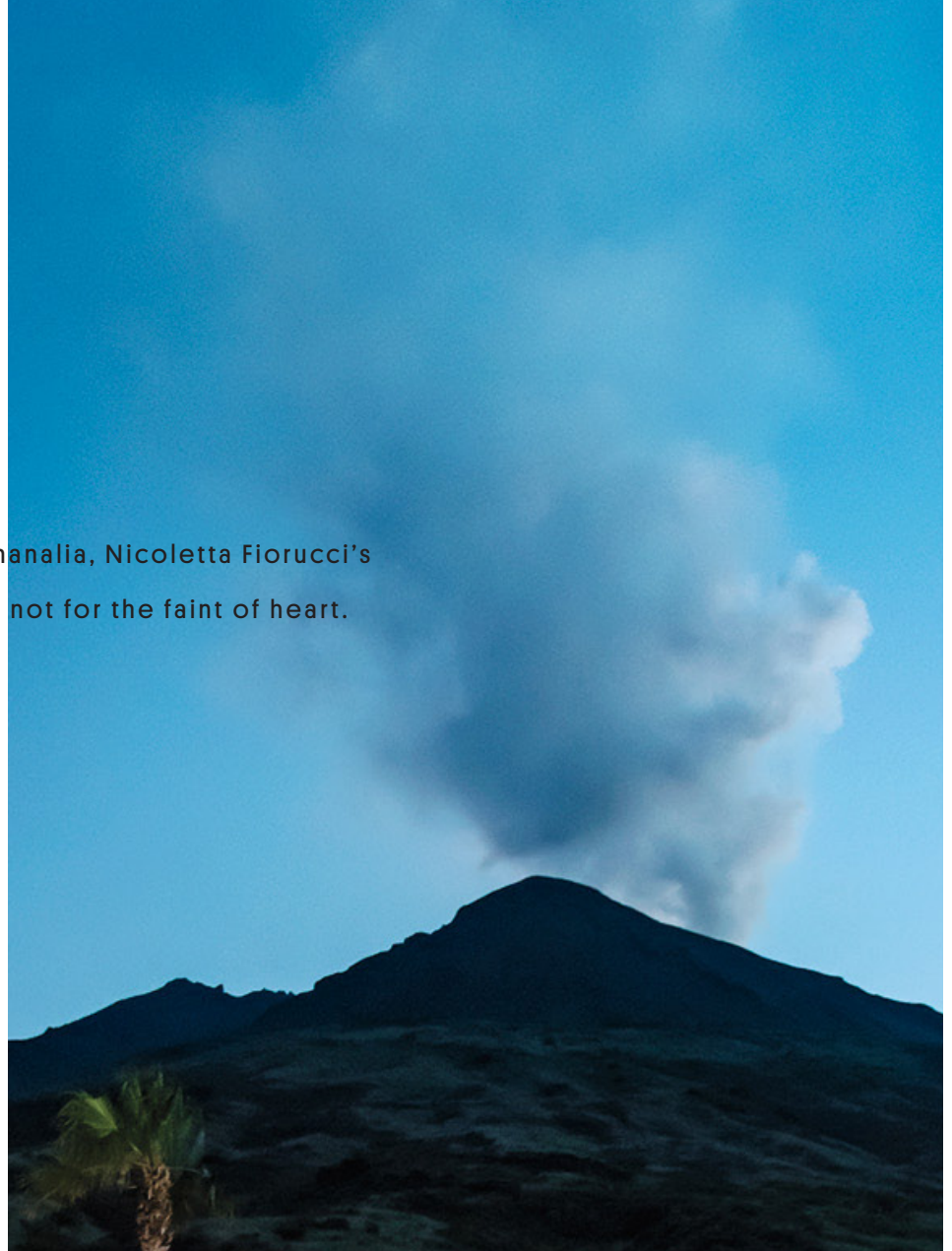


## Sparks Will Fly

Part performance festival, part bacchanalia, Nicoletta Fiorucci's  
Volcano Extravaganza in Stromboli is not for the faint of heart.  
Christopher Bagley makes the trip.

