

Adam Broomberg

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DAGENS NYHETER.

ART | REVIEW

Imaginative spring program at Magasin III

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Adam Broomberg, "Glitter in my wounds #8", 2021 Photo: Adam Broomberg

The spring season at Magasin III in Frihamnen offers a whole bouquet of interesting exhibitions and innovative artist presentations. DN's art editor Birgitta Rubin believes that the museum is leading the way in educational innovation.

Exhibitions

"Solar mountains & broken hearts"

Maya Attoun

Various collection presentations

Magazine III Museum for contemporary art, Stockholm. Shown until 17/6

In the fall of 2020, Magasin III – Museum for contemporary art in Frihamnen reopened, after a three-year "pause for thought". New thinking was needed after three decades of growing operations and a changed environment, in addition to a transition from private art gallery to museum. Instead of large-scale presentations of international artistry, a more flexible concept was initiated with smaller exhibitions, greater focus on the collection and more educational activities. This parallels the involvement in the satellite gallery in Jaffa and the new Accelerator art gallery at Stockholm University.

However, the corona pandemic put a damper on several initiatives - but now everything is rolling. On my visit the other week, the museum was full of new arrangements, captivating exhibitions and surprising works. Several push the boundaries of what art can be.



Installation view, "Focus: Lawrence Weiner Magasin III". Photo: Jean-Baptiste Béranger

Of three current exhibitions, two are based on works from the collection. The older one highlights unexpected "Valfrändskaper" - like the German art star Baselitz visible influences from the Swedish painter Evert Lundquist (tom 4/3). The new "In the eye of the viewer" is about how artists depicted others or themselves. Adam Broomberg's close-ups of the trans activist Gersande Spelsberg are magnetic and Tom Friedman's self-portrait "I'm not myself" particularly multifaceted – 250 small, twisted and distorted photos of one's own face!

Add to that several smaller but immersive solo presentations by artists represented in the collection. MERIC ALGIÜN'S "Successes, failures and in-betweens" is an ingenious text work in the entrance, which is based on sample sentences from dictionaries. On April 1, Algün opens his own exhibition at the museum, while the mural is described as an "introduction" to "Focus: Lawrence Weiner".

This American artist (who died in 2021) was one of the leading figures of 60s conceptual art that questioned the boundaries of art, with the aim of reaching a wider audience. One of his so-called "linguistic sculptures" stretches across a long wall. A kind of poetic thought figures presented in everything from public places to simple utility objects, with translations into the local language.

"Something turned into something" is Weiner's inscrutable message to us Swedes, while his yellow plastic tub presumably passes many people by. It says "Along the shore" on one side and something incomprehensible on the others. A translation into Icelandic, it turns out, while the plastic tub itself is identical to the ditto of the fishing industry. In the edition of 60 objects, only ten are in the museum, while the rest function as fishbowls, drifting across the world's oceans to inspire the imagination.



Image 1 of 2 Installation view, "Maya Attoun. Solar mountains & broken hearts". Magazine III
Photo: Jean-Baptiste Béranger

Downstairs in the museum's main hall, Maya Attoun's "Solar mountains & broken hearts", produced for Magasin III Jaffa, is shown. The Israeli artist was to come to Stockholm as an IASPIS grantee and add a new mural, but died unexpectedly this summer. Instead, a corner is dedicated to James Lee Byars' "The path of luck", six vitrines with geometrically intricate and perfectly polished sculptures in blue shimmering granite.

It is a workable emergency solution, as Byars and Attoun share a strict external design language and an interest in the remains of nature. In Attoun's case, a volcanic eruption in 1815 in Indonesia, which dramatically affected the global climate. Volcanic dust prevented the sunlight from breaking through, the temperature dropped, as did jet black rain. It was during this terrifying "year without summer" that Mary Shelley wrote the basis for "Frankenstein".

However, the smallest works on Magasin III have the most explosive power

The catalog booklet explains this background to the exhibition, which also contains esoteric symbols and inspiration from tarot cards. How everything is connected is cryptic to say the least, but in general Attoun's art can be interpreted as a reaction to our time's climate crisis and impending disasters.

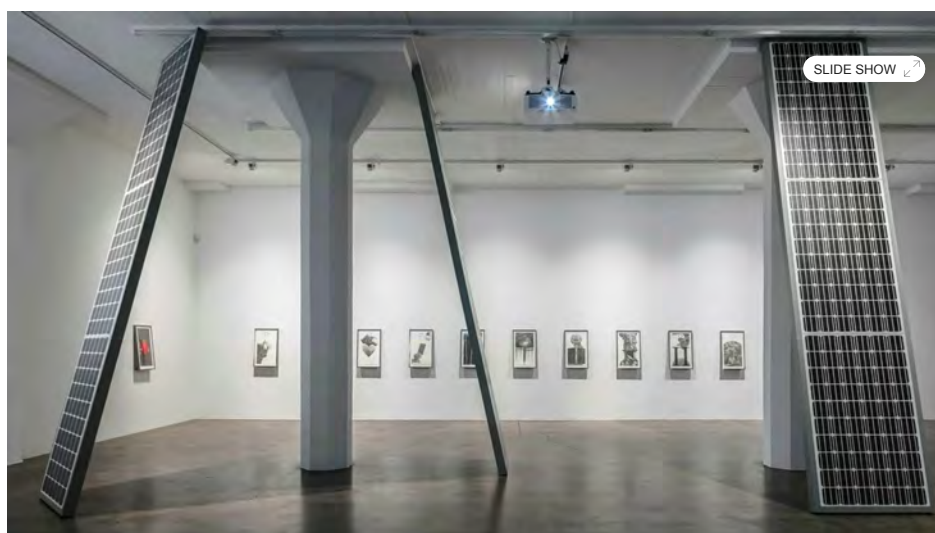


Image 1 of 3 Installation view, "Maya Attoun. Solar mountains & broken hearts". Magazine III
Photo: Jean-Baptiste Béranger



Image 1 of 2 Jill Magid, "Auto portrait pending (detail)", 2005.

Photo: Courtesy the artist and LABOR, Mexico City

All three series of works are meticulously drawn in pencil. Also "Solar plexus", five meter high sculptures that resemble solar panels. During the pandemic's severe lockdown in Tel Aviv, the artist struggled alone with the construction of millions of pencil strokes - and yes, these symbolic solar panels in graphite (mineralized carbon) can be said to transform "human energy into art". Maya Attoun's visual world is alarming but at the same time suggestive and beautiful.

However, the smallest works at Magasin III have the most explosive power, two thought-provoking process works in the library by the American Jill Magid. Here you have to read the fact sheet to understand the challenging and multi-layered ideas behind the inconspicuous ring without a stone and the necklace with an etched charm.

The ring is a self-portrait in the making. Magid has a contract with a company that, after her death and cremation, will create a diamond from the ashes - which, enclosed in the ring, will become a market object. In "Foreign body ingested (Portrait of my son)" it is instead the son who is indirectly portrayed. The boy happened to swallow a special coin, which, after the alarming passage through his body, was attached to a chain as long as the gastrointestinal tract.

The coin is one of 120,000 pennies in Magid's public work "Tender", ordered at the beginning of the pandemic. The coins are engraved with the text "The body was already so fragile" - at once a small-scale intervention in the American economy and a thoughtful, anti-heroic monument that will circulate in society for a long time. Just like Weiner's fish bowls.

Of course, I still miss Magasin III's magnificent solo exhibitions and the focus today can seem fragmented, with a whole bouquet of smaller presentations. At the same time, the museum is on the lookout for new, successful approaches to how to work educationally, activate the collection, generate knowledge exchange and public engagement. In addition, everyone gets a rich art history lesson.

TEXT



Birgitta Rubin

PHOTO SPARK

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The Camera Bag: Great Photography to See Now

Jan 25 - Written By Gabriel H. Sanchez



Photograph by Kris Graves, on view on now in *Pained Vistas* at the Photographic Center Northwest. (Photo courtesy of the exhibition.)

Welcome to the first edition of *The Camera Bag*. Our monthly review column offers a tailored mix of the most exciting exhibition openings and book releases, as well as noteworthy contests, product drops and industry news – all packed into one giant camera bag of goodies. This bag is well stocked with everything to keep you in loop with photography today, and maybe even an unused roll of film floating around the bottom.

In Los Angeles, Kevin O’Meara’s new exhibition at The Fulcrum and its accompanying book, *The Housemate*, takes a quiet and contemplative look at the path to sobriety, while Mona Kuhn’s *835 Kings Road*, on view now at the AD&A Museum in Santa Barbara, is a mesmerizing experience of light, architecture and unrequited love.

At the Photographic Center Northwest in Seattle, curators Jon Feinstein and Roula Seikaly have organized a remarkable exhibition of contradictions titled, *Pained Vistas* – and at Signs and Symbols gallery in New York City, Adam Broomberg joins CA Conrad and Gersande Spelsberg for *Glitter in My Wounds*, a hypnotizing collection of repeating portraits that scrutinizes the nuances of both literal and symbolic transitions. Also on view in New York City, Stephanie Syjuco's *Latent Images* at Ryan Lee gallery reveals the fallacies of the American historical record, while Alec Soth revives vernacular pictures once lost to history at his new exhibition at Sean Kelly Gallery titled, *A Pound of Pictures*.



Photographs by Adam Broomberg, on view in *Glitter in my Wounds* at Signs and Symbols gallery. (Photo courtesy of Signs and Symbols gallery.)

The 30 has released their annual list of New and Emerging Photographers to Watch, which includes the likes of the tremendously talented Rosem Morton, Sebastián Hidalgo, and Clara Mokri, to name a few. For a good submission opportunity, Pomegranate Press is requesting examples of work to be featured in their upcoming group zine of emerging photographers, which in previous years has sold out multiple times over.

Lastly, we at PhotoSpark are on the hunt for new photography to feature and passionate writers to publish. If you are interested in sharing your photography with us or possibly writing a feature or review, shoot us an email at info@photo-spark.com.

Make sure to stop by *The Camera Bag* soon for more exciting news – until then, keep your lens clean and keep shooting.

-Gabriel H. Sanchez

MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

JAN 12 EXHIBITION REVIEW: ADAM BROOMBERG WITH CACONRAD AND GERSANDE SPELSBERG

REVIEWS (/CULTURE/CATEGORY/REVIEWS)



© Adam Broomberg. Courtesy of the artist and signs and symbols, New York, *Glitter in My Wounds* #7

Written by Emily Capone

Edited by Jana Massoud

In his first solo exhibition at signs and symbols gallery, Adam Broomberg collaborates with trans-activist and actress, Gersande Spelsberg, and American poet and professor, CAConrad in his photographic installment, *Glitter in My Wounds*. Drawing on his inspiration from August Sander, whose oeuvre summed up the romanticized, well-timed moment within a photographic portrait, and Helmar Lerski, whose stance on photography was a harsher, more materialistic version of Sander's, Broomberg seeks to redefine the two versions into his own interpretation of the self through photographic identity.

Adam Broomberg (b. 1970) has participated in numerous solo exhibitions, as well as international group exhibitions, including the Yokohama Triennale (2017) and The British Art Show 8 (2015-2017). In his newest photographic series, Broomberg leans into his own reenactment of Lerski's and Sander's works, in conjunction with CACConrad's [poem](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/148106/glitter-in-my-wounds) (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/148106/glitter-in-my-wounds>), "Glitter in My Wounds" from his book, *(Somatic Poetry Rituals*, in which the gross caricature of the LGBTQ+ identity according to a widely accepted cisgendered society is questioned. Using CACConrad's poem as a guide, Broomberg transcends the romanticized nature of the portrait, while dismantling society's primitive and categorized understanding of identity.



© Adam Broomberg. Courtesy of the artist and signs and symbols, New York, *Glitter in My Wounds #11*

Glitter in My Wounds consists of a series of portraits of Gersande Spelsburg, all of which were taken within a duration of 9 hours in Berlin. Adopting the same lighting techniques as Lerski, who uses nothing but mirrors and sunlight for his *Metamorphosis Through Light* series, Broomberg captures each image on a 5"x4" negative, with Spelsburg as the model for a span of 100 photographs. Each portrait appears to be a copy of the last, lining the gallery walls like a monochromatic reel. From afar, the consistency of technique and lighting appears surreal, hypnotizing. Up close, the proximity of space between lens and model forces the viewer to relate.



© Adam Broomberg. Courtesy of the artist and signs and symbols, New York, *Glitter in My Wounds* #8

As if staring at my own reflection, a jarring sense of disassociation first takes effect. I find the autonomous expressions and angular shadows of Spelsburg's jaw and cheekbones to be a primary focus. Then, as if on cue, my eyes try to compartmentalize each photograph from the last. How does *Image #7* differ from

Image #8? The lips appear to smile, then they purse into a slight smirk. The eyes remain soft, then they are steel – a commanding gaze. With the slight tilt of the head, light and shadow carve into the cheek bone of one, in stark contrast with the other.

The face, a.k.a. identity, is not captured in one shot, but in multiple frames. Complex and vulnerable, hardened by reality and softened by light, each image reflects the last but with a subtle change. On view is the same person with multiple versions of the self. However, skin and bone are not key players to any identity. Broomberg questions the subjective nature of an identity behind a face, more specifically, the LGBTQ+ identity amidst the broadly cisgendered mentality that has dominated our society. In this way, Broomberg questions the status quo of identity, mirroring CAConrad's poem through Spelsberg's portraits: "...to know glitter on a queer is not to dazzle but to unsettle the foundation of this murderous culture."

The Adam Broomberg with CAConrad and Gersande Spelsberg: *Glitter in My Wounds* exhibition will be on view at signs and symbols gallery, New York, NY, from January 6 – February 12, 2022.





6 OCT / Elina Ruka / Interview

The (art) world of Adam Broomberg

The artist Adam Broomberg (1970) is best known for his over two decades long collaboration with a fellow artist Oliver Chanarin (1971) that was ended in 2021 with an official statement that Broomberg&Chanarin “legally, economically, creatively and conceptually committed suicide”. Their contribution to the art world is tremendous. Books *War Primer 2* (2011) and *Holy Bible* (2013) that both deal with violence and absurdity of conflict are essential publications in the history of photography. Broomberg pursues various, also collaborative projects that include activism, NFTs and fair photography. A 40 minute conversation over *Zoom* was much about hypocrisy, hierarchy and believing in the good. A marginalized intellectual who has received online death threats for his words of belief and passion, Broomberg continues to defend his political and artistic interests in a new capacity.

He currently lives and works in Berlin. He is a professor of photography at the Hochschule für bildende Künste (HFBK) in Hamburg and teaches in the MA Photography & Society programme at The Royal Academy of Art, The Hague. Broomberg has had numerous solo exhibitions, most recently at Fabra i Coats Centre D’Art Contemporani Barcelona (2021), the Centre Georges Pompidou (2018) and the Hasselblad Center (2017), among others.



Adam Broomberg. Photo by Claude Somot

What preoccupies your mind these days?

I've embarked on a collective project with the main collaborator Issa Amro - an artist and activist who lives in Hebron, Palestine. There are a number of other people collaborating who all have very different and essential skills. There's somebody with the artificial intelligence knowledge, there's somebody dealing with cybersecurity. There's somebody with practical skills such as building cameras, there are other people who deal with a blockchain. It's quite a big group of diverse people, based throughout Europe and Palestine. We're working on a number of projects that all intersect through conceptual art, photography and activism but they are very practical projects.

Is it Artists + Allies x Hebron?

Yes, so for our first project we've installed a number of surveillance cameras throughout olive groves. They send a live stream to various institutions and to a website that we run. It's open to the public, so they can take care, cast an eye and make sure that the trees are okay because they are personally attacked by Jewish settlers and by the Israeli authorities. If you have surveillance, what's the gaze of a surveillance camera? It's a very philosophical thought, of course. We wondered what could constitute a counter-surveillance gaze?

You would imagine there would be an eye looking back at that camera, but we wondered about the drive behind surveillance? It's about control, it's about maintaining power, it's about humiliation because you're robbing people of their privacy. We thought, counter-surveillance could be more interesting when it's a benevolent gaze. It's not about breaking, it's about building and servicing the community. So instead of an aggressive gaze back, it's rather a very gentle gaze using exactly the same technology. It's a camera's gaze at things that are happening live. The cameras were placed to ensure that these trees which are up to 3000 years old, are safe, because they're very important economically, socially and spiritually to the community. It is a very conceptual idea, as well as very practical.

There's a few more projects that we're starting to work on now, for instance, using the blockchain. We have access to a very high-resolution satellite imagery of Israel and Palestine. And we're currently training an artificial intelligence algorithm to be able to identify an olive tree from any other tree from the top. Then the algorithm will also be able to estimate the age of the tree, as well as the geolocation which means that we can identify who the owner of the tree is because, according to all the Palestinian farmers, they have title deeds to their land. The age of the tree, the owner of the tree, and the location of the tree will be listed on the blockchain. When I was little, sometimes, as a birthday present, I would get a certificate of adopting a koala bear in Australia, for example. For \$100 you were feeding the koala bear for five years and you got a picture with the koala bear and its name. We're going to offer people the same experience - they can adopt a tree and that money will go back to the community. It helps to maintain, again, the safety and security of the tree and I think it's interesting to be able to put in the location of your tree and to see it in high resolution on the website. Maybe you get in touch with the local farmer or the family that owns it. You can actually be in correspondence. We are co-opting the technology for a more positive use.



You are proactive at addressing political conflicts, war, injustices – does it come from a socially and politically active citizen or an artist?

They are not separate. I grew up in South Africa under apartheid. I remember at the age of 16 or 17 already collecting images from the archive of the biggest hospital in Johannesburg because it was world famous for people. Doctors would come from all over the world to deal with gunshot wounds and knife wounds. That archive was already politically charged and I was very interested in it. If you look at all the work that I did with my former partner Oliver, there's never been a separation of politics, life, or art. It's all been very connected. The difference is that previously the practice was more manifested as wandering geographically and I think that now it is focused more on building a long-term relationship with a place and with people in the community. I think that's something that's really been missing for me. To make artwork that actually has a profound effect on people's real daily lives.

You are also active on social media, mainly *Instagram*. How effective are the social media platforms in communicating important issues?

It's been effective and helpful. I have almost 40,000 followers and I get a lot of information from it. I'm able to put out a lot of information too but it's so clear that my account is shadow banned. Whenever I talk about something that is particularly sensitive, it's seen by much less people. It's an effective soap-box. In England, every Sunday in Hyde Park corner, there is a so-called Speaker's Corner, people go and stand on a box to shout their opinion. It's a bit like that on *Instagram*, you're shouting and screaming, but it's a bit like shouting into Plato's cave. In the end, I use it as a tool, it's helpful to get technical support or to find particular skills. I try and use it in the best way but I don't have much expectation from it.

There was a recent clash on *Instagram* after you commented on *Vogue's* photoshoot of the Zelenskyy couple. Do you like controversy? Your opinion seems to stir up one. What was the main disagreement about?

It was very interesting. I didn't expect that kind of response, nor the ferocity. My whole practice is based on interrogating images. It doesn't matter if they are on the *Rice Krispies* cereal box or they are in *Vogue* magazine, I always interrogate them and that's what I was doing. But I hit upon a particular nerve, and it showed me many things. First of all, the level of patriotism in Ukraine and also the reactive nature. One can understand, you have people whose very existence is threatened and that's when you react like that, in such anger. However, I also received a lot of death threats for making an academic comment that I constantly do about other images. This war exposed a lot of the hypocrisy of the world and also something which I call the hierarchy of empathy. I created a fundraiser right away as the war happened.



Solidarity prints (<https://solidarityprints.com/>)?

Exactly. We raised a lot of money that went directly to art and cultural workers who are at risk, fleeing Ukraine. I managed to get 150 of the world's most recognized artists to give work as an open edition which normally they would never do in an instant. That is because this was war in Europe. If I was asking for money for refugees fleeing climate change or conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa and trying to cross the Mediterranean, there is no way I would get that response. It was because these were white Western refugees, and it doesn't mean that their pain is any less. I worked alongside a dedicated team of people for four months, full time on that fundraising. I was also at the train station where up to 2000 people were arriving per day in Berlin. This war has generated the same number of Palestinian refugees in the world. Seven to nine million and nobody talks about Palestine even if it's the same amount of suffering.

I found those images and the whole narrative around the war very disturbing, because it makes the assumption that a war is a given and that somebody's going to win this war. Nobody's going to win the war. Nobody wins wars. There is a pathological dictator, threatening a country and there has to be a defence or a push back, but nobody's going to win this war. Nobody won the First World War, nor the Second. They're still going on.



Photoshoot of the Zelenskyy's by Annie Leibovitz for the Vogue

Why is human race so obsessed with war?

I can talk about photography. That (*Vogue's* photoshoot, ed.) was a perfect example of how photography enables a certain narrative, which is, in this case, the brave heroic man, his female counterpart whom he defends, but she also enables him, there is a kind of sexy beauty to it, which we see in photography. There's always a certain degree of sexiness. Even in the writing. The way the Spanish Civil War was written about by Hemingway, it's the same thing, right? But if you look at the writing of the amazing Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexandrovna Alexievich, she writes about war from a feminist perspective, not of the men who are engaged in the battle. It's a very different narrative. I read that there was a lot of correspondence of female journalists during the Spanish Civil War that was just published. It was again a very different narrative to Hemingway's. There's an assumption in photography and in journalism, that being at war is just an inevitable part of being a human. There's also some tendency to glorify or romanticize it and I think those photographs did that. For me, that is dangerous because that makes war inevitable.

So long as there are men, there will be wars.

Well, this is what my father said during the apartheid to his children who were activists: "This is just humanity whom you're fighting against." I think if you don't believe in progress, then you might as well just die. We're in such an interesting time now, because most of Europe is fascist. We're living under this extreme conservatism, and at the same time, we have a generation and my children are in that generation who see the world in such different ways. It's so beautiful, progressive and inclusive. I have a lot of hope.

You don't lose hope for a better world?

I do. Like everyone, I totally lose energy. But I think that's why I like to work with a group of people because then somehow, we keep each other going. If I had to rely on myself only, I think I couldn't do it.

You are a big advocate for Palestinian rights, however you're marginalized in your attempts for help. Do I understand correctly that your initiative to create a campaign for Palestinians similar to that for Ukrainians didn't get the support?

I understood that I need to put my energy into what I believe and where I most focus even if it's like swimming upstream. It's almost impossible to raise money for this project, however, we have fantastic ideas, an amazing team of people. If this was a pro-Israel Zionist project, I would have millions by now, I would have the whole Hollywood behind me. We are building a *GoFundMe* project because I've run out of money. It's again, the hierarchy of empathy, and that depresses me a bit. Because, especially in Germany, they're too scared to fund something like that.

So, there is fear that exists in the art world?

Absolutely. I did work around Israel and Palestine in 2005. I had a show at ICP (<https://www.icp.org/>), in New York, and then we got sued for accusing Israel of ethnic cleansing. I never really had a career in America. Palestine is just a swear word in the art world. I think that's going to change because you've got a new generation, many Palestinians who are being recognized internationally for their work and identifying as Palestinian. I think it's just a matter of time. More and more young Jewish people are coming on tours to Hebron, getting to understand what's going on around them.

How much do art institutions want to get involved in political projects and issues?

It depends on the issue and the country. Identity politics contribute to all the rage in America. LGBTQI+ is not very popular in Poland. But it seems the Palestinian occupation is one universal no go. We asked almost 200 institutions to take part in our olive tree project, only 4 agreed.

