

But while *Great Freedom* certainly wrestles with larger issues of social injustice, at its most transcendent Meise's film is a beautifully observed examination of the centrality of sexuality and love to personhood, especially when it has been denied.

For Hans the great freedom is the right to love and do what he will. At one point he protects his sometime lover Leo, testifying that he forced Leo to commit the sex act for which he was arrested. When an overwhelmed Leo asks Hans, "Why would you do that for me?" Hans reticently answers, "Because you are a teacher." Pinned like a fly to the wall, Hans remains a true homoerotic superhero, fighting for the freedom to love, even if actual freedom is the purchase price.—**Mary F. Corey**

Fire of Love

Produced by Shane Boris, Ina Fichman, and Sara Dosa; directed by Sara Dosa; edited by Erin Casper and Jocelyne Chaput; written by Sara Dosa, Erin Casper, Jocelyne Chaput, and Shane Boris; narrated by Miranda July; original score by Nicolas Godin; animation by Lucy Munger; featuring Katia Krafft and Maurice Krafft. Color, French dialogue with English subtitles, 93 min. A National Geographic Documentary Films release, www.films.nationalgeographic.com.

The relation between volcanoes and love has a long history in Japan, as hundreds of lovers and spurned lovers have leapt to their deaths in the fiery depths of Mount Mihara for centuries, but most famously during the Twenties and Thirties. Later in the century, in 1991, another pair of lovers—volcanologists Katia and Maurice Krafft—perished at the foot of Japan's Mount Unzen. Having rushed there to observe an imminent eruption to film and photograph it in action, they, along with forty-one journalists and firefighters, were swallowed by Unzen's powerful excretion of moving earth. Sara Dosa's remarkable documentary, created largely from the Kraffts' visual archive, includes a shot of their final volcano erupting, as captured by a camera abandoned by a fleeing journalist. Although Japanese TV has only recently discovered the beauty and attraction of volcano imagery, the Kraffts had known and pursued these aspects throughout their working lives.

Maurice and Katia Krafft were married to each other and married to volcanoes—several of which are credited as characters in *Fire of Love*. As Dosa has explained, "It wasn't just Maurice and Katia in a relationship; it was almost a love triangle between the two of them and the volcanoes." It was Etna and Stromboli that brought the French couple together in the Sixties. Since then, the Kraffts made photographs and shot 16mm footage of dozens of volcanoes. Working outside any formal institutional context, we learn that the Kraffts were important contributors to the science of vol-

canology. Although their tools for taking measurements and getting ever closer to volcanoes are frequently DIY improvisations, including aluminum HAZMAT suits and rubber life rafts, they disseminated their findings through books, educational films, lecture tours, and TV interviews. After the devastating mudslides in Colombia in 1985—in which 25,000 rural villagers perished after the government refused to credit volcanologists' dire predictions and evacuate the area—the Kraffts devoted themselves to public education and helped to avoid similar catastrophes in Indonesia and elsewhere throughout the world. Their own deaths in the path of a dangerous volcano came as the inevitable culmination of their work—something they openly acknowledged during their lifetimes. As Maurice wrote, "I prefer an intense and short life to a monotonous, long one."

Director Sara Dosa and her team managed to access the Kraffts' imagery through the largess of Maurice's brother and the Image'Est archive in France. Because the couple filmed and photographed one another constantly—in part to show the scale of the terrain they traversed and in part to give character and a human dimension to their films—their archive features them as performers of their own lives. They pose, they play, they dance, but they never display affection for one another, only for the volcanoes they study and stand before in awe. They are often accompanied by teammates who film the couple together, but who are rarely featured themselves in Dosa's compilation. As an archive-based film, *Fire of Love* is one more pandemic project in which home-bound filmmakers have plumbed the archives of the twentieth century to construct new histories from new angles, a great side benefit of the global lockdown. *Fire of Love* deploys creative collage effects to move between different pieces of the Kraffts'

archive, mixed with fragments of their TV appearances, and bits and pieces from many other archives to fill out the story, including etched illustrations from nineteenth-century books and original animation sequences, which tie together the tropes of geology, travel, and volcanic activity.

Some of the Kraffts' footage appears in Werner Herzog's *Into the Inferno* (2016), but where Herzog uses Verdi to augment the spectacle, Dosa has assembled a more subtle soundtrack featuring the French band Air and only a few stately electric guitar riffs to underscore the volcanic grandeur. The sounds of the volcanoes themselves are sumptuous, varied, and awe-inspiring. Beautiful collages of details of the Kraffts' everyday lives in the field punctuate the film. Reel-ends register the small-gauge film stock, as well as Dosa's debt to experimental film practices. She has said that she was inspired by the French New Wave, which was part of the Kraffts' culture. *Fire of Love* certainly conveys the playful reflexivity of the period, along with the temporal and spatial leaps of logic associated with that cinematic movement. At one point, the stirring "Ecstasy of Gold" cue from Ennio Morricone's score for *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) accompanies a shot of men exuberantly galloping on horseback through a volcanic crater desert—a shot filmed by the Kraffts for unknown reasons.

