

ARTFORUM

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin

GALERIE GABRIEL ROLT Elandsgracht 34, January 13–February 18

Hans den Hartog Jager, January 2012



What purposes can monuments now serve, in a culture so full of messages, meanings, and temptations? That question underlies the exhibition “Portable Monuments” at Galerie Gabriel Rolt, by Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, two British photographers who have always been fascinated with what goes unseen in a photograph, an image. In the series “Poor Monuments” (all works cited 2011), the specific object of their fascination is Bertolt Brecht’s book *The War Primer* (1955), which

combines photographs clipped from newspapers (Hitler orating, Dresden after the bombing) with four-line poems. Broomberg and Chanarin have placed a translucent red rectangle over each page; supplementary materials indicate what contemporary image (accessible on the Internet and invariably related to the present-day “war on terror”) should be imagined there.

It is this delayed visual gratification, this prolongation of the desire to consume images, that gives “Poor Monuments” its special value. If you look up the contemporary images on the Internet after returning home, you are confronted with bizarre scenes ranging from Donald Rumsfeld on a unicycle to five dark fingers lying jauntily side by side in the sand—blown off in a bombing.

Delayed visual gratification again plays a role in the artists’ second and most recent series of work, also titled “Portable Monuments.” The photographs show blocks of various colors, which—through grouping, arrangement, and coding—represent news stories. The connection

between image and meaning is even more tenuous here, but Broomberg and Chanarin's creative choices (with strong allusions to modernism) do pull you out of the everyday flow of visual consumption. As far-fetched as its connections may seem, the exhibition makes it abundantly clear that the assignment of meaning, whether to images, photographs, or monuments, is a never-ending process.