking.

The exhibition is curated by Alexandra McIntosh (Director of Programs and Exhibitions, Fogo Island Arts) and Nicolaus Schafhausen (Director, Kunsthalle Wien and Strategic Director, Fogo Island Arts).

#### ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

Isa Melsheimer lives and works in Berlin. Known for her engagement with the history of architectural styles—especially the legacy of Modernism and 1950s-70s concrete architecture—Melsheimer's works are expressions of her intensive research as well as formal investigations. The artist acts as an archeologist of forgotten or neglected buildings, recreating their distinctive shapes through a vivid re-imagining of the forms and spirit of the structures. Selected solo exhibitions of her work include *Der tote Palast zitterte – zitterte!* (2017), Mies van der Rohe Haus, Berlin; *Über die Dünnhäutigkeit von Schwellen* (2016), Esther Schipper, Berlin; *We live in townscape and, after a trek, we shop in Futurism* (2015), art3, Valence; *Kontrastbedürfnis* (2015), Ernst Barlach Haus, Hamburg; *Times are hard but Postmodern* (2014), Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris; *Isa Melsheimer* (2013), P K M Gallery, Seoul; and *Plant Hunters* (2013), Galerie Nächst St. Stephan, Vienna.

#### ABOUT FOGO ISLAND ARTS

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> Haraway, Donna. Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene. e-flux Journal #75, September 2016.