

Afterlife, 2009

Collage, glass, lead, C-type prints, 50,8×40,7 cm.

● On 6 August 1979, just months after the end of the Iranian revolution, a single photograph recorded the execution of 11 blindfolded Kurdish prisoners by a firing squad in Iran. The image, which captures the decisive moment the guns were fired, was immediately reproduced in newspapers and magazines across the world. The following year it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, but for the next 30 years its author was simply known as ‘Anonymous’ —the only anonymous image to ever win the prize. Years later, the photographer was revealed to be Jahangir Razmi, a commercial studio photographer working in the suburbs of Tehran.

Broomberg & Chanarin sought out Razmi and, based on their discussions with him, created *Afterlife*. This work comprises of a series of collages that present a rereading of this controversial image, as well as an examination of the neglected images on the roll of film taken that day —an iconoclastic breakdown or dissection of the original image— that interrupts our relationship as spectators to images of distant suffering.

Portable Monuments (London Suicide Bombers), 2011

C-type print, 190×150 cm.

● This assemblage of coloured cubes represents a photograph, captured on CCTV, of the four London suicide bombers at Luton railway station in 2005. Continuing to interrogate Bertolt Brecht’s assertion that media images require ‘decoding’, Broomberg & Chanarin worked with students to develop a new lexicon for the reading of such images. To do so, they posed a series of twenty questions, including What is the resolution of the image? How close is the photographer to the subject? What degree of violence is shown? What degree of violence is implied?

The coloured cubes were then assembled according to the answers, and the different assemblages as a result of the debates —here we exhibit one of many. This pedagogic tool was developed during a series of workshops and aims to function as a means for deconstructing 21st-century news imagery. Each time a workshop is held the code is further refined.

Every Piece of Dust on Freud’s Couch, 2015

Trace Evidence, Freud’s Qashqa’i rug

Scanning Electron Microscope, BEC/BES/BET/LSEI detectors and 35 mm slides.

Trace fibre from Freud’s couch under crossed polars with Quartz wedge compensator (#1)

Unique jacquard woven tapestry, 290×200 cm.

● For this commission by the Freud Museum, Broomberg & Chanarin hired a police forensic team to scrutinise Sigmund Freud’s iconic couch, gathering DNA samples, strands of hair and a multitude of dust particles left by the many visitors to his home. These may include traces of Freud’s early patients such as ‘Dora’, the ‘Wolf Man’ and others, as well as other visitors, mainly tourists, who have travelled from around the world to visit this legendary item of furniture.

The couch itself was given to Freud by one of his patients, Madame Benvenisti, in Vienna in c.1890, and the ‘Smyrna rug’ that covered it for its entire active duty was gifted to him by his cousin Mortiz, a trader in antiquities, as an engagement present. The rug remains draped on the couch in North London where Freud spent his final years, after fleeing to England to escape the Nazis. The Persian Qashqa’i rug that covered the couch for its entire active duty was the primary focus of Broomberg & Chanarin’s forensic analysis. The thick pile is covered in invisible household dust, most of which is keratin, the main protein of skin. In addition to skin, the analysis found the rug to be covered with hair and cloth fibres containing human DNA.

The artists transformed the forensic scientists’ findings —presented initially as a series of high-resolution radiographic quartz images— into large woven tapestries that mirror the scale and texture of the original covering. The first in a series of these textile works was to be draped over the actual couch at The Freud Museum, London, replacing the rug with an abstracted portrait of one of its sitters.

The Bureaucracy of Angels, 2017

HD video, 11 min 8 s.

● *The Bureaucracy of Angels* records the demolition of 100 migrant boats in Sicily in the winter of 2016. The artists filmed the rescue missions by the Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS) foundation off the coast of Libya, as well as the destruction of the boats left to decay once the migrant journeys have been made. These boats arrived laden with refugees from North Africa and while their human cargo was either sent home or absorbed into the asylum system, the boats themselves were never returned to their owners, laying beached in a vast shipping graveyard in Porto di Pozzallo, Sicily.

