

(english)

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### **Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani – L'Avventura senza fine**

Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani practice a strange sort of detective work. The German artists, who have been working together in Berlin since 1993 (exclusively so since 1994), are fascinated with what remains of people after they have disappeared. In the past, they have used high-frequency cameras to photograph electromagnetic fields in houses, once considered a means of capturing the „aura“ of former inhabitants. Although their methods are scrupulous, the artists do not collect these traces in order to reconstruct the past. Unlike real detectives or even historians, they are evidently content to search without the hope of a find.

Michelangelo Antonioni's 1960 film *L'Avventura* provides an appropriate starting point for the pair's most recent investigations, an impressive series of eighteen black-and-white photographs of Lisca Bianca, the island off the Sicilian coast that served as a central backdrop for the film. Disappointed by the return of her lover, the film's protagonist, Anna, takes an old adage to its logical conclusion: If absence makes the heart grow fonder, then why get back together again? During an outing on the deserted island, Anna simply disappears without a trace. Her absence, never explained in the film, sparks an affair between her fiancé and her best friend as they attempt to find her. The title of Fischer and el Sani's series-- „L'Avventura senza fine“ (The adventure without end, all works 2000)--confirms that the search for the missing woman is both endless and futile.

Where Antonioni's film provokes a complex philosophical reflection on the necessity of absence, be it in relationships or representation, Fischer and el Sani's work is harder to pin down, teetering between a reverential homage to the film and pure parody. In their first images, all photographed from the water with a panoramic lens that mimics the scope of the cinema screen, the Aeolian island appears as a majestic landscape. But as the shots move closer, a strange spot suddenly appears, disfiguring the pristine natural setting: a poster of Anna. Her paper face, which seems to cling to the rocky surfaces of the island through the sheer force of the wind, resembles at once a wanted poster, a makeshift memorial, and an amateur reenactment of the film - different attempts to hold on to the past and prevent it from disappearing. As spectators moved from one print to the next, they were unwittingly drawn into a game of „Where's Anna?“ and ended up retracing their own steps in order to find her picture in the first distant shots of the island.

Under Fischer and el Sani's scrutiny, absence is a creative, almost mischievous force, capable of not only renewing our relation to the past but also influencing the present in ways we cannot fathom. Since Antonioni literally banished Anna from the screen, his film implied that a woman who wants both independence and love simply cannot exist. By putting Anna back into the scenery of the film, if only on paper, Fischer and el Sani seem to suggest that she is still looking for a screen that could contain her story. The only explanation provided by the artists came in the form of excerpts from a travelogue, which documented an altogether unexpected encounter. While the pair were completing their project, not Anna, but Antonioni showed up for a celebration in honor of the film's fortieth anniversary. When the artists asked the director what had really happened to Anna, he replied that he didn't have a clue.