

the guide

An Exhibition without Inhibition

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Andy Warhol meets Lady Gaga. In an age when drunken escapades have become instantaneous Facebook fodder, thanks to the ubiquitous presence of camera phones, Jeremy Kost's Polaroid exhibition, "Anyone Other Than Me," depicts the flamboyantly fierce characters of the New York City club scene — simultaneously allowing us to indulge in our cultural obsession with photographic vulnerability and forcing us to self-consciously examine the masks we alternatively don and abandon each weekend.



Set in rectangular grids of varying dimensions and non-geometric, collaged arrangements, Kost's raw, unedited snapshots of urban nightlife line the walls of Conner Contemporary Art. Celebrities infamous in the tabloids for scandal and debauchery — Bill Clinton, Katy Perry, Eva Longoria and Pamela Anderson, to name a few — are the tamest of Kost's subjects. Gold-fringed harem boys, naughty nautical nymphs, drag queens of all shapes and sizes, and other club go-ers leap luridly from the white-boxed frames of his photos, drawing the viewer into the bizarre dreamland of the city night. The glittering veneer of exotic costumes and outlandish makeup immediately captivates attention, but it's the grit of emotion beneath the glamour, as unveiled by Kost's deft eye and unusual medium, that connects the alien world with our own.

Whether captured vamping it up on Halloween, or caught in the thousand-yard gaze of intoxication or boredom, the revelers of Kost's photos appear unabashedly naked beneath his lens, no matter how outrageous the costume worn. The seemingly random arrangement of 70-130 Polaroids per square measurement gives the viewer a kaleidoscope depiction of an underground, forbidden world in its various states of undress and vulnerability, as if seen through the eyes of its inebriated inhabitants. Unlike the paparazzi stalker shots of celebrities that reek of voyeurism and shame, Kost's photos reflect the skill of a photographer whose subjects have warmly invited him into their private sanctuary as if an honored guest.

Known merely as "the Polaroid artist" in certain circles, 30-year-old Kost and his camera have infiltrated the sanctum of the NYC club scene to capture intimate portraits of humanity as it revels in its youthful vibrancy and eccentricity. As a Washington-based artist whose Warhol-inspired work was recently displayed in both New York, N.Y., and Paris, France, and is soon to be featured at The Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, Pa., Kost represents the type of raw, innovative artist for which Conner Contemporary Art's curators were searching.

Located in D.C.'s Atlas Arts District, Conner Contemporary Art is dedicated to the promotion of both established and up-and-coming Washington-based artists. Moreover, it seeks to develop a discourse between local and international art by juxtaposing such works side by side. With its focus upon works that reflect the realist and abstract movements, the gallery frequently features figure-based exhibits in which experimentation in artistic medium reigns. Kost's edgy Polaroid snapshots of celebrities, drag queens and

other club-goers epitomizes Conner Contemporary Art's figural emphasis while demonstrating a dramatic deviation from the conventional style of portraiture through collage and cropped perspectives.

Although Kost's photographic grids often appear to be arranged randomly, with a smiling couple dressed as Sesame Street's Bert and Ernie contrasted with the endless legs of a go-go dancer, a certain continuity can sometimes be glimpsed in a corner of the display. By dividing their bodies into five or six separate snapshots taken at imperfect angles, Kost's camera becomes a funhouse mirror that elongates the revelers, representative of how human opinion can further distort the unfamiliar. His impressive use of foreshortening and juxtaposition of mismatched torsos and legs in *One Night of Drama* (Los Angeles) further lends the sense of the forbidden carnival — but the partiers are never the sideshow, but rather the main act.

Moreover, certain subjects such as the drag queen Rainblo are scattered repeatedly throughout the exhibit, both in randomized grids such as "Everyone's A Winner (The Glammys)" and individual, collaged portraits, such as "Rainblo in My Shower" at the Standard, LA, and rendered virtually unrecognizable by the dramatic shift in costume and emotion. Kost successfully transforms the foreign into the familiar as his viewer ceases to fixate upon the gaudy fashion of his subjects, which is constantly in flux, but searches for a familiar face amid the whirling crowds.

Especially fascinating were Kost's individual collaged portraits of club personalities. Backgrounds of shower stalls, trashed rooms and abandoned boulevards fade beneath the vivid expression of his models, who stretch languorously in their decadent glory across multiple photos. Sometimes a shot will capture just the tilt of a hip, but Kost carefully connects the dissected body parts to form a choppy composite. Such grids allow the viewer to more carefully examine the carefully composed conception of each club go-er in their natural environment, brazen in their beauty.

In his desire to capture the exotic underworld of New York City nightlife and deconstruct the elaborate, fabricated identities of his subjects, Kost offers us a fantastic glimpse of the strange sub-culture that awakens nightly beneath the strobe lights and techno beats of urban clubs. "Anyone Other Than Me" forces us to confront our worst fears of exposure as we transform into our looser, nighttime selves each weekend, and shed our daylight masks along the way.

"Anyone Other Than Me" will run until March 6, 2010, and it is open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., or by appointment. Conner Contemporary Art is located at 1358 Florida Ave., NE. For more information, call (202) 588-8750 or log on to www.connercontemporary.com.