

PhotoMonth Krakow 2011

Emma Broomfield for The Sunday Times

29 June 2011



‘None of the artists in this exhibition exist. All of the works are copies.’

Krakow ‘11

Last week I returned from Poland after my first taste of Krakow’s Photomonth, an enigmatic, imaginative and occasionally downright baffling show that left me with more questions than answer (which is probably the point).

Entitled Alias, this year’s

festival is being curated by London-based artists Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, who describe it ‘an incomplete survey of invented artists’.

Complicated stuff.

From the outset Alias sets out to break the usual curator > artist > writer formula. Instead Bloomberg and Chanarin kicked off the project by asking a bunch of writers to create a heteronym, i.e., an imaginary character with a history. Then the text is passed to artist who responds with a piece of photographic-based work to represent the character, which is then displayed in one of 23 venues across Krakow – from church crypts to apartment blocks (half of the fun was uncovering them, using a very basic map and an even more basic grasp of Polish).

Adding to the intrigue is the fact that although the writers and artists are cited in the Photomonth catalogue, who collaborated with who to produce what remains a mystery. As a result it's impossible not to spend much of your time comparing notes with other visitors at each venue – which proved to be a great opportunity to compare notes.

Why each of these artists chose to assume another identity is equally as interesting. Their reasons vary wildly; some in the face of a repressive regime, others to allow themselves more creative freedom, and many purely for the fun of it.

As a concept Alias is bold, unapologetic and often tricky to process. As a festival it's varied, pacy and unabashedly passionate. And as a whodunit it's glorious fun which will leave me scratching my head for weeks to come..