READERS GUIDE

- 1. Retired professor of art history Megan Crespi is reflecting on an interview she had with the Viennese Expressionist artist Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980) in Switzerland shortly before his death at the age of 93. What is she an expert on? Why is she thinking about Kokoschka? What did Kokoschka tell Megan about some "juvenilia" stored in fourteen crates in a Vienna art storage vault? What has happened to the crates?
- 2. Megan receives a phone call from the director of the Basel Museum, Hans Tietze. A major double portrait by Kokoschka showing himself with his lover Alma Mahler has been stolen. Left in its place is an exact duplicate, except that Alma has been replaced by an unknown woman. What is Hans Tietze's connection with the artist?
- 3. Megan goes over the drama concerning the doll Kokoschka had made in the likeness of Alma; she then remembers Oscar and Alma's descriptions of their affair via long quotes from their

memoirs. Megan arrives in Basel and meets Tietze at the museum. On the way to his office she stops to admire the riveting painting by Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin, The Isle of the Dead. What are the reminisces of Oskar and Alma about their three year affair? Do they remember it in similar fashion? Do we know yet the significance of The Isle of the Dead? Megan meets with the museum's two restorers. All agree that the substitute *Tempest* showing a blonde woman instead of the brunette Alma is also by Kokoschka; not a copy. What leads them to this conclusion? Are there any thoughts on who the blonde might be? What is the significance of a phone call Tietze receives?

- 4. We meet retired Hunter College professor of art history Bruno Fichte, unacknowledged great-grandson of Alma Mahler. Why does he not use Maher in his surname? What was his son Felix doing in Vevey, Switzerland? Was he successful?
- 5. Megan decides to stay another day in Basel. She muses over the two early

- posters Kokoschka made in 1908 and 1909. How are they so different from each other?
- 6. We meet Leo Lang, grandson of Lilith Lang, whose lovechild with Kokoschka in 1914 was Oskar Lang, Leo's father. What did Leo find hidden under his mother's bed when she died? How does Leo intend to make the whole art world know Alma took Lilith away from Kokoschka? Why does Leo employ the shady agent Agnes Sauer? What does she do to forward his plans?
- 7. We meet Helmut Haesslich, owner of one of Berlin's most prestigious galleries. He has two passions: Böcklin and Kokoschka. What happens when a young restorer shows him his very good copy of the Swiss painter's *Isle of the Dead*?
- 8. Now we meet the gorgeous long-nosed, long-limbed, exotic Greek Desdemona Dumba, great-granddaughter of Vienna's patron of the arts, Nikolaus Dumba. She is a throwback to the 19th C in her absolute worship of Sisi, Austria's beautiful but tragic Empress.

- What else does she have in common with Sisi? What is Xenia?
- 9. Bruno Fichte is disappointed by what Felix has brought back from Switzerland. What is it and why is Bruno disappointed? What emboldens him to consider a theft on a larger scale? And where?
- 10. Megan arrives in Vienna, eager to visit the art storage company where the fourteen crates were stolen. What does she want to ask the owner and why would that be important?
- 11. Now we meet Desdemona's agent, the Greek Theo Papadakis. He is an expert in ferreting out supposedly lost works of art. What has he restituted to Desdemona? Who is second only in fascination to Sisi for Desdemona? What is the unique link between Sisi and Alma Mahler? Who is Constantine Christomanos?
- 12. Leo Lang has picked up Agnes Sauer and her special baggage from the airport. Back at his villa they open the heavy cardboard tube and remove the canvas roll that is the Basel Museum's

- The Tempest by Kokoschka. Why is Agnes surprised at Leo's reaction to the painting? What is Leo's grand plan in which she will play a vital part?
- 13. Megan visits Moser's art storage with her museum director friend Hannes Ohm. What does she manage to find out? How does that help figure out what might be in the fourteen stolen Kokoschka crates?
- 14. The Albright-Knox Art Gallery plans to hold a "Famous Artists and Their Lovers" exhibition. Why does this fit in with Bruno Fichte's bold new plan? How does he go about realizing the plan?
- 15. Leo Lang gives Agnes Sauer a new assignment in his crusade to rid the world of images of Alma Mahler. What is it, and where will it take her?
- 16. Megan visits the Galerie Hummel and is shocked by what she sees on exhibition there. What does she find? When she exits what is the sudden event that causes Desdemona Dumba to say "Oh! You have saved my life!"?

- 17. In New York Bruno Fichte browses the Internet and comes upon the logo *Remove Nudity in Museums*. What does he do next and why? Is he prepared to go the limit?
- 18. In Tokyo now how does Agnes Sauer plan to deface the "Mona Lisa" portrait of Alma. What steps does she take to execute her plan?
- 19. Megan accompanies Desdemona to the hospital. How bad are Desdemona's injuries?
- 20. After visiting the venerable Christian M. Nebehay Antiquariat, Megan goes to the Amadeus Auktionshaus where she is shown a preparatory drawing for Kokoschka's 1909 poster, *Murderer*, *Hope of Women*. What does she think about it and what seal does she see on the back? Who is Kallias Andriopoulos?
- 21. Agnes Sauer manages to deface Kokoschka's Alma Mahler portrait at Tokyo's MOMAT museum. What are the tools she uses and how does she gain unencumbered access to the painting?
- 22. Why does Helmut Haesslich roll up the forged Kokoschka *Portrait of*

