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## Bonavista Biennale Artist Spotlights

Facilitated by Katie Butler Major & Jane Walker

### **Will Gill**

*Will Gill's practice spans photography, painting, sculpture and live-action work. His Biennale work, The Green Chair, is a site-specific outdoor steel sculpture set at the ocean's edge, allowing the free and ever-changing play of light, wind and water over and through the chair. It replicates an archetypal Newfoundland wooden chair found in many rural kitchens. Because kitchens are where families and friends gather, this chair calls up memories of the comfort and pleasure of daily activities and "times". But it also can evoke thoughts of people sitting by the window in anxious vigil, awaiting overdue sailors and fishermen. Paintings from Gill's on-going Fires in the Desert work at the Factory Building in Port Union draw from his recent experience of two "ice deserts" during a 2014 residency aboard a three-masted barquentine out of Svalbard, Norway and an earlier voyage through the Canadian Arctic. The canvases with their soft pink organic forms play off Doug Guildford's large crocheted sculptural works, some of them pink, installed in the Factory's second floor.*



Photo by Mark Gray

### **What role does site-specificity play in your practice and in this work in particular?**

For some time now I have been making work - a kind of live action work - in the environment that relies on the unpredictable elements of our surroundings to add context and meaning to the work. In these works I have placed objects or figures in nature (or in a couple of cases simulated natural environments) to allow wind, currents and other seemingly random forces to act upon them. For example, I worked on a series of pieces for Art Ex in Grand Falls-Windsor a number of years back and floated them down the Exploits River. The current of the river played a part in the work because it manipulated the floating works to bring them close together or drift apart to set up interesting, random and poetic associations between one another. It's exciting to see nature's choreography in action.

I consider The Green Chair work a kind of collaboration with the ocean in that I have done my part and the surroundings - the ocean and wind - are left to do theirs. It is a work that people would ideally visit two or three times as conditions change.

### **How do you think non-gallery spaces can change the way we learn from visual art?**

It depends who your audience is, I think. As an artist, I appreciate and learn from work in all its forms whether it's in a gallery or outside of it. For people that are not used to looking at art, an art gallery can be an intimidating place to go for a variety of reasons. Work that is situated away from white cube spaces allows people the chance to happen upon work or seek out work outside of the physical and psychological constraints of the gallery. This in turn can create quite a different perspective from the outset and perhaps allow people to be stimulated or engaged with new or unusual things.

### **Do you have any other upcoming exhibitions or publications of your work?**

It has been a relatively busy year for me. I have been in group shows in Eastbourne UK, Boston, Long Island and had a solo show in Toronto for Contact Photography Festival. I am looking forward to a month long residency in November in the tower studio on Fogo Island through Fogo Island Arts.

### **If you could give one piece of advice to a young aspiring Newfoundland and Labrador artist, what would it be?**

To paraphrase Liz Taylor: Don't listen to the bad things people say about your work, you might start to believe them. Don't listen to the good things people say about your work, you might start to believe them.