

Stolen digital photographs on display in London

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Artists Eva, right, and Franco Mattes look across their art work called 'Stolen Pieces' on display at the Carroll/Fletcher Gallery in London, Thursday, April 12, 2012. The exhibition opens to the public on April 13, and displays stolen fragments from works by a roll call of the 20th century's best known artists. (AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth)

(AP) -- Recognize that picture? Two Italian-born artists are showing off more than 10,000 private photographs they claim to have stolen from random people's hard drives, part of an exhibit that also features fragments cut, torn or chipped off of iconic works by Andy Warhol, Marcel Duchamp and Jeff Koons.

The loot from the art-minded crime spree is intended to raise questions about what's private, what's public, and what makes art "art," said curator Barbara Rodriguez Munoz, who gave The Associated Press a tour of London's Carroll/Fletcher gallery on Thursday.

She was philosophical when asked whether such exhibition also raises legal or moral questions.

"We wanted to create a space where there's room for risk and a room for discussion," she said. "Sometimes if you don't shake those boundaries, you don't create conversation."

The artists, Eva and Franco Mattes, said they gathered their trove of stolen photographs after stumbling on users of a file sharing program who had misconfigured their profiles.

"We were not hackers," said Franco. "By chance we figured it out."

The pair copied the contents of about 100 people's hard drives, downloading pictures, videos, and music which they arranged into a slide show. A projector installed in the darkened front room of the white-walled gallery flashed photographs of people's smiling friends, their grinning lovers, their lazy pets, their unmade beds, boozy nights out, road trips, dances, landscapes, street scenes and more.

Some photos could easily have been pulled off Facebook. Others - shirtless men photographed in the bathroom mirror, women squeezing their breasts for the camera - probably weren't intended for public consumption.

Franco said the stolen photographs weren't intended to humiliate, describing the slideshow as a "celebration of daily life."

He, Eva, and Munoz were all eager to highlight the similarity of their project, entitled "The Others," to [social networking sites](#) such as [Facebook](#), where friends often post intimate photos of each other for the world to see.

"The Internet runs on voyeurism and exhibitionism," Franco said. "All of us are members of this spectacle."

At the back of the gallery, the pair explained another potentially controversial work: A collection of fragments pilfered from museums of modern art.

There was a tag taken from the table leg which held up Koons' "Three ball total equilibrium tank," filaments removed from Warhol's "Ethel Scull 36 Times" and what Franco described as his biggest challenge - a tiny porcelain fragment chipped off of Duchamp's "Fountain" with a Swiss army knife.

Eva Mattes said the pair spent hours scouting out their targets, often taking before-and-after photographs or filming themselves stealing the material. In one case, she said, she enlisted an unsuspecting security guard to help her take pictures. The thefts began in 1995, but the pair didn't go public with what they had until many years later.

Franco said that he and Eva treated the pieces "like relics."

"It was not an act of anger or iconoclasm," he said of the thefts, explaining that what he did was aimed at bringing the pieces "back to life, liberating them."

The pair said they were never caught in the act and had never had any trouble - either from artists, museums, or the police.

He and Eva said they hoped the work, "Stolen Pieces," would one day be displayed in a museum.

"Maybe I should expect someone to steal it," he joked.

More information: <http://www.carrollfletcher.com>

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