- Constantine Christomanos after paying for it?
- 23. When and how does Megan reveal to Desdemona that her islet of Xenia is the same island painted by Böcklin in six versions? What do they decide to do next?
- 24. What is the layout of Jutta Feinstein's *Degenerate Art Revisited*? Which artists are in the bold exhibition at Essen's Folkwang Museum? Why does the layout ultimately cause Agnes Sauer to deface the wrong painting?
- 25. Where is the painting Bruno has had kidnapped delivered and how was the art heist accomplished?
- 26. We meet Karl Palkovska, nephew of Kokoschka's wife Olda. What is his special talent and where has his work taken him? What does he do about the fourteen missing Kokoschka crates, and on what does he depend?
- 27. Megan and Desdemona fly to Berlin to see what Theo Papadakis has informed them has come to light, the long lost Kokoschka *Portrait of Constantine Christomanos*. What is

- their reaction when they see the painting?
- 28. Karl Palkovska successfully creates fourteen small "Kokoschka" still lifes. What does he do then? Why does he decide to go to Vienna?
- 29. Bruno Fichte(-Mahler) sends his son to Vienna to hunt down Megan Crespi. Why? He learns about 103-year-old Margareta Nussbaum's decision to give the Wien Museum her collection of Kokoschka. What chain of events will this set off?
- 30. Why does Leo Lang have a life-size cloth doll which, like the original "Alma" doll commissioned by Kokoschka, includes "all orifices"? What does Agnes Sauer think of her employer?
- 31. Bruno Fichte send his son Felix to Berlin. Why?
- 32. Agnes Teuer arrives in Hamburg and checks out the museum where the seven Kokoschka fans of him and Alma are on display. What are the means she will use to steal them. Why does Leo want her

- not to destroy these particular artworks? Is Agnes successful in her plan?
- 33. Megan and Desdemona visit
 Margareta Nussbaum in Berlin and are
 shown the Alma mural. What happens
 when the 103-year-old toasts the two
 women? How does this make it possible
 for Felix, who has been watching the
 villa's comings and goings from across
 the street, to enter the house? What does
 he do once inside?
- 34. On assignment from Leo, Agnes is in Klosterneuburg. What is she after in the sleepy old abbey town and what does she do to achieve her mission?
- 35. Janette Killar, author of the oeuvre catalogue on Kokoschka, arrives in Berlin. She goes with Megan and Desdemona to see the putative Kokoschka portrait of Constantine Christomanos. What is her reaction?
- 36. Agnes Sauer is in Berlin to stake out the Neue Nationalgalerie's show of *Kokoschka's Women*. What does she see in the third room of the exhibit and why is this so lucky?

- 37. Karl Palkovska shows photos of his fourteen "Kokoschka" still lifes to Theo Papadakis and a fifteenth one in the flesh, a still life with Venice in the background. What does this move Papadakis to do?
- 38. Agnes Sauer has cased the Berlin museum and assembles the equipment she will need to get at the two Kokoschka doll paintings. This includes a wheelchair. Also she needs a partner this time and calls her sister Rita Sauer-Luge to come to Berlin. Why the special equipment and do we know what Agnes's plan is yet? What happens when she tries to execute it?
- 39. Felix Fichte catches Megan at breakfast and importunes her with questions and the assertion that his dad is "real scared" about his own Kokoschka collection with all the "Neo-Nazi" goings-on. She fishes out from him that he and his father are related to Alma Mahler and he inadvertently mentions his father's second home in Nyack. Later Megan conveys this information to Detective Versteckt of

- the Vienna police. Why is Felix following Megan?
- 40. Rita Sauer-Luge flies from Berlin to Vienna and cases out Leo Lang's villa. Why? Through a window she observes him at dinner. His companion is the gynoid-Alma doll. She enters the house unknown to Leo and hides behind the drapes in his bedroom. When Leo comes up with the doll what happens next?
- 41. Karl Palkovska has created two more Kokoschka still lifes, one with a view of Delphi, the other with a view of Jerusalem. Although he could put them on auction with Amadeus, he decides to try to interest the fanatic Greek Kokoschka collector Kallias Andriopoulos in his still lifes, and emails him. He hears from Andriopoulos that very evening. Yes, come the next afternoon to Graz. Why is this so important to the plot?
- 42. All Felix Fichte's efforts to do away with Megan have failed. He decides to redeem himself with his father by

- executing another act. What does he plan to do?
- 43. Megan agrees to fly to Greece with Desdemona. Felix's momentous plan t takes him to Kallias Andriopoulos's villa in Graz. Who is also there?
- 44. What astonishing works of art does Megan encounter at Xenia? And further, why does Desdemona decide to share the contents of the fourteen crates with her? What amazing objects do they find? And what do they *mean*?
- 45. Karl Palkovska shows old Kallias Andriopoulos the two fabricated Kokoschka still lifes. Who impinges upon their conversation? What terrible events happen next?
- 46. Felix flies back, successful, to New York. What happens when he arrives? And what happens to Bruno Fichte?
- 47. Desdemona has a missed call waiting for her. It was Theo Papadakis. She returnes his call immediately and learns the astonishing news that Monsieur Léman of Geneva is putting his Böcklin *Isle of the Dead* up for sale. What is the

- asking price and what does Desdemona do next?
- 48. Both Megan and Desdemona fly to Geneva to see the Böcklin *Isle of the Dead* for sale. What hotel do they stay in and what do they do there that causes a chamber maid to get fired? What happens as they walk on the Lake Geneva promenade? What does Desdemona whisper in Megan's ear?