

Milovan Farronato, Director of the Fiorucci Art Trust, is a visionary curator and writer. He teaches Visual Cultures—to some lucky individuals—at the IUAV University of Venice (Università IUAV di Venezia), while curating shows around the globe. He is responsible for a residency program at the Fiorucci Art Trust headquarters in London, and a series of projects that happen yearly on the magical island of Stromboli. His style, though he makes no fuss about it, is immaculate, and certainly adds to the power of his personality. Once you meet him, and if you hold it together while meeting a gaze that penetrates you to the bones, you might ask yourself how Sicily has not yet been extinguished by the sheer force of his presence coupled with that of the region's volcanoes. On a less exaggerated note, Farronato is an inspiring individual who loves art and artists equally. He has contributed to the art scene considerably, both through a set of particularly perplexing and fascinating projects and through his discovery and support of younger artists. We met in Athens for the opening of Vanessa Safavi's show at The Breeder. This is an extract of our conversation, which unfolded amidst the houses of the Athens' red light district.

Fokidis: Is there a conceptual stigma or distinctive trace that your curatorial work embraces?

Farronato: I prefer projections to confessions. The focus of my activity is very much about ongoing experimentation and an open-ended creative process. Somehow I reject the word "work" in the sense of a physical, fixed manifestation. Of course, I have not lost interest in curating exhibitions. In fact, I have just curated a show of work by Christodoulos Panayiotou at the new Kaleidoscope space in Milan. But what I am trying to say is that my "conceptual stigma", so to speak, is my investment in creating occasions and gatherings that generate inspirations and collaborations between artists beyond the moment itself. Sometimes, these collaborations become visible much, much later. Currently, the format of the artist's workshop is one that currently interests me the most: for the past few years, the Fiorucci Art Trust has presented a costume drama workshop over the period leading up to New Year's Eve, featuring artists, designers, curators and writers, among

other cultural practitioners. In October 2014, we will present a one-week workshop in Poland curated by myself and Paulina Ołowska inspired by the principles of mycology and Grotowski's theatre. The outcomes remain open and will be presented in London in 2015.

Fokidis: Lately we have seen a renewed inflation of the art market. Of course, this event applies to the usual suspects: very established artists and to younger artists with firework careers who are mainly known, or become known, through art fairs. But things don't need to seem so gloomy! On this note, how would you define a healthy relation between art and the market today?

Farronato: I don't know if I can define a healthy relationship between art and the market in general, but surely this balance is something we have been seeking to achieve within the Fiorucci Art Trust, which in its very nature is exposed to multiple facets of the art world. Nicoletta Fiorucci, the founder of the Trust, provides a very interesting example of how the art market and its collectors can be beneficial to artists and not just put pressure on their careers, in my opinion. Nicoletta has the mission to support artists through a number of channels: on the one hand, the not-for-profit activities of her Trust; and on the other, her private activity as a collector, which is driven by her interest in giving artists the opportunity to grow. I would not want to place too much importance on the market. While there is paramount attention devoted to the prices of artworks, I wish to keep myself focused on other concerns, which for me, personally, are more fundamental. I try to not let fluctuations and trends in the art market interfere with my interests and the goals I wish to develop, support and explore.

Fokidis: London, Stromboli and the world: how would you describe the relations between these localities?

Farronato: We have this joke at the Fiorucci Art Trust, about the impossibility to frame what we do. We keep making up names: lately someone called us the radical wing of public programming! I think the failure of a fixed definition is a good



From right to the left, 2010, Alessandro Di Giampietro

thing and is precisely related to this question—London, Stromboli, the world. Our geography is spread out and reflects the nature of the Trust. We are hosts to the artists: all our venues are homes for them to test ideas out and produce work in a more intimate scale. We have only been in London for a year now and our space in Sloane Avenue is growing in this spirit: it is a house on three floors where we host performances, events, site-specific installations and residencies. Recently, we were very lucky to have Christodoulos Panayiotou—in my practice, collaborations are recurrent!—in residence. He worked on a collection of letters from Sloane Avenue that will grow into a book. We also celebrated his birthday at the Trust, and he gave a YouTube lecture titled "Death on Stage", and you can visit the links to the clips through our website. There is Stromboli, there is London, and there is also Venice, where I teach Visual Cultures in the Fashion Design Department of the public university IUAV. All these plac-

es are islands. Isolation, in very different ways, is something I quite enjoy.

Fokidis: What is it like to produce parallel projects in a key city for contemporary art, London, and in a vacation heaven, Stromboli?

Farronato: Stromboli is a vacation heaven indeed, far away from a lot of things. But in some ways, I think this is not just a geographical distance: it's a state of mind. Above all, when artists work with the Trust, whether it be in Stromboli or in London, we hope to offer them an opportunity to be in a "vacation heaven" on an intellectual level—a space where they can think and work within a completely different set of parameters. The title of our seasonal programme in Stromboli this year seems quite apt to mention in this context: *Forget Amnesia*, which I am curating this year with artist Haroon Mirza. The "harmonic tremors" and seismic activity emitting from Stromboli's volca-

no, which averages one eruption per hour, are the inspiration for a ten-day programme of events and performances spread out over the island and which include participations by Richard Sides, Trisha Baga and Ed Atkins, among others. *Forget Amnesia* will also come to London, to another “island” so to speak: the Serpentine Gallery summer pavilion, which, in August, will host a Park Night inspired by the Haroon Mirza’s programme in Stromboli.