Portrait by Annabel Elston



Last July, if you happened to be wandering around Naples or the Mediterranean island of Stromboli, you might have stumbled upon some unexpected sights. One evening, just before dusk, in the public courtyard of a decaying Neapolitan palazzo, 10 naked Italian men faced off in a soccer match, grunting their way around a makeshift field while spectators watched with a mixture of fascination and feigned nonchalance. The next afternoon, on the outskirts of the city, the volcanic crater Solfatara belched sulfurous columns of steam as dancers in red unitards leaped around to a soundtrack of spoken word, delivered live by the poet Holly Pester. And at dawn two days later, on one of Stromboli's magnificently barren beaches, dozens of young revelers—their bodies smeared with glitter from an all-night dance party at a club up the hill—stripped and sauntered into the water. The British artist Eddie Peake, his emotions surging after orchestrating the events as part of an annual gathering called Volcano Extravaganza, burst into tears before joining the crowd in the sea.

What you might not have noticed during the four-day festival, which began in Naples and ended on the austere volcanic island, was an elegant blonde woman in Loro Piana shorts hovering discreetly at the fringes. Nicoletta Fiorucci doesn't like to make a show of herself at art events or parties—even if she's responsible for them, as was the case here. The founder of Fiorucci Art Trust, the London-based foundation behind Volcano Extravaganza, Fiorucci owns two houses on Stromboli, but she ceded them to staffers and invited guests, retreating every night to sleep on a yacht moored just offshore. She barely exchanged a word with Peake until the festival's last day. ("Eddie is very shy, and he's working, and I don't want to disturb him," she told me.) But with her no-nonsense tactfulness and her knack for fostering an atmosphere of unbridled creative freedom, Fiorucci has been endearing herself to a whole generation of artists. In a world full of art foundations that are thinly veiled bids for social clout, the trust is an outlier that manages to be the real thing.

"In many ways, this experience is exactly what artists aspire to," said Peake, who wore a Maradona soccer jersey as he coached his team through the festival's eight performances, at eight separate locations.

Making art on a remote volcano, he said, away from the scrutiny of London or New York or Basel, "you're free from the psychological constraints that are normally imposed on artists."

Volcano Extravaganza is also a reflection of its idiosyncratic Italian patron. Camille Henrot, the 2016 guest artist, called Fiorucci "a female Ulysses—someone who's always going to places where people rarely go or that are difficult to access." Case in point: Stromboli (pop. 500), the most forbidding of southern Italy's Aeolian Islands. With its stifling summer heat, lava rock beaches, lack of potable water, and ever-rumbling crater, it's one of those spots that seem determined to push everyone away—thereby making itself irresistible, at least to creative types. Devotees have ranged from Roberto Rossellini and Ingrid Bergman, who immortalized the island in their moody 1950 film *Stromboli, Terra di Dio*, to Nan Goldin and Cindy Sherman.

Anyone who spends much time on the slopes of a giant black cone, one that's spitting fiery rock fragments from the depths of the earth, can't help but face all sorts of existential questions, and Fiorucci says the intensity can be too much for some. "There is a natural selection here," she said. "You have to have this romanticism about the human being in front of nature, in front of the unknown. It's an attitude." Those who vacation on the island in summer quickly realize that even standard holiday activities often involve hazards. Without the right shoes, a stroll along the beach can leave your feet covered in bloody gashes. Road signs identifying tsunami escape routes depict a stick figure fleeing in panic, under the crest of a gigantic wave.

