



On the monitor in video artist James P Graham's south London studio, the steam from the vents at the top of Stromboli roars and howls like an animal. 'Strombolian explosions', caused every 15 minutes or so by build-ups of pressure at the vents, blast rocks 150 metres into the air: 'like champagne corks,' says Graham. The first eruption in nearly 20 years sends lava hissing into the Tyrrhenian Sea, leading to a state of emergency on the island and an ongoing ban on visiting the volcano's 924-metre-high crater. Interspersed is moody footage of Stromboli's inimitable smoking conic profile, its caves, its cemetery, dominated by the graves of slaves dropped off by passing Moors, and sunrises and sunsets over the offshore islet of Strombolicchio.

It's all hypnotising stuff, even on an ageing 12-inch screen. And this is just the pilot, albeit one powerful enough to help Graham – a commercials director turned video artist who has exhibited in Barcelona, Paris and Auckland – win a £30,000 grant from NESTA (the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) to shoot the real thing. Graham is cutting this now, a 15 to 20 minute artwork of Stromboli filmed in 360-degree panorama, to be projected onto 12 3.6m x 2.7m screens. With a seamless dodecahedral circumference of 44m, appropriately oriented – north facing north – and complete with surround sound, it's likely to be an immersive experience.

But it's been a long haul. The editing – a pretty daunting job given the multiple footage and synchronisation involved – is the culmination of three years of work; of raising finance, organising and shooting. Graham devised his own system for filming in 360 degrees, designing a unique tripod to bolt on the 12 1970s 8mm cine-cameras he uses to create the panorama. (Each has a 30-degree vista: 12 x 30=360. He reckons he has one of the biggest 8mm collections in the country, most of which was sourced on eBay: 'a godsend,' he says.) Getting permission to waive the ban on visiting the crater was quite a performance, as was hauling all that kit up there (three hours up, two hours back), and setting up the dozen cameras.

Graham worked closely with Italian seismologists who have been studying Stromboli for years, using their kit to spot the seismic pulses that are pre-

80 frames per second to capture the complete event in slow motion (the beauty of analogue: you want high-quality super slow motion, you just run the film faster). The scientists' work will be shown alongside Graham's film, to add an educational dimension to the installation.

As for the inspiration for the project, Graham says he has been driven by a revelatory experience he had on Stromboli back in 2000, when he went up to the crater at night and slept out, with the stars above, a distant thunderstorm out to sea, and the crater flaming and spurting below. 'I realised what an infinitesimal speck we are, in the face of all that. Stromboli is inspirational – a sacred space. I wanted to communicate this to others. That's what this project is all about.' 'Iddu' – the Sicilian name for Stromboli, meaning 'him' ('and it definitely is a him,' says Graham) – debuts at London's Sketch Gallery in June, then heads to Rome and Luxembourg. **By Christian Smith**