Fokidis: Stromboli at once brings together the pleasures of the Mediterranean—the sea and the weather, for instance—with its misfortunes, such as migration, conflicts and economic crises. Is the project in Stromboli political in any symbolic sense?

Farronato: Recently in a Cumulus for *Parkett 93*, Angela Vettese wrote a long article about our “time” in Stromboli, in which she wrote: “The lack of a political approach must not be taken as an attempt to escape into a meaningless bilateralism period. These days do of course lead to a divergent interpretation of reality, but in the most

constructive sense of what could in fact be called bilateral thought, which has to do with the empathy generated in human relation from the proper use of our mirror neurons. Especially in Stromboli, visitors are requested to contribute an unusual way of confronting reality that they can teach to others. Everyone who comes, always from an appointment with the Fiorucci Art Trust, goes home with an altered cognitive field.”

Fokidis: Have there been some art world highlights for you in terms of exhibitions and events?

Farronato: These are not so much exhibitions but more time-based and performance projects, but my highlights include: *This Much is Uncertain*, a film by Runa Islam; our series of costume drama workshops; and the series of performative lectures delivered at Sloane Avenue. In terms of exhibitions, definitely a show by Roberto Cuoghi at Museo del 900 in Milan—this exhibition was not a “must” but I think with time it might become cult. Exhibitions that have been of great importance to me are Obrist and Parreno’s *Il Tempo del Postino* (2007), Lucy McKenzie and Paulina Olowska’s

Andro Wekua, Action, 2012. Volcano Extravaganza 2012, curated by Nick Mauss and Milovan Farronato. Photography by Giovanna Silva. Courtesy Fiorucci Art Trust and the artist.



project *Nova Popularna* (2003), and Camille Henrot, currently on show at Chisenhale Gallery in London.

Fokidis: Can you reveal any future plans?

Farronato: I am not good at keeping secrets, so I can definitely reveal a future plan. We are very proud to be presenting a site-specific work by artist Nick Mauss. This will be a completely new production, the first one ever of this kind, commissioned specifically for our headquarters in London. In the fall, there will be Paulina Olowska’s Myrcorcal Theatre workshop in Poland. In the words of internationally acclaimed mycologist David Arora, “Mushroom hunting is not simply a matter of traipsing through the woods after the rain. It is an art, a skill, a meditation, and a process.”

Fokidis: Can you name some artists you feel are upcoming?

Farronato: I see Prem Sahib as a synthesis of many forces, from the white cube minimalist aesthetic to the subversive nature of nightclubs. Prem runs a regular club night with artists Eddie Peake and George Henry Longly called Anal House Melt-down. Celia Hempton is a good balance between awareness and desire. Then there is Aditia Mandayama: it is hard to frame his practice as it is constantly in flux, as is his name, which he keeps changing.

Fokidis: When did you realise that you loved art?

Farronato: When I was making up my face and my classmates’ faces in school at 7 years old: this was both my first exhibition and my first creative production. I remember when I found that one of my companion’s skin was reluctant to powder, I tried to use a glue stick to adhere it. My attraction for a specific palette started from that moment: Paloma Picasso’s red lipstick became both my imprint and base note.

Fokidis: Have you ever been disappointed?

Farronato: Paloma Picasso is not in production anymore. Extinction is a problem.

Fokidis: Style and appearance seem very important for you. I personally envy your wardrobe. How do you invent and reinvent your self? What does fashion mean to you? What does style mean for you? Are fashion and style synonymous?

Farronato: I’d like to quote Christodoulos Panayiotou: “There is no self ... There is only invention and reinvention ... style and fashion are the obvi-

ous symptoms.”

Fokidis: Since *Dapper Dan* is a men’s fashion magazine do you want to tell me how you comprehend the barriers, or non-barriers, between masculinity and femininity?

Farronato: I understood this question when I spoke to Camille Henrot one evening here at Sloane Avenue. She was staying with us—like I said we often host artists and the house becomes a place of crossings. Camille and I spoke at length about the many nuances of difference between masculinity and femininity. Through that conversation, I understood that I had understood. But then I forgot what I had understood. Forget Amnesia, again...

Fokidis: Do you think the art world is affected by social conditions? Was it ever affected? Should it be?

Farronato: Art is made by people, so anything that affects society on a broader level inevitably filters through to the art world as well. And in the same way, what happens in art can hopefully also filter through to society at large. It is osmosis. So the most important thing for me is to understand in which direction I can best facilitate this exchange. This can’t always be through art in its purest form: we must also allow for contaminations to happen if this could be beneficial for those involved.