Does being a Jew gives you a protective shield when criticizing the Israeli State?

First of all, historically, any Jew that criticized Israel was called an anti-Semite. My entire family apart from my grandparents were wiped out in the Holocaust. I live in Germany, I experienced the apartheid, and I identify very much as a Jew. It's only recently my family are starting to accept some of the work I make, like this last project. When I made a book called *Chicago* in 2005, my father begged me not to publish it, saying that I was betraying the Jewish people. I don't think I've been very protected to be honest.

Looking at your Instagram, I get a feeling that you have a lot of retrospective moments lately - analysing and criticizing the photographic media and your own role there in the past. What do you mean when you say that the traditional photographic practice, technology and experience was toxic?

All of photography involves a relationship that's just a one-way flow of power. The person behind the camera is in control and has all the power over the economics, distribution, and narration. I'm very privileged to be able to look at my work and say, what's wrong and to show people what is wrong. I feel it was work very much of a moment where there was that narrative that documentary photography can be a force for good, that bullshit thing of giving a voice to people without a voice. Give me a break! That's just rubbish. Everybody is quite capable of speaking up for themselves!



Adam Broomberg, Blood in the cut nr. 1, 2020

Are these the ideas where Fair Foto (<https://www.fairfoto.media>) was born from?

That's another project that uses the blockchain. I think it has a real potential. *Adobe* has already done something called the content authentication initiative which means that they are registering all the metadata attached to a digital image on the blockchain. They are just not including the person in front of the camera in the contract or in the metadata. Photography works with copyright, which is very outdated. Other art forms now work with *Creative Commons*, which is a more agile and much more expandable or adaptable contract and practice. Copyright just says "check, you own it forever, bye bye". That's crazy. You can't own somebody's image!

Do you believe that art can change the world or can help in changing the world?

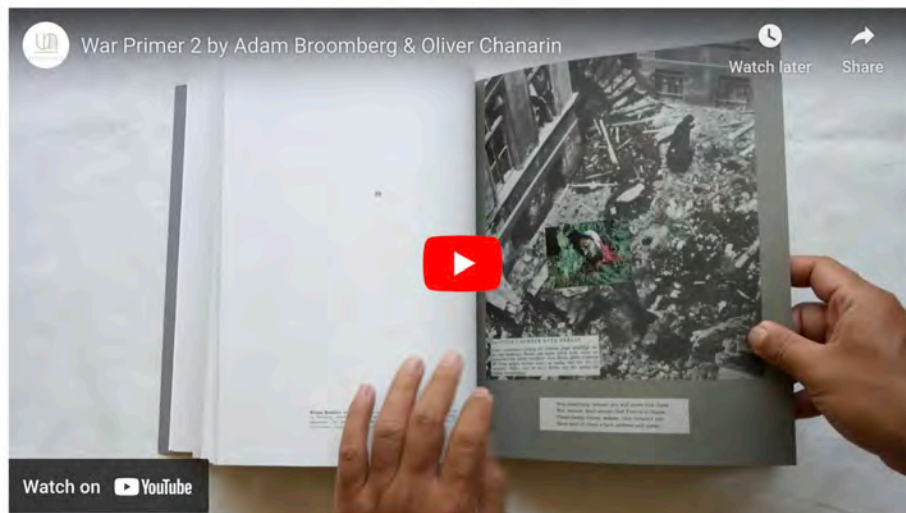
That implies there's art and then there's the world. What's the drive behind the artwork? Is it ego-driven? Is it about getting your name celebrated? Is it about making money? Or is it about revealing the complexity behind being alive, about giving other people a sublime experience or insight into a place or a space you have explored or invented.

What is your drive?

It's changed over time. Mine was about as toxic as you can imagine. It was very ego-driven, very arrogant and very entitled. I had very much a white male's swagger. It's only in the last while that I've come down, I've landed on the ground and trying to become humble and to be of service. Feminist politics would say "the personal is political". The mother of my children often says that I am very good at doing the world politics, but how about the politics within the domestic space? In those terms I've got a long way to go.

Is that the reason why you've stopped the long career with Oliver Chanarin? You seem to still like the collaborative form.

I'd rather not even talk about the past. I talk about that in my therapy, I don't need to talk about it in a magazine.



Where does your interest in NFTs lie? Going with the trend or you're interested in technologies per se?

The idea of registering the Palestinian olive trees, that is a NFT. What we considered NFTs for a couple of years was nonsense, but I have always understood the radical potential of the technology from 2017. What we need to think about is a non-fungible token as a contract. In this case, it would allow the *Olive Tree Project* or *Fair Foto* to use the technology according to its real function. It's not just trade in Pokemon cards as JPEGs really, I think that's kind of over now, thank God. I know the people who bought the thing for 69 million and it was all about crypto trading and inflating a currency. The market was all just false promises to young artists. I think the art world's snobbish response to NFT's was about the aesthetics and the politics, which I think is appropriate, but I think it's going to still be a very big part of the future. I think that the blockchain and the tokens will now start becoming interesting projects even though the market is still wanting figurative photography or figurative painting.

What are the biggest problems in the art world?

There are many art worlds, and I've removed myself from the ones that I find most toxic, which are the ones driven by money, ego, power, money laundering, false economies and bloated ideas of talent, and it's a very big relief to get out of that. It felt like a mixture of gambling and selling your soul, like literally sitting at a blackjack table and having to flirt with the croupier, needing the croupier to say how great you are. A double nightmare. I've had many dinners with the most horrific people until one day I said I had to get away because I didn't see myself in this art world. I'm not sure it was so elegant and conscious. I think I made myself so distasteful. Like when you have a splinter in the skin, the skin just gets rid of it. I think that world got rid of me as opposed to me elegantly turning my back on it. I'm not exactly the most popular person in the art world. I think I've insulted pretty much everyone there is to insult. Some of that I regret. I mean, I could have done things a lot more elegantly. But mostly I am at peace.

MUSEE PHOTO

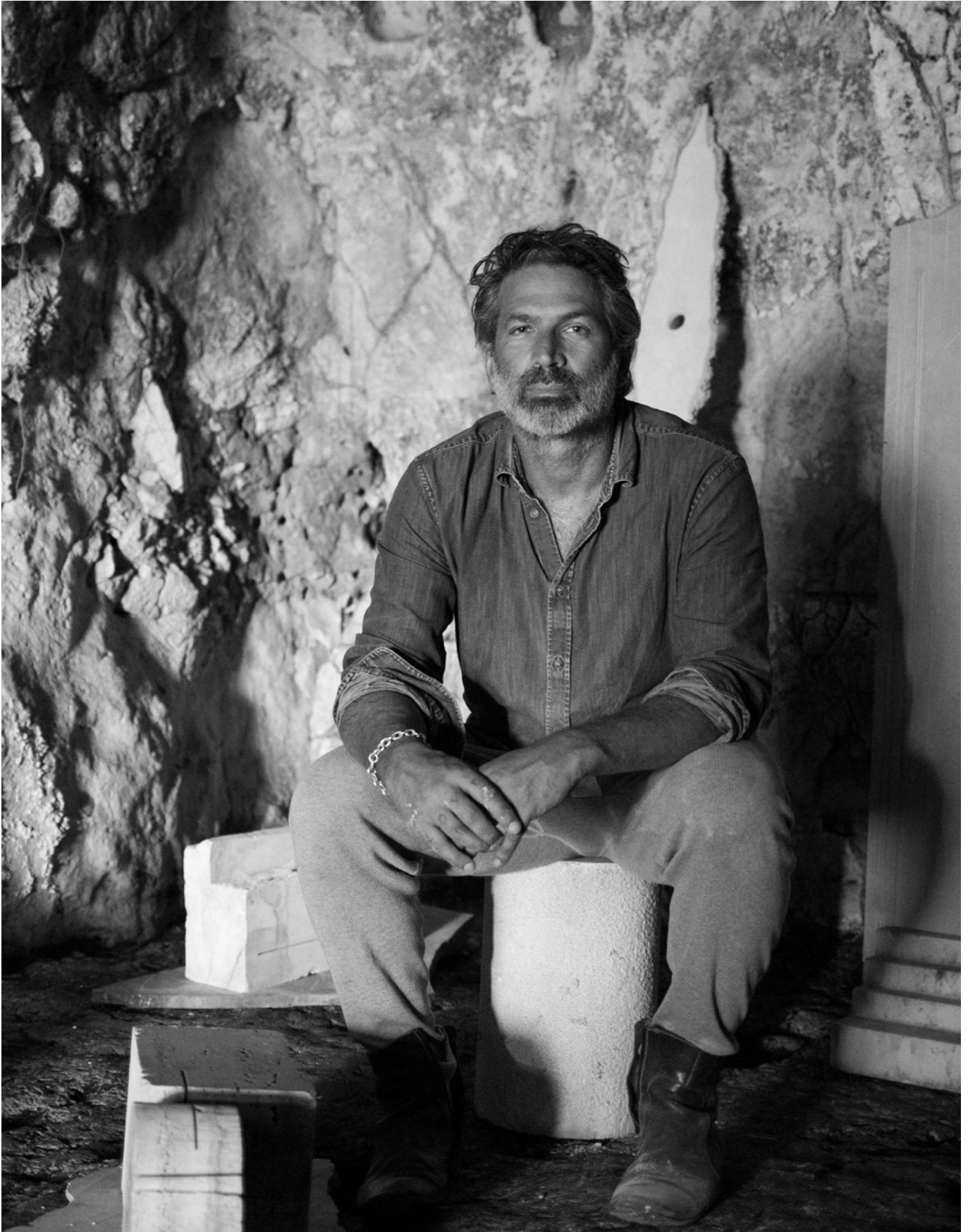
NO 27 PERFORMANCE



ADAM BROOMBERG CARLOS MARTIEL KUDZANAI CHIURAI MARY SIBANDE MIKHAEL SUBOTZKY NOBUKHO NQABA SUE WILLIAMSON FRANZ XAVER MESSERSCHMIDT
TONY GUM ALEC SOTH ALEX PRAGER CALIDA RAWLES JEFF WALL JESSICA LANGE MARILYN MINTER MALICK SIDIBÉ MICHAEL AVEDON RASHAAD NEWSOME
VINCE ALETTI ZANELE MUHOLI CHARLIE ENGMAN DEANA LAWSON GAURI GILL JILL GREENBERG LUCAS BLALOCK BEEPLE SANDRO MILLER THOMAS STRUTH

ADAM BROOMBERG

RAW AND BARE



Adam Broomberg in his Sicily studio, photographed by Melissa Carnemolla.

TERRENCE PHEARSE: *Talk to us about the process of picking up a camera and falling in love again after 30 years. Did you find artistic freedom in creating Glitter in My Wounds singularly after such a long artistic collaboration?* **ADAM BROOMBERG:** Those are two big questions. Let me try and break them down or mix them up. Just a year ago, maybe a little more, just ended a 23-year collaboration with Oliver Chanarin. For the better part of half of that collaboration, we were on the road. We were carrying a large format analog camera through all the places that you would imagine a documentary camera would go. From a refugee camp in Burundi - I remember August 2000, 4 years after the Rwanda genocide - in Uganda, in Burma, on the border of Thailand and Burma, Lebanon, to conflict zones. We were in Afghanistan in 2003, we were in Iraq in 2005, and then prisons, an endless number of prisons. Prison in Mexico, in Sinaloa, the home of the cartel. While it was this kind of dizzying, very adrenalized, unbelievable experience to witness the extremity of joy and suffering of the human condition, also, just to be able to witness that around the world is a remarkable thing. When I look at the outcome of that stuff, of that work, it's not something I feel proud of. In fact, it really disturbs me very deeply. I remember Susan Sontag talking about photography, essentially the camera making everyone a tourist in other people's reality. The quote reads, "But essentially the camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own." This is something I read really early on and I really relate to that statement. I think particularly the way our working process was, we would spend three weeks, a month, in each of those communities or those places I described. I don't remember having a conversation of more than 15 minutes with any one of our subjects. Just picture the scenario, two white men carrying a large format camera, which is technology so associated with colonial expansion, policing, cataloging - all the toxicity of literally 19th century and then early 20th century photography. Ultimately, I think, although we did have a kind of thesis or hypothesis in our mind that we were studying the workings of these gated communities, I think the process really just reinforced or doubled down or repeated the toxic power dynamic, the one way flow of power that photography suffers on, which is, all the power lies in the hands of the photographer and the subject is excluded from the narrative, the economic political, and cultural product that is a result of that. Although we collaborated so well, Olly and I. We really did, but we never really collaborated with the subject of our images. When you say falling in love with a medium, again I would correct it. I don't think I was ever in love with a medium. I think I never really enjoyed it. I enjoyed so many things, but I never really enjoyed the process of that type of photographing. I think the difference is, with the book, it felt like a true collaboration. **TERRENCE:** *All 100 photographs were made during a 9-hour period and shot on 5x4 negatives. What was the metamorphosis through light or life that you wanted to portray by using mirrors and sunlight?* **ADAM:** The whole shoot took place over nine hours, nine very intense hours. To the point where Gigi, who's the subject of all 100 odd pictures, is an experienced actress and she directed me. Not only was it more collaborative, it was, if anything, a kind of reversal of power. Also, the book was kind of framed around a poem by the poet C.A. Conrad. There were these three very different characters. This white cis hetero man who came with a whole lot of baggage in terms of the medium. I can't speak for C.A. or for Gigi, but definitely different relationships with their identities, different struggles. I think that this kind of triangle created an interesting minestrone. Truly, although the shoot took nine months, it took a

year of percolating and just sitting for it to emerge and to warrant becoming something in both exhibition and book form. **TERRENCE:** *What does the poem mean in relation to the context of the series, and how was C.A. Conrad a collaborator?* **ADAM:** I think the series doesn't exist without the poem. And in a way, although the poem existed before the series, it's in its book form the way it's broken up and emphasizes that both the concrete poetry style of the way C.A. lays out their poems. But also, I guess, the ritual, it's not ritual like. It's definitely a series of rituals which they use to create the poem which changes the images, the images change the text. There's a fundamental relationship between those two. And in the exhibition, the photographs are accompanied by Gigi attempting or reading but attempting over and over again to get it better, reading the poem. And that comes from a source hidden behind the images, not behind, but behind an adjacent wall. So this feeling like a performance is going on and it's not quite perfect. Gigi's voice is just exquisite, she sounds like Nico after 20 packets of cigarettes. My meeting with C.A., and we've never met in person, I was introduced to C.A. by an artist called Jason Dotru who also runs a small poetry publishing house. **TERRENCE:** *How did accident and improvisation provide a space to confront the restrictive categories that pervade art, life, and identity?* **ADAM:** I think it's very much about identity, and I think the whole book is about that. I think, there's a curious triangle again between CA's queer and non-binary position, between Gigi's transgender identity and what she's been through and is still going through, what CA has been through and is still going through, and what I'm going through and how we affected each other in these little ways. But I think this poem talks about... Let me just pause for a minute. I think the poem... I am a straight cis man. I think there's elements of me that are definitely queer. But there are elements of defiance which I really relate to in the poem, which are the grit and the courage needed to live a queer life. The line, "You think Oscar Wilde was funny. Well darling, I think he was busy distracting straight people so they would not kill him." Then the way the poem ends, which is, "My friend Mandy calls after a long shift at the strip club to say, 'While standing in line for death, I am fanning my hot pussy with your new book. Will you sign it next week my fearless faggot sister?'" And there's just a kind of almost comic self-referential. But also, there's something about the, wouldn't call it bond, but there's something that CA, Gigi, and me, and I hope I'm not being presumptuous, but we are of a similar age and I think we all experienced this idea of being on the periphery or being somehow on the outside. It's almost as if I could have met CA and I could have met Gigi many times in many places at 4:00 in the morning. It's that kind of fine salvation as not a member of the mainstream, and I think we share that relationship. **TERRENCE:** *I'd like to hear about how you met Gigi [Gersande Spelsberg], and how your purview of Helmar Lurski's work converged once you met.* **ADAM:** First of all, just to say, we met on Tinder. And we met with no intention of doing any work together. But we weren't on a date but landed up talking and found so much in common that it was almost immediately that we were excited by potential things to do together, work together. One of the things, you have these projects that you just carry in the back of your mind and they just simmer and sit there. And eventually they just, I don't know, find a little gap. And someone helps you make that and it just pops out. But I was introduced to Helmar Lurski by the curator now of the Pompidou who curated our show. Now, Florian Ebner, he used to run the Museum Folkwang and he got the museum to acquire a set of a piece of work by Helmar Lurski made in 1936 called *Metamorphosis by Light*. **TERRENCE:** *How do you see the subject and object coming together*



Adam Broomberg, *Glitter in My Wounds #8*, 2021. © Adam Broomberg; Courtesy of the artist and Signs and Symbols, New York.



Adam Broomberg, *Glitter in My Wounds #9*, 2021. © Adam Broomberg; Courtesy of the artist and Signs and Symbols, New York.

through the mechanics of repetition in these photographs? **ADAM:** These pictures, if I could just describe them to you, I think he shot a couple of hundred, but ultimately, he chose about 75 or so. They shot on 8 x 10, they were photographed on the balcony of an apartment in Palestine. So, it's 1936 then called Palestine now it's Tel Aviv in a place some people would call Israel. But the images are very, very unique. And part of it is the choice of subject, but more than anything is the mechanism Lerski used to light it. Which is to surround his subject with a series of mirrors and use sunlight, which is very strong but coming from all different angles. What it does is it accentuates the sculptural, the materialist properties of a face. And he chose a very angular, I guess, sculptural face. You've never quite seen anything like it, I had never. **TERRENCE:** *How did the binary position of August Sander relate to the work? And what were the limitations of Sanders' practice that you felt Lerski's viewpoint opened up?* **ADAM:** When I started finding out about it, that Lerski was a contemporary of August Sander, then I was doubly shocked because, of course, Sander has come to embody the humanist idea of the ultimate portrait, which is the full body portrait or slightly closer up. But the portrait portrays the essential elements of the sitter. It's basically a survey of Weimar Republic Germany, but broken down into these subjects according to what people do, so sometimes their employment or there's the brick layer. But then there's very strange things like the artist's wife. It moves, in hindsight, when you look at it, it starts with the banker and it ends towards the end of the series with the vagrant and the Vagabond and the homeless. So there's a strange moral hierarchy that I don't think was intended but unfortunately, ultimately fits quite neatly into the Nazi eugenic notion of how to categorize. So that is deeply unfortunate. But there was also something that always bothered me a bit about August Sanders's work, which is how it's just seen as such hollowed, perfect portraiture. In fact, when you compare it to Lerski and you listen to the way Lerski talks about pictures in such a materialist way, he literally talks about skin on bone rendered with light, as if he's dealing with a sculptural object or made of stone. And I don't think it's a coincidence that he was just written out of history because pretty much nobody knows about him. Even though his genius is quite apparent, both in a conceptual and aesthetic way and he also went on to become, well he was Fritz Lang's director of photography, he shot Metropolis. So an incredibly talented person, but it is worth thinking through why he's been written out of the history of photography. I would argue that that position was just too radical and still perhaps is too radical. I became obsessed with this series of pictures, and in the back of my mind was always wanting to find somebody to reenact, but in a different way, that series of pictures. **TERRENCE:** *Lerski remarked, "The lens does not have to be objective, the photographer can be, with the help of light. [to work freely, characterize freely, according to their inner face]." How have you used light to be objective in the making of this work with Gigi?* **ADAM:** So, then it slightly kind of dawned on me and I spoke to Gigi and we looked at the work and I just realized that Gigi was the perfect person to do this with. Not only because of the structure of her face, but also the so interesting twists it brought up on the notion of identity. Whereas we look at the ultra-conservatism of August Sander who is not only so binary, but divides society into this clear hierarchy, as opposed to Lerski who deals almost like a sculpture or even a surgeon would deal with a body. And I think Gigi being transgender, being an activist, and also an actress and model brought something entirely different to that space because as Gigi explained her experience of transitioning: it was very interesting for me, because I've never really understood it in the notion of body dysmorphia and



Adam Broomberg, *Glitter in My Wounds #10*, 2021. © Adam Broomberg; Courtesy of the artist and Signs and Symbols, New York.



Adam Broomberg, *Glitter in My Wounds #11*, 2021. © Adam Broomberg; Courtesy of the artist and Signs and Symbols, New York.

the surgical procedures. And in order to render, in order to create an image of oneself, which is what photography's all about. So, it was almost as if we spoke about how Gigi had already engaged aesthetic strategies to create the outward appearance of the self. But then, so I brought in that complexity, but then there was something else which is, I felt that Lerski was like almost devoid of emotion, just treating it as a materialist kind of conceptual, bestial project, and August Sander was too much in the land of nostalgia and... beauty in a way, you know, summary. And what I really wanted to do with Gigi was to do a similar thing, do these hundred odd pictures, also in large formats, also lit with sun and sunlight, but to try and evoke small, minute, tiny different emotional responses in the face, through the tiniest of muscle movements. You know those things that we can't help giving away. **TERRENCE:** *I'd like to hear more about your collaboration while making the pictures.* **ADAM:** So we worked for nine hours. First, I constructed about a five-hour recording, going from things like a baby being born, to a car crash, to a sound of a gerbil drowning in mud to whatever. All these sound effects, hoping that if I just played that it would evoke something, but that didn't work. And then slowly, almost Gigi taught me, kind of directing. And then at one point I was like, "Okay, I want you to close your eyes, and just bring into the room somebody, the closest person to you, the person you loved the most who passed away and just bring them in here". And, she took her time and she opened her eyes and it was clear that she was in that space, and that person was there, and there was genuine grief. And then I quickly said, okay, now I want you..." And she said, "Ah, like don't take me to that place". And then, "No?", then tell me, "there's a fire. Run down the stairs" as a joke. This is serious stuff. But I do hope that that is evident. Those kind of minute changes, but they're not just changes of angle or things. They're emotional shifts. **TERRENCE:** *The photographs in the exhibition at signs and symbols gallery are all unframed C-Type*



hand prints, which in a way read like a film. By way of the quantity and quality of your photographic process, these formally simple images taken at close range appear like a forensic examination through light, mirrors, and performance. **ADAM:** It's all a performance. And I think the fact that Gigi is a performer and there's a kind of this thing, although it was a very meaningful, beautiful, almost kind of spiritual nine hours and we were all exhausted in just the right way. No, I mean, you can't tell anything about Gigi from those pictures, even if she was more stripped bare than she ever normally is. Being an actress, Gigi, she's never without her hair or make-up done or costume. And so, this was also a new kind of quite raw experience for her.



Adam Broomberg, *Glitter in My Wounds #13*, 2021. © Adam Broomberg; Courtesy of the artist and Signs and Symbols, New York.

WELTKUNST

EXHIBITIONS / Thinking and Hope



Photography in Dusseldorf



THINKING AND HOPE

"Think We Must", the main exhibition of the Düsseldorf Photo+ Biennale, hits the nerve of the present: What role does art have in times of war?

By CATHERINE PETER
05/17/2022

The title of the exhibition quotes the English author Virginia Woolf. In the essay "Three Guineas", published in London in 1938, she answers the question written to her by an unknown gentleman: How do you think a war can be prevented? In three chapters she describes in detail why, as a woman in this society, this is not in her power. But one thing cannot be denied and becomes a duty for them: "We have to think". Joseph Beuys later formulated it in a similar way: "If you don't want to think, you're kicked out". Thinking as a necessity, thinking as a political means for the individual human being. Art, not primarily as an aesthetic experience, but as the result of an examination and as an opportunity to stimulate reflection and questioning. This is the approach chosen by Pola Sieverding and Asya Yaghmurian for the jointly curated group exhibition at the Akademie Galerie. The show takes place as part of the second edition of the Düsseldorf Photo+ Biennale. Over 50 exhibitions on photography and media art can be seen throughout the city until mid-June.



