

REVIEW

Review of Sara Dosa's documentary *Fire of Love*

2022, Sandbox Films/Cottage M/Intuitive Pictures, 94 min

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Sara Dosa's spellbinding doc opens with the following poetic declaration: "In this world lived a fire, and in this fire, two lovers found a home." Nominated for the Best Documentary Feature at the 2023 Academy Awards and claiming awards at Sundance and in with several critics associations, Dosa's film edits together several hours of archival footage like most scientific and historical documentaries, while also adding a layer of Shakespearean wonder. As the documentary traces the lives of French volcanologists Maurice and Katia Krafft, their tragic star-crossed love story is as beautiful and radiant as the volcanic molten rivers upon which it is told. Dosa is unapologetic about revealing their unfortunate death early in the film, showing the salvaged footage of the culmination of their love affair, from their shared first loves amid the volcanoes of Sicily to their ultimate demise.

The film provides enough handholding for a digestible narrative while encouraging viewers to see the intrinsically reflective metaphors of relationships with humans and with volcanoes. Accompanying the montage of footage is the English-language narration of Miranda July (*Me and You and Everyone We Know*, 2005). Her breathy voice is reverent and dry, letting the soft moments of the Krafft's love and teamwork provide the emotion. The praiseworthy edits made to the hours of film produced a story both comprehensively biographical and narratively interesting – the Krafft's love story being worth the extra effort. It should come as no surprise that Werner Herzog (*Grizzly Man*, 2005) also produced his own take on the Krafft's volcanic odyssey, given its ending that echoes his preferred theme of defying the limits of human exploration. His *The Fire Within: A Requiem for Katia and Maurice Krafft* (2022) is reminiscent of the slow cerebral shots of Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982), making the archival footage fight for the audience's attention. Herzog hopes for us to relish in the "adequate shots" of the couple's explorations, yet forgets to craft a narrative around their relationship, the bond which produced the breathtaking scenes in the first place. In this *Fire of Love* is the superior documentary on the Krafft's saga.

The documentary might flex at the pressures of truly depicting relational nuance and drama, yet it overcomes this by leaning on the personalities of the quirky lovebirds. Contemporary audiences find such a couple extrinsically relatable as their teamwork, backdropped by earth crafting volcanoes reflects the seasons of love so commonly felt in relationships. The episodes of the film go through early infatuation, clumsy mistakes, budding trust, and powerful cooperation: a pattern shared by their discoveries of volcanoes. Truly, this film finds itself a home in volcanic metaphor, where love is just another unsolvable molten pit where folks like the Kraffts grow progressively in appreciation and trust, forging a relationship and a film that is as much about human nature as it is about natural science.