

Broomberg & Chanarin at the Baltimore Museum of Art

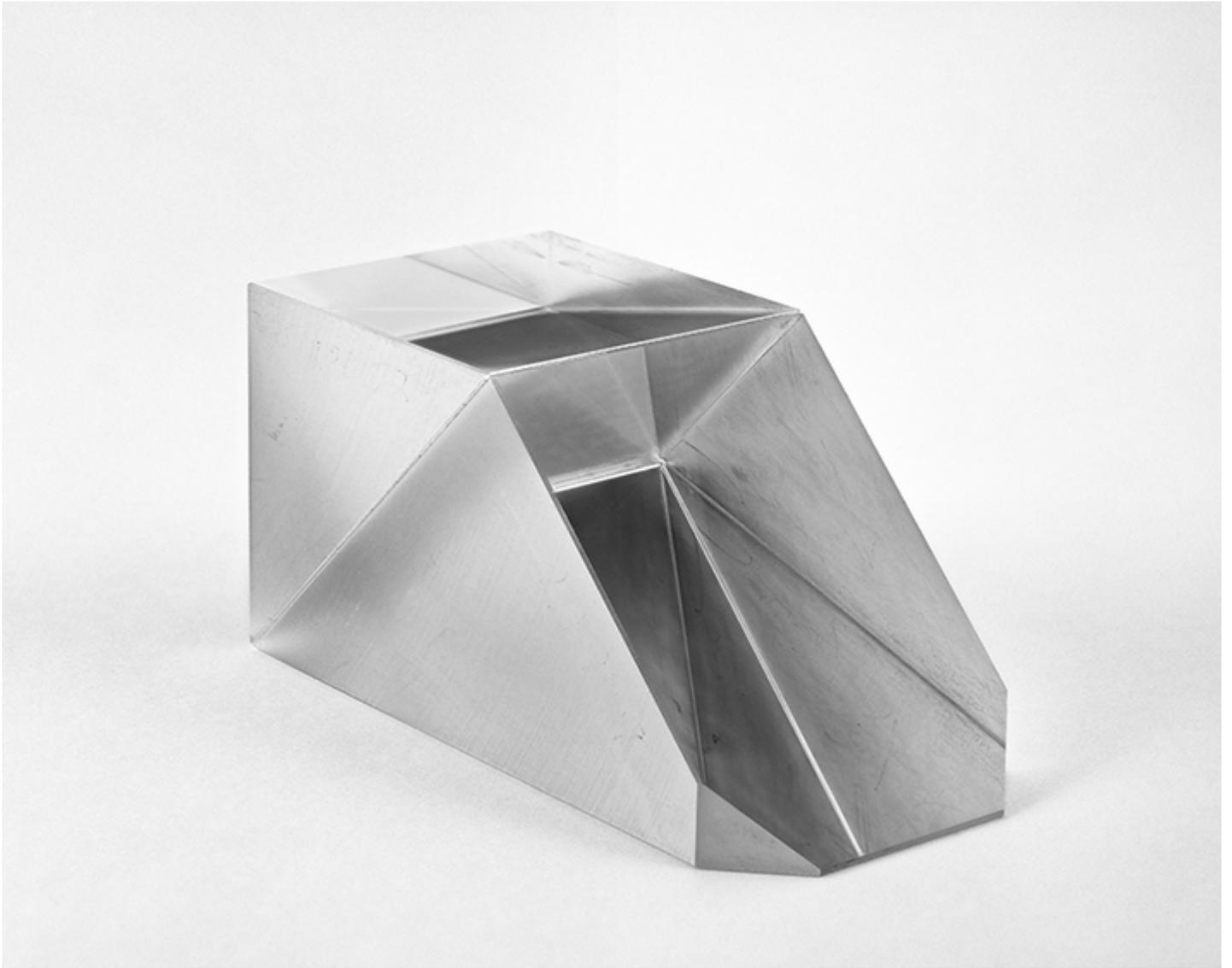
P [photographmag.com/reviews/broomberg-chanarin-at-the-baltimore-museum-of-art/](https://www.photographmag.com/reviews/broomberg-chanarin-at-the-baltimore-museum-of-art/)



Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin, *Untitled (Fused Bullets 1)*, 2015. Courtesy the artists and Lisson Gallery

Four large photographs dominate the main room of Broomberg and Chanarin's first solo museum exhibition in the U.S. at the [Baltimore Museum of Art](#), on view through September 11. Two of the images show close ups of bullets that improbably collided in mid-air over a Civil War battlefield, fusing to become a single misshapen object. The bullet images are paired in scale and palette with two images of high-precision prisms used in the gun sites of contemporary weapons. Because Broomberg and Chanarin's projects tend to balance conceptual coolness with visceral undertones, these arrested bullets and crystalline prisms are, together, a useful metaphor for the collaboration of these two artists, who began working together in the mid 1990s, most notably as editors of Benetton's notorious magazine *Colors* in 2000.

One of the repeating motifs in the BMA's show is the figure of the *bouffon*, a fool or jester who scorns authority. Their video *Rudiments* is a strange hybrid of documentary, stagecraft, satire, and musical composition that shows young British military cadets in training. The *bouffon* figure hovers at the edge of the marching drills, laughing and crying at the hapless attempts of these young recruits to meet the rigor of military discipline. The rhythm and emotional tone of the video informs its politics as it swings wildly between pathos and mockery.



Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin, *Untitled (Prism 1)*, 2015. Courtesy the artists and Lisson Gallery

Another work manifesting that combination of pathos and mockery is a series of 22 small-scale photographs, *The Follies*, that pays homage to the master of that balance, Francisco Goya. The title references Goya, but visually the photographs echo Hans Bellmer's images of fragmented dolls from the 1920s and '30s. The *bouffon*, wrapped in white cloth, seems to fall apart and re-assemble itself in impossible configurations of the human body. Here Goya's sardonic humanism collides with Bellmer's surrealist abject artifacts, creating images that are, in turn, ridiculous, horrifying, and haunting.

Broomberg and Chanarin dig around in history and contemporary politics to find forgotten or overlooked details that evoke the foibles of people as they interact with institutional power. Their work is weighty and playful — they are refined in their aesthetic yet suspicious of even their own authority. In this sense their work embodies the spirit of the *bouffon*.