



## THE VOLCANO EXTRAVAGANZA

### Various venues, Stromboli

The rain battered the windows of the writer's London office as she opened her mail. She was tired. She tore open an envelope and read: 'The Fiorucci Art Trust, invites you to the island of Stromboli. Curated by Lucy McKenzie, with the Director of the Fiorucci Trust, Milovan Farronato, "The Volcano Extravaganza" takes as its inspiration the 1982 film adaptation of Agatha Christie's 1941 novel *Evil Under the Sun*.' The writer vaguely remembered seeing the film: it was about a glamorous group of visitors staying on a tiny island, one of whom is murdered. 'I hope,' she whispered, 'this is not a sign.' She continued reading: 'We will supply the beachwear, the page-turner and the scent of the season. A series of informative lectures on subjects will be presented to the public for their entertainment, as will film screenings, exhibitions, dance, music and performance art.' The writer fell into a blissful daydream. 'Sunshine,' she murmured to herself.

A month later. After a long trip, the boat docked at Stromboli. A thin line of smoke drifted up from the volcano into the cloudless sky. A young woman approached the writer, smiling. 'You must be Jennifer.' She led the writer to a whitewashed hotel, overlooking the limpid blue sea, handed her a beach bag and a bright pink parasol, and swiftly disappeared. A little dazed, the writer examined the bag and pulled out a paperback: *Unlawful Assembly* (2013), by McKenzie and Alan Michael. The writer opened the book at random and read: 'You have arrived in the room in which this story takes place. You pick up this book and it describes the room in which you are standing.' The writer shivered, despite the heat. The bag also contained a small wooden box, inscribed with the words 'Evil Under the Moon': it contained a bottle of scent in the shape of a caper. An homage to Arlena, the beautiful, malevolent victim of *Evil Under the Sun*, it was designed by Nicoletta Fiorucci herself. It smelled delicious: like smoke mingling with wild fennel. The bag also contained a poster for a fashion label, 'Pelican Avenue'; and the anthology *Ten Fundamental Questions about Curating*,

published by the Fiorucci Trust. 'Curating is the last thing I want to think about,' muttered the writer. She looked out of the window; waves lapped a black volcanic beach. Without a second thought, she donned a swimming costume, grabbed the parasol – which, she later discovered, was painted bright pink by Peter Saville and Anna Blessmann – and walked towards the sea.

Three days later. The writer had a tan, a hangover and time for one last swim. As she plunged beneath the waves, she tried to make sense of the past few days: the interesting people she had met, and the long conversations about ghosts, memory and fixed-point theory (one of the artists, Bea McMahon, had trained as a physicist). She thought about the filmic meditation on death by Markus Selg, *Dos Ewige Antlitz* (The Eternal Face, 2012) screened beneath the stars in Marina Abramović's old house; the elaborate patterns quoting Islamic rug design, painted on La Lunatica's sun-bleached terrace by Bernie Reed; the chic clothes and accessories designed by McKenzie and Bea Lipscombe; Alison Yip's elegant drawings of beach scenes; the volcano, exploding with a shower of red sparks every 15 minutes or so; the moon glowing like a polished fingernail over a landscape that could have been painted by the 19th-century British artist John Martin. She was sad she had missed gallerist Martin McGee's lecture on fencing, Enrico David's mural and Antonia Baehr's performance 'Ridere, A Selection of Laugh Scores'. However, as the writer swam around the rocks, she felt a nagging sense of guilt. 'Should art be this ...' she struggled for the right word ... 'Enjoyable? Conversational? Isolated?' As the writer chased a fish, she wondered what it meant, exactly, in McKenzie's words, 'to explore the points where fine art encounters design, abstraction and narrative, where fact and fiction become intertwined'. She mused on what Farronato had murmured one evening under the stars: that Alighiero Boetti suggested the name *stra-vaganza* as an allusion to 'those who want to invest in the multiplicity and unexpected nature of encounters'. She flinched as she remembered Farronato also telling her a dreadful story about his hair tangling with a jellyfish. An observation from Agatha Christie's 1946 story *The Hollow* popped into her head: 'What alchemy there is in human beings.'

An hour later. Leaning on the rail of the boat back to Naples, watching the volcano retreat into the distance, the writer wondered how on earth she was going to review 'Evil Under the Sun'. It was, after all, a very unconventional gathering, involving 19 participants – not all of whose work the writer had seen – that went on for a month. Who could stay that long? The writer felt like a character in a fragment of a novel. A line from *Evil Under the Sun* floated back to her: 'It is deplorable [...] to remove all the romance – all the mystery!' The writer sighed and went inside to have an espresso. It was time to return to reality.

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