

Alfredo Cramerotti, Director, MOSTYN about the exhibition 'Divine Violence, Jul-Nov 2014, MOSTYN.

In conversation with Lucy Davies, Commissioning Editor, The Telegraph, UK.

05 July 2014

Broomberg & Chanarin are amongst the most interesting artists when it comes to discuss the contribution of visual arts to 'real matters' i.e. what we live and absorb daily through media and relations.

Their work poses good questions on the idea of conflict, its representation through mass media, its circulation as 'news', and ultimately how these kinds of images are shaping the way we live and slowly build our knowledge about the world we inhabit. In 2009 I have published a whole book aptly titled "Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform without Informing". So I am really intrigued about the connection of these two 'systems of representation' (art and journalism) that both aim to make sense of what is out there.

Alongside the Divine Violence work, I have selected two earlier series that give a different angle on the same matter. The Day Nobody Died is a series of totally abstract, non-figurative 'action photography' taken in the middle of a war situation. The work is almost antithetical to what we expect from a conflict photograph, the one usually associated with war reportage. Yet, it is prepared, planned, generated and ultimately distributes in much the same way of the traditional 'conflict photography' – the embedded photographer, the conflict situation, the witnessing, the reportage. The result is massively different, and it poses the question – what do we really see? Do we ever learn to see as much as we learn to read and write?

The other work I have chosen, Afterlife, is basically an anatomy of a picture. A very famous photograph of a conflict situation, syndicated throughout the world and awarded the Pulitzer Prize, yet being the only frame ever printed and distributed of the whole event. To me, the work of the New York Times' journalist who painstakingly tracked down the anonymous photographer, and Broomberg & Chanarin's work who sat down with him, got out the whole film and printed for the first time ever the other eleven frames, reflects again the question mentioned earlier – what do we really see? Afterlife does not stem from being somewhere at a certain moment, but it is a form of dissection of a received image, one that characterised a whole media approach to those event in Iran in the 1970s. A call to step-up a visual literacy that should go hand-in-hand with the rest of education subjects.