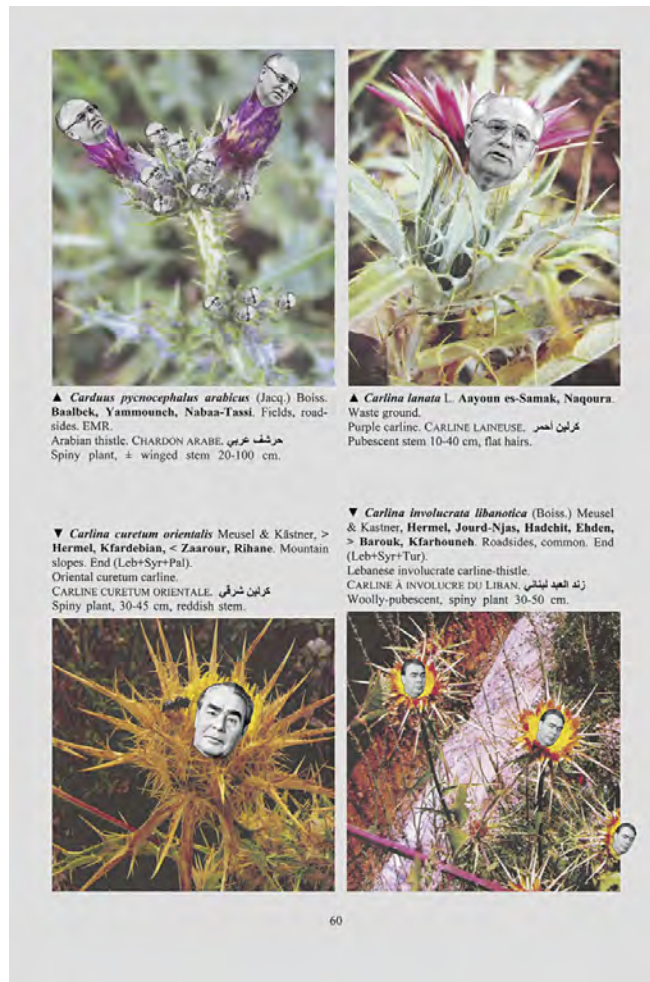
Adam Broomberg photographed actress and trans woman Gersande Spelsberg for his series *Glitter in My Wounds* (2021). © Courtesy the artist and signs and symbols, New York

As you progress through the exhibition, the political aspect becomes clearer. The video work by the Palestinian artist Shadi Habib Allah "Dag'aa" documents a Bedouin smuggling zone on the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. The collages "Better Be Watching The Clouds" by Walid Raad ironically depict the heads of dictators in biological panels. The photo series "Line of Site" shows modified press photographs of Russian and Ukrainian artillery positions in the Donbass. "We should not fall for one narrative" explains curator Asya Yaghmurian while watching the video "Falling Together in Time" by Mexican artist Mario Garcia Torres. This is about amazing coincidences that happened around a suicide attempt prevented by Muhammad Ali. "Jump", the world hit by the band Van Halen, was composed in the same year in the same city. A car driver then requested this song from a radio station while he was stuck in a traffic jam on a bridge. What he didn't know: the reason for the traffic jam was a woman who wanted to jump off the same bridge at the same time. And and and. This uncertain outcome

The more you know about a work, the greater the chance that art can convey something, explains Pola Sieverding in her opening speech. In this sense, the exhibition is accompanied by a brochure presenting each of the sixteen works on display. In the first room, the subject is the individual, including works that deal with the genre of the portrait. When Helmar Lerski realized 140 portraits of the civil engineer Leo Uschatz in the mid-1930s, this was meant specifically as a response to August Sander's project "People of the 20th Century". With "Transformations through Light", Lerski proves how changeable the human face can be simply through constantly changing light conditions. Ten of these portraits, on loan from the Museum Folkwang, are juxtaposed with the work "Glitter in My Wounds" (2021) by Adam Broomberg. When Broomberg photographed Berlin actress and transgender woman Gersande Spelsberg, he was referring to this contradictory view of the portrait in the history of photography: 100 works were created in a single day, within nine hours. The inner life of a person remains hidden, despite constant observation through the lens. The artist Estefanía Landesmann deals with the portrait in a completely different way. Her work "Retrato (Cuerpo de Obra)" is a sculpture consisting of 9000 stacked sheets of printed paper.



The artist Estefanía Landesmann in front of her sculpture "Retrato (Cuerpo de Obra)". © Photo: Catherine Peter



The collages "Better Be Watching The Clouds" by Walid Raad ironically depict the heads of dictators in biological panels. © Courtesy of the artist and Seir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg



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VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

JAN 12 EXHIBITION REVIEW: ADAM BROOMBERG WITH CACONRAD AND GERSANDE SPELSBERG

REVIEWS (/CULTURE/CATEGORY/REVIEWS)



© Adam Broomberg. Courtesy of the artist and signs and symbols, New York, *Glitter in My Wounds* #7

Written by Emily Capone

Edited by Jana Massoud

In his first solo exhibition at signs and symbols gallery, Adam Broomberg collaborates with trans-activist and actress, Gersande Spelsberg, and American poet and professor, CAConrad in his photographic installment, *Glitter in My Wounds*. Drawing on his inspiration from August Sander, whose oeuvre summed up the romanticized, well-timed moment within a photographic portrait, and Helmar Lerski, whose stance on photography was a harsher, more materialistic version of Sander's, Broomberg seeks to redefine the two versions into his own interpretation of the self through photographic identity.

Adam Broomberg (b. 1970) has participated in numerous solo exhibitions, as well as international group exhibitions, including the Yokohama Triennale (2017) and The British Art Show 8 (2015-2017). In his newest photographic series, Broomberg leans into his own reenactment of Lerski's and Sander's works, in conjunction with CACConrad's [poem](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/148106/glitter-in-my-wounds) (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/148106/glitter-in-my-wounds>), "Glitter in My Wounds" from his book, *(Somatic Poetry Rituals*, in which the gross caricature of the LGBTQ+ identity according to a widely accepted cisgendered society is questioned. Using CACConrad's poem as a guide, Broomberg transcends the romanticized nature of the portrait, while dismantling society's primitive and categorized understanding of identity.



© Adam Broomberg. Courtesy of the artist and signs and symbols, New York, *Glitter in My Wounds #11*

Glitter in My Wounds consists of a series of portraits of Gersande Spelsburg, all of which were taken within a duration of 9 hours in Berlin. Adopting the same lighting techniques as Lerski, who uses nothing but mirrors and sunlight for his *Metamorphosis Through Light* series, Broomberg captures each image on a 5"x4" negative, with Spelsburg as the model for a span of 100 photographs. Each portrait appears to be a copy of the last, lining the gallery walls like a monochromatic reel. From afar, the consistency of technique and lighting appears surreal, hypnotizing. Up close, the proximity of space between lens and model forces the viewer to relate.



© Adam Broomberg. Courtesy of the artist and signs and symbols, New York, *Glitter in My Wounds* #8

As if staring at my own reflection, a jarring sense of disassociation first takes effect. I find the autonomous expressions and angular shadows of Spelsburg's jaw and cheekbones to be a primary focus. Then, as if on cue, my eyes try to compartmentalize each photograph from the last. How does *Image #7* differ from

Image #8? The lips appear to smile, then they purse into a slight smirk. The eyes remain soft, then they are steel – a commanding gaze. With the slight tilt of the head, light and shadow carve into the cheek bone of one, in stark contrast with the other.

The face, a.k.a. identity, is not captured in one shot, but in multiple frames. Complex and vulnerable, hardened by reality and softened by light, each image reflects the last but with a subtle change. On view is the same person with multiple versions of the self. However, skin and bone are not key players to any identity. Broomberg questions the subjective nature of an identity behind a face, more specifically, the LGBTQ+ identity amidst the broadly cisgendered mentality that has dominated our society. In this way, Broomberg questions the status quo of identity, mirroring CAConrad's poem through Spelsberg's portraits: "...to know glitter on a queer is not to dazzle but to unsettle the foundation of this murderous culture."

The Adam Broomberg with CAConrad and Gersande Spelsberg: *Glitter in My Wounds* exhibition will be on view at signs and symbols gallery, New York, NY, from January 6 – February 12, 2022.



FAIR FOTO

Interview with [Adam Broomberg](#)

Photography has been a problematic medium since its invention. Due to its indexical qualities we often forget that the medium interprets reality and by no means represents "truth". Subjects portrayed rarely have a say in the way they are represented and almost never receive financial compensation generated by their image.

We spoke with educator, artist and activist Adam Broomberg about his involvement with NFT (non-fungible token), the problematic nature of the medium and his initiative "Fair Foto". Via blockchain technology, it aims to recalibrate power dynamics between photographer and the subject, protecting copyright and proposing an ethical pathway for the future of image making.

FOTODEMIC: How did you get into NFT and how do you interact with it?

Adam Broomberg: About three years ago, there were two pieces of writing that really caught my attention. One by a McKenzie Wark, who is a professor of Media and Cultural Studies at the New School. She wrote a piece called "My Collectible Ass." I'll paraphrase it badly but it spoke about how once rarity was the commodity, increasing the value of the art work. Right now it is kind of inverted, speaking about how, in a way, the more the painting is disseminated on social media, like IG, the more it is copied - the more value it has. McKenzie also spoke about the notion of the blockchain and decentralized economies and open-sourced intellectual ideas.

Then there was another piece by Jason Bailey, "Photography and the Blockchain," and both of these pieces presented a kind of utopian vision of the future that meant that if we accept the fact that now most images are made of digital data, and you can actually verify the data and solidify it in a way and lock it, why not go back to what we believed fifty years ago, like Lucy Lippard wrote in the "Dematerialization of the Art Object"? Literally forty-fifty years ago we were prepared to buy something that was not physical. The problem with photography is that it has always been on the bottom of the food chain in terms of the art world. It doesn't have the aura, the fingerprint of the artist and is also reproducible ad infinitum even if it is analog, never mind digital.

We have a potential to build a utopia, and what do we do? We go and replicate not even the 21st century but the 17th century. We are recreating colonial gestures.

I am a professor of photography at Hamburg University, and I started bringing this up in my class. After watching the blockchain and more recently the NFT environment for about three-four years, what happened now is like a perfect storm: you've got Covid, everybody is inside, you've got a generation that was brought up as gamers, with a particular aesthetic leaning, plus crypto currency became an attraction as a solid investment. And then technological development to the point where, if you ever spend time in the VR chat in a pair of Oculus glasses which cost around 200-300 dollars now, you are walking through a bar, a gymnasium, yoga center or a meditation room. It's an unhinged and wild world. Then you've got other places on the metaverse, like Decentraland and other places which sound equally as insane. Decentraland started a few years ago and it's a digital land, where plots of land were for sale, and what it originally looked like was, I don't know,Trinidad? It's basically looked ripe for colonization without having to kill the local inhabitants. At the time you could buy a plot of land 16x16. Two years ago it cost about 200-300 dollars and now its worth about six times that, while the currency, Manna, increased 600 times in value.

It's a digital replica of the power structure of the world right now, where the middle-aged white men are in power. That is why I got engaged as an ally and collaborator with a number of people who would bring in a different vocabulary into this place.

I can't take the art world response to this seriously. As we know about the art world is ripe with money laundering, and the least regulated economy on the planet. I also don't take seriously their critique of the aesthetics of NFT's. I don't think that "quality" is a valid word when you are critiquing somebody's work. My taste is very different to my little boy's taste who is into Pokemon cards. He sits with me with one of those cards and he describes for half an hour what's impressive and valuable about it, visually and conceptually, and I accept it. I am not judging any of the works that I see on the NFT. What I do judge is when I look at the demographic of the NFT world and see who is producing these works. When I look at the demographic of a place like Decentraland, I look at how the notion of the woman is depicted in these NFT's and all of it starts to get really disturbing. You see that it's 70-80 percent white, middle-aged heteronormative men who are running it, producing it, consuming it. I mean it's Wall Street.

What freaks me out is that we have a potential to build a utopia, and what do we do? We go and replicate not even the 21st century but the 17th century. We are recreating colonial gestures. It's a digital replica of the power structure of the world right now, where the middle-aged white men are in power. That is why I got engaged as an ally and a collaborator with a number of people who would bring in a different vocabulary into this place, for example, a friend of mine, Gigi, who is a transgender activist and an actress, and we made some pieces together.



The White Cube by Adam Broomberg in collaboration with Guy de Lancey and Brian O'Doherty.

A lot of conscription, description and education around NFT happened on the app called Clubhouse. I kind of felt like a spy in this space where I was listening in and contributing and questioning. I wasn't there just to gather some information, just to mint some NFTs to make some money. I was there just listening to the language. And the language was quite interesting, it was quite evangelistic. When I listened to the language what I kept hearing was that it is decentralized, everybody could get rich, even if you are a teenager out in Siberia.

We were watching Black Lives Matter, we were watching institutions struggling with gender imbalance, inclusivity, race, LGBTQI issues and here we have a massive new economy being built, a digital parallel world that is completely oblivious to these completely real struggles that the rest of the world is going through.

It had all these promises, and what I realized was that a lot of the promises were actually euphemisms. Decentralized meant deregulated, that no one is watching. Of course there is gate-keeping there. Another promise was the progressive nature of this technology. I didn't see or hear about any projects that were meant to benefit society in any way.

So this is what started really worrying me about it. In the interim we were watching Black Lives Matter, we were watching all of our institutions struggling with gender imbalance, inclusivity, race, LGBTQI issues and here we have a massive new economy being built, a digital parallel world that is completely oblivious to these completely real struggles that the rest of the world is going through. Which struck me as very strange. I read an article that in Decentraland they are building the biggest museum in the world. It may sound weird, "in the world," because people exist in IRL—in real life—but actually the writer, Legacy Russel, a curator at the Studio Museum in Harlem, she talks about these digital places as essential reference points of our life here. The way we conduct ourselves in those spaces is very important. Where it comes to your point, that yes, it has become a boy's club.

Literally what stopped me from taking pictures was exactly this: the notion of informed consent was a bunch of bullshit. In this new technology there is a potential to solve a lot of the ethical problems that photography has always had.

Is there an ethical, *clean* way of being a photographer?

No. No way. Even when you are taking a selfie. Literally what stopped me from taking pictures—and I did it for 10-12 or more years, from refugee camps to prisons, to psychiatric hospitals, to you name it—was exactly this: the notion of informed consent was a bunch of bullshit. I've made an entire book that took me three years, and everyone in that book was not aware of how their image would be used or disseminated or have any share in the money earned or say in how it's used.

But, with this new technology there is a potential to solve a lot of the ethical problems that photography has always had. However this ecosystem has been built by people who are not concerned about ethics.

A member of my family went to a very elite university to study engineering and coding and in the four years of studying didn't get 15 minutes of ethics. When you study medicine you learn ethics once a week and at the end you've got to sign an oath before you practice. Are you building a bridge to transport soldiers or bread? No one has asked that question, it's just build the bridge in the fastest and most efficient way.



"Going. Full time 1." by Adam Broomberg in collaboration with Gersande Spelsberg and computational artist Isaac Schaal.

I think that the argument of relationship between truth and the image is an old one. It's very conclusive that there is a very dubious relationship between the two.

What about the fears about the synthetic image compromising the credibility of all images and rendering them useless? Can we use this to solve that issue, do you see this as an opportunity to start again? Deconstruct the old notions of image being truth and create new strategies that help us move forward?

I think that the argument of relationship between truth and the image is an old one. It's very conclusive that there is a very dubious relationship between the two. Probably a third of my class in Hamburg and also The Hague are making images—and I can go as far as to call them "photographs"—using 3d scanners, blender, unity, cinema 4d and unreal engine, and people are kind of a little bit up in arms about it. But I'd say that is exactly what happened when digital arrived and the analog people were rejecting it.

When you say that this is a chance to kind of start again, it is but we need to be careful. We know that when Kodak was invented, it was predicated to white skin. We also know that there is a bias built into these algorithms because they are mostly built by white men and unfortunately a lot of this technology it's already been colonized. But it's relatively new so we are not dealing with centuries of colonizations.

People are talking a lot about digital colonialism: access discrepancy due to internet speed or having the money to mint things or engage in this world, emphasizing discrepancy between rich and poor.

If you look at the work of the activist and artist Lajuné Macmillan' who deals with 3d archives. She noticed a chronic lack of black bodies and also black body movement. She also talks about digital black-facing, which is a very interesting and very common thing where people appropriate black body movement and can modify it and make a lot of money on Tik Tok and Instagram. But the point is that the technology is very new and there is time to deal with it.

People are talking a lot about digital colonialism, where they talk about access discrepancy to this stuff due to internet speed or having the money to mint things or engage in this world, emphasizing discrepancy between rich and poor. There are a lot of people doing work around that. At the moment I think that people are on the back foot a little bit, because everyone is screaming "Ethics!".

Everyone involved in Fair Foto recognizes that the notion of photography has always been ethically problematic. The person behind the camera is in a position of power and the subject is powerless in terms of any kind of contract, whether it is financial, or how it's going to be disseminated and in what context.

Can you talk about your idea of "Fair Foto"?

It's really just an idea at the moment. We are in the process of gathering people from various sectors: technology, photojournalism, lawyers dealing with IP as well as talking to companies like ADOBE and Verisart who are involved in blockchain certificates. Everyone involved recognizes that the notion of photography has always been ethically problematic. The person behind the camera, which is generally a white man, is in a position of power, and the subject is powerless in terms of any kind of contract, whether it is financial, or how it's going to be disseminated and in what context.

Steve McCurry's image of the afghan girl is the most known example, which even my grandmother would recognize that it's just wrong. A young girl who is meant to have a face covered is uncovered while being photographed. The image generates millions but the share is disproportionate, plus her life was affected radically and she had to go into exile because she was recognized. But on the other hand, this also works for photographers. Firstly, it has become impossible to control the dissemination of the images on the internet and verify our ownership of

them. Also, wouldn't you want to feel comfortable taking the picture of somebody that you know will have a say in the process of whatever life that picture has, both financially or politically? It's a bit like having a prenup, or a will if you have a partner, or if you are planning to change it after a while.

There is multiple ways of making this contract so easy - simply sharing the email or using facial recognition. And blockchain technology built into the jpg or tiff or the raw file, locates the GPS location, the time but also the identity of the subject are built into the contract.

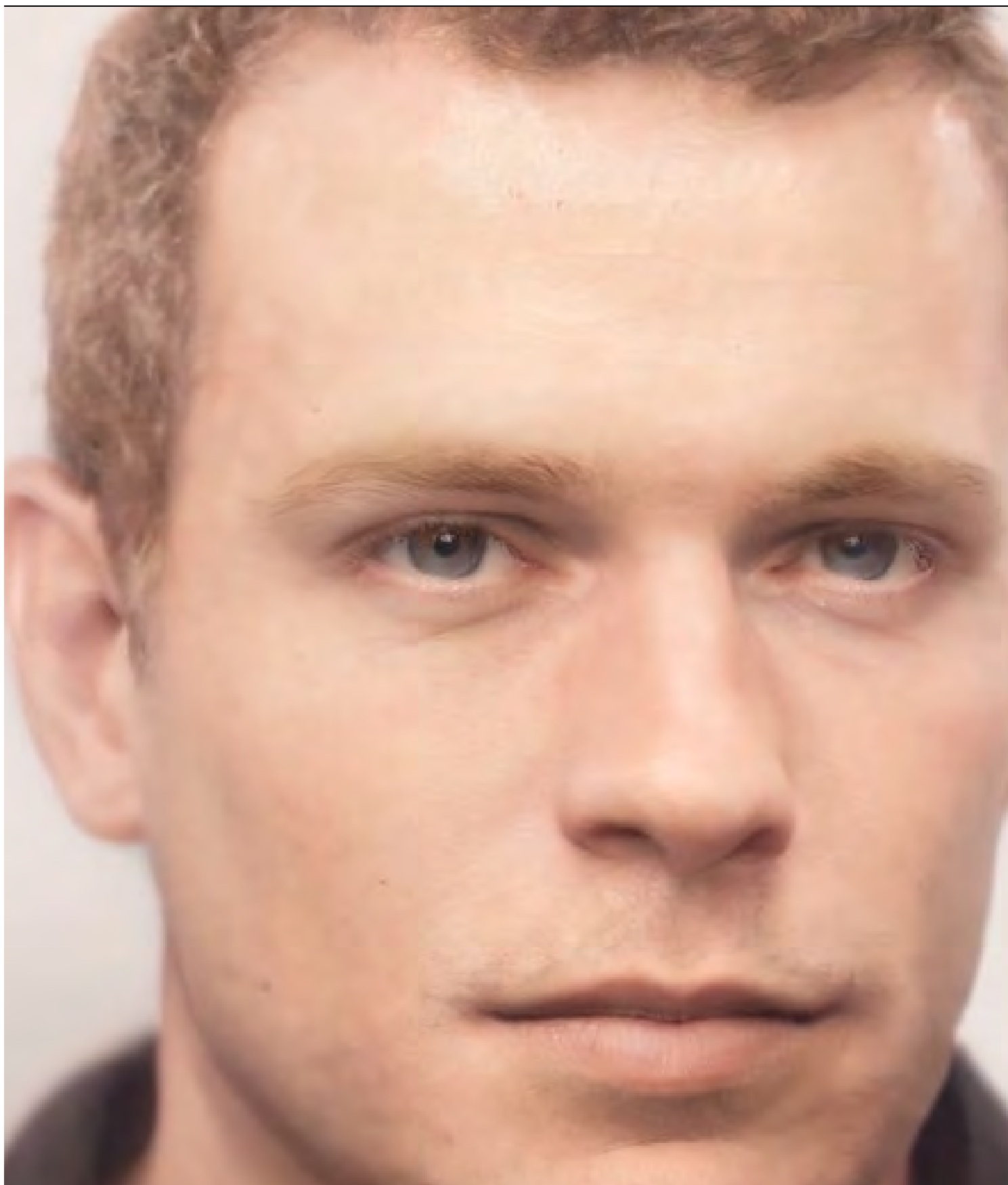


Sex Work by Adam Broomberg in collaboration with Aja Jacques and Segolene Hutter.

NFT seems like a great solution in terms of maintaining copyright, credibility and now you are introducing financial distribution models. Yet again, just it is challenging to be a photographer in a "clean" way, this method seems problematic due to power consumption. There is not a lot of quantitative data available to measure the consumption but some researches suggest that minting a token emits the same amount of CO₂ between an artist studio's electric use of a year to flying a jumbo jet for 1000 hours. Is there a conversation about reducing those emissions?

That is being addressed, they are responding to the pressure. Every time anyone says NFT, it's like "fuck!" It's actually kind of pathetic. It started with the bitcoin, when to verify the value of the coin it had to be "mined." It has to consume the same energy as it would to get the value of gold out of the ground. As if you must insist on that much damage to the planet for anything to be valuable.

There are platforms that don't use Ethereum and there are platforms that don't use the contract called "Proof of Work", instead they use "Proof of Stake". "Proof of Work" consumes an enormous amount and the other one uses barely anything. Again, you have rogue, hungry and greedy people moving very fast, but there has been so much protest about that, that it will change within months and it will be the standard. There are a lot of questions, but I think there are so many questions about photography as we know it, that something has to be addressed and I think that this model might be potentially helpful.



