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The Islander, not rated, art theatre release

I loved this modest, plaintive film about a Maine lobsterman, Eben Cole (beautifully played by Thomas Hildreth), who, in defense of his livelihood, lost his temper in an argument. A young man died as a consequence and Eben was sentenced to five years in prison, causing a radical change in his life.

The film perfectly captures the insular nature of Maine's population where strangers are seen as "from away" and where deviant behavior is frowned upon. While the fisher people are good Christians, there is little forgiveness in them and Eben is shunned upon his return after serving his time. He can't get a job, or see his daughter (his wife has divorced him), or walk anywhere without getting stares and glares.

Shot in digital photography, the ubiquitous water seems more foreboding than glamorous, and the island feels like a small enclave in which spontaneity is contained by the ever-present incoming waves.

Ian McCrudden directs with an eye that entraps us all in the limited life of the island. He wrote the script with Hildreth who comes from Maine and has its flavor imprinted on him. As a character and an actor, Hildreth is intense and deep. His elusiveness is seductive. We suffer with him and demand that he be resurrected to his home boy status because he has paid his dues, and because he is a good man. How dare others be holier than thou? Eben Cole deserves redemption and the way he pursues it is by remaining true to himself even as everyone else turns from him. He was a good man before he went to prison, a good man who made a bad mistake, and he remains that same good man after prison.

I was very impressed with Hildreth's acting and confirmed my suspicions (through an internet search) that he was also a stage actor with significant training to his credit. He has that rare gift of being still enough to communicate with the camera and grand enough to send his life force out into the far reaches of his audience.

I highly recommend this film.

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These Film Commentaries are dedicated to the memory of Herman E. Warsh, a man of love, kindness, integrity and excellence.