

Broomberg & Chanarin

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Archeologies of Vision and Power: Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin

by Jennifer Burris for On The Curatorial blog

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In Ecatepec de Morelos, a co-extensive principality of sprawling Mexico City, a B-25 airplane propeller spins lazily within the industrial complex of a juice factory. This massive sculpture anchors the recently opened exhibition DODO at Galería Jumex: a white cube space for contemporary art wedged in a site of production and labor. Artists Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, who have been working together for over twenty years, presented a solo project drawing upon the 1968-69 filming of Paramount Picture's *Catch-22* (1970) on Mexico's western coast on the outskirts of Guyamas, overlooking the Sea of Cortez. Intended to represent the Sicilian shore of 1944, standing on the "brink of isolation and urban development," this near-mythic film set is rumored to have buried fragments of the period-specific airplanes it used once the shoot was complete. With the help of an archaeological team from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Broomberg and Chanarin excavated the site in an effort to find these material remains.

The three-room installation, presented with straightforward and effective curation by Javier Rivero, comprises a cinema-scaled screen projecting off-cuts of landscapes from the 1970 film, a series of black-and-white photographic prints of the purportedly last surviving dodo egg, the afore-mentioned propeller, and a room filled with an assortment of rusted artifacts found outside Guyamas. Evocative of projects by artists David Malkovic or Laurent Grasso, particularly Grasso's *The Silent Movie* (2010), DODO investigates cinematic history as archaeological site: inextricable from the landscape in which it was filmed. The archaeology in question is the non-chronological or non-linear evolution of sight and memory via mechanisms of cinema and warfare: twin technologies of vision and power both real and fantastical.

A grounding theory for such work, increasingly relevant to contemporary artistic practice, is Paul Virilio's analysis of the systematic use of cinematic techniques in twentieth century conflicts. In his landmark study *War and Cinema* (1984), Virilio argues that the logistics of military perception not only alter the strategies and geopolitical orientation of warfare, they also create a space in which the soldier's very existence is called into question because all sensory input enters the mind through the distorting lenses of illusion, spectacle, and captivation. Much like industrialized warfare, cinema is defined by the manipulation of images and sounds, the production of an alternative reality through narrative and sensory delusion. If, as Virilio claims, we are currently embedded in a state of what he describes as "pure war"-a limitless experience of conflict in which the military-technological worldview shapes our entire apprehension of reality-such (archaeological) explorations into the twin histories of cinema and warfare machinery are becoming increasingly prescient.

In Dodo, we see a triangular formulation of what such explorations are made of: trash heaps scavenged from the ground, artifacts of debatable veracity encased in museums and archives, and fragments of filmic or photographic images that speak to archeologies of power and vision. A telling anecdote rooting such concerns in the artists' larger practice comes from an October 2013 interview they did with Rémi Coignet for *Le Monde* in which they describe a story from the magazine *Granta*: "The starting point was an excerpt from the diary of a British explorer who went in Tierra del Fuego. And he told this incredible story: he met the giant, extraordinary creatures that nobody had ever seen before. And he described these people dancing around a fire. He had seen them from the boat without ever setting foot on land. Other people left in search of these giants, and they could not find them. And it turned out that he had probably never seen. But somehow, this new world of Tierra del Fuego, this strange land became a virgin area that was used as a projection screen. He projected his own imagination there... but also the imagination that his contemporaries expected of him. And that's what we ask the photograph to be: it meets an expectation."

DODO is on view at Galería Jumex through October 12th, 2014.