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News: Dallas Morning News Stories

'Phooning' phenom: It's still-life silliness

Attempt at record poses challenge for Dallasite

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By **DAVID FLICK** / The Dallas Morning News

Amy Martin phoons because it's fun.

But it's more.

"It's about feeling a moment. Most of what we do is mundane. You live for the 10 percent of life that is memorable," said Ms. Martin, 47, a writer who lives east of White Rock Lake in Dallas.

"The philosophy of phooning is that it makes you stop and capture the moment. It's almost like meditating."

Part performance art, part high school prank, phooning consists of being photographed while frozen in a running position, preferably in an unusual or interesting setting.

There's a Web site, of course.

Phoons.com includes more than 800 photos that depict – to pick a few random examples – phooning at a dentist's office, crashing a wedding picture and posing in front of the Tower of Pisa.

Ms. Martin is planning to submit her own contribution. At the annual Summer SolstiCelebration on Saturday at Big Thicket on White Rock Lake, she will organize a circle of phooners in what she hopes will be the largest collective phoon ever photographed.

The current record is 32.

"We'll beat that easily," she said. "For a peace freak, I'm pretty competitive."



Louis DeLuca / DMN

Phooning enthusiast Amy Martin strikes a pose along White Rock Lake in Dallas, where she hopes to gather a crowd this weekend. The mural nearby depicts a runner, not a phooner, though the pose is certainly adaptable.

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John Darrow, the man who invented phooning, is skeptical. Not just any phoon will do.

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"If she's just going to use people on the spot, they need to take a few moments and practice," he said. "The problem is that when you get that many people and they've never done it before, some of them won't do it right."

Mr. Darrow, 42, a technical writer and programmer in San Jose, Calif., is a stickler for precision phooning. On his Web site, he offers a step-by-step guide on the "the right way to Phoon."

Step No. 2, for example, instructs: "Bend your arms at the elbow (think about your elbows, NOT your hands – otherwise, you might point your hands and end up with straight arms)."

As the Webmaster of Phoons.com, Mr. Darrow said he can and will reject improper phoons.

"Some people are just lax about it," he said. "Artistically, the element that ties it together is the pose. If the pose isn't done right, it just doesn't work."

His first recorded phoon was on a family vacation in 1980.

He was 19 at the time, he said, and "I was in a goofy mood."

He has no idea where he came up with the term "phooning." A group of friends at that time often used the word "oon" as a suffix to create nonsense words, and somehow it came from that.

"People ask me if it's related to buffoon or typhoon, but I really don't know," he said.

In the late 1990s, he stumbled upon the old family vacation photos. On a subsequent business trip, he had himself photographed phooning in a mall and then posted the pictures on a Web site.

Then things just grew.

"I started getting photographs from people I didn't know," he said.

Since then, there have been documented phoonings by police officers, ministers, postal workers, doctors, Mormon elders and firefighters. Phoonings have occurred in 37 states and 38 countries.

Goran Lindqvist contributed the first one from Slovenia. Mr. Lindqvist, 38, a strategy consultant living in Stockholm, Sweden, phooned in the main hall of the Slovenian National Gallery, a feat made more difficult because photography was not permitted there without a permit. And as Mr. Lindqvist said, "Getting a permit would have not only taken time but also spoilt most of the fun."

He and a female friend armed with a camera waited patiently until a museum guard left the room, and then Mr. Lindqvist went into a full frontal phoon – just as another guard walked into the room.

"The guard seemed more interested in Amy taking photographs than me making strange poses in front of the pictures," Mr. Lindqvist said in an e-mail interview. "In any case, one of the few shots Amy had time to take came out well."

As the submissions have increased, Mr. Darrow has become increasingly selective.

"I got one from Indiana that was basically just someone standing in his back yard," he said. "That's when I decided to post some guidelines."

The Web site now receives more than 20,000 hits a day, he said. When it debuted on Yahoo! Japan, it briefly spiked to just under 100,000 hits a day.

Philander Scroggs, 35, a Seattle artist, has submitted about 20 phooning photos over the years, of which 17 are now posted.

His method is to set the camera on a tripod, activate the timer, run in front of a local landmark and then freeze in mid-phoon.

"I'm always a little nervous if I start to draw too much of a crowd," he said. "A couple of times I've gotten some weird looks."

Last week, he phooned in front of the locks on the Lake Washington Ship Canal and has plans for a mass phooning of perhaps 100 people, and maybe a phooning by a group of nude bikers.

"It wouldn't be gratuitous. They always put paint on their bodies, so it would be sort of hard to tell," Mr. Scroggs said.

But it still may not pass muster. Mr. Darrow wants to keep his site G-rated.

"I've rejected sexual ones," he said. "I got one from a Canadian sexual talk show, where the stage crew is posing with some, uh, visible sexual items showing. I want this to be a clean site, one where parents can let their children see it without worrying."

Like other devoted phoonists, Mr. Darrow begins by describing phooning as purely a lark, but then waxes philosophical.

"It takes courage to be silly in public, and it takes creativity to come with a really excellent phoon picture," he said.

Ms. Martin, who has organized the Summer SolstiCelebrations for the past nine years, said she intends to organize the circle phoon as a prelude to the solstice service, an event with spiritual overtones.

But the phooning itself will be nondenominational, and she intends to take a few minutes to show people the proper pose.

"I wanted something for the event that was joyous and fun," she said. She thinks phooning also answers a higher call.

"Anything that makes people stop for a moment is good," she said. "Even if it's not necessarily thoughtful, phooning is very yogic in its own way."

And very democratic.

"I can be overly serious about some things," she acknowledged. "But one thing I like about phooning is that it shows that we're all one. People are different, but everyone can phoon."

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