

## Sketches of Sorrento

FEBRUARY 10, 2014 *by Amy Sherlock*



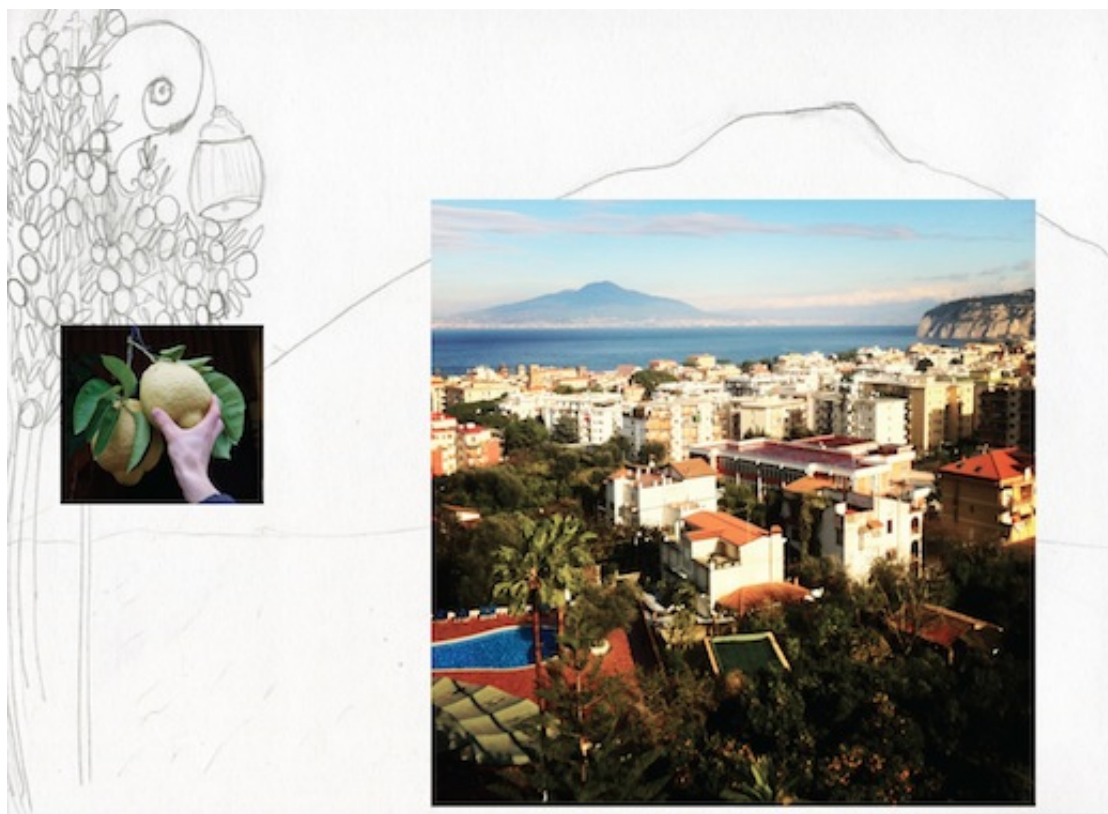
Mural from the stairwell of the Hilton Sorrento Palace

It is said that the Bay of Naples was home to the sirens, those mythical seductresses whose song was so sweet and promised so much that it lured passing sailors to their deaths on the jagged outcrops of the archipelago that now takes their name, 'Le Sirenuse'. None could resist them.