Fiorucci first visited the island in 2008, when she learned that Marina Abramovic's whitewashed house near the main village was for sale. She bought that property and a larger one on the shore, and, with the trust's artistic director, Milovan Farronato—a Milanese curator with a track record of innovative collaborations in Italy and elsewhere—began inviting artists for informal residencies. In 2011, Fiorucci and Farronato turned these residencies into an official program, and every summer since they've hosted an artist and a crew of guests for a fully funded





Nicoletta Fiorucci and her dachshund, Gordon, in the living room of her London home, with a painting by Leidy Churchman and a sculpture by Erika Verzutti. Opposite: A view of Stromboli's active volcano.   
Sittings editor: Gianluca Longo





Clockwise from top left: Fiorucci with Milovan Farronato, the artistic director of Fiorucci Art Trust; Ed Atkins performing during "Forget Amnesia," the 2014 edition of Volcano Extravaganza, curated by Haroon Mirza and Farronato; Fiorucci with Giovanni Russo, her partner; a bedroom in Russo's home, formerly owned by Rudolf Nureyev, on Li Galli, where Fiorucci Art Trust holds residencies; a terrace on Li Galli.

happening that lasts several days or weeks. (In 2014, Haroon Mirza's edition focused on soundscapes inspired by Stromboli's continuous explosions of gas; last year, Henrot used films, drawings, and artifacts from her childhood to explore themes of exile and rejection.) All events are open to the public, no works are bought or sold, and artists aren't expected to leave their creations behind. "We just ask for their time and their vision," Fiorucci said.

For the 2017 edition, titled "I Polpi" ("The Octopuses"), Peake and Farronato conceived of a series in which a group of dancers performed the same piece multiple times, each with a change of venue, costume, and soundtrack. A cosmopolitan band of about 150 spectators—artists, curators, writers, friends, plus a handful of curious locals—followed along. "Watching the same performance repeated over and over, but in different settings, it becomes like a mantra," Fiorucci told me during a break. As for the uniform-free soccer match, her initial reaction was pure amusement, since to her it revealed the absurdity of Italy's obsession with soccer. "Finally, these men are naked," she said, "and someone shows that they are human beings, not gods!" But like many in the audience, she found the piece—a new variation of *Touch*, the naked match Peake originally staged as a student at the Royal Academy of Arts, in London—complex and affecting in unexpected ways. "It's very animalistic, and very well

related to Eddie's other performances here, which are all about bodies, contact, competition, action, attraction."

Fiorucci is unmistakably Italian, with her thick accent and warm, easy humor, but as an inveterate nonconformist, she feels most at home outside Italy. Born into a wealthy Roman clan that made its fortune in the production of prosciutto and supermarket meats (the family is distinct from the fashion-y Fioruccis of Milan), she initially studied to become a psychoanalyst, then switched to art history. But in 1994, when her father was temporarily sidelined by illness, she succumbed to the pressure to take the helm of the family business. "I didn't have the strength to say, 'No, this is not my life,'" she recalled. Eventually, her father sold off parts of the company, and five years ago Fiorucci fulfilled a long-held wish of relocating to London. Her son, Andrea, is based there, and her long-time partner, Giovanni Russo, joins her in the city for much of the year. Russo is a well-known hotelier whose family has several luxury properties in Sorrento, including the Bellevue Syrene; he also owns the mythical islands of Li Galli, Rudolf Nureyev's former retreat, where the trust has hosted residencies and small events.

In London, the art trust's headquarters is a homey town house near Earls Court, where, instead of standard exhibitions, the schedule includes weekly meditation sessions. For a rare group show in 2015, artists explored how to use fragrance as a medium (Celia Hempton created a "vagina perfume"). Whether Fiorucci is seeking out works for her personal collection or working with Farronato on the trust's ventures, she steers clear of most things hyped and hallowed. What are the biggest traps she sees for wealthy collectors? "Well, in the world there is a huge amount of cash," she said. "So, of course, some people treat artworks as trophies, which is very sad. I respect everybody, but I don't want to enter into that mentality. To me, it's a way of missing what art really is, which is taking risks, exploring different points of view, living according to intuition." If a collector's main thrill comes from snagging the latest Basquiat to hit the market, Fiorucci added, "then I don't think they actually enjoy art. I wonder why they spend so much money for a work if they don't understand it."

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