Miranda July's voice-over narration lends the film a certain lightness and whimsicality despite its somber subject. Her voice is throaty, almost like a whisper, as she tells the Kraffts' story, starting from their deaths, as a recounting of their shared journey through the slightly absurd world of volcanology. July's soft voice cuts through the hypermasculinity of Maurice, the real risk taker of the couple. The narration describes Katia as a bird and Maurice as an elephant seal. Katia says, through a voice actor reading from her



In this scene from *Fire of Love*, Katia Krafft wears an aluminumized suit to protect herself from a lava burst erupting at the Krafla Volcano in Iceland. (photo courtesy of Image'Est)



In this scene from *Fire of Love*, Maurice and Katia Krafft watch a volcano from a safe distance while smoke, steam, and ash swirl around them. (photo courtesy of Image'Est)

diary, that she liked to walk behind Maurice over unstable ground because he is heavier than her and in the event of an accident she would thereby follow him to their deaths instead of being left behind. This is perhaps the only moment of vulnerability Dosa shows in a portrait of an otherwise fit, professional, and happy woman.

The couple's obsession to get as close as possible to volcanic geographies, often breaching safety zones, is risk-taking adventure of the highest order. Their mantra is that curiosity is stronger than fear, and that close-up photography is worth the necessary risk, but the film also makes us wonder if it is, indeed, all for science. We see Maurice and another foolhardy scientist get stranded in an inflatable raft in a sulfuric-acid lake that dissolves their metal instruments. Maurice and Katia camp for weeks inside the crater of a bubbling volcano in Africa; they also camp on the beach of an evacuated Indonesian island being bombarded daily by volcano bombs, flying pieces of hot lava, and falling rocks. Maurice's lifelong passion was to build an insulated canoe that would enable him to ride along a red-hot lava flow.

The images recorded by the Kraffts are ultimately what makes the documentary so powerful. The spectacle of hot lava flows—powerful blasts that make fireworks seem pathetic in comparison—and daredevil exploits with figures repeatedly silhouetted against walls of fire or on the lips of craters, is balanced by serene details of cave interiors, geological formations, volcanic debris, and flora and fauna. Scenes of the devastation following the eruption of Mount Nyiragongo in Zaire and Nevado del Ruiz in Colombia are vast and disturbing, cruel evidence of the power of volcanoes to reconfigure the face of the earth in mere seconds. Because we are

not presented with any technical or scientific data beyond shots of recording instruments, *Fire of Love* seems to substitute spectacle for science, but in the Sixties, 16mm film and still photography were scientific instruments, anticipating the drone and surveillance technologies that have subsequently become critical volcanology tools.

In one of his TV appearances, Maurice makes the bold claim that volcanoes cannot be classified, as volcanic scientists have attempted to do, because each one is an individual with its own character. Shortly thereafter, we are told that the Kraffts more simply labeled two kinds of volcanoes—red volcanoes, which are friendly because they are predictable, and gray volcanoes, which are more dangerous because they emit enormous clouds of gas and spew mud in unpredictable directions. The latter type includes Mount Unzen that finally claimed the couple's lives and Mount Saint Helens that claimed the life of their colleague David Johnston. Dosa's supplemental archival images and animations flesh out the mythic nature of volcanoes in the human imagination, and the equation of love and fire in her film suggests that love is also unclassifiable. The uniqueness of the Kraffts' love affair is like the unpredictability of volcanoes and their challenge to scientific method; mythic love is as big and powerful as the natural forces displayed by burning hot lava flows, but at the same time each love affair has its own character and flow.

While *Fire of Love* may not be a film about climate change, the depiction of the planet in action is unparalleled. The smallness and insignificance of human life is indelibly portrayed in the Kraffts' stunning visual archive and in the remarkably dynamic collage crafted by Sara Dosa and her team.—**Catherine Russell**

Il Buco

Produced by Marco Serrecchia, Michelangelo Frammartino, and Philippe Bober; directed by Michelangelo Frammartino; screenplay by Michelangelo Frammartino and Giovanna Giuliani; cinematography by Renato Berta; edited by Benni Atria; production design by Giliano Carli; sound by Simone Paolo Olivero; featuring Paolo Cossi, Jacopo Elia, Denise Trombin, and Nicola Lanza. Color, 93 min., Italian dialogue with English subtitles. A Grasshopper Films and Gratitude Films release, www.grasshopperfilm.com.