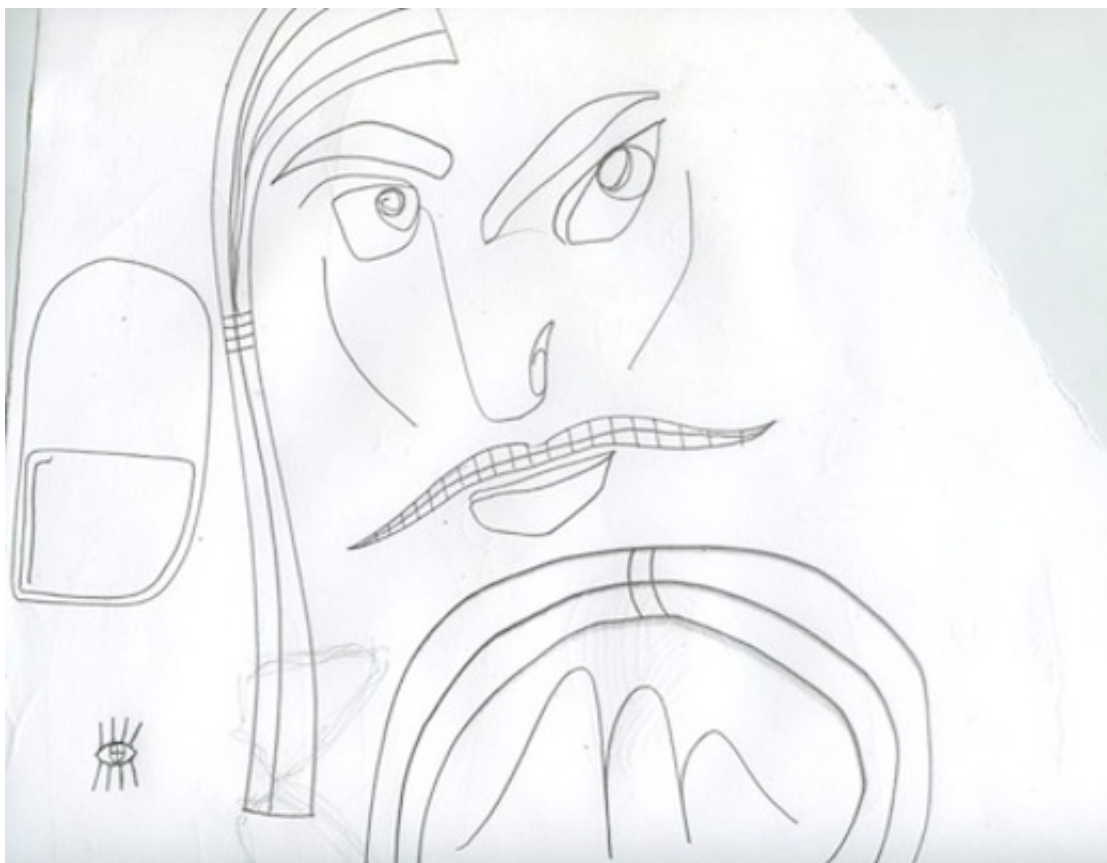
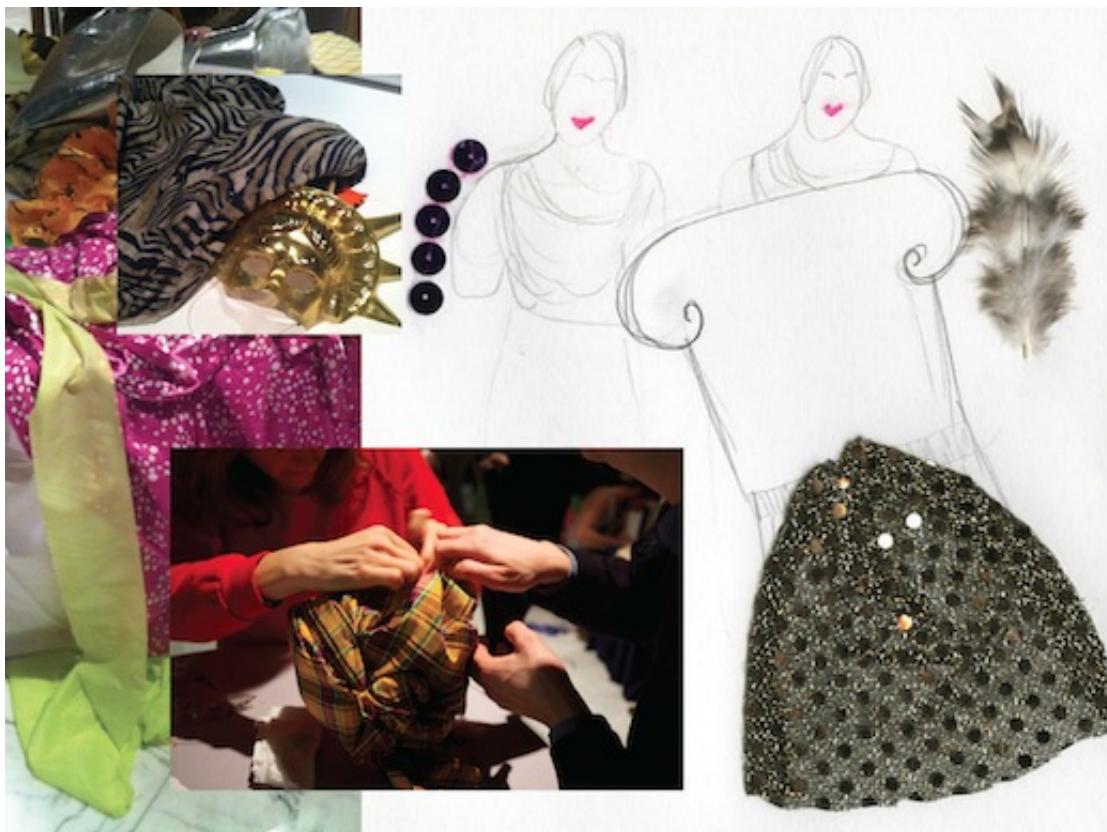
Half women, half birds, the sirens of the ancient Greeks were not the lovely porcelain-skinned nymphs that popular culture has returned to us, by way first of the Pre-Raphaelites and later of Walt Disney, in hybridised mermaid form. By an interesting quirk of fate or of grammar, the name by which these islands are more commonly known, 'Li Galli' (The Roosters), stays truer to these feathered origins, though with the sexual potency of the femme fatale displaced onto the cock of the roost.\_

