

MODERNPAINTERS

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**Krakow Photomonth 2011 venues throughout Krakow,
Poland May 13–June 12**

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Will the real photographer please stand up? Ferreting through the exhibitions that made up the 2011 edition of Krakow Photomonth was a

bit like taking part in one of those English country-house weekends where the object is to identify the murderer. False clues abound, and in the catalogue each "photographer" had a suspiciously unlikely bio.

The brilliant conceit of the co-curators — the London-based photographers Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, a team for 15 years — was to upend the conventional structure of Photomonth, in which well-known photographers show discrete bodies of work, archivally framed and neatly labeled. Instead, they called their Photomonth "Alias," an event that, as a wall text in the central show in the Bunker Sztuki gallery informs viewers, "includes works created by fictional others, spurious institutions, anonymous collectives, and artists who have decided to inhabit an alternative version of themselves. Throughout history artists have deployed this strategy to explore issues of sexuality, gender, race, or political repression.... For others the strategy simply offered a respite from the exhausting job of being oneself."

Ah yes, the "exhausting job of being oneself." It is an ongoing struggle for most artists to develop a voice, a style, subjects that make their work identifiable to a critical — often highly critical — audience. So the opportunity to don a mask and make work as someone else was welcomed by those represented in the web of collateral exhibitions mounted throughout Krakow.

Freed from having to consider their careers and their professional personae, the photographers came up with alter-egos ranging from the wonderfully wacky — George and Patricia Beacher, a committed artistic couple who shoot themselves in odd poses in the English countryside and paste the photos into albums — to the profound: Dora Fobert, a victim of the Nazi extermination of Polish Jews who leaves behind a box of black-and-white photographs of her teenage girlfriends from the ghetto.

The conceit informs even the presentation. Because of budgetary constraints, the curators couldn't afford to insure and ship works, so they requested high-resolution installation images from artists and institutions, blew them up, and hung them on the walls. "We are elevating the installation photograph to the level of an artwork in itself," says Broomberg.

The survey show sets the tone. It contains, for instance, Sophie Calle's 1997 photograph "The Chromatic Diet (Saturday: Pink)," of a place setting featuring pink tableware, pink napkin, and pink food. The piece is a response to Paul Auster's Calle-like character in his 1992 novel *Leviathan*, Maria Turner, who follows a regimen in which each day's meals are governed by a particular color. Other variations on the theme are represented by Matt Mullican's work, which was made under hypnosis.

"He is inhabiting a fictional version of himself," explained Bloomberg.

One wall carried a large low-resolution blowup of a lurid sun setting over a Mediterranean beach supposedly taken from video archives of the Beirut secret police: an anonymous police photographer who was detailed to film the suspicious activity of people, but preferred to film sunsets instead.

"Alias" also features new pieces made especially for the event by 23 writer/artist combinations. The writer invented a story about a photographer, and the artist adopted that persona to make the work. Visitors to "Alias" were liberated as well. They engaged with remarkable work for what it is, unencumbered by preconceptions about the creators. In today's art world, this is a rare and illuminating situation.

<http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/38163/mysteries-and-aliases-at-krakow-phot/>