

dealers' diary



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Confessions of a Polo player

ON October 20 London-based **Frances Lincoln** publish *Roberto Polo: The Eye*, a sumptuous tome which chronicles the collections in the 40-year career of a remarkable man, **Roberto Polo**, who is now Brussels-based.

A legend to many in the international art world, 60-year-old Mr Polo might not be so well known elsewhere but this book deserves a wide audience as it celebrates the connoisseurship and aspects of the life of a colourful, controversial character sadly now a rare breed among art professionals.

I met Roberto Polo in 2007 at his then recently-opened *Galérie Historismus* on Place des Vosges in Paris, but his name was familiar as he had already packed enough incident and drama into his life to make you think if it was a movie the storyline would not be believed.

Cuban-born, Roberto Polo showed early precocious talent both as an artist, with successful New York shows, and as an art historian, with a parallel career at American academic institutions.

In 1975 at the age of 24 he curated a landmark exhibition in New York, *Fashion as Fantasy*, featuring work especially created for the show by the luminaries including Andy Warhol, Robert Motherwell, Yves Saint Laurent and Karl Lagerfeld.

Known for his taste and sharp eye, Polo rose fast and joined Citibank where he launched the company's



pioneering art investment service. He formed his own company, Private Asset Management Group, in 1991 and built up a fortune with fabulous collections of antique French furniture and paintings and homes in Manhattan, Monte Carlo and Paris.

But after the meteoric rise came a devastating fall, starting with Polo's arrest in Italy in 1988 on charges of misappropriating some \$120m of investors' money. Subsequently, he spent four years in Italian, Swiss and American jails, always, and still, protesting his innocence.

Others also believed in Polo's innocence and he retained his charm and expertise, so after his release old clients returned and approached him to invest for them again.

After losing everything Polo was

Left: Roberto Polo, snapped here by Ivan Terestchenko in Paris in 2007, has had a mercurial career few in the art world can match and much of it is recorded in a book out in October.

back on his feet and in 2006 one of his English hackers helped him found *Galérie Historismus* in Paris. Here he shunned French antiques and dealt in top quality Bauhaus, Modernism and Arts and Crafts.

The gallery was successful with some acclaimed exhibitions, I especially remember one devoted to Eileen Gray. Then two years ago *Galérie Historismus* relocated to Brussels, near the famous Grand Place.

He is settled and happy in Belgium, which is one of the bastions of Polo's beloved European Modernism but, as many Paris businesses seem to be finding, Brussels is also infinitely more tax friendly than France.

Roberto Polo retains an intense and loyal following from many eminent academics in the museum world who still admire his legendary eye and maintain he is notable since he is not just an art dealer but a formidable art historian.

Some of these supporters have contributed essays to the new book, which features over 300 illustrations and costs £95.

Roberto Polo has been described as 'one of the 10 people who has made a difference in the art market' and he has made his mark. The new book focuses on the collector and collections. Personally I can't wait for the autobiography and the complete story.