

Islander

An Illusion Review by Joan Ellis

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With a strong sense of place and consistent authenticity, "Islander" rises to that state where lovers of good movies like to dwell: the suspension of all else except what we are watching on the screen. The man who knew this island is Thomas Hildreth, producer/co-writer/star of the film who absorbed the culture while growing up there. His confidence creates the perfect backdrop for the subtle, never overwrought work of director Ian McCrudden. The collaborators know how to handle unnerving events in a culture of understatement.

Resentment toward mainland fishermen is deepening as they set their lobster pots ever closer in waters claimed by island fishermen. Against the cooler advice of his elders, Eben Cole (Thomas Hildreth) sets off in a hotheaded, youthful rage to confront the poachers. Armed, he challenges two mainlanders and causes an accident that kills a young man. As the boy's body is brought ashore in Vinalhaven, the stage is set for Eben's accountability, punishment, and slow path to redemption.

After serving a five year jail term, Eben returns to the island to find his community closed to him in coldness. He has lost his wife Cheryl (Amy Jo Johnson), daughter Sarah (played by two fine young Maine actresses), his boat, and his first mate (James Parks) to his old friend Jimmy (Mark Kiely). Rejected, Eben takes a job in a junkyard. "I'm not exactly cut out for dry land." But Eben has come back by choice, to be judged.

If Eben's return from prison seems abrupt, it allows Hildreth and McCrudden to focus entirely on his redemption. They let us soak up the reactions and behavior of the people he has known all his life. The cast is flawless. We won't forget the images of the fishing boats moving slowly out of the harbor in the early morning