*Ulysses the trickster, 'so full of guile,' says Kafka, 'such a fox, that not even the goddess of fate could pierce his armour', was the only mortal to hear the siren's prophecy and pass by unscathed, lashed to the mast by his crew, their ears stuffed with wax. But even he never reached the shores of the sirens' islands. No one ever did, not in any version of the story that I have ever heard. Why is it, then, that we so often see the sirens painted from behind, looking out to sea and the powder-sailed ships, as if the artist has somehow managed to slip through the trap and made it to land? But maybe this is not so far fetched. After all, another tale has it that the Argo owed its safe passage to the lyre Orpheus. The poet, the Ur-artist, drowned out the siren's call, an equal master of treacherous words and limitless promises.*

For monster and muses, artists, poets and tricksters alike, the allure of the Bay of Naples remains little dimmed since Ulysses' fast black ship sped hence on its way back to Ithaca. And where better to spend 2013's twilight hours – that in-between moment as one year becomes the next – than on it's myth-steeped, citrus-scented coastline. At the invitation of the Fiorrucci Arts Trust (founder Nicoletta Fiorucci, director Milovan Farronato and curator Stella Bottai) a merry band gathered in a Neptune's cove in Sorrento. (In fact the pool of the Hilton Sorrento Palace hotel, where we stayed as guests of Giovanni Russo, Fiorucci's partner.) In full view of Vesuvius and its past-preserving slopes, and amongst jewel-flecked orange groves that pointed to the spring not far away, we passed a topsy-turvy moment of carnivalesque transformations – aided and abetted by light-fingered seamstresses, swathes of fabric and slicks of facepaint – prophecy and promises...





















*Sketches and costume designs by the author and other guests, made during costume workshops at Hilton Sorrento Palace as part of Fiorucci Art Trust's 'Party Monster' celebrations. Fabrics and logo courtesy: Fiorucci Art Trust. Photographs: Alessandro Di Giampietro*

## About the author



Amy Sherlock is assistant editor of frieze and is based in London.

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