"21" by Adam Broomberg in collaboration with Gersande Spelsberg and computational artist Isaac Schaal.

What do you say to people who think that embedding this kind of tech inside an image is like nicknaming a nuke "the peacekeeper"?

The reason why you got that response and I got that response is because of the perception of the ethical police coming to attack once again a very brutal infrastructure.

This idea troubled many photojournalists, which I understand on the instinctual level, since their job is hard enough right now. There is no money in it, they can't operate in most places. The point is I think that this is going to alleviate so much of that stress. The images will be trackable the moment they are broadcasted, they are not going to be used in any way that photographers don't want them to be or aware of. They will be ethical because instead of bringing some flimsy signature on a consent form that has been badly translated to somebody under extreme stress in a way - that's just not going to hold up in court. Photographers will know every time the image is being used. In my experience it has happened a thousand times, when I am not aware of how my image is being used and paid for without my understanding.

The images will be ethical because instead of bringing some flimsy signature on a consent form that has been badly translated to somebody under extreme stress in a way - that's just not going to hold up in court. Photographers will know every time the image is being used.



Mirage by Adam Broomberg in collaboration with Gersande Spelsberg.

Last year, during the world wide reckoning with social justice in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, many called for protesters faces to be disguised and blurred to avoid prosecution. Can facial recognition component of this application compromise the safety of the subjects?

I like the idea of co-opting a nefarious technology and using it for something benevolent. But equally somebody just has to give you an email. Same way you have to sign into every single email right now, it's the same consent. Do you want to control the cookies? Then you enter that into Creative Commons. You can do that between photographer and the subject: do you want to control your cookies? Yes. I give you permission to use this image for one year. In the worst case scenario, in the war zone you can't be passing email across each other, people can be identified if they want to and the contract can be sitting there in both derival and an economic sense, like an escrow account, if Steve McCurry's subject gets to 23 years old and says: no more, stop! Or the model that Terry Richardson photographed at 16 and who now doesn't want a picture of her naked out there still circulating, they can make it stop as well.

I think that every institution, every school is going through the same struggle. We've all got to start acting ethically because of the environment, inclusivity, bipoc, LGBTQI+ communities and our photographic practice needs fine tuning.

The way this thing needs to be built is by taking the key players from each sector of the industry from Kathy Ryan to Magnum to model agents, hearing everybody's concerns, and try to meet them all as opposed to imposing. Essentially what this is, is just a legal document that is built into the photograph. It needs to be a document that can be adjustable, you can tweak the stipulations and it can be adjustable over time as well. Also for the photographer, if in ten-years time you regret taking the picture, if you want to remove it from the private sector, you would be able to do that. You can just kill it like you can burn the NFTs, you can just get rid of them.

I think that every institution, every school is going through the same struggle. We've all got to start acting ethically because of the environment, inclusivity, bipoc, LGBTQI+ communities and our photographic practice needs fine tuning. This is going to be a group effort from all of the sectors of photographic world. I don't have the solutions, but what if this could be pointing us in the right direction?

Interview by [Alexey Yurenev](#)

ARTISTS BIO

Adam Broomberg (b. 1970, Johannesburg) is an artist, activist and educator. He currently lives and works in Berlin. He is a professor of photography at the Hochschule für bildende Künste (HFBK) in Hamburg and teaches in the MA Photography & Society program at The Royal Academy of Art, The Hague. For two decades, he was one half of the critically acclaimed artist duo Broomberg & Chanarin.

Broomberg has had numerous solo exhibitions, most recently at The Centre Georges Pompidou (2018) and the Hasselblad Center (2017), among others. His participation in international group shows include the Yokohama Triennale (2017); Documenta, Kassel (2017); The British Art Show 8 (2015-2017); Conflict, Time, Photography at Tate Modern (2015); Shanghai Biennale (2014); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); Tate Britain (2014); and the Gwanju Biennale (2012). His work is held in major public and private collections including the Art Gallery of Ontario, Baltimore Museum of Art, Centres Pompidou, Cleveland Museum of Art, MoMA, Stedelijk Museum, Tate, Yale University Art Gallery and Victoria & Albert Museum. Major awards include the Arles Photo Text Award (2018), ICP Infinity Award (2014) for Holy Bible and the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize (2013) for War Primer 2.

The works he has made as NFT's are all collaborations that deal with issue of diversity and inclusivity.

'A retrospective of a no career'

Matthew Krouse's films reveal an agitator awed by the tradition of 'dirty queers'

Sean O'Toole

Earlier this year, Adam Broomberg, a Johannesburg-born artist living in Berlin, phoned Matthew Krouse, a former actor turned writer and editor, with a request. It didn't involve Yiddish translation work.

"People seem to think I am Isaac Bashevis Singer, which I'm not," says Krouse, who was born into a Jewish family from Germiston in 1961, grew up speaking Yiddish with his mother and has previously helped Broomberg with translations. "I won't ever win a Nobel prize for writing in Yiddish," he insists in reference to the Polish-American writer's 1978 accolade.

Broomberg revealed his reason for calling Krouse in increments. He started out by asking if he knew about Clubhouse, the social-media app used to host audio chats. Krouse, a man of uncommon creative accomplishments in performance and publishing, responded no.

Nonplussed, Broomberg recruited him into a chat about nonfungible tokens (NFTs), cryptographic units of data used to verify the uniqueness of ephemeral digital and video art. Krouse uses piquant language to describe this new-fangled technology. Nevertheless, and in deference to Broomberg, whose artistic career he promoted during a three-year stint working at the Goodman Gallery, Krouse agreed to play along.

After the Clubhouse hangout, during a private chitchat, Broomberg asked about the whereabouts of the underground films Krouse had been involved with in the 1980s. Krouse doesn't know. His personal archive includes only VHS cassette recordings of the urgent, austere and visceral films he collaboratively nurtured and contributed to.

"I was shocked," says Broomberg. His disbelief soon morphed into action. In a timely act of recovery Broomberg has devoted the entirety of his current solo exhibition at Kunsthallo, an online gallery, to showcasing Krouse's films. The exhibition is even named after Krouse, whom Broomberg first met in The Dungeon, a gay nightclub he frequented as a teenager in 1980s Johannesburg.

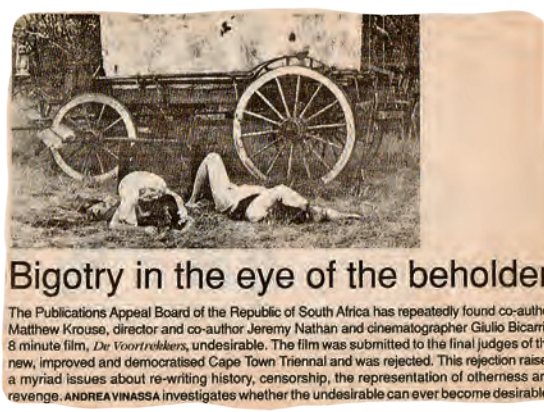
The exhibition includes digitised versions of two films banned in 1987 by apartheid censors. The short parody film *De Voortrekkers* features simulated gay sex, the collapse of the Voortrekker Monument and Krouse's Jewish-Afrikaans father playing the role of pioneer patriarch. The Andrew Worsdale-directed feature *Shotdown* is a hot mess of ideas set in the white demimonde of Yeoville and was co-written by Krouse. The exhibition also exhumes rushes from *The Soldier*, an unfinished short film about militarism and male rape conceived by Krouse.

"It is funny to have a mid-career retrospective of a no-career," says Krouse. "It is right but it is wrong, this whole thing."

As part of the exhibition's marketing, Krouse is sensationally billed as "the most censored man in apartheid South Africa". The claim is somewhat



'Outrageous': (clockwise from above) Matthew Krouse in *Famous Dead Man*; performing South African Defence Force CPR; a newspaper article about the banning of *De Voortrekkers*; and Krouse's VHS collection



overwrought, especially if one consults entries in *Jacobsen's Index of Objectionable Literature*, a voluminous apartheid-era handbook of censored books, films, music and more, but it nonetheless helps to pin the timeframe and zeitgeist of the work.

Krouse was a provocative artist and cultural activist whose work in the 1980s was serially banned by a state that also criminalised political dissent and gay love. That Krouse isn't more widely known and celebrated for his ribald satire and daring agitprop work is a state of affairs Broomberg has explicitly set out to investigate in his current exhibition.

Broomberg's interest in Krouse's films, and the extraordinary personality that lurks behind them, has much to do with his recent work exploring gender and normativity in an increasingly digitised art world.

In the past year Broomberg has eavesdropped on Clubhouse chats and lurked around Decentraland, an evolving virtual world and marketplace powered by the Ethereum blockchain. He has gained a reputation as a gadfly because of the uncomfortable questions he asks about the normative biases informing these environments.

"The NFT world is run by middle-aged, white, hetero-normative men," says Broomberg. Two of his recent projects animate this critique. Last year Broomberg collaborated with transgender activist and artist Gersande Spelsberg, aka Gigi, to produce a unique artificial intelligence-generated portrait of Spelsberg's transformation from man to woman. The mutating portrait, which was tokenised using a digital verification company, recently sold to an online bidder for R120 000 — a paltry figure when compared with some of the

gaming graphics masquerading as art in the NFT metaverse.

The other project is his elegant digital hustle aimed at providing Krouse with an international platform. As part of the programming for his Kuntshallo exhibition, Broomberg invited author and journalist Mark Gevisser to engage in an online conversation with Krouse. The talk yielded some insightful anecdotes.

Krouse was Nadine Gordimer's amanuensis (literary assistant) when she received the 1991 Nobel prize. He edited and co-designed Lesego Rampolokeng's first book. He painted banners for trade union federation Cosatu.

Another tidbit from the conversation relates *The Invisible Ghetto* (1993), the first-ever anthology of lesbian and gay fiction from South Africa. Krouse, who was working at the Congress of South African Writers at the time, jointly edited the book with printmaker Kim Berman.

The Invisible Ghetto includes Krouse's short story *The Barracks are Crying*. The work substantially draws on his personal experiences of being a military conscript sequestered in a platoon of gay men. The story rehearses a triad of themes that energised Krouse's cabaret performances and film pieces of the 1980s: white masculinity, militarism and libidinal energy.

Krouse's stint in the military is central to his early biography as an artist. "I couldn't leave the country to avoid the army, as my family wasn't wealthy," he says.

After completing his basic training Krouse joined the army media centre. He worked as a scriptwriter and produced training videos and slide programmes on nursing procedures. He also joined a military-approved drag troupe, known as the Arista Sisters, that did a Fats Waller

routine involving a musclemans, wigs and high heels. The troupe ended up touring nationally, even performing for medal-festooned grandees and then-president PW Botha's wife.

"Female impersonation has been one of the basic forms of entertainment in barracks, prisons and sometimes even in schools," wrote Krouse in a 1994 essay in *Defiant Desire*, a book of nonfiction co-edited by Gevisser and Edwin Cameron. "Armies and institutions allow — and sometimes even encourage — a brief and public display of momentary transgression. It is a sanctioned assertion that there is otherness, an assertion of who the other is."

It was during his time in the military that Krouse also met producer Jeremy Nathan and cinematographer Giulio Biccari. The trio hatched plans for a film commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Great Trek, which they named *De Voortrekkers* after a 1916 film of the same name. Their script was later seized during a police raid on Krouse's home, along with photos of him sprawled naked at a monument to a fallen soldier.

Starting in 1985, Krouse routinely found himself in trouble. *Famous Dead Man*, his bawdy two-person cabaret act with Robert Colman commemorating the life of Hendrik Verwoerd, was banned. So too *Noise and Smoke*, his 1985 anti-conscription cabaret piece with Colman featuring a stolen slide of a grossly wounded soldier.

Shotdown, which features Krouse and Colman re-enacting scenes from *Famous Dead Man*, was banned in 1987. A similar fate befell *De Voortrekkers* when it was completed that year too.

These experiences, while initially energising, ultimately unsettled Krouse. "There I was, a prematurely productive young artist, who was really battling with shit." He found solace in a drug addiction.

Drawing on his skills as a media officer clandestinely involved in the organisation of Nelson Mandela 70th birthday tribute concert at Wembley Stadium in London in 1988, he transitioned into writing and editing. For 16 years Krouse was the *Mail & Guardian's* arts editor. He currently works as a freelance writer and art consultant.

"I just couldn't make the jump, I couldn't go from the one place I was successful — making statements that hurt people and disturbed them and unsettled them, which was the function of art — and then go on and make a commercial career."

But Krouse, who likens himself circa 2021 to the early Johannesburg outlaw William Foster holed up in a cave, is not resentful or regretful. He defiantly remains an "outrageous homo" awed by the tradition of "dirty queers".

His films have quietly cultivated a mythology that he feels is true to the history of underground filmmaking, which is "more about the possibility of the existence of that kind of film rather than its actual material essence", as he told Gevisser.

In short, he is not nostalgic. The past, after all, is a failed country. Wistfulness, he cautions, is fatal. "It is a repulsive thing because what you are nostalgic for is your oppression, or at least, in our situation, the oppression of others. There is no use walking around saying of the 1970s and '80s, it was the best of times and the worst of times. It has to be framed within the broader discussion that is being held now."

What is that discussion? "You may say apartheid is over, but there is still a lot of work that has to be done."

He points to the four women who brandished modest posters reading "I am 1 in 3", "#", "10 years later", "Khanga" and "Remember Khwezi" in front of then-president Jacob Zuma in 2016. "That is activism and performance. That is fearless. Who knows what would happen to them? That was in the same mould or spirit that I, we, did things."

Adam Broomberg's exhibition *Matthew Krouse* runs until 7 May at kunsthallo.com



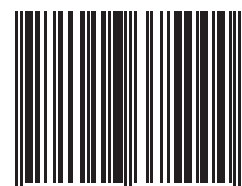
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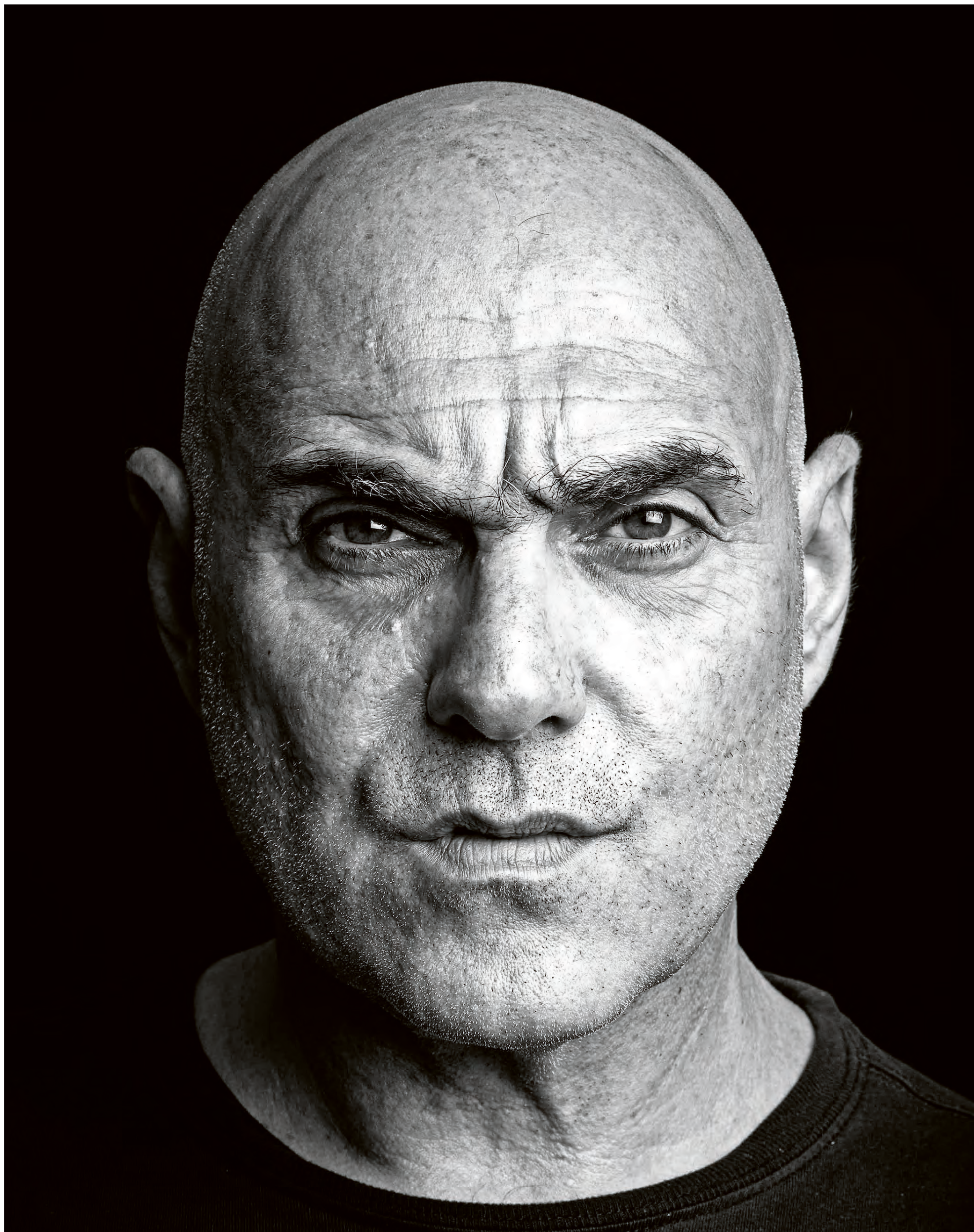


PHOTO BY MARC SHOUL

1854.photography/2021/04/adam-broomberg-interrogates-the-world-of-blockchain-technology-in-a-photographic-context/



British Journal of Photography

PROJECTS, TECHNOLOGY & HUMANITY — 7 HOURS AGO

Adam Broomberg interrogates the world of Blockchain technology in a photographic context

by TOM SEYMOUR



Broomberg has spent the pandemic immersed in the world of digital technologies, including the recent explosion of NFTs. What has he learnt about them, and how has he endeavoured to interrogate them through his work?

Blockchain technology became the art world zeitgeist in the wake of Beeple's zNFT-based *The First 5000 Days* (2021) selling for \$69.3 million at Christie's on 11 March 2021, making Beeple the third most valuable living artist in terms of auction prices. But, Adam Broomberg, formerly one half of the artistic duo Broomberg & Chanarin, began researching the possibilities of blockchain technology back in 2017, long before they hit the headlines. He describes his move into the worlds of blockchains, NFTs and cryptocurrency, as "strategic", devoting the last year to "checking out the moral and technological boundaries of what we're now calling the metaverse".

An NFT acts like a physical certificate of authenticity, but for the virtual world. It's a way of ensuring artwork is a one-of-a-kind asset, like a painting: something with unique properties that cannot be exchanged, like for like. NFTs allow individuals to tokenise digital artworks like photographs — which people can endlessly duplicate — through a shared ledger known as a blockchain. The token proves that whoever purchases the work can demonstrably own it.

But how will this emergent new technology impact the medium to which Broomberg has dedicated some of his practice? "To answer that, I decided I had to enter, literally enter, the world of it," he says. "I had to see it from the inside. And that was a strange process." It meant time spent on the chatroom app Clubhouse, and particularly in a room called NFT tips, "where people impart most of the knowledge," he says. "I went in there, and I sat, and I listened, and I asked questions."



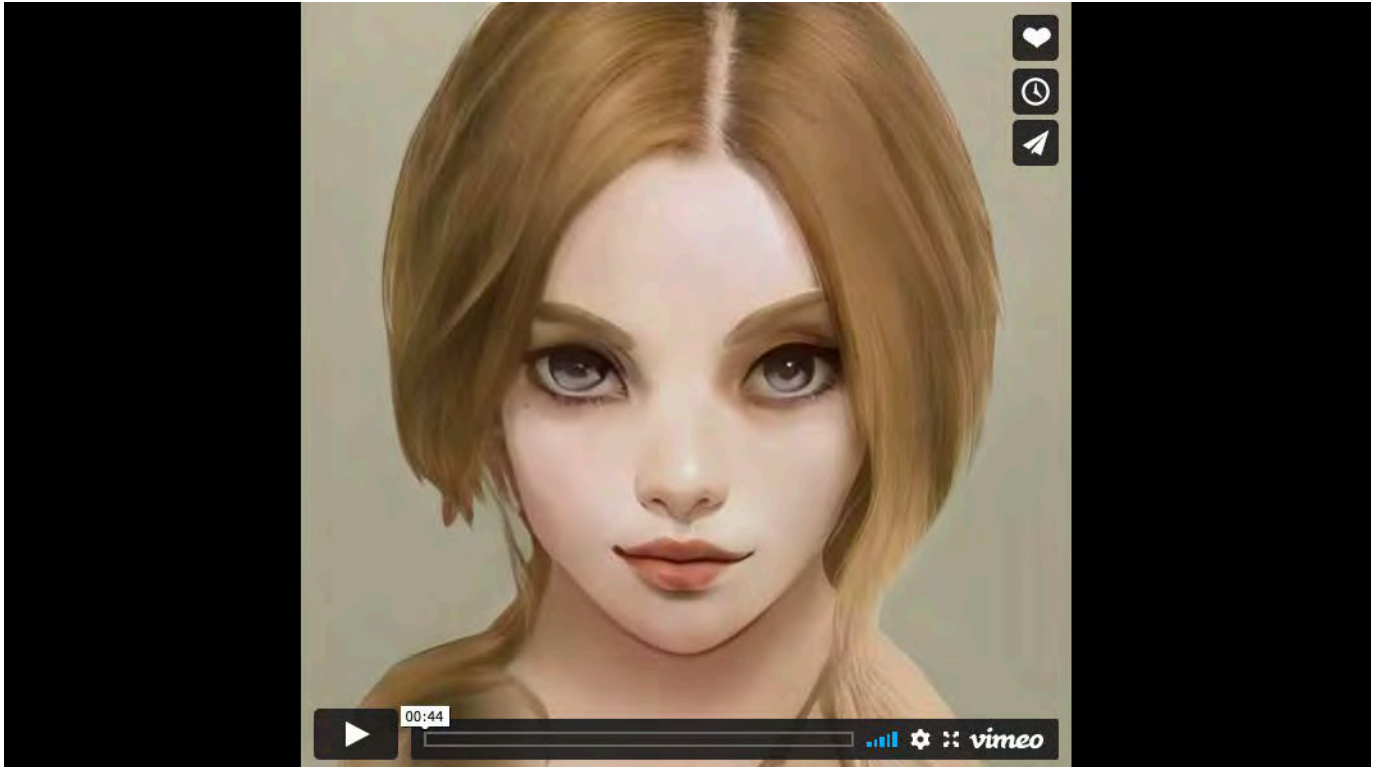
It was during the pandemic that Broomberg actually began creating a series of new works as non-fungible tokens (NFTs) connected to a blockchain, available to purchase with the cryptocurrency Ethereum, on the platform SuperRare, a marketplace for users to collect and trade unique, single-edition digital artworks.

He observed that white, heteronormative men aged between 20 to 40 dominate the spaces where he was learning about NFTs. Broomberg recognises that he is part of that demographic – and now considers much of the work he created at the start of his photographic career to be problematic. This project is, in part, a reaction to those reflections.

