

Cultural Daily

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Bergman on Fårö, Part 2

John Bailey · Thursday, October 13th, 2011

(Part 1 of this essay is [here](#).)

When Ingmar Bergman decided in 1967 to build a house on remote Fårö Island, he cast his fate with the nets of the local fishermen. Whether he was seeking a part-time refuge from the roiling world of cinema and the Royal Dramatic Theater, or whether he understood how much his own life soon would become intertwined with the local people, is still grist for speculation. What is clear in the two feature length documentaries that he made about the island's residents is how deeply he admired their tenacious struggle to prosper in a challenging climate. In 1967, and again a decade later in 1979, he produced *Fårö Documents*, two closely observed feature length films about their work and lives. Much like Michael Apted's ongoing *Up* series, Bergman planned to track the life journey of Fårö's people every ten years—but a planned third film was never made.

Michael Koresky wrote of the stylistic simplicity and integrity of Bergman's portraits by the filmmaker's

surveying spaces with a lack of overt editorializing, letting the people speak for themselves or, more frequently, just go about their business, which Bergman captures with an intense focus—farmers slaughtering pigs in harrowing real time; neighbors working together to thatch a roof; and, in my favorite moment, a lonely fisherman cleaning, cooking, and eating his freshly caught dinner: simple, effortless, wordless.

So close was the director's bond with and acceptance by his fellow islanders that they protected him, guiding cinematic pilgrims away from his home, respecting his desire for privacy. Even the details of Bergman's funeral went off according to his last wishes, as implemented by his neighbors....

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Image: Ingmar Bergman photograph by Irving Penn.

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