The film is narrated by the hydraulic jaws of the digger charged with the job of destroying these boats, tearing them apart into their constituent parts of timber and metal, a process that took forty days to complete. The digger appears in the narrow corridors of the boatyard, on the open sea and in the midst of a rescue operation off the coast of Libya, like a *cantastoria*, or ‘singing storyteller’, recounting the Sicilian ballad *Terra ca nun senti*. The song speaks of the fear and pain associated with immigration to and from Europe’s most southerly territory over the last 150 years. The original music for the ballad is by Alberto Piazza and performed by Rosa Balistreri. It plays alongside a new composition by John Woolrich performed by the London Sinfonietta.

The film was shown at King’s Cross St. Pancras station, in a location close to the exit of the Eurostar, a passageway between the UK and greater Europe, embedding the work within the station and enabling it to be shown to a transient audience.

Not for sale and distribution in Iran, 2017
Copper plates, 30×30 cm.

● Broomberg & Chanarin embrace one of the most sacred names in Iranian literature, Sadeq Hedayat, focussing on his haunting novel *The Blind Owl*. As part of a group of Marxist intellectuals, Hedayat was antimonarchical, anti-Islam and critical of the conservative literary establishment. As a result, he was made to pledge to the official censors in 1935 never to publish again. Two years later, Hedayat went to Bombay where he printed, in defiance of Reza Shah's censors, just 50 copies of *The Blind Owl* in his own handwritten text. The first page of which was marked, 'Not for sale and distribution in Iran'.

The book, which was initially passed from hand to hand by friends, is today translated into 29 languages and widely regarded as having established an authentic example of Modernist Persian fiction with its profoundly radical aesthetics. Hedayat belongs to a limited group of authors who have found ways to speak to many cultures simultaneously. Despite its almost immediate acceptance as a major literary work, it remains banned in Iran in its original version, although a heavily censored copy was recently approved. The book is not only considered politically explosive, but its deep melancholia, sense of alienation and its confrontation with the absurdity of human existence has also led to the myth that the book has caused many suicides. Hedayat's biography renders this frightening tale all the more confronting. In 1951 he left Tehran and went to Paris where he took his own life under the spell of his "black dog of a mood".

In an attempt to quietly by-pass the local censorship laws, Broomberg & Chanarin produced 50 copies of the book in Farsi Braille. For their first solo show in Tehran, they exhibited the copper plates used to produce the copies.

Prestige of Terror, 2010
Work on paper, 22×28 cm.

● *The Prestige of Terror* is the title of a pamphlet written by the Egyptian surrealist Georges Henein and published in Cairo, in French, several days after the dropping of the atomic bomb. It was not a thesis so much as a manifesto, in which he reaffirms his distaste for fascism and describes this moment in history as the worst day in the career of humanity, in which the allies have come to resemble their antagonists. Henein despised the politics of compromise, 'the lesser evil' as he called it. *The Prestige of Terror* was a rejection of racism and murder as a justification to win a democratic war.

Broomberg & Chanarin exhumed the Egyptian surrealist movement at the Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, in May 2010. Over the course of their short and sweet life, the Art and Freedom Group, as they were known, prepared just five exhibitions and published two editions of a magazine, *La Part du Sable*. It is difficult to say what led to their premature end. What we do know is that the Egyptian surrealists spent much of this short period eloquently describing their demise. Still, on 22 December 1938, when this group of precocious painters, poets, journalists and lawyers published their manifesto, *Vive l'Art Dégénéré*, they were brimming with optimism. With their stand against order, beauty and logic, the Bread and Freedom Group, as they later became known, shook up a community steeped in academicism and the picturesque with their particular version of modernism. Herein was a remarkable moment when surrealism, in an odd alliance with Marxism, met the Orient. True to their spirit, the exhibition ran backwards, with the 6th Art and Freedom show opening on the closing night, 12 May 2010. Until then, the gallery space was dedicated to the production of new works, which were added to the gallery walls each day. This exhibition coincided with the publication of the surrealist magazine *La Part du Sable*, which breathed its last breath after its second issue in 1941. In this way, the third issue, planned around the theme of violence but never realised, finally saw the light of day.

This project took place without the consultation of any founding members—all of whom are deceased. Anyone with information about the dreams and works of the original protagonists—Georges Henein, Ramses Younane, Fouad Kamel and Kamal el-Telmissany—your contributions are welcome.