He made the series, which is ongoing, in collaboration with computational artist Isaac Schaal and the transgender activist, artist and actress G3rsande Spelsberg (who goes by Gigi), a friend and collaborator offering a difference in perspective. All three creators have equal ownership of the work and will share the primary profits and a 10 per cent share of subsequent sales on the secondary market.

Broomberg met Gigi in the summer of 2020 in Berlin on the dating app Tinder. "Our relationship soon grew into a creative and collaborative one," he told SuperRare, the platform on which the NFT *Going. Full Time. #1*, created with Gigi and Schaal, was minted on 26 March 2020 in partnership with Verisart, a blockchain certification platform. The artwork consists of an AI-created portrait of Spelsberg's face transitioning and explores how artificial intelligence, trained on a vast dataset of hundreds of thousands of human faces, visually narrates the process of gender transition and the issues emerging around that — including the biases inherent in such datasets.

"[We hope] the series of NFTs disrupt the homogenous demographic and vocabulary of the crypto world," reiterates Gigi. "Suddenly these heteronormative men are hearing about transgender activism, the agony and the beauty of transitioning. Adam and I have been working together as digital allies and he's made me a non-fungible trans."



But Broomberg has also announced a new initiative. And, this time, it's not the subculture of NFTs that is the focus, but the photography world at large.

#FairFoto is a reorientation of some of the most powerful technologies on earth today: the AI algorithms and facial recognition software increasingly employed by state militaries for security and control. Broomberg, working with a team that includes Robert Norton from Verisart, is co-opting this technology, combining it with the latest blockchain usages to ensure the subject of a photograph has as much ownership of that photograph as the person who shot the image.

Broomberg recalls Steve McCurry's 1984 image of Sharbat Gula, the so-called Afghan Girl. "Single prints of that image have sold for \$178,900, but Gula received very little," he says. Broomberg wants to upset this fundamental tenet of photographic ownership. "Since the inception of photography, the one-way flow of it has haunted the medium," he writes in the announcement of #FairFoto. "The photographer remains the owner of the image while the subject receives none of the financial proceeds."

Broomberg acknowledges the problematic nature of his relationship with subjects he has photographed throughout his career. "I feel completely complicit in the moral impasse photography has presented us from its very inception," he says. And he hopes with this new technology the subject's identity can be "baked into" a photograph's raw data, connecting it to the digital public ledger that is a blockchain. "That means every time an image is made and then generates any financial profit, a share will go to the subject," he says. "Harnessing the power of these technologies to bring fairness to photography."

"It is not just about addressing the financial imbalance or the problems with photojournalism but with all sectors of the photographic world," he continues. "With this new form of contract, a model photographed at age 16 who may have signed a release form for an advertising campaign, would now a decade later, have the right to challenge the distribution of an image they felt less comfortable with. Terry Richardson, Richard Prince and many other examples come to mind."

His idea has sparked quite the reaction. And so it should because it's a truly disruptive act. And one the photography world may desperately need.



THE ART NEWSPAPER

NEWS → ARTISTS

After more than two decades together, artist duo Broomberg and Chanarin commit 'creative suicide'

A "posthumous retrospective" in Barcelona will divide their joint estate

LOUISA BUCK

17th February 2021 19:40 GMT



The artist duo Broomberg and Chanarin are parting ways Courtesy of Goodman Gallery

The artist duo Broomberg & Chanarin have achieved an international reputation for their photographic, moving image and performance works that grapple with themes around warfare, surveillance, historical truth and the challenging of authority. They are represented in the collections of Tate, MoMA, the V&A and Centre Pompidou and in 2013 they won the prestigious Deutsche Bourse Prize.

But now Broomberg & Chanarin are no more. According to a statement issued this week by Fabra i Coats Contemporary Art Centre in Barcelona, after more than two decades of collaboration the pair have "legally, economically, creatively and conceptually committed suicide".

To mark this momentous turn of events, Fabra is mounting 'a "posthumous retrospective" devoted to the oeuvre and archive of the deceased duo. *The Late Estate Bloomberg & Chanarin*, opens on Saturday with a ceremonial reading of their joint last will and testament. The exhibition opening also coincides with a flurry of Broomberg & Chanarin obituaries scheduled to be published in the international arts press over the weekend. As part of the

show, the entire archive and extant works will be appraised and logged onto a database by a trained archivist with the exhibition unfolding over the next three months to reveal every aspect of their legacy.



But while their partnership may have died, the individual artists Adam Broomberg (b. Johannesburg, 1970) and Oliver Chanarin (b. London, 1971) are still very much alive—although in keeping with their now divided status they will only agree to talk separately. So why have they decided to pull the plug on a successful twenty year double act? And in such a dramatic manner?

“There came a point when I had to individuate, explore and respond to the world professionally and privately, according to my own set of values and principles and without the mediating presence of the ‘other’,” states Broomberg, who prefers to use the term “euthanasia”, rather than suicide to describe pair’s shared demise. According to him their relationship was “infused with both love, admiration and also intense conflicts and envies. Something has died and I mourn that loss”, he adds.

Oliver Chanarin takes a more pragmatic view. “The idea came from a very practical problem. Storage. How to extract everything from our storage facility and figure out what was there after over 20 productive years of collaboration. The show is literally and practically an appraisal of these things,” he says. However, he also indicates that all was not well between the pair. “Towards the end of our collaboration the mood shifted radically from a loving, combative partnership to a house fire that we both urgently needed to escape,” he declares, while also mourning that, “a partnership and a friendship has died”.

Both agree that the Fabra exhibition and related events and announcements offer an appropriately grand and flamboyant finale for their association. “The poem to end all poems,” as Chanarin puts it, while Broomberg sums up their artistic suicide and creation of a posthumous estate as “a ritual-like end, worthy of the quarter of a century of labour”.

So what does the future hold for the now-divided duo? Quite a lot, it seems. Broomberg has opted for a form of rebirth by creating an interactive artificial intelligence alter ego called adam.baby. This digital self portrait is plugged into an Open Ai 1.5 billion neural network based on Broomberg's entire internet history of thirty years and is accessible for conversation on www.adam.baby [↗](#).

Other projects include a book published by Mack, based around AI and gender transitioning. Oliver Chanarin is featuring in a group exhibition poised to open once it is permitted at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) where he will show intimate photographs of his wife Fiona Jane Burgess, taken during lockdown. He is also working on a photographic survey of the United Kingdom inspired by the legacy of August Sander, which will start production as soon as it is permitted to travel again. Both artists will continue in their role as joint professors of photography at the Hochschule für bildende Künste (HFBK) in Hamburg, and their joint estate will be managed by Goodman Gallery. So RIP Broomberg & Chanarin, and upwards and onwards, Adam and Oliver!

[The Late Estate of Broomberg & Chanarin](#) [↗](#), *Fabra i Coats Contemporary Art Centre, Barcelona, 20 February-23 May 2021*

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1000 Words



Obituary for the artist duo Broomberg & Chanarin

By David Company

On the occasion of the posthumous retrospective of Broomberg & Chanarin at Fabra i Coats Contemporary Art Centre, Barcelona, David Company elicits a co-authored obituary for the renowned artist duo.

Adam:

Dear David, Olly and I are about to announce the official end of our collaboration with a show at Fabra i Coats Contemporary Art Centre in Barcelona called “The Late Estate Broomberg & Chanarin”. I would love you to write an obituary for this artist. I don’t know anyone who has had more influence on that artist and who has also been fearless as an outspoken critic of it. Would you consider writing a standard say NYT length obit. The show is on Feb 20 and we would like to pitch it beforehand so time is tight. Please would you consider it. It’s a really big moment for us and it would close a circle in some way and allow for a fresh new start. Let me know your thoughts D.

David:

In the spirit of this authorial play, the artists should write it and Mr Company will sign it. Graham Lee, secretary to David Company

Adam:

Are you serious?
You will sign your name to anything we write?

David:

I'll check with him.

Adam:

Please do

David:

He says "in principle, yes" but he knows that principles are for sale.

Adam:

Tell him no deal
We want his thoughts and emotions
Or nothing

David:

No deal. He keeps his emotions pretty private.

Adam:

Then his thoughts

David:

Feb 20 is too soon, I think. I've had a look at my schedule. I have so much to do here.

Adam:

We go back a long way David. Those chats you and I had *did* influence many of the key projects Olly and I made. Likewise, us publishing your first book, me introducing you to Michael Mack were important to you.

Adam:

OK... last try... not even a few words? Literally just a soundbite?
I know it's a big ask David but it's a big moment
Please do this, life is short and these moments count
Let me know.
Love
Adam

David:

okok! (why all the pomp for this dissolution?)

Adam:

Thank you
It's not pomp it's a celebration and a ritual. I've spent 23 years of my life working with that man. It deserves some dignity and celebration.

David:

Well, a bang, not a whimper it be.

Adam:

Are you happy for 1000 Words to publish your obit, D?

David:

I don't know. I haven't written it yet. Try not to let the tail of publicity do the wagging.

Adam:

David, You speak in riddles.

The separation of this partnership has been fucking gruelling and painful. It was 23 years of intense and beautiful collaboration. You know how much had to be negotiated between us and what a wrestle collaboration involves. You also know the difference between our practices strutting, overconfident public performance and the very ordinary anxiety involved in the making of the work. I have asked a handful of people on the planet I love and who have influenced my work to put it to rest. Not to eulogise or publicise it but to put it to rest. They have all been able to say yes or no. Just let me know.

David:

Dearest Adam,

This has been the obituary you wrote for Broomberg & Chanarin. I am happy to put my name to it.♦

Image courtesy the artists © Broomberg & Chanarin

The Late Estate of Broomberg & Chanarin at Fabra i Coats Contemporary Art Centre, Barcelona, 20 February – 23 May 2021. Curated by Joana Hurtado Matheu.

—

David Company is a curator, writer and Managing Director of Programs at the International Center of Photography, New York.



<https://www.1854.photography/2021/02/an-obituary-of-sorts-for-the-end-of-artist-duo-broomberg-chanarin/>



British Journal of Photography

OBITUARY 11 HOURS AGO

An obituary, of sorts, for the 'death' of artist duo Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin

by SEAN O'TOOLE



On the opening day of Broomberg & Chanarin's posthumous retrospective at Catalan contemporary art centre Fabra i Coats, Barcelona, Sean O'Toole reflects on the duo's rich career, replete with experimentation and subversion, in light of its official end

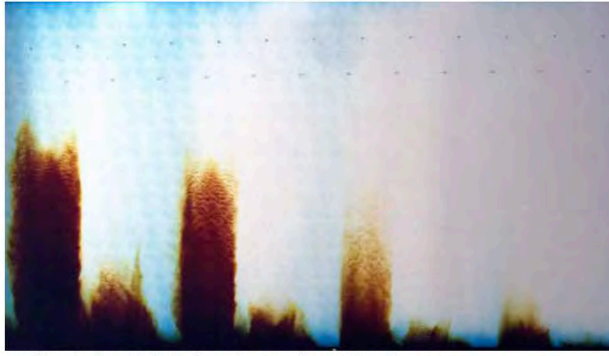
The partnership of Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin is no more. Eschewing an expression like 'divorce', the lauded collaborative duo, who began working together in 1998, and in 2013 became the first pair of artists to win the prestigious Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize, have proffered something more final. A media release announcing a "posthumous retrospective" of their entire professional archive at the Catalan contemporary art centre Fabra i Coats in Barcelona opening today, 20 February 2021, states that the survey will mark the end of their collaboration. A separate statement issued by the artists and the Goodman Gallery, which will represent their estate, confirmed the duo's cause of death as "suicide".

Cute? It depends on how you define cute. The photographers, who are not dead but rather symbolically marking the end of their collaboration, are fans of the late Groucho Marx, a brash comedian from a country where cute can also mean impertinent and smart-alecky. The title of their retrospective at Fabra i Coats, which will showcase their output in increments, including their archive of unpublished materials, is *The Late Estate Broomberg & Chanarin*. But, it could just as easily be *chutzpah*. Striking out as modish, editorial-portraitists with a gift for the gab, Broomberg & Chanarin evolved into forensic and febrile experimenters interested in the social meanings of photography. They frequently showed themselves unafraid to use Marxian effrontery – be it insult or caustic humour, or both – to get their points across.

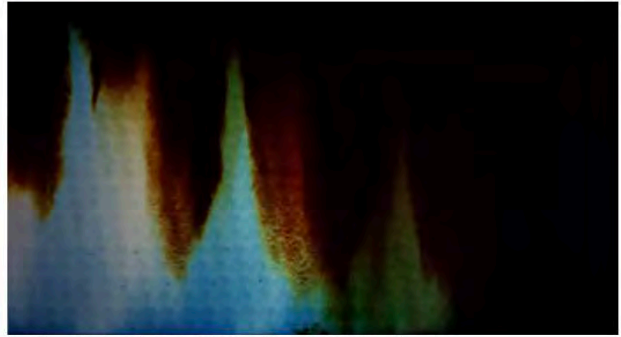


In March 2008, shortly after serving on the jury of the World Press Photo Contest, they published an essay critical of the award's blinkered formalism. Photojournalism, they asserted, is a "genre in crisis". Gesturing to ideas that would preoccupy them over the ensuing years, they pointed to the proliferation of poor images taken by onlookers and highlighted the symbiotic relationship between photography and conflict, leading them to wonder, "Does the photographic image even have a role to play any more?". Their broadside concluded with a call for a new language of photojournalism, "one that presents images that are more aware of what they fail to show; images that communicate the impossibility of representing the pain and horror of personal tragedy".

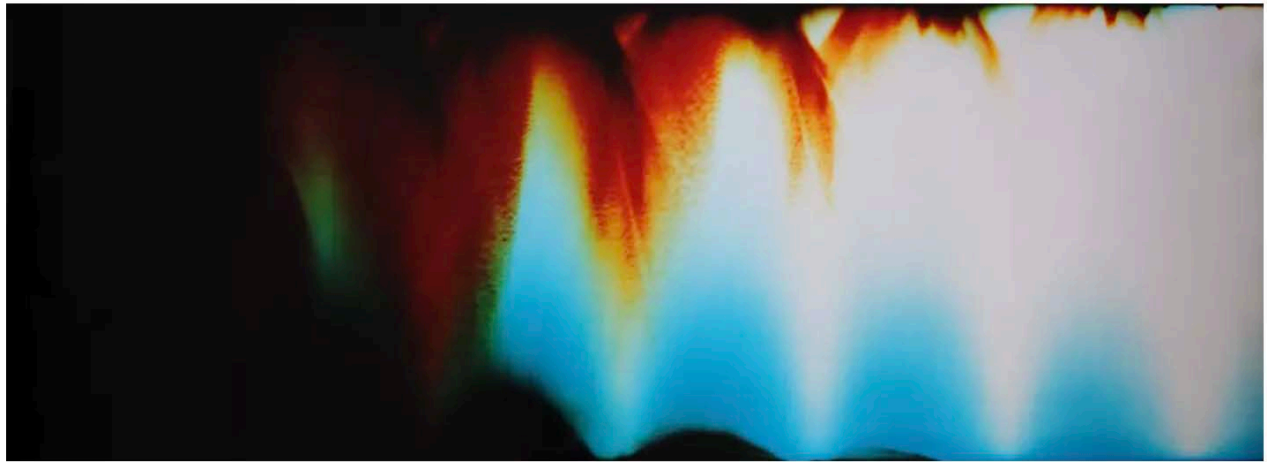
Dismissed as grandstanding villains by some, Broomberg and Chanarin shortly enacted their conviction when, in June 2008, they travelled as embedded journalists to Afghanistan. In place of their medium format camera, the pair operated as handlers for a 50-metre length of photographic paper rolled and sealed in a light proof cardboard box. Responding to a series of events – an execution, a suicide, a visit to the troops by the Duke of York, a press conference, nothing – they exposed seven-meter sections of the paper to the sun for 20 seconds each. In choosing this timeframe, they quoted the practice of early war photographer Roger Fenton, who employed large format glass-plate cameras and the collodion, or wet-plate, process, which required long exposure times of up to 20 seconds or more. From September to October 2008, they exhibited six photos from the series *The Day Nobody Died* (2008) in the east London gallery, Paradise Row. The exhibition generated only passing notice. *La petite mort*.



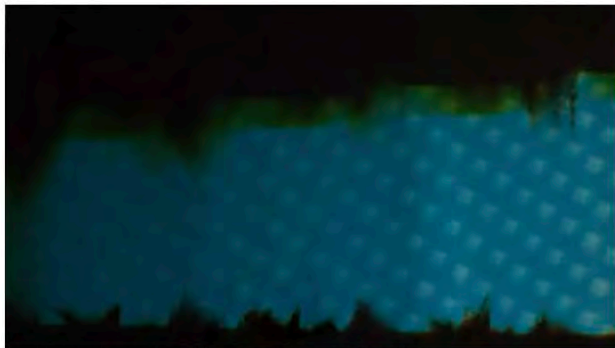
Detail from The day nobody died II © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.



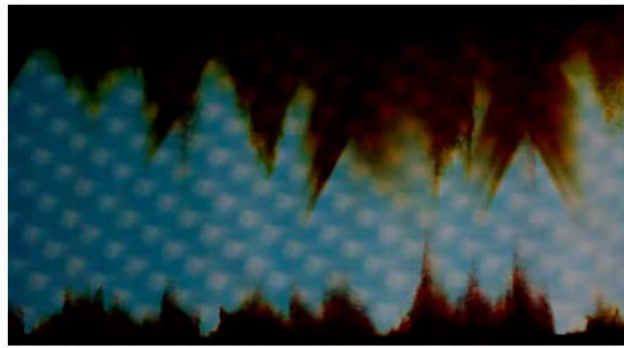
Detail from The day nobody died II © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.



Detail from The press conference © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.



Detail from The day nobody died III © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.



Detail from The day nobody died III © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.

“Death is an awkward business,” wrote anthropologist Michael Taussig after a 2002 visit to the grave of his intellectual hero, philosopher and critical theorist, Walter Benjamin, at Portbou in Catalonia, Spain. “And so is remembrance.” Writing about the dead does nonetheless offer the courtesy of silent indifference: the dead don’t bite back. Reflecting on Broomberg & Chanarin’s career – its rehearsals, lulls, experiments, and bold statements – death emerges as a leitmotif. Its inevitability gave their roaming practice its urgency. A hand-printed poster issued by their publishing company Chopped Liver Press, which features a quote from Joseph Heller’s novel *Catch-22* (1961) printed in bold red letters onto a page of *International New York Times*, is emblematic: “Be furious you’re going to die,” reads the poster.

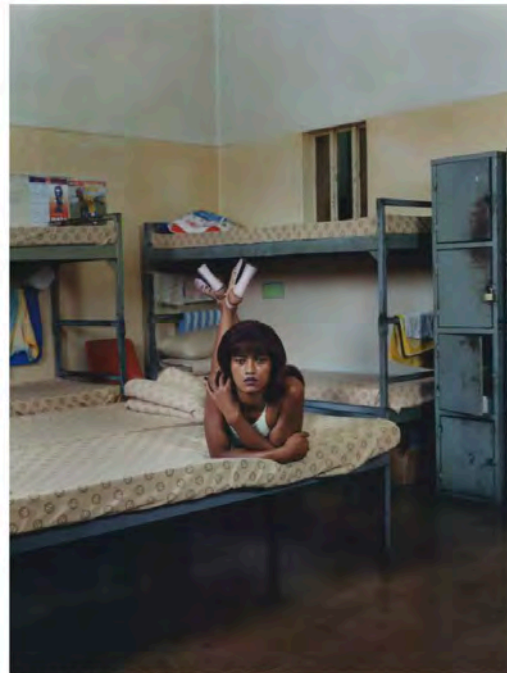
Death also informed their initial association. In 1995 Broomberg, a sociology graduate born in Johannesburg, secured a job as an editorial intern at *Colors*, an influential photo-led magazine overseen by photographer Oliviero Toscani. Three years later, Broomberg invited London-born Chanarin, a philosophy and computer science graduate with a shared liking for portrait and documentary photographer August Sander, to work with him on an issue of *Colors* with the theme of death. Something clicked and their incipient creative association shortly yielded a book, *Trust* (2000), a series of tightly framed colour portraits of gamers and surgery patients, and an invitation to jointly edit *Colors*.



From Ghetto © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin



From Ghetto © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.



From Ghetto © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.

Working in collaboration with various photographers (notably Stefan Ruiz) and writers, they roamed the planet documenting closed communities: a refugee camp in Tanzania, a prison in South Africa, an asylum in Cuba, a remote encampment in Patagonia. Methodologically, the impudent new documentary style of Louis Theroux and Sacha Baron Cohen informed Broomberg & Chanarin's early work in the field, especially for *Colors* and their subsequent book project in South Africa, *Mr Mkhize's Portrait* (2004). However, in formal terms, their portraits of subalterns and grandees reiterated the anthropological gaze of *Neue Sachlichkeit* photography and its many rehearsals in 1990s art and editorial photography.

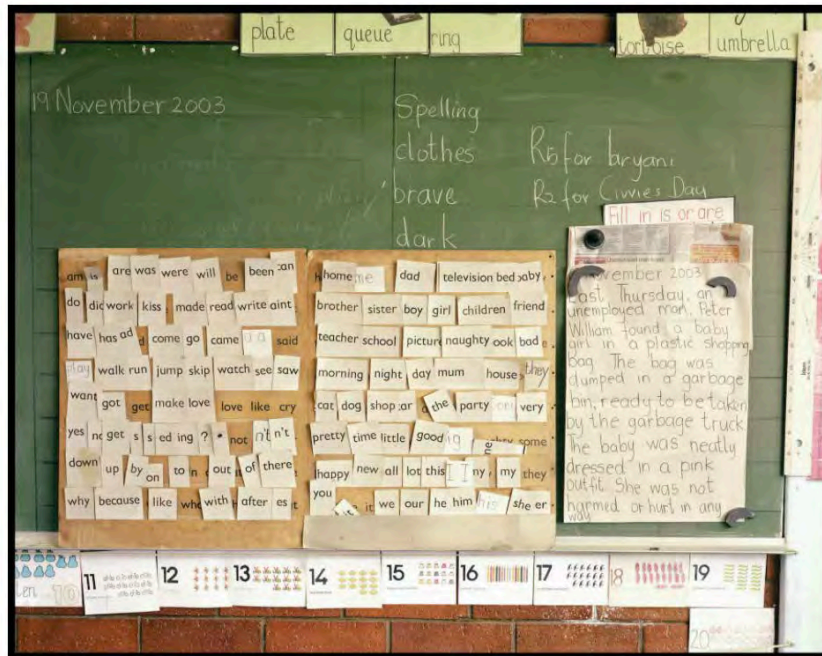
I accompanied the photographers to Leisure World, a gated retirement community in Orange County, California, for an issue of *Colors*. I was tasked with interviewing the dog club and a nude model. We've collaborated subsequently. I have frequently been asked about the division of labour between the two, and who did what. The question overlooks a defining action, their identification as a unit, and its relationship to the cultural moment. Collectivity and collaboration, argues art historian Claire Bishop in her book *Artificial Hells* (2012), is one of the "most persistent themes" in radical contemporary art of the new millennium. A 2011 exhibition project, curating Photomonth Festival in Kraków, Poland, bears this out.



From Mr. Mikhize © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.