Explore Europe from north to south, east to west, and you'll witness many places where the gap between rich and poor is no smaller than the worst gaps in the United States. Americans who first visit Europe, their heads full of overinflated notions of a more equitable, a more just, and a more, well, democratically socialist place than back home are shocked to discover that their image of a relatively better Europe is shattered by the reality. Now, some of these gaps are in some cases less severe than decades ago. I stumbled into a desperately poverty-stricken town in Estremadura, Spain in 1980, less than five years after the death of Franco and just forty-eight hours after having dined at a nice restaurant in downtown Madrid. It was no less stunning than visiting the segregated Black and white sectors of Palm Beach, Florida, around the same time. But nowhere was this gap more pronounced for me in Europe than in northern and southern Italy: the gleaming, fashionable streets and boulevards of Milan, and the devastated outskirts of Bari, home to outrageous living conditions that the Western world associates with the so-called "Fourth World."

Now, it isn't as if European cinema hasn't made clear this persistent gap between rich and poor. Alice Rohrwacher (*Happy as Lazzaro*, 2018) and Pedro Costa (his opus trilogy set in Lisbon's Fontainhas quarter) poetically embed these conditions in their cinema by various means, continuing a tradition that extends from neorealism (perhaps the first film movement to make a foundational element of the political as well as the emotional aspects of poverty in the midst of relative wealth). But a new wrinkle on this perspective emerges in Michelangelo Frammartino's third feature, *Il Buco*, which won the Special Jury Prize at the 2021 Venice Film Festival.

Frammartino has returned once again to his ancestral home in Calabria, where he previously filmed his features *Il Dono* (2003) and *Le Quattro Volte* (2010) and located his installation, "Alberi," presented at MoMA's PS1 in 2013 and Centre Pompidou in 2021. His father was born and raised in Caulonia in the Calabrian Mountains—roughly the location of *Il Buco*—which he left like thousands of fellow Calabrians seeking opportunity in the economically booming Italian north in the Sixties. Similar patterns of internal expatriation hap-



Beyond Wiseguys: *Scarface's* Italian-American mobster was portrayed by a Jewish actor.

The film reminds us how firmly anchored stereotypes are in the American psyche, in some cases because—as with “Tony from Brooklyn,” described as the typical Italian American GI in many WWII films, noted for his pronounced New York accent—they were based in reality. Other intriguing facts are sprinkled throughout the film. Iron Eyes Cody, a perennial performer as a Native American in Westerns and the weeping Indian in a famous anti-pollution public service announcement, is revealed to have been born to Sicilian immigrant parents. Cody is cited as an example of the way Italians, with their Mediterranean appearance, were used by filmmakers as all-purpose outsiders.

Although not noted in the film, there is an implicit similarity in this regard to Jews. The most famous of the early Italian movie gangsters, in *Little Caesar* (1931) and *Scarface*, for example, were portrayed by Jews—Edward G. Robinson in the former, Paul Muni in the latter. The Jews, too, were all-purpose outsiders. It is also a typically American irony that the recent high points of popular culture’s gangster stereotypes of Italians were the work of Italians themselves—Francis Ford Coppola with *The Godfather*, Scorsese with his many films about Italians, and David Chase with *The Sopranos*.

In one of Pacific Street’s rare forays into the world of music, their short film *I Promise to Remember: Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers* (1983), focusing on the brief life and stardom of the group’s lead singer, portrays one of the first Black rock and roll groups to break the color barrier in the Fifties. Lymon and his friends were typical kids in Harlem, having met in junior high school, and practicing and writing their most famous song, “Why Do Fools Fall in Love,” in the hallway of the building in which Lymon lived. Skillfully constructed from interviews and performance footage of Lymon and his backing singers, the documentary provides an exemplary case of the



I Promise to Remember: Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers.

fate of inexperienced, unsophisticated Black performers in the early years of rock and roll who made fortunes for everyone but themselves. Disc jockey Danny Stiles provides a frank explanation for the exploitation to which Lymon and other fleeting stars were subject. “Bands like The Teenagers had so short a time in the sun it was easy to take advantage of them.” Before they even knew they’d been cheated, their careers were over.

Fifty-five years after their first short film, Steven Fischler and Joel Sucher, driven from their Pacific Street office many years ago by rising rents in brownstone Brooklyn, still have films in the works. They are beginning work on a documentary about the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, and still hope to make a film about Fernando Arcos, an exiled Spanish anarchist. Also in the planning stage are *Moishe*, on Morris Levy, the so-called “Godfather of the music business”; *Aldo*, about the caretaker of the old Jewish cemetery in Venice, Italy; and *High Flyers*, about early aviators, many of whom were Black.

