

Italy

The elusive Giorgione revealed

Venetian archive sheds light on the painter's surname and place of death

VENICE. Giorgione is notorious for his elusiveness in the written records of his day. We have not even known his surname. But a remarkable recent discovery has opened a small window onto his private life. Thanks to the rich holdings of Venice's Archivio di Stato (state archive), and the alertness of the historian Renata Segre, a document has come to light that identifies his family and describes his possessions at his death.

The document Segre discovered is an inventory, drawn up at the order of a judge in the Venetian magistracy (Giudice del proprio), on 14 March 1511, and amended five months later, on 13 October. Referring to Giorgione in the Latin genitive case as *Giorgii pictoris* (that is, Giorgio the painter), it names his father as Giovanni Gasparini. Giovanni's widow is identified as Alessandra, because it was her heir, Francesco Fisoli, who requested the inventory, but she is not called Giorgione's mother, so that question remains open. It is a breakthrough, nevertheless, that we now know that the artist's full name was Giorgio Gasparini.

Though the exact date of his death in the autumn of 1510 remains unknown, the document also informs us where he died: in the Lazzaretto Nuovo, on the quarantine island in the Venetian lagoon.

As for Giorgione's possessions, despite strict laws protecting the houses of those taken to the Lazzaretto, the contents of his home seem meagre even for a man who was reputed to have



Giorgione, *Self-portrait*, undated

lived modestly. Although not a notarial inventory, which would have given information room by room, this is a listing of household goods—beds, benches, a table, kitchen equipment—and clothing. The latter was non-descript, but did include a woman's satin dress. In the October amendment, a fine red gown lined with fox fur was added. The entire lot, however, was valued at only 89 ducats, a paltry amount for so sought-after an artist. The absence of any mention of a painter's materials, or of works of art, suggests the existence of a separate studio, beyond Fisoli's reach.

These are but a few of the findings the newly discovered document makes possible. Segre is publishing the text in *The Burlington Magazine*, and there she explores further the details that allow her to lift, ever so slightly, the veil that covers the life of Giorgione. ■

Theodore K. Rabb

Poland

Krakow photography festival blurs fact and fiction

Artists invited to take on imagined personalities

KRAKOW. For this year's edition of Krakow's Photomonth (until 12 June), which is entitled "Alias", the invited curators, artists Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, have persuaded well-known artists, including Jeremy Deller and Gabriel Orozco, to hide their identities and take on fictional personae instead. "There is a relationship to art at the moment which is: you walk into a gallery with a lot of prior knowledge of the artist, you read the accompanying text and only then do you look at the work," said Chanarin. "We wanted to disrupt this relationship." Indeed, a brief respite from the art world's fame-driven market seems timely. According to Chanarin, the festival is conceived as a "resistance to the phenomenon of the artist as a brand".

Broomberg and Chanarin commissioned 23 writers to each create a text describing an invented character, which was then assigned to an artist to portray. The resulting work is exhibited in venues across Krakow. "Alias" draws on the literary concept of the heteronym—a fictional character with a biography that is distinct from its author—invented by Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa. Through the mechanism of the heteronym, the curators wanted to offer the artists a chance to "break from the exhausting task of being themselves, and from their own artistic practice". One writer-artist couple, for example, created the character of Pearl Fieldlitch and described her trip to the Galapagos islands for which she had saved for her whole life. The



Galapagos project, 2011, by "Pearl Fieldlitch"

work is presented in an old-fashioned album, where her seemingly amateurish photographs of the islands are accompanied by hand-written comments.

In the past, artists have often chosen to obscure their true identity. This is explored in the festival's central exhibition at the Bunkier Sztuki gallery, in what the curators call an "incomplete survey show of invented artists". In the first overview show of its kind, copies of works by artists such as Blinky Palermo, Balthus, Patrick Ireland and Roni Horn, are exhibited alongside works by writers including JT LeRoy, musicians Die Antwoord, and CCTV footage of Mossad operatives who

assumed stolen identities. "While the artistic need to remain anonymous in Europe is one associated with a period in modernism, in the exhibition it becomes clear that this practice is still very active in

“In the past, artists have often chosen to obscure their true identity”

some areas of Africa and the Middle East," said Broomberg. One work in the show is by Egyptian artist and musician

Ahmad Sherif. As an opponent to the Mubarak regime, he created his pseudonym to protect himself from persecution. Shortly before the exhibition catalogue went to press, however, Sherif revealed his name, Aalam Wassef, when Mubarak was deposed.

"Born out of financial necessity," the works in the Bunkier exhibition are installation shots rather than the original photographs. By including these prints in a photography festival, however, they become works of art in their own right. "The aura of the original work is removed and the focus becomes the idea behind it," said Chanarin. ■

Julia Michalska

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