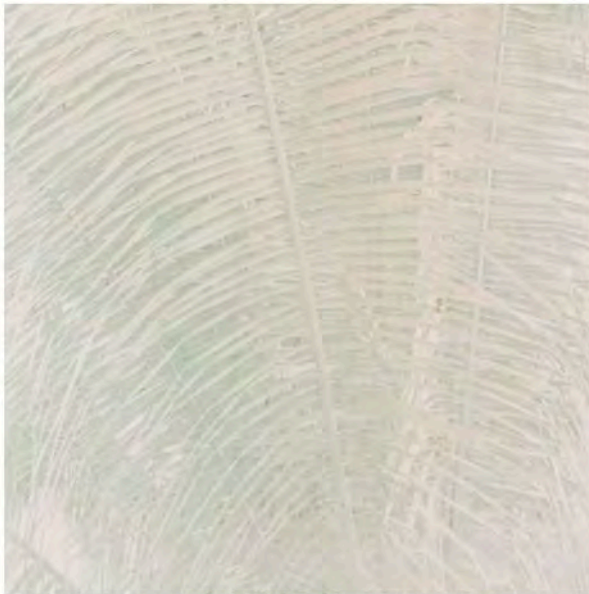
From Mr. Mikhize © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.



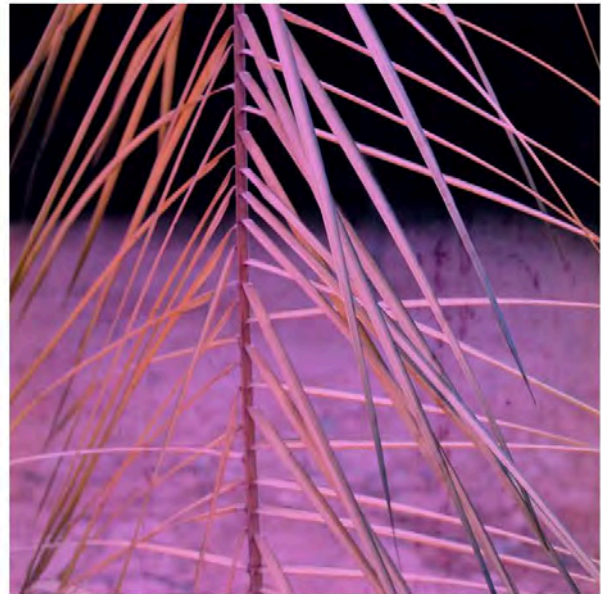
From Mr. Mikhize © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.

When they were asked to guest curate Photomonth Festival, the photographers invited 23 writers (including Ekow Eshun and Lynne Tillman) to each create a text describing an invented persona. They then assigned these personas to artists and photographers (including Gabriel Orozco, Alec Soth, and the late David Goldblatt) to inhabit. The idea drew on Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa's creation of fictional heteronyms for his polyphonic output. The Australian writer and art critic Jennifer Higgin, who was paired with Jeremy Deller on a contribution to the exhibition, described Alias as "one of the oddest, most enigmatic and imaginative shows I've seen". Their personal exhibitions by distinction, particularly after the thickening of favourable opinion around their practice in 2013, were hit-and-miss affairs.

Their 2015 debut with London's Lisson Gallery included a video of a martial performance accompanied by austere still-life photos of military-grade prisms and bullets that had collided and fused. A follow-up 2017 exhibition included forensic images of hairs and other fibres from the rug covering Sigmund Freud's couch in the Freud Museum in London. The work lacked the propulsion of earlier projects like *The Day Nobody Died*, which was included in the Tate Modern's 2015 exhibition *Conflict, Time, Photography, and To Photograph the Details of a Dark Horse in Low Light (2012)*, an examination of the racial bias in the chemistry and processing of Kodak film products that included new and archival photography, found material and sculpture.



From Details of a Dark Horse in Low Light (2012) © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.



From Details of a Dark Horse in Low Light (2012) © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.



From Details of a Dark Horse in Low Light (2012) © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.

Perhaps given their apprenticeship in editorial, it is their 15 books that distil the energy and arc of Broomberg & Chanarin's insurgent, but never indifferent practice. *Chicago* (2006), a series of bland documents of a mock settlement used by the Israeli military for urban combat training presented in book form, marked a crucial pivot. Together with *Red House* (2006), a suite of photographs detailing marks and drawings on the wall of a political building in Kurdish northern Iraq, *Chicago* announced their break with the humanist anthropology of their *Colors*-era. Their practice increasingly became sedentary, retrospective and carnivorous, frequently ingesting other people's photography, mostly in bits, but sometimes whole.

Issued in a small edition by Mack, *War Primer 2* (2011) overlays found photos and other visual data trash from the multi-site *War on Terror* onto Bertolt Brecht's *War Primer* (1955), a compendium of news photographs captioned with biting, four-line poems by the German playwright. Brecht's anxieties about photography, that it was "a weapon against truth", as Broomberg & Chanarin wrote in 2011, dovetailed with their own. The *Deutsche Börse* jury described the resulting book as a "bold and powerful reimagining" of Brecht's work; art critic Sabrina Mandanici disagreed, describing the updated book as "less precise, rigorous and self-critical than the original". (Split juries were a hallmark of their career.) *Holy Bible* (2013), which interpolates strange and violent images from the *Archive of Modern Conflict* into the *King James Bible* to argue that photography is congruent with the Abrahamic divine in its commitment to catastrophe, is a continuation of *War Primer 2*'s essentially parasitic method. Its publication prompted critic Sean O'Hagan to describe them as "the most politically engaged artists working in Britain today".



From War Primer 2 (2011) © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.



From War Primer 2 (2011) © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.



From Chicago © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.



From Chicago © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.

In a 2015 interview, Broomberg, who now lives in Berlin, and Chanarin, who is still based in London, likened the start of their collaboration to two bullets colliding in mid-air. The violence of the collision was catalytic, providing combustible energy for a creative partnership marked by their striking metamorphosis from photojournalists to artists. "Photojournalists make photographs that arrest us and that are hard to argue with," the duo wrote in 2011. "But they cannot help us demystify the results. It is the role of the artist to interrogate and challenge this system."

They are now embedded in this system: since 2016 Broomberg and Chanarin have been professors of artistic photography at the University of Fine Arts (HFBK) in Hamburg, and in 2020 both presented solo projects under their new, solo monikers: Broomberg has created an interactive artificial intelligence alter ego, adam.baby, trained by Broomberg's entire internet history of thirty years, and Chanarin has an upcoming solo exhibition at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art inspired by Amazon's automated distribution hubs and filled with photographs of his wife Fiona Jane Burgess, on which they collaborated during lockdown. News of their deaths, it would appear, is overstated.



The Late Estate of Broomberg & Chanarin, Fabra i Coats Contemporary Art Centre, Barcelona, is on show from 20 February to 23 May 2021.

TAGS: ADAM BROOMBERG, BROOMBERG + CHANARIN, OLIVER CHANARIN

SEAN O'TOOLE

Sean O'Toole is a writer and editor based in Cape Town, South Africa. He has published two books, *Irma Stern: African in Europe - European in Africa* (2021) and *The Marquis of Mooikloof and Other Stories* (2006), and edited three volumes of essays, most recently *The Journey: New Positions on African Photography* (2020). He has contributed to recent monographs by Onejoon Che, Margaret Courtney-Clarke, David Goldblatt, Jo Ractliffe, Lindokuhle Sobekwa and Mikhail Subotzky. He is a contributing editor to *Frieze* magazine.



VULTURE

VULTURE RECOMMENDS | UPDATED 4:00 P.M.

The Couch Gallery Crawl

By Thomas Benfield



Tour Courtauld Gallery in London, virtually. Photo: Courtauld Gallery

Each week, we're gathering the art world's latest and best virtual museum and gallery offerings. Here, how to look at art from the safety of home.

1. Remember **Frieze Week**? All the parties made for selfies and that fancy-pants ferry ride to Randall's Island where you could browse and eat Roberta's pizza? Now it's all on your laptop. From May 8 to 15, see Frieze's reinterpretation of what their New York art fair would have been, with over 200 virtual viewing rooms subbing for booths. It's now more generous to video art and narrative content, though far, far worse for taking selfies.
2. Closed since 2018 for renovations, the **Courtauld Gallery** in London has now opened its virtual doors. Upon entry, turn around to see the green skin of a crucified Jesus in Botticelli's *The Trinity With Saints*. In the first doorway, notice Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait With Bandaged Ear*, 1889.
3. **Signs and Symbols** presents *The Bureaucracy of Angels* — a video work that incorporates artist duo Broomberg & Chanarin's footage taken of the Migrant Offshore Aid Station's rescue missions off the coast of Libya. The work documents the destruction of 100 migrant boats by a crane fitted with hydraulic jaws. At times, computer-generated imaging shows the jaws remorsefully singing, other times tearing vessels apart. What's stirring about this video work is the tension between the subject matter and the personification of the crane — its subjectivity somehow provides a more objective take on a crisis of our own making.
4. The **Institute of Contemporary Art Miami** has commissioned four video works from Miami artists Cristine Brache, Domingo Castillo, Faren Humes, and Terence Price II. See Brache's *Morning Sickness in the USA*, where she sets a narrative to found footage of pregnancy examinations and viruses attacking cells. The narrative comes from a recorded phone call with her grandmother, who recounts a mystery illness that quarantined her in a mental asylum in 1961.

5. **Mass MoCA** has a web version of their exhibition “Sol Lewitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective.” I know what you’re thinking — there’s no way a wall-drawing exhibition can translate online, and it probably doesn’t, but there are still 105 expertly curated works and well-researched biographical blurbs to sort through. At the very least, noticing the astounding diversity flourishing within such limited constraints is enough to transport you out of your apartment for at least a second, at least in spirit.

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6. “Too Long, Didn’t Read,” Candice Breitz’s new online exhibition at the **Baltimore Museum of Art**, includes two multichannel video installations: first, the eponymously acronymic *TLDR* explores cultural debates surrounding sex work and human-rights campaigns on behalf of sex workers. The second video, *Love Story*, contrasts the allure of stardom with the tribulations of the global refugee crisis.

7. In **Di Donna**’s online exhibition of Portuguese-born modernist Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, you can see her attention to multiple perspectives, a convention that grounds her abstractions in a “thought form rather than a realistic form,” as she puts it. It’s very pleasant to look at.

8. Expanding on its mission to facilitate collaboration and spur new experiences, the Brooklyn art/food/flowers pop-up shop **Wifey** is selling drawings, prints, and photographs of flowers from a number of different artists, all for \$100. Send one as a gift, as you would a bouquet or Edible Arrangement, or keep one for yourself — either way you’ll aid the independent Brooklyn arts scene.

TAGS: ART QUARANTINE CORONAVIRUS VULTURE RECOMMENDS MORE

MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

May 8 Art In: SF Camerawork, Signs and Symbols, Hauser & Wirth

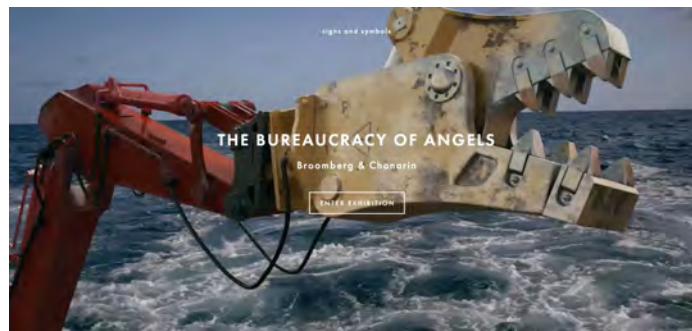
ART OUT (/CULTURE/CATEGORY/ART+OUT)



Wray Herbert-King, *State Between*.

Cell Signals - SF Camerawork

Cell Signals brings together visions from within U.S. prisons and jails to address the role of images in our understanding of incarceration in America. Through visitation hacks, repurposed archive reels, collaborative portraiture, cellphone pics and prison newspaper coverage, Cell Signals peers upon the growing and changing uses of both artistic gesture and networked, image-technologies within American security, prisons and homeland culture.



Broomberg & Chanarin, *The Bureaucracy of Angels*, 2017, still.

The Bureaucracy of Angels - Signs and Symbols

Signs and Symbols brings us a video piece by Broomberg & Chanarin, originally made in 2017. The 12 minute video depicts the destruction of boats used by African migrants in their journey across the Mediterranean to Europe.



Lorna Simpson, *Walk with Me*, 2020.

Lorna Simpson: Give Me Some Moments - Hauser & Wirth

Hauser & Wirth is showing Lorna Simpson's newest series of collages. The gallery describes her newest work as featuring "female and male protagonists, often the focal point of the compositions, who Simpson splices with architectural features, animals, and natural elements to create scenarios that are at once poetic and arresting." The full series is available on the Hauser & Wirth website.

ADMINISTRATOR

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CONTEMPORARY
LYNX



Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin work in a studio near Spitalfields Market in Shoreditch, East London. They are professors of photography at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg and at The Royal Academy of Art, The Hague. Major awards include the prestigious Deutsche Börse Photography Prize in 2013. Their work is held in most important public and private collections.

They are not a regular artistic duo. They are cousins and as they have mentioned: 'We discovered after working together for twelve years that we're related.' Everything which surrounds them is connected. And this is a clue to their works. Everything is linked to everything. There is no truth and no falsehood, no right or wrong. There is no single author, even when they invite a specific artist to their project — the notion of authorship is blurred. They add more and more layers to show this endless list of connections and possibilities. There is no real end, no single point of view. Everything is changing, and so are we... If we can change our minds, maybe we can change a little bit more — something that is beyond us... Eventually everything flows, *panta rhei*, and nothing stands still.

To capture this moment, I spoke to Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin about photography, truth, falsehood, and the politics of the material.

Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin

STORYTELLERS

Dobromiła Błaszczyk: You often say that taking pictures doesn't interest you. You say that something must stand behind them. What is then the role of the visual side of your work and its status in comparison to the intellectual, content-related part?

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin: Are we allowed to change our minds?

DB: ...Haha, of course...

AB & OC: Taking and making pictures is interesting and the act has always been an important part of our practice. There is always a space between what you imagine an image will be like and the reality of what emerges when it is processed. It's this spark of contingency, the accidents and magic of image-making that is still very

valuable to us. We are also not sure if it's helpful to distinguish between visual and intellectual work like you do. Images can be intellectual and ideas can be visual.

DB: In each of your stories, you enclose layers of contexts, links and connections. Why are you interested in adding layer upon layer in your projects? What is the purpose of all the footnotes around an image?

AB & OC: It's nice that you call our work *stories*, it feels good to imagine ourselves as storytellers. The stories have lots of footnotes because life is complicated. When we start investigating something it always seems to reveal more and more layers, like unpeeling an onion. We are excited by this complexity, by the strange links between seemingly



Broomberg & Chanarin, *Bandage the Knife Not the Wound*, 2018, UV print on cardboard © Broomberg & Chanarin, courtesy Lisson Gallery





disassociated events and we are eager to share them. People have complained before that our work always has too many *ands*. What can we say, we're reluctant to just produce visual sound bites.

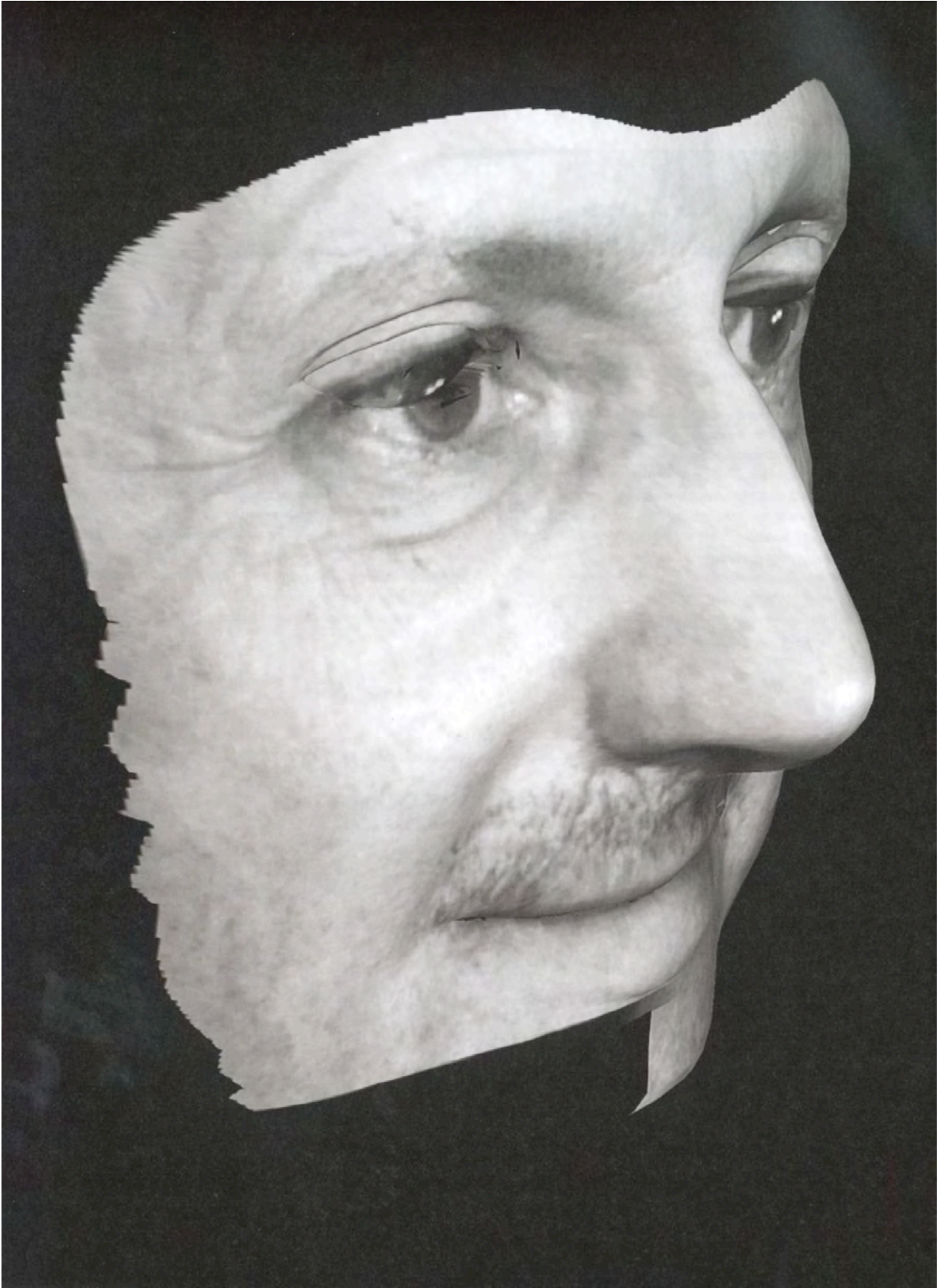
DB: Both of you are artists, curators, researchers, but also the founders of Chopped Liver Press which publishes and sells limited edition books and posters. Are you particularly attached to any of the roles?

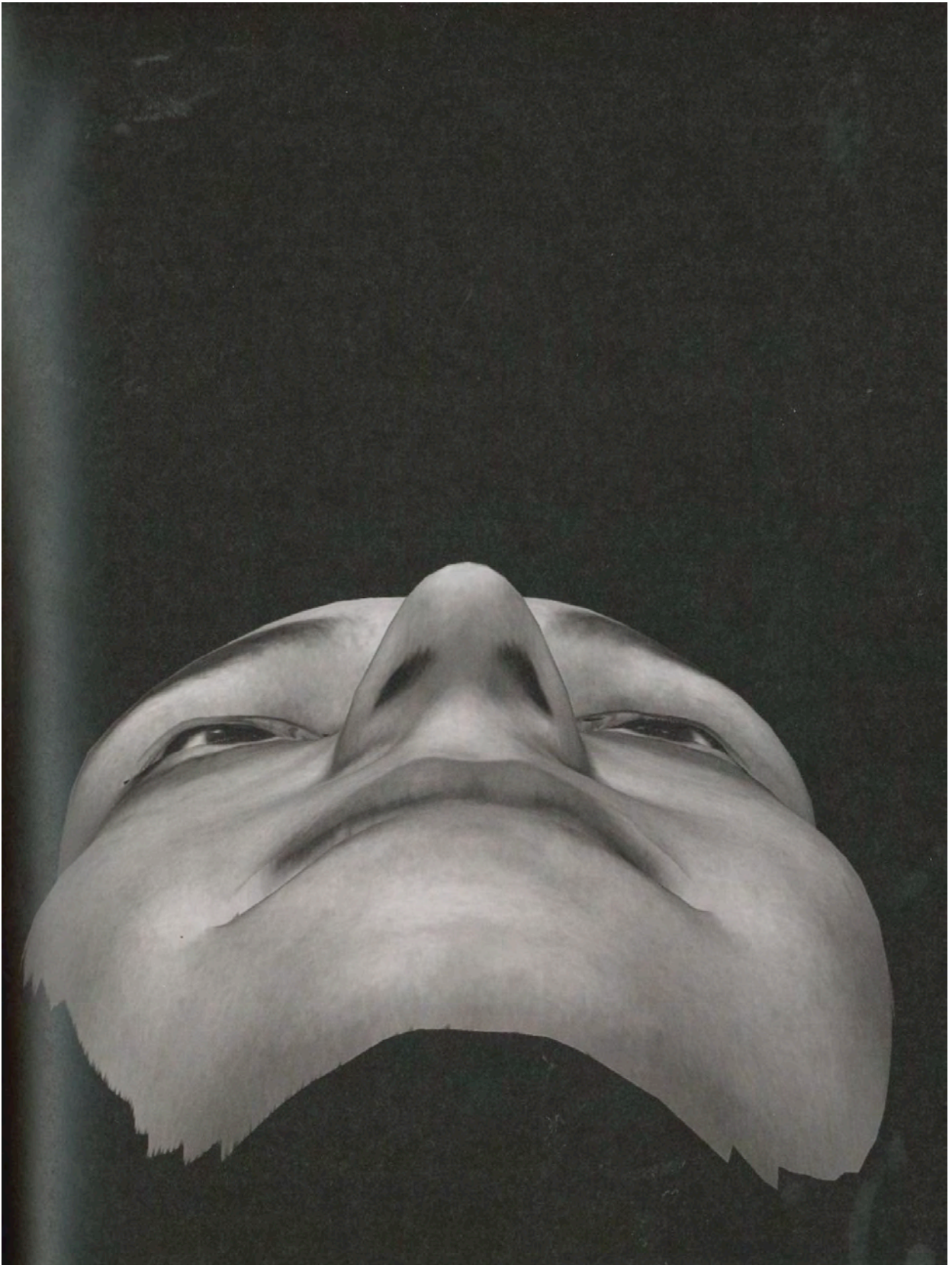
AB & OC: No, none of them. At the moment we are spending the majority of our time being teachers and the ability to wear so many hats makes for better listening. We never feel like there is one way of doing things, there's not one correct answer when making work. We just want to impart a way of asking questions, of interrogating the world.

DB: You operate like hackers who break through a system and disintegrate institutions from the inside. For example, in 2008, you acted as press reporters to get permission to photograph the British military base in Afghanistan. You acted under a guise, provided false information about who you are and what you do to uncover deeply hidden facts. Is your aim to shed light and let others make up their minds? Or do you take it further, by actively trying to harm institutions you find inherently bad?

AB & OC: We wish we were that effective! We wouldn't be so arrogant to think we can have any impact on the powerful institutions we have infiltrated or worked with but perhaps we have managed to occasionally pry open the door just an inch or two to let people see the machine at work.







DB: Your projects discuss social and political issues. Yet, they also require you to enter into this strange relationship with powerful actors, who may try to use you for their aims, even if they expose themselves to some extent. How do you manage this risk?