The problems of financing radical films remain the same as those they outlined in 1974, but so is their determination to press on. In a *Cineaste* article on the activities in the spring of 1970 of the Cine-tracts group and other radical students at NYU at the time Fischler and Sucher were starting out there, writer Bill Simon wondered “whether the actions of the student filmmakers in the last four weeks will constitute only a brief footnote or whether it is an opening chapter for a continuing chapter.” For most of those involved it was, indeed, “a brief footnote.” For Fischler and Sucher, it laid the groundwork for their life’s work. ■

Distribution Sources:

The Pacific Street Films discussed in this article, with the exception of *Inciting to Riot*, are distributed in the U.S. by The Cinema Guild, www.cinemaguild.com.

Inciting to Riot is distributed by Pacific Street Films, <https://pacificstreetfilms.com>.

Contributors

Mitchell Abidor, a writer and translator born and living in Brooklyn, is the author of many books, including a new paperback edition of his translation of Jean Jaurès’s *A Socialist History of the French Revolution* ... **Adam Bingham** lives in the U.K. where he teaches film studies and writes on and researches Japanese cinema ... **Brent Calderwood** is author of *The God of Longing* and a contributor to *Rolling Stone*, *Noir City*, and *Out* magazines ... **Kevin Canfield** is a writer living in New York City ... **Robert Cashill** is a member of the *Cineaste* editorial board ... **Mary F. Corey** teaches history at UCLA, specializing in U.S. cultural and intellectual history and African American history ... **Thomas Doherty**, professor of American studies at Brandeis University, is author of numerous books ... **Megan Feeney** has a PhD in American studies from the University of Minnesota and is author of *Hollywood in Havana: US Cinema and Revolutionary Nationalism in Cuba before 1959* ... **Graham Fuller** is a *Cineaste* contributing writer ... **Maria Garcia** is a freelance writer and author of *Cinematic Quests for Identity: The Hero’s Encounter with the Beast* ... **Sam B. Girgus** is author of several books, most recently *Generations of Jewish Directors and the Struggle for America’s Soul: Wyler, Lumet, and Spielberg* ... **Rahul Hamid**, a *Cineaste* editor, teaches film at New York University ... **Matthew Hays** teaches film studies at Marianopolis College and Concordia University and is co-editor (with Thomas Waugh) of the *Queer Film Classics* book series ... **Valerie Kaufman** is a freelance writer who also teaches film and writing ... **Jonathan Kirshner** is professor of political science at Boston College and author of *An Unwritten Future: Realism and Uncertainty in World Politics* ... **Robert Koehler** contributes criticism and film writing for *Cinema Scope*, *Variety*, *DGA Quarterly*, and *Sight and Sound* ... **Gary M. Kramer** is a film critic for *Salon*, *Gay City News*, *The San Francisco Bay Times*, and other outlets ... **Alison Lanier** is a cultural critic and researcher based at MIT and has written for *Pajiba*, *Atticus Review*, and *Ms. Magazine* ... **Phillip Lopate**, an essayist and novelist, has written movie criticism for *Cineaste*, *Film Comment*, *The New York Times*, among other publications, and teaches at Columbia University ... **Megan Hermida Lu** is a PhD Candidate at Boston University ... **Cynthia Lucia**, a *Cineaste* editor, is author of *Framing Female Lawyers: Women on Trial in Film* ... **Charles Maland** is professor emeritus of cinema studies and English at the University of Tennessee and editor of James Agee’s *Complete Film Criticism* ... **Adrian Martin** is a film critic and audiovisual essayist living in Barcelona ... **Declan McGrath** is a filmmaker and author of *Screencraft: Editing & Post-Production* ... **Andrew Montiveo** is a writer in Los Angeles and a graduate of film and media studies at UC Irvine ... **Jonathan Murray** teaches film and visual culture at the Edinburgh College of Art ... **Darragh O’Donoghue** works as an archivist at Tate Britain in London ... **Catherine Russell** is Distinguished Professor of Film Studies at the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema at Concordia University ... **J. E. Smyth** is a writer and professor of history living in England. ... **David Sterritt** is editor-in-chief of *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* and author or editor of fifteen books on film ... **Lucian Tjon** is an assistant professor at the University of Cluj in Romania ... **Frankie Vanaria** has a PhD in American studies from Boston University ... **Ezra Winton**, a writer, curator, and teacher focused on the intersection of media and social justice, is the co-founder of *Cinema Politica*. ■

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited
without permission.