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Ingmar Bergman on Fårö: A Testament

John Bailey · Thursday, October 6th, 2011

A map of the island of Fårö looks as if it broke off from the tip of Gotland, itself an island in the Baltic Sea off the southeastern coast of Sweden. Getting to Fårö is a challenge; once there, most of the few roads are single lane, dirt ruts with grass growing between the tire tracks. When director Ingmar Bergman first visited while scouting locations for his 1961 film *Through a Glass Darkly*, he knew he had found the secluded yet enchanted place where he would spend much of the rest of his life. From the completion of his great valedictory film *Sarabande* (2003), he would remain on the island until his death four years later on July 30, 2007. In one of those quirks that defy logic yet seem after the fact almost poetic— fellow director Michelangelo Antonioni died the same day.

The short summers on Fårö are luxuriant, with native flowers, wild strawberries and mushrooms in profusion. This secluded island has become a Swedish tourist destination, an intoxicating getaway. There is no bank, post office, police or doctor. But Bergman built a small cinema from an old barn, where he screened dailies for the many films he shot there: *Persona*, *Shame*, *The Passion of Anna*, *Scenes from a Marriage* (appropriately shot in an ex-wife's house.) Tarkovsky filmed his final Bergman-like film *Sacrifice* on the island as well.

Bergman directed over fifty films, but it is the rugged sea and landscapes of Fårö seen in his mature films that constitute a powerful visual correlative to his character's existential crises....

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