AB & OC: That's a good question. I am not sure we have managed the risk well. Although we intend our work to be progressive it can easily be co-opted. Images and their collective noun, archives, are dangerous things, open to interpretation and beholden to no one. Our work can be seen as the creation of many new archives, each one as a potential argument against everything we hold dear if it lands in the wrong hands.

DB: Do you think that every work of art and every action that we take as members of society is political, every attitude is a statement?

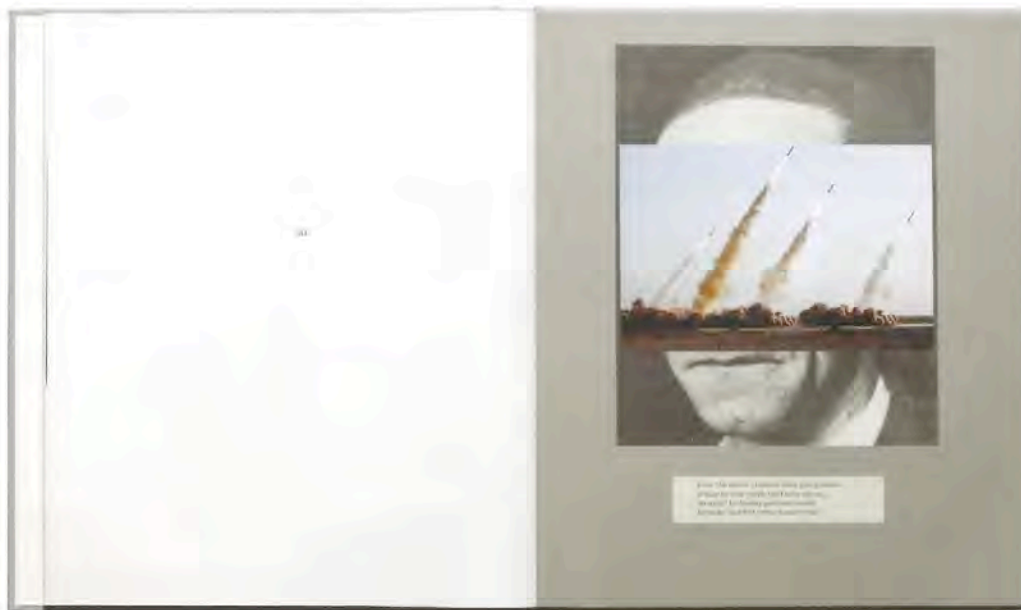
AB & OC: Yes but that doesn't mean ours are right.

DB: You also use the concept of the *politics of the material*. What does it mean?

AB & OC: The relationship between the machinery of war and that of photography and cinema is well documented. The mechanics of the machine gun allowed for the development of the film camera. The history of photography is the history of policing, of categorisation of control. Less well-known is the relationship between race and photographic technology. In our stories on Kodak and Polaroid, we explore the links between race and colour Kodak film. It's clear that early film was predicated to white skin and was what Jean Luc Godard called 'racist.' Polaroid earned 10 percent of their profits from South Africa's apartheid government by developing a camera capable of taking an efficient mugshot for the apartheid regime's pass books. It emitted 80 percent more light from its inbuilt flash to allow for the effective documentation of dark skin. These stories are not something of the past either. More and more details are emerging from the artificial intelligence community about how machine viewing is somehow gender and racially biased. This is not something that can be fixed



Broomberg & Chanarin, *Kodak Ektachrome 34 1978 frame 4, To Photograph the Details of a Dark*



overnight with a short line of coding, the fact is that the people who have been programming AI machines for over half a century now are short white men. Of course the deep learning that machines are doing is going to be racist and sexist. So it's clear from the past, and we fear for the future that there is a political bias built into the very material that is the basis of photographic looking and documenting.

DB: The game of deception is also one you play with a viewer at a gallery. Your projects create and present fictitious stories, fake characters, and authors (like in your 'The Alias' project from 2011). It strikes me that you emphasise at every step that there is not one story, one truth and one portrait of humanity. Or do I misread the purpose of the smoke and mirrors? Maybe in art we don't need the truth, only stories (no matter if it's true or not)?

AB & OC: We couldn't agree more. There is no one truth, contrary to what documentary photographic defenders would have us believe. At the same time we are not willing to give into some horrible post-modern idea that everything is *fake news*. We believe there is right and wrong.

DB: Your work relies on composing seemingly contrasting situations and concepts, such as trust and betrayal, truth and falsehood. Is the purpose to blur the lines between them, or maybe the opposite – to expose how they are radically different?

AB & OC: Hopefully to prove the latter by using the former.

DB: Is this constant questioning part of an artist's duty?

AB & OC: No. It's unfortunately our cross to bear. Although we are trying to reconnect with our sense of humour, which we often lose touch with.

DB: Your artistic strategies based on fiction also blur the notion of authorship. Who is an author and what is his or her role? Is it still possible to clearly assign authorship (associated with an individual, unique and creative genius) in present times?

AB & OC: Authorship is an interesting and troubling idea for us. As a duo we never really own any one idea or any marks we make, we have to share the authorship and in a sense there is a kind of anonymity to the work.

DB: In your work you often refer to your Jewish Eastern European and South African roots. I wonder if your art is a (subconscious) search for roots, where, like at an archaeological site, every new layer provides clues to the fundamental questions: where do we come from, why are we here, and for what purpose? Does each new context (private, social, political – true or false) give you the opportunity to provide new insights?

AB & OC: The more we mature, the more we can see how important our inherited trauma is for our practice. It's no coincidence that we both come from first generation Holocaust-surviving families that had to engage with apartheid South Africa. That kind of past can't be ignored and we have somehow harnessed the trauma to work for us, to help us pry open the closed doors of power.

DB: What are the projects you are working on now?

AB & OC: That is top secret. ●

Sunday Times

THE PAPER FOR THE PEOPLE

May 13, 2018

1+1=3

Sunday Times 13 May 2018 TYMON SMITH

For almost 20 years, Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin's work as photographers and artists — while it demonstrates a collection of concerns around the role of photography



in the digital age, the responsibilities of photographers and the role of archives in shaping our ideas about history — has also been notable for the variety of ways in which they have presented their investigations.

As Broomberg observes in his still recognisably Johannesburg Jewish manner: “We’re restless

in that way, we don’t have a shtick.”

Broomberg was born in South Africa. Chanarin was born in London but lived part of his childhood in South Africa before returning to England. The two met in their early 20s in the Western Cape town of Wuppertal. After a call from Broomberg to Chanarin to help assemble a piece of Ikea furniture, the rest has been art history.

Over the past two decades they’ve developed a working relationship that Chanarin describes as being guided by “a sense that we don’t really know who makes our work — it’s not Adam and it’s not me — it’s some sort of third personality and so the authorship is divested into this collaborative space”.



PLAYFULNESS Adam Broomberg, left, and Oliver Chanarin at their exhibition ‘Bandage the knife not the wound’ at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg.

Trinity of two

The trinity that is Broomberg and Chanarin was in Johannesburg last month to open their new show, *Bandage the knife not the wound*, which takes its title from a work by conceptual artist Joseph Beuys.

For a long time the artists have been thinking of what to do with their personal archives of images collected over the course of their careers — first as more traditional documentary photographers working extensively for the now-defunct *Benetton Colors Magazine*, and later as exhibiting artists showing work across the globe.

For years the pair lived in London, working out of a studio in the city's East End. Broomberg has since moved to Berlin and they both work as professors of photography at the University

of Fine Arts in Hamburg.

It was there, in the school's analogue lab, where the delivery of chemicals and paper has resulted in cardboard boxes lying everywhere, that Chanarin experimented with the idea of printing an image on a folded-out box using a UV printer.

Although the two teach at the same place, they're not often there at the same time, but Broomberg saw Chanarin's image and responded with his own, and so a game of ping-pong between the two began, each using images from years of shared and stored digital images on their hard drives.

For Chanarin, "it was quite accidental the way they intersected and we really just fell in love with the way the cardboard resonated through the image so that you have this sepia coming

through. It kind of brought the collage together as one image."

Through their teaching, Broomberg and Chanarin have become fascinated with the disposability of images in the digital age of Instagram where "likes" trounce the actual experience of standing in front of a piece of work.

As Broomberg sees it, "in a funny way there's been a kind of reverse in art history from the time when an art object was normally this kind of very precious, authentic piece of material that had the aura of the artist and the handprint of the artist. Now it's kind of the inverse, where the value of this object comes through how many times it is liked or repeated on the internet."

It is estimated that more than a trillion photographs were taken

in the world last year, so the artists' choice of a suitably disposable material that Chanarin describes as "essentially detritus" seems perfect for a show that seeks to raise questions about the photograph in the digital age.

Because the images were selected from their personal archives, stored over years of working together on various projects, the resulting work displays some familiar tropes. As Chanarin points out: "You can see as you walk through that there are images that repeat themselves — masks, contrasts, hand gestures, people falling over. It was quite enjoyable for us that these themes came out of the process rather than us beginning with them."

The works are not titled and have been displayed unframed with the folds of the cardboard

providing a sculptural element. This, while it may leave collectors puzzled as to how to display the images in their homes, makes for a satisfyingly three-dimensional viewing experience in the gallery.

The cardboard artworks make up the bulk of the exhibition, but they are not the centre of the show. That place belongs to a series of abstract canvases in which the white spaces created by the removal of the boxes after printing are the focus of the frame.

These works, Broomberg notes, "are not only about whatever is outside the frame, which is something we've spoken about quite consistently for 20 years . . . they also highlight the idea that all photographs are abstract in their nature — there's no such thing as a non-abstract picture — but suddenly we were

able to make a very clear reference to everything except what information is contained in the frame, and that's of value in itself."

They may have revelled in the freedom to create images offered by the disposability of their chosen material, but the show is now up and so the works have entered a new phase of life, one in which the pieces of cardboard, as Chanarin observes, "become pieces of art and go from being these things that you chuck around to suddenly being these things that are handled with white gloves".

Their previous collection, *Divine Violence* — in which the artists made visual interventions in the Old Testament of a copy of the King James Bible — is currently at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.



The new work has debuted at Johannesburg's Goodman Gallery. For Broomberg in particular, "it's quite important

that this show is happening here. I've spent many a sleepless night wondering whether two middle-aged white men

who left the country at varying degrees of their adolescence have any entitlement to show their work here.

“For me it’s really important to come here and stand in this room and talk about it and face the music in a way — to understand how I feel about it in my homeland, because this is still home. I think it’s not accidental that we happen to have a show here and it’s so personal for me.”

Back to making images

Although they often finish each other’s sentences, the pair don’t always agree. For Chanarin, the personal elements of the show are less important but, as he points out, “this is the first conversation that we’ve ever had about this work. As you talk it over and over again you kind of develop a spiel and at the moment we don’t have a spiel. The weird thing is: can we avoid the spiel? Do we need to talk about it? Essentially it’s a digital dig of an archive . . . it’s

not bound by some kind of conceptual framework and I don’t really know how to talk about it.”

The inscrutability of the work also appeals to Broomberg, who says if you’re the kind of viewer who “might demand absolute conceptual rigour and political awareness, there’s something else here that we can’t actually explain and that’s interesting”.

Compared with their earlier work, there is a visibly looser presentation. Chanarin sees that as a reflection of the fact that they “both felt very vulnerable in producing this work and actually that feeling of vulnerability is essential”.

It’s a vulnerability that comes through in many of the images, but there is also a typical Broomberg and Chanarin sense of play and impishness in evi-

dence. Both the vulnerability and the playfulness are perhaps the result of the process, in which, Broomberg says, “there was no judgment and we actually let each other do what we wanted. In a way we’ve spent 20 years reducing our work down to what passes the Adam-and-Ollie censorship board and this is a time when we’ve had to let go of that.”

Finally, there’s another ironic way in which this collection of images reflecting on the ethereal self-flagellations of social media photography signals a departure for “Adam and Ollie”. That is, in Chanarin’s words, “a return to photography, because although these ‘canvases’ are very abstract, if you walk around the show there’s a real joy in the images and an embracing of image-making, and that’s something we’ve been agonising over for many years

— what does it mean to be a photographer, especially in an age where everybody’s taking photographs?

“Here I think we find ourselves coming back to making images.”

Broomberg & Chanarin’s exhibition, *Bandage the knife not the wound*, is at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg until May 26

Telegraph Luxury
15 October 2017

LUXURY

Adam Broomberg (left) wears: all his own clothes. Oliver Chanarin wears: trousers, £440, Comme des Garçons Homme Plus (farfetch.com). All other clothes, his own



The Disruptors

Broomberg & Chanarin

'I wouldn't describe us as war photographers,' says Oliver Chanarin, explaining his 19-year creative partnership with Adam Broomberg. 'Our work has always been about the role of photography in conflict zones, rather than the conflict itself. We're interested in photography as a currency in our lives.' Their practice has evolved considerably; artistic endeavours running alongside commercial work for Benetton's *Colors* magazine among others, until 10 years ago when art took over. Today, the pair are professors of photography at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg.

Passengers at King's Cross St Pancras station can view their latest piece, a powerful 12-minute film *The Bureaucracy of Angels*,

which explores the immigration crisis. 'We're expressing something about the Mediterranean Sea, which is a playground for us but also where people disappear - it's a war zone,' says Chanarin. Such preoccupations continue in their forthcoming show *Divine Violence* at the Pompidou Centre next February, exploring the history of conflict. Clothing is normally not so high on the agenda, though they appreciate Comme des Garçons and Martin Margiela. Chanarin says, 'We wear the same thing everyday until it breaks. We look like waiters at St John restaurant.' *The Bureaucracy of Angels*, commissioned by Art on the Underground, at King's Cross St Pancras Station, London, till 25 November; art.tfl.gov.uk

THE ART NEWSPAPER

IN THE FRAME

Refugee film for King's Cross commuters

by THE ART NEWSPAPER | 26 July 2017



The Bureaucracy of Angels. (Courtesy of Broomberg & Chanarin, Art on the Underground & Lisson Gallery)

Visitors passing through King's Cross Station this autumn will see a new, 12-minute film by the artist duo Broomberg & Chanarin. The piece, entitled *The Bureaucracy of Angels*, focuses on the demolition of 100 boats in Sicily used to transport thousands of refugees fleeing from North Africa. "The artists visited Sicily a number of times where they were able to explore the area where migrants arrive from perilous journeys across the Mediterranean," a press statement says. The duo filmed the rescue missions organised by the Migrant Offshore Aid Station foundation off the coast of Libya, as well as the destruction of the dilapidated boats left in a shipping grave yard in Porto Pozallo in Sicily. The Art on the Underground film commission, unveiled in September, will be shown in a space near to the Eurostar exit.

Wall Street International

ART

Broomberg & Chanarin. Trace Evidence

20 Jan – 17 Mar 2017 at Lisson in Milan, Italy



Broomberg & Chanarin. Trace Evidence, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

6 MAR 2017

Broomberg & Chanarin's first solo exhibition at Lisson Gallery Milan provides a broad overview of the artists' work through eight different photographic series from 2006 to 2016, presented alongside a new work created especially for the show.

Trace evidence is created when objects collide or connect and some material is transferred by friction between them. The term is associated with forensic science and the reconstruction of crimes, often describing how people, places and inanimate things interact with each other. An examination of Broomberg & Chanarin's work over the past decade unearths an approach to photography that is both anthropological and political in nature, characterised by an inherently investigative quality. The artists use photography as a form of conceptual ethnography, immersing themselves into spaces and situations that reveal evidence, residue or traces of past human presence. With abstracted imagery deliberately lacking a central subject or focal point, their refusal to depict or narrativise has become one of their primary tools for communicating the ineffable in war and conflict.

Works on display bring to the fore the duo's constructions of identity and human behaviour and can be understood as surrogates for missing objects or persons. The exhibition title draws directly from a recent work by Broomberg & Chanarin, created in 2015 for the Freud Museum in London, in which they commissioned a police forensics team to gather DNA samples of hairs and other fibres from the rug covering Freud's couch. These findings were transformed into a large woven tapestry, mirroring the scale and texture of the original, as well as a number of high-resolution radiographic quartz images, all collated under the rubric of Trace Evidence. When the artists were embedded with the British Army in Afghanistan, rather than photographing the landscape or soldiers in combat, they unrolled lengths of photographic paper to 'record' abstract moments. Only the titles the artists later assigned to these compositions – The Day Nobody Died or Repatriation (all 2008) – allude to a time, place or death, combining to create an alternative war diary.

The idea of staging, rehearsal and artifice relates to the artists' on-going interest in German poet Bertold Brecht and his experiments in poetry and theatre, an influence that is also evident in Portable Monuments (2012). Here the artists use coloured blocks as stand-ins for significant events or characters from newspaper photographs, the resulting fictions are vehicles to explore the documentation, dissemination and currency of media imagery.

Subversive investigations into the mainstream continue in American Landscapes (2009), which spotlight the interiors of commercial photography studios across the USA where images are manufactured, again in opposition to the rules of representation. Physical restriction and personal expression are more closely observed in Red House (2006) – photos of marks and drawings made on the walls of a building in Iraq by Kurdish prisoners – the recorded traces of oppression.

Lisson

Via Bernardino Zenale, 3
Milan 20123 Italy
Ph. +39 02 8905 0608
milan@lissongallery.com
www.lissongallery.com

Opening hours

Monday to Friday
From 10am to 1pm
And from 3pm to 6pm



Captions

1. Broomberg & Chanarin. Trace Evidence, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery
2. Broomberg & Chanarin. Trace Evidence, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery
3. Broomberg & Chanarin. Trace Evidence, Exhibition view. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

NEWS

Broomberg & Chanarin to bring their politically-engaged art to the London Underground

New film at Canary Wharf will focus on refugee crisis in Europe, while current show in Milan includes topical works from past ten years

by GARETH HARRIS | 23 January 2017



Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin (Photo: Thierry Bal, © Broomberg & Chanarin. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery)

The artist duo Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, who have tackled subjects such as the war in Afghanistan and the terrorist attacks in London, are making their presence felt with a new exhibition at the Lisson Gallery in Milan and a commission for Art on the Underground in London, which will be unveiled in September.

Commuters passing through Canary Wharf tube station in the city's financial district will see a film showing the destruction of boats used to transport refugees fleeing from Libya and Syria to Italy. The pair spent a year gaining access to the port in Sicily where more than 100 migrant boats were stored.

"The week before Christmas, the Italian government began to demolish the boats [and] we were there to document the destruction with forensic detail. The demolition of the hundred boats felt like such a melancholic act of violence, undertaken by the state against objects that speak of culture and loss," Chanarin says.

Meanwhile, an exhibition of the duo's works at Lisson Gallery in Milan, which opened last week (*Trace Evidence*; until 17 March), is described by the gallery as a broad overview of the artists' canon, featuring works drawn from eight photographic series spanning a decade from 2006-16. Andreas Leventis, the associate director at Lisson Gallery who organised the show, says: "Their work resists representation; in every image, something or someone is missing."



Installation view of Broomberg & Chanarin: Trace Evidence at the Lisson Gallery, Milan. (Photo: Jack Hems. © Broomberg & Chanarin. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery)

Among the works is a woven tapestry with a blown-up image of the scientific samples of the debris, left by Sigmund Freud's patients and family members among others, on the Persian rug covering his famous couch in his north London home (now the Freud Museum). The piece—titled Trace Fiber from Freud's Couch under crossed polars with Quartz wedge compensator (#3) (2015)—is based on DNA and other particles collected by a police forensic team.

ARTFORUM

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin

06.14.16



Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, *Rudiments*, 2015, HD, color, sound, 12 minutes.

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin are a collaborative duo whose photography-based practice explores themes of institutional authority, surveillance, and consent in an era of rapid technological advances. Here they discuss their recent book, Spirit Is a Bone (Mack, 2015), as well as their first US solo exhibition, which is on view at the Baltimore Museum of Art through September 11, 2016.

IN MARK TWAIN'S 1905 pamphlet *King Leopold's Soliloquy*, he assumes the persona of King Leopold bemoaning the arrival of the camera, the "incorruptible Kodak." This new technology is able to bear witness to the atrocities the king was committing in the Congo, and undermining the lies that he could previously manage in the press. Surveillance, of course, has since reached new levels of horror. Our book *Spirit Is a Bone* uses technology developed in Moscow, just now being rolled out worldwide, which allows the state to create a three-dimensional photograph, a digital life mask, of citizens in crowded public places—made without any consent or knowledge. They call these "non-collaborative portraits," and the phenomenon marks a fundamental shift in portraiture, where for the first time there is no relation between the imagemakers and the subject—the citizens. Using this same technology, we re-created August Sander's entire life's work in four days by casting all of his "categories" of people on the streets of Russia. Our poet is the wonderful Lev Rubinstein and the revolutionary is Yekaterina Samutsevich, from Pussy Riot.

We've spent some time in war zones, so when approaching new work, we decide to take some steps back and examine the beginnings of when young people give over to hierarchy, authority, and power. Virginia Woolf nailed it in *Three Guineas*, when she said that if men were not in control of education, business, and government, then perhaps there'd be a chance for peace. We gained access to a cadet camp in Liverpool—it's a grim military base where schoolkids between the ages of seven and seventeen get sent to learn how to march, drum, drill, and obey orders. What we didn't tell the military was that we were coming with a *bouffon*—a dark clown whose performance teeters on vulgarity. Each evening our bouffon held workshops with the kids, effectively getting them to unlearn the day's discipline. This power play is the basis of our film *Rudiments*, which is currently showing at the Baltimore Museum of Art.



Trailer for Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin's *Rudiments*, 2015.

We typically work in spaces populated by journalists, not in an artist's studio or on a film set. But we treat these settings as backdrops to a performance, a dance with authority that inevitably ends in us being booted out. We are curious about how these institutions of power function, from the military to psychiatric hospitals. The state's increasingly insidious command of our lives is acutely troubling. As photographers we always try to remember that the technology of imagemaking is never morally neutral, that it always embodies the ideology of whoever uses it. So much of our work is about seduction—getting permission to enter these spaces to gain an understanding of the workings and then find some way of fucking them over, of exposing the machinery.

— As told to [Gabriel H. Sanchez](#)

AnOther

Art & Photography / Culture Talks

Photographic Portraits Made by Russian Surveillance Cameras

– March 11, 2016 –

Broomberg and Chanarin's latest series repurposes equipment used to document citizens in modern-day Moscow, resulting in eerie images the artists deem "the digital equivalent of a death mask"



Detail © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin 2015 courtesy MACK © Jungjin Lee 2014 courtesy MACK

Text [Maisie Skidmore](#)

A strangely hollow greyscale face gazes out eerily from the cover of Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin's most recent book, *Spirit Is a Bone*, occupying the liminal space somewhere between an X-ray and a photograph. Its anonymity is very deliberate - the image was created not with a normal camera, but with repurposed surveillance technology usually employed by the Russian government, where it compiles images from thousands of snapshots taken on street corners and in train stations 24/7 - a concept that the artists are very much ill-at-ease with. "This technology is accumulating hundreds of thousands of archival images every day," Chanarin tells me over the phone. "There is an overwhelming flood of archival and historical information being recorded by the state. That's a very frightening thought."



