

ARTFORUM ARTFORUM

“Death of a Cameraman”

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A cell-phone recording filmed in Homs, Syria, in 2011 functions as the curatorial conceit for the winning entry for Apexart’s recent Unsolicited Proposal Program. A literal shot-reverse-shot culled from YouTube, the video depicts the moment when a cameraman catches sight of a gunman, shots ring out, the recording device tumbles, and cries penetrate a darkened screen.

Displayed on a cell phone on the wall at the entrance to the exhibition, the hair-raising footage precedes a succession of five works by five artists—Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, Harun Farocki, Rabi Mroué, Hrair Sarkissian, Rudolf Steiner—that all address the relationship between the camera and the gun, between the shot that symbolically captures and the one that kills. Ethically conjuring a distant battlefield that endures over two years after this double shooting, the display also enacts the banal ease—and creepy voyeurism—of viewing a stranger’s ending on a handheld gadget.

Directly addressing the moment a sniper’s barrel meets the photographic lens, Mroué’s *Shooting Images*, 2012, involves a deconstructive reenactment of such an instance of ubiquitous, yet anonymous, finitude. In a similarly analytical move, Broomberg and Chanarin engage a much-publicized image of the execution of Kurdish prisoners on August 27, 1979, in Sanandaj in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution. Employing the image as well as others that were not circulated in the media, their series involves twelve frames in which haunting figures, excerpted from the photographs as well as their surroundings, focus on the fleeting instant that separates life from death, and the time it takes for a shutter to close.

Most eerie, though, are images that show no violence at all. Sarkissian's "Execution Squares," 2008, is a series of photographs taken in Syria preceding the civil war; each show capital punishment sites in cities that are completely devoid of the human figure, including those whose lives were terminated there. The conceptual gap opened by the exhibition—between the horror of a cell-phone recording of death and its visual inverse in these depopulated executionary scenes—deftly broaches the paradox that even documented horrors have the capacity to remain not only ungraspable but also unrecognized.