

SCENE & HERD

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NISYROS, GREECE 08.01.16



Participants in the Experimental Education Protocol. (Except where noted, all photos: Agnieszka Gratza)

CAN EDUCATION BE SEXY? I didn't used to think so. Twelve days in the company of twelve near-strangers on the volcanic Dodecanese island of Nisyros made me reconsider.

What brought us there—from Athens, Stockholm, Berlin, Brussels, Kassel, Hamburg, and Vancouver—was the Experimental Education Protocol, admittedly not the sexiest of banners. Drafted by artist Angelo Plessas, EEP or #exedupro—in its snappier, Instagrammable version—proposes “an alternative educational model” based on “experiential and communal learning.” For Plessas, whose Eternal Internet Brotherhood has been meeting every year since 2012 in far-flung places around the world, you stand a better chance to learn something from people you've not met before, particularly if you're gathering in “extreme places.”

Sepake Angiama led the way with her flag project. “Desire lines” or “desire paths,” we learned, are shortcuts made in defiance of urban planning. “One person may forge it but others follow it,” Angiama told me as we pored over the “lines of desire” others had drawn onto a piece of cloth for her to embroider with threads of their choosing. Each came with a story, told and retold. (In time, the sewing became a collective endeavor as Angiama struggled to keep up with our storytelling.) Nisyros-devotee Greg Haji Joannides, who has been coming to the island since he was a child and was our point of contact with the islanders, related how he first paddled there with his father from the nearby island of Kos after the engine of their boat went off.



Left: Artists Garrett Nelson and Oliver Laric. Right: Artists Andreas Angelidakis, Sepake Angiama, and Arvo Leo.

For the third summer running, Joannides's Sterna Art Project set up camp in an old-fashioned spa hotel located next to the crumbling Baths of Mandraki in Loutra, which were to house the exhibition at the outcome of our residency. These twin buildings, facing a small fishing harbor and backing onto a whitewashed former desalination factory, became the center of our activities.

Poet Quinn Latimer used the thermal baths, fueled by hot springs, for daily, twenty-minute one-on-one reading sessions staged in adjoining cubicles. That way the reading partners could (just about) hear without seeing one another “taking the waters” in their respective bathtubs. The acoustic or acousmatic potential of the baths was not lost on her partner, sound artist Paolo Thorsen-Nagel. “It's like the Pythagorean veil,” he noted, alluding to pupils of Pythagoras who absorbed the philosopher's teachings in silence from behind a veil-like partition.

By day three we had settled into something of a routine, if not exactly a schedule. Before the daily 11 AM meetings, everyone occupied themselves as they pleased. Angiama was busy embroidering the flag at the crack of dawn. Led by Andreas Angelidakis, toenail-painting “workshops” were on offer. The Greek island seemed to bring out the athletes in us. There were those who ran or swam a mile first thing. Watching topless

artists Oliver Laric and Garrett Nelson doing their pushups in the baking sun one morning, Angiama sighed: "I'm just so glad I wasn't born a boy."



Left: Urbanist Mia Lundstrom and writer Quinn Latimer. Right: Artist Paolo Thorsen-Nagel.

More structured learning activities, such as Plessas's own talisman-making workshop or Angelidakis's anger-release exercises drawing on educational toy volcano molds, took place in a common room overlooking the Kos caldera with the volcanic islet of Strongili—the Round One—in its midst. This was as close to a classroom as it came.

On Bastille Day, the room was transformed as if by magic into a banquet hall in one of the more spontaneous and enjoyable events the first week held in store for us. Orchestrated by Nelson, the evening began with cocktails and *dakos* (the Greek take on bruschetta) inspired by Pierre Balmain's Vent Vert salad from Alice B. Toklas's *Cook Book*. Following Nelson's readings of Mary Oliver's poems as well as one of his own, we feasted on Oliver's July 14 salad, stuffed cucumbers, Greek eggplant gazpacho, and fried fish that Nelson had spent much of the day preparing with the artist [Dora Economou](#).

Then came the party inside the ruined Baths lit up at night with sepia-colored street light, which melded beautifully with the designer gold suits Nelson (and some of us) sported for the catwalk for which we had been collectively recruited. And the group night skinny dip under the stars, once we were exhausted from dancing and Laric's DJing.

Much of the learning from one another happened at the beach. Although opinions were divided as to which is the best on the island, Pachia Ammos, a nude beach with a fine stretch of dark brown volcanic sand—too hot to walk on barefoot—was the default option for afternoon outings. It was there that Thorsen-Nagel got us to listen to the sea with a hydrophone by sticking two microphones into the wet sand.

The beach is also where we were all, one by one, initiated into the art of Brazilian jiu-jitsu by Laric, who sees its mechanics as the perfect antidote to the "ambivalence" (or did he mean ambiguity?) of his life as an artist. "I've seen him do it so many times I don't even find it erotic any more," Latimer pronounced as we saw from a little distance Laric teaching moves that could easily be mistaken for sex positions to Swedish urbanist [Mia Lundstrom](#).



Left: Writer Tess Edmonson and artist Angelo Plessas. Right: Garrett Nelson, Sepake Angiama, and Oliver Laric.

At the Bastille Day-themed dinner, Plessas reminisced about how he and Angelidakis—aka Pale Blue—met online and then, that very same day, IRL. This was on July 17, almost exactly seventeen years ago. A numerology workshop seemed in order. Instead, we marked the anniversary date with uncoordinated yet strangely consonant efforts, from flower garlands and bracelets to custom-made T-shirts and ice cream flavors named after Angelo (watermelon) and Andreas (Reese's Peanut Butter Cups) at our favorite ice cream place—an inspired idea by Arvo Leo, who was full of them.

The Experimental Educational Protocol evinced "the desire for broader regional feedback" from local residents and tourists alike. In some ways we got more than we'd bargained for. Just as we were getting ready for the opening at the Baths of Mandraki—bringing together material and immaterial traces of our activities—a spoof poster came to our attention. Modeled on the Sterna Art Project 2016 announcement posted around the island, the mock "Manifest of Abstract Engagement" listed [Martin Kippenberger](#), Cheese Burger, and [Anish Kapoor](#) among the participants.

That taught us.

— [Agnieszka Gratza](#)



Left: Panos Kokkinias and [Greg Haji Joannides](#). Right: Angela and Andreas ice cream. (Photo: [Arvo Leo](#))

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