Structurally, *Spirit is a Bone* is based on German photographer August Sander's 1926 taxonomy of German society, *People of the 20th Century*, in which he attempted to create an exhaustive cross-section of what people in 1920s Germany were like by dividing them up into sections - 'The Farmer', 'The Artists', 'The City', etc. Likewise, Broomberg and Chanarin street-cast a selection of people on the streets of Moscow to fill the same categories, but with intriguing new subjects. "For example, we photographed Yekaterina Samutsevich, one of the imprisoned members of Pussy Riot, to replace Sanders' 'Revolutionary,'" Chanarin says. "Our 'Poet' was the conceptual writer Lev Rubinstein, who composed many of his famous 'note card poems' whilst working in the Lenin Library in Moscow."

The shooting process was an uncomfortable one for Chanarin, largely due to the intensely impersonal way in which the photographs were made: the equipment was set up in a Moscow studio and subjects invited to walk through it while the cameras recorded their image, to create the ghostly, death-mask-like imprint. Partly as a result of the impersonality of this process, the overall impact of the book is unnerving above all else. Still, it is effective in its aim. "We're living in an age when the notion of privacy is being redefined in favour of power," Chanarin says. "What we want to do with this book is to invite people to think about what it feels like to be watched." In the below quotations from their conversation with architect Eyal Weizman, Broomberg and Chanarin discuss the historical and cultural implications of the work, and question the resonance of the photographic portrait in contemporary society.



The Society Lady © Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin 2015 courtesy MACK © Jungjin Lee 2014 courtesy MACK

On the technology they used to create the portraits...

“The portraits in this book were produced by advanced facial recognition technology that is being brought into use, as we speak, in cities around the world. Software engineers in Moscow developed the technology from an existing system built to recognise car number plates. What first sparked our interest when speaking with these engineers was the technical challenge they faced in producing what they call ‘non-collaborative portraits’ – where the subject is neither consensual nor necessarily aware of the camera. These portraits, essentially three-dimensional data maps rather than photographs per se, form a digital archive that can be rotated in space on a computer screen. There is never a moment in the capturing of the ‘image’ when human contact is registered; the subject’s gaze, or any connection between photographer and sitter that we would ordinarily rely on in looking at a portrait, is a complete fiction in this space. What we’re seeing is the negation of that humanity: the digital equivalent of a death mask.”



On the influence of August Sander on the project...

“Thinking about the human face, of portraiture and the defunct histories of physiognomy and phrenology, it’s impossible not to also think about August Sander, who set out to document the society around him during Weimar Germany, after the end of the First World War. He starts with the wholesome person who works on the land, he then moves on to employed people – the Banker, the Baker – and then he progressively moves on to the Poet, the Artist, the Artist’s Wife, and then to more marginalised people: the Unemployed, the Vagrant, the Revolutionary, and ends with ‘The Last People’, comprised of a single portfolio documenting ‘Idiots, the Sick, the Insane and Matter.’

The last of these categories, ‘Matter’, is possibly the most illuminating for our purposes – these were photographs of the dead, one male, one female, followed by a single final photograph, ‘Death Mask of Erich Sander, 1944’, Sander’s son. This image is stripped of any background context, the mask floats in empty space, eerily reminiscent of the portraits in this book.”

On the relevance of creating a series about surveillance in present-day Russia...

“Sander was determined to show a full and complete record of Weimar society but unfortunately his project was interrupted by the Second World War and the rise of Nazism. There’s a moral tale embedded in his project that even Sander could not have foreseen. Incomplete at the time of his death, his archive has been subjected to a constant re-reading and re-presenting. On the one hand it’s a heroic attempt to capture and preserve an image of a society reeling from one destruction and on the brink of another; on the other hand his portraits take on a new and sinister meaning when seen through the prism of Aryan supremacy, itself built on the foundations of colonial rhetoric of superior and sub-human hierarchies.

We see disturbing parallels of this totalitarian regime in present-day Russia: from the threat of imprisonment where individuals to all intents and purposes disappear from society to the illegal annexation of whole countries, and the kind of assassination plots so brazen and sensational that you would think they could only exist on a film screen. And all with relative impunity.”

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin's Spirit is a Bone is out now, published by MACK.

BE FURIOUS YOU'RE GOING TO DIE

BY ADAM CARR



The works of the art duo Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin are based on the assumption and questioning of different professional roles and practices, from photojournalism—which they undertake as a necessarily risky activity in Afghanistan—to a type of archaeology of modernity and “humor” that traces back through the strata of events in a given place. Adam Carr met the artists to talk over the opportunities that have led to many of their works, which often involve aspects of exhibition and publishing at the same time.

Adam Carr: Let’s start where you started. How did you become interested with the visual arts? When did you first meet? I remember I asked this question when we first met a few months ago, and I was surprised to hear that though you are both from South Africa, you didn’t really meet there properly.

Oliver Chanarin: We met in Wuppertal, South Africa on a camping trip. I don’t think Adam and I said two words to each other, but several years later I was living in London and Adam come to study at Saint Martins, mostly to avoid military conscription. He called me because he needed help constructing a flat pack Ikea bed his brother had given him. That’s how it started. Neither of us had studied art or art theory and our practice came out of philosophy, politics and a sort of idiotic curiosity. About 10 years after that, we discovered we were cousins, distantly related, which is not so odd actually since our grandparents all came to South Africa via the same Lithuanian shtetl.

Adam Broomberg: It’s a puddle of a gene pool. My mother taught at a kindergarten run by Olly’s late grandmother, a formidable character who was infamously the first woman to trade on the South African stock exchange. The last time we saw her she was well past 100 years old, sitting in a Jewish old-age home in Johannesburg, staring blankly into space. When we got up to leave, I stroked her hand and walked off... after about a hundred paces I heard a booming voice yell “Cheerio Broomberg!” I want that carved on my tombstone.

ac: What was the first project that you worked on together?

ab: It was a book and show called “Trust”. It was shown at the Hasselblad Center in Gothenburg and published as a book: a clumsy meditation on the absolute authority of the camera. Its various chapters charted the subjects’ inability to compose themselves, beginning with people absolutely absorbed in video games and ending with people under general anaesthesia. As a body of work, it testifies to how the camera has always been so tied up with power and is in fact a part of its arsenal. Somehow people unflinchingly agreed to be photographed, no matter how vulnerable they were. I’m sure it would be impossible now to repeat that project, which was made almost twenty years ago.

oc: It wasn’t a great book but I most clearly remember the last chapter... those portraits of men and women going under general anaesthesia. We managed to obtain access to the operating theatre at Guy’s Hospital thanks to a close friend who was an anaesthetist there. Later he gave it up to become a performance artist, so he understood where we were coming from. We spent two months going to Guy’s, interviewing patients during the pre-op and asking them to sign a consent form to have their portrait taken while they were asleep during their operation. What really shocked us was that not a single patient declined to be photographed. They were all so vulnerable and scared. When you are in any institution you give over so much authority to it. It dawned on us that we were aligned with the institution. Over the years we’ve found ourselves in lots of comparable situations—embedded with the Ministry of Defence in Afghanistan, or giving a photography workshop to Israeli Defence Force soldiers, or gangs in the Pollsmoor Maximum Security Prison—where our role is repeatedly somehow unclear to both those in power and to the subjects, for whom the camera seems to offer some kind of salvation, a false promise. We’ve somehow managed to harness that ambiguity, that duplicity, and it’s become a central theme of our work.

ac: Something you said before, Adam, about your early way of working—which you described as a classic documentary mode of photography—is connected with an interest I have had regarding your work, which I have not had the opportunity to ask you about before. Your work seems to have shifted from the “photographic world” to the visual art world, if there is ever a separation between the two. A related question is about your books. When does a work settle as a book and when does it become something for an exhibition? I mean in the traditional sense of a presentation of objects in a gallery space. Though of course there is a whole history of artists who have treated the book as an exhibition space, or the exhibition space as a book...

ab: There was certainly a definite shift at one point. Our doubts and uncomfortable shuffles have always been motivated by well-timed texts that somehow find their way onto our paths. One memorable text during this particular shift

was *The Journalist and the Murderer* by Janet Malcolm, in which she repeatedly expresses how baffled she is that people continue to confess to her as if she were a psychoanalyst, knowing all too well that she is a journalist—she is confused by their willingness to lay bare all of their dirt. Even though she’s now notorious, people still can’t help themselves. We share her scepticism with the medium and the one-way flow of power. Unlike her, though, we are not out to exploit that flow.



The Day Nobody Died (still), 2008. Courtesy: the artists

oc: Books are more democratic objects. They are affordable, which makes them very different from art-world objects. And more intimate too. We always advise people who buy our Holy Bible to leave it in the toilet. That’s the best place to really engage with it.

ac: It was interesting to me, during one of our previous conversations, to hear that you first made the book of Holy Bible on the wall in your studio, so to have it framed, isolated and presented within the context of an exhibition space comes back, in part, to how you envisaged it initially. I wanted to ask you to expand on something you mentioned before about the different guises you sometimes have to assume to achieve your works, which meddle with different modes of representation, and in fact, different genres... I am thinking here about the project you did in Afghanistan, which was less about documenting the war but more about exposing time spent there, in both a political and economic sense, and perhaps questioning the genre of war reportage. The project was as much a conceptual exercise as it was a political one (though of course the two can and do overlap). The project certainly speaks a conceptual language in its underpinning of process, performance and presentation, that could be seen to link back to artists synonymous with the birth of Conceptual Art...

oc: You wouldn’t think of Robert Capa’s image of a Republican soldier dying as conceptual, but recently unearthed interviews with Capa reveal that he was too scared to put his head above the trench wall, and made the photograph blind, holding the camera above his head and snapping randomly. Who would have thought that the quintessential photojournalistic image, made by our “brave” (male) proxy with a perfect sense of timing, was actually a forerunner of techniques like chance or accident applied by conceptual artists using photography? Our work in Afghanistan is conceptual, in that it could be distilled into a set of instructions and executed by anybody. But it was also an extremely dangerous undertaking, driving around Helmand Province in a “Snatch” vehicle we had turned into a darkroom, risking being blown up by an IED (improvised explosive device). That element of risk was part of it too... we had to be present, to be in danger, for the performance and the outcome to have any value. And there was nothing conceptual about the danger. It was very real.

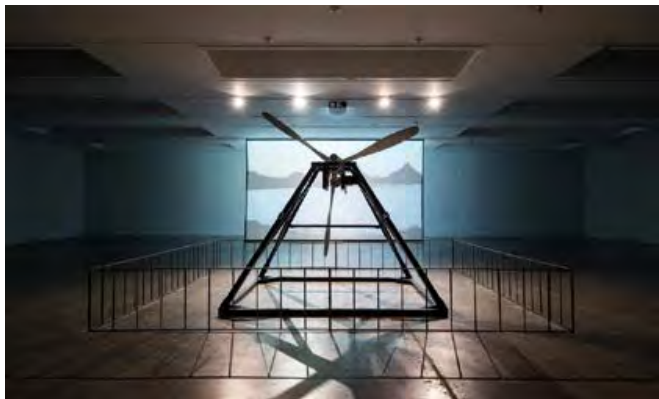
ab: It’s the documentation, the film that follows the McGuffin, the box of photographic paper, from our studio in London to the front line and back, which is more important than the works themselves. The film functions to analyse the logistics and the banal ecosystem of a conflict zone. It also demonstrates the most infuriating element of the project: how art can lie to and expose power.



Set of Catch 22, Guaymas, Mexico, 1969. Courtesy: the artists and Uribe Collection



"Dodo" installation view at Fundación JUMEX, Mexico City, 2014. Courtesy: the artists and Fundación JUMEX, Mexico City



“Dodo” installation view at Fundación JUMEX, Mexico City, 2014. Courtesy: the artists and Fundación JUMEX, Mexico City



“The earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up together” - Numbers 26:10, from Holy Bible; “Life for life, {21:24} Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, {21:25} Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe - Exodus 21:23 from Holy Bible, MACK/AMC, 2013. Courtesy: the artists



“Everything Was Beautiful and Nothing Hurt” installation view at FotoMuseum, Antwerp, 2014. Courtesy: the artists. Photo: Lukas Verdijk & Vesna Faassen

OC: Our recent show “Divine Violence”, where each chapter of the Holy Bible is framed individually, reflects the process of its construction more honestly than the bound book does. We poured through over 10,000 images to make the 720 individual works. We didn’t do it in a linear fashion, as the book suggests. It was much more chaotic and accidental. The exhibition, which looks much more like a massive collage, is a more honest rendition. It was overwhelming walking in there, whereas the book tends to tame the work. You can close a book, put it away. But you can’t escape the claustrophobia and confrontation of an exhibition of that work.

AC: Your recent exhibition at Jumex in Mexico revolved around the set of the Hollywood adaptation of the novel *Catch-22*, which again was much about assuming other roles—archaeologists, in this case—together with a team of professionals. Could you explain the project and some of its starting points?

OC: There’s a phrase in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*, “Be furious you’re going to die”, which became our motto, because the project traces a series of extinctions. Hence the title “Dodo”, which was the first species to be made extinct by human activity. With the help of the Jumex Foundation, we got permission to return to the location where the film version of *Catch-22* was shot, in northwest Mexico. Almost nothing in recorded history happened in this desolate place until May 22, 1969. The peak of the Tetakawi (Goat’s Breasts) Mountain was the only landmark along a deserted stretch of coastline. Now there is a highway along the narrow space between the desert and the Sea of Cortez, a favourite feeding spot for a variety of whales. A sequence of discordant buildings lines this path: hotels, holiday bungalows and weekend houses for families from nearby Hermosillo or retirees from Canada and the United States. A weak, corrupt or perhaps just indifferent local planning department has left this stretch of real estate looking ill considered and haphazard. However, in 1969, before all this, San Carlos resembled Pianosa, the diminutive island off the coast of Sicily where Joseph Heller set his satirical Second World War novel.

AB: This single event came to define the town of San Carlos and its surrounding landscape forever. The transformation began with the construction of an enormous runway, 6,000 feet long and 40 feet wide, large enough to accommodate eighteen B-25 bombers. Years later, the runway was commandeered by drug cartels and then destroyed by the Mexican military. In 1969, the smooth black tarmac ran perpendicular to the ocean, cutting cleanly through the scrub like a prehistoric message. Stunt pilot Frank Tallman had been responsible for assembling the fleet and reported that each plane was purchased, repaired and made sky-worthy at an average cost of \$10,000. There were so many planes on the set—some of them whole, others in pieces—that it was considered the sixth biggest air force in the world at the time. The director of photography David Watkins insisted on shooting in the middle of the day, when the sun was at its apex. Thus actors are silhouetted and the background is burned out, giving an effect of perpetual limbo that echoes the strange dislocated mood of Heller’s narrative. With just two hours of shooting per day, the production quickly went over budget and off schedule. Yet little of this abundant material made it into the final cut. Most of it has instead languished in a sealed box in the Paramount Studio archives ever since. The box contains 4,891 strips of film, some as short as several frames. Time has done its work, and these fragments have inadvertently become the record of a landscape that has changed beyond recognition. Thus material from a fictional film set in 1944 in Italy is transformed into a nature documentary set in 1968.

AC: The show was set into different environments. The parts of the plane were displayed in such a way that they seemed to mimic a display akin to a natural history museum, and the larger space was taken up by an operating plane propeller, which seemed right at home, since the exhibition space is a former factory. Also, something you said earlier made me think about your work as a comment about the politicization of technology... This is perhaps most apparent in your piece *The Polaroid Revolutionary Workers...*

OC: Like the Dodo, of which there is no single whole skeleton in the world, our archaeological finds were a minestrone of various bombers. Apart from the propeller, the various other components are laid out on a small plinth and hung on the walls in a small separate space, using the nails for the set construction. Many of the objects found by our archaeological team are undoubtedly parts of the B-25 bomber. These were collected, photographed, measured, catalogued and eventually displayed at the Jumex gallery. The effect, as you say, is similar to a museum display, albeit an undisciplined and unruly one. But there was a second group of objects that may have been part of the plane, though it was hard to be sure. And the objects in the final group were definitely unrelated, such as the thousands of pellets of dried rabbit shit that we found at the location. We decided not to discriminate, so the objects are displayed without hierarchy. The curator dubbed it archaeology with a sense of humour.

ab: The gallery at Jumex is vast, and we decided to install just two other objects in this large space, a propeller from a B-25 bomber and a cinema-scale screen. There was also a double reversal of intentions here. A mechanical intention—propellers usually suck air, but we had it turning in reverse, filling the space with air and making the cinema screen bellow and drag in the breeze. And then a metaphorical intention—by turning a fictional film into a nature documentary, we upset its original function.



I.D.0008 from the series “The Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement”, 2012. Courtesy: the artists

oc: *The Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement* is something very different, but again technology is the central protagonist. In this case a very special camera, which we used to photograph plant specimens in South Africa.



“The Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement” installation view at Biel/Bienne Festival of Photography, 2013. Courtesy: the artists. Photo: Prune Simon-Vermot

ab: The story goes that in 1970 Caroline Hunter, a young chemist working for the Polaroid Corporation, stumbled upon evidence that her multinational employers were indirectly supporting apartheid. With the collusion of local South African distributors Frank & Hirsch, Polaroid was able to provide the ID-2 camera system to the South African state, to efficiently produce images for the infamous passbooks.

oc: The camera included a boost button designed to increase the flash when photographing subjects with dark skin, and two lenses which allowed for the production of a frontal and profile portrait on the same sheet of film. Along with her partner Ken Williams, Hunter formed the Polaroid Workers Revolutionary Movement, and campaigned for a boycott. By 1977 Polaroid finally did withdraw from South Africa, and the international divestment movement—which contributed to put an end to apartheid—was on its way.

ac: What are you working on currently?

ab: Brecht spoke about his work as a series of attempts, the word in German is *Versuche*.

oc: It’s a nice word because it leaves open the possibility that a work is never finished.

ab: One of the attempts we are working on is a contemporary opera. The idea of making an opera began while working on our recent project *War Primer 2*, which is a book that physically inhabits the pages of Brecht’s remarkable 1955 publication, *Kriegsfiibel* or *War Primer*. The original is a collection of Brecht’s newspaper clippings about World War II, each accompanied by a four-line poem or “photo-epigram”. It is a practical manual, demonstrating how to “read” or

“translate” press photographs, and it reflects Brecht’s unease about the way such images of war were being distributed and interpreted. Later we learned that Brecht hoped to transform his book into an opera, and he invited Hans Eisler to set his photo-epigrams to music. There are 85 photo-epigrams in all, but Eisler only managed to write 15 compositions before they both returned to East Germany and abandoned the project. Brecht died in 1956 and the work was never completed.

oc: The term opera is misleading though... we envisage a large-scale installation and performance presented in a gallery space, rather than a theatre. In the spirit of Brecht, who famously collaborated with workers’ musical groups in East Germany, we are keen to perform the original Eisler compositions with a military youth orchestra, and we will be interrogating these young cadets on their personal notions of war (and peace).



Chicago #, 2006. Courtesy: the artists

ab: Another project we are working on is called *Schük Fleis Mit Tzvei Eigen* which is a Yiddish insult meaning “A Piece of Meat with Two Eyes”. It’s a phrase that my grandmother called my mother every morning of her life, apparently. For this we began experimenting with a technology known as non-collaborative portraiture, which reflects some startling new developments in the romance between photography and the state. The camera we are using was designed for facial recognition purposes in crowded areas such as subway stations, railroad stations, stadiums, concert halls or other public areas, but also for photographing people who would normally resist being photographed.



Chicago #, 2006. Courtesy: the artists

oc: Any subject encountering this type of camera is rendered passive, because no matter in what direction he or she looks, the face is always rendered looking forward and stripped bare of shadows, make-up, disguises or mood. So far we’ve produced a series of portraits in Moscow, where the camera has been developed. The success of these “portraits” is determined by how precisely the machine can identify its subject: the characteristics of the nose, the eyes, the chin, and how these three intersect. Nevertheless, the pictures cannot help being portraits of individuals, struggling and often failing to negotiate a civil contract with state power.

ab: We recently encountered a strange collection of objects housed in a provincial museum in Istanbul. They are contorted bits of metal that are the result of two bullets having accidentally collided on the battlefield and fused. We’ve begun a photographic catalogue of these coincidences, each one effectively having saved two lives.

oc: A bit like the two of us.



"Everything Was Beautiful and Nothing Hurt" installation view at FotoMuseum, Antwerp, 2014.
 Courtesy: the artists. Photo: Lukas Verdijk & Vesna Faassen



The Day Nobody Died V. June 10, 2008.
 Courtesy: the artists



The Day Nobody Died (still), 2008. Courtesy: the artists

6/2/2014 Broomberg and Chanarin's best photograph: Pussy Riot in 3D | Art and design | The Guardian

Broomberg and Chanarin's best photograph: Pussy Riot in 3D

'We took this with Russia's new 3D surveillance camera. Pussy Riot's Yekaterina was happy to pose'

Karin Andreasson

The Guardian, Thursday 6 February 2014



Yekaterina Samutsevich of Pussy Riot, from Two Eyes Above a Nose Above a Mouth, 2013. Photograph: Broomberg and Chanarin

Last summer, we went to Moscow to visit a company that was developing a new kind of portraiture. The aim is to take shots of people passing through places like border crossings, railway stations, sports halls, even cinemas. It is eerie and sinister: it captures the shape of a face in a split second, from multiple angles, using various lenses. It then constructs a 3D model of the head that can be closely analysed and stored for future reference. The result is more like a death mask than a photograph. The eyes have a deadened appearance because at no point does the subject look into a camera.

The image could be used as evidence in a court of law in the same way as a fingerprint. So if somebody was in a protest and a camera caught just part of their face, their identity could be traced – if one of these pictures had already been taken of them.

What scares us is that this technology operates in what its developers call the non- collaborative mode: the subject is not aware of the camera, they never look into it, or engage with it. Yet historically, photography has always been about collaboration: there has always been a relationship between subject and photographer. Sometimes it's been romantic, sometimes problematic. This undoes all of that narrative.

The big theme of the last year has been the degree to which both state and companies can access our private lives. This technology takes things a step further by colonising the human face. It might be used at a petrol station: a camera recognises the face of a 35-year- old woman and then an advert for sugarfree gum is sent to her radio.

Our work is heavily influenced by August Sander, a photographer who spent his life documenting Weimar Germany, from the butcher to the banker to the vagabond. What he ended up with were portraits of people at a time when Europe was imploding and the Nazis were using social categories for their own ends. We felt echoes of that in today's Russia, so we decided to use this new technology to re-enact his great work, People of the Twentieth Century.

We photographed 120 people using Sander's categories. One was the revolutionary, which in Russian today clearly had to be one of the Pussy Riot girls. If you spend any time there, you'll find that, in broad society, they are totally disrespected. We wanted to take this technology developed for state control and subvert it, so it made sense to involve them. Yekaterina Samutsevich was happy to pose for us.

Ironically, the only deterrent against this camera is very low-tech: the balaclava. So we are calling for people to knit them. When these shots go on show, we will have knitting circles. That way, people can make their own.

• Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin feature in Ruin Lust at Tate Britain, London, 4 March to 18 May.

CV: Oliver Chanarin Born: London, 1971.

Studied: Philosophy and computer science, Sussex University. Influences: "August Sanders, Walker Evans, Saul Bellow, my mother." High point: "Winning the Deutsche Börse prize." Lowpoint: "Photographing David Cameron." Top tip: "Never refuse an invitation."

CV: Adam Broomberg Born: Johannesburg, 1970. Studied: Sociology at University of

the Witwatersrand, South Africa. Influences: "The Marx brothers." High point: "Sharing an opening of our work at MoMa with work by Magritte." Low point: "Photographing cheese in Ragusa." Top tip: "Life is short."