


# Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin Artists: 'I've never been able to put anything together. Ollie is the one with the screwdriver'

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Karen Wright

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin work in a studio near Spitalfields Market in Shoreditch, East London. With its front windows aping a shop front and its back opening on to a shady courtyard, complete with a swing, it is a welcoming space. The three of us arrange ourselves around a desk so I can talk to them without turning my head as if an observer in a tennis match.

When I ask where they first met, they say they are South African Jews and first met in Wupperthal, a small missionary town in South Africa. Broomberg, born in 1970 in Johannesburg, South Africa, came to London to study. Chanarin was born in 1971 in London and moved back to South Africa when he was young, staying there until he was seven before returning to London. Broomberg admitted that it was over assembling an IKEA bed given to him by his brother that they bonded. "I have never been able to put anything together and I called Ollie; Ollie is the one with the screwdriver."

Debuted in the JUMEX foundation in Mexico, Dodo involved researching and uncovering the original set constructed by Hollywood for Mike Nichols to shoot his film adaptation of Catch-22. "The irony," they say, "is they had to build a road and the result is chock-a-block American and Canadian hotels along that coast. We went to Paramount and asked for their archival photos, so we made a film of the pristine Mexican coast."

Although it has been shown in photographic museums, and Dodo won the prestigious ICP prize, their work is not traditional photography, often culminating in books or films. Chanarin shows me a portrait of Yasser Arafat and tells me the history of the shot. They were working on a project in Ramallah and were invited to meet Arafat and took his portrait. On the way out of the country their film was seized and put through the X-ray machine, back and forth, in an attempt to destroy it. When they returned to England, they found the marks of the machine on the image. At first they tried to retrieve the original image but then they realised "the mark was more interesting than the portrait. They were active authors in the work".

Broomberg and Chanarin have a disciplined practice. They arrive at the studio daily at 9am to continue their discursive work. They have worked together for more than 20 years. As Broomberg says, "As you get older the collaboration has felt safer and safer and left space to express ourselves within the collaboration." They are comfortable enough in their relationship to argue in front of me, the politics in Israel and Broomberg's recent trip there leading to a heated discussion.

What touches me is when I ask about Broomberg's tattoos, and he tells me that they are the names of his children. Just in case you think they do not get on, Broomberg is going to be the best man at Chanarin's wedding next month. Far from being sick of each other, they seem to be ever increasingly close.

*Broomberg and Chanarin: Divine Violence, Mostyn, Llandudno ([www.mostyn.org](http://www.mostyn.org)) to 14 November*

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