

Front cover
Soldat Ahmed ben Mohammed el Yadjizy /
Soldat Ali ben Ahmed ben Frej ben Khelil /
Soldat Hassen ben Ali ben Guerra el Amolani/
Soldat Mohammed Ould Mohammed ben
Ahmed
17:00 / 15.12.1914 / Verbranden-Molen, West-
Vlaanderen

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A copy of the video *Shot by their own side: Chloe Dewe Mathews on her photographic journey to First World War execution sites* is available to view in the main museum reception for the duration of the exhibition
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For further information on *Shot at Dawn* and Chloe Dewe Mathews please visit <http://shotatdawn.photography> and <http://www.chloedewemathews.com>

All works C-prints, 120 x 150 cm
© Chloe Dewe Mathews 2013

Shot at Dawn is sponsored by Genesis Imaging, one of Britain's leading photographic laboratories, and the project has been supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England and the Heritage Lottery Fund and by the British Council, Government of Flanders, John Fell OUP Research Fund and Van Houten Fund.

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IRISH MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
EAST GROUND GALLERIES
9 OCTOBER 2015 – 7 FEBRUARY 2016

Chloe Dewe Mathews: Shot at Dawn



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The number of soldiers in the British army who were executed by firing squads during the First World War is utterly insignificant compared with the massive carnage at the front... At the time of their condemnation [these soldiers] were branded as 'shirkers', 'funks' and 'degenerates', whose very existence was best forgotten. Yet, ever since, the manner in which they were tried and their subsequent treatment have given rise to a profound unease in the national conscience. Death did not come to them, random and abrupt, on the field of battle; it came with measured tread as the calculated climax of an archaic and macabre ritual carried out, supposedly, in the interests of discipline and morale.

For the Sake of Example: Capital Courts-Martial 1914–1920
Anthony Babington

Shot at Dawn is a new body of work by the British photographer Chloe Dewe Mathews that focuses on the sites at which soldiers from the British, French and Belgian armies were executed for cowardice and desertion during the First World War. The project comprises images of twenty-three locations at which the soldiers were shot or held in the period leading up to their execution (of which an edited selection is shown here). All are seasonally accurate and were taken as close as possible to the precise time of day at which the executions occurred.

Soldiers were routinely executed for breaches of military discipline throughout the First World War. To ensure obedience on the battlefield, the armies of nearly all the combatant states felt obliged to make an example of troops who disobeyed orders and men were brought before courts-martial, sentenced to death and shot for a range of offences, including cowardice and desertion. Most of these executions took place at daybreak.

Today there seems little doubt that at the time of their offences at least some of these men were suffering from psychiatric illnesses brought on by the horrors of

trench warfare. There is now recognition and understanding within the military institutions that psychiatric conditions can be attributed to military service, which can help to explain erratic and uncharacteristic behaviour, including conduct that could be classed as military crime.

After 1918 armies on both sides of the conflict closed their files on the war. Certainly, there were anecdotes about executions, and in a few instances the truth seeped out, but only since the 1970s have more cases come to light. Thanks to the efforts of veterans' groups, human rights organisations, independent researchers, journalists, and the families and relatives of the soldiers themselves, a number of these stories have become well known and campaigns have been established to exonerate and seek posthumous pardons for those who were shot at dawn.

Some countries, like Britain and New Zealand, have issued statutory pardons for individuals who were executed for cowardice and desertion. Other countries, like France and Belgium, are still in the throes of political debates about the rehabilitation of troops who appear to have been the victims of miscarriages of justice.

Chloe Dewe Mathews on *Shot at Dawn*

'As I stand in the 4am darkness, at the edge of an empty field in Flanders, I know that there is an absurdity to what I'm doing. Why am I searching for an event that took place 100 years ago? Why am I scrutinising the landscape when I know what I'm looking for is long gone?

For the past two years I've been driving from London to Belgium and Northern France every few months. I get up early and walk to a point in the landscape where I take a photograph as the day breaks. The resulting works form a series that records the exact places in which soldiers from the British, French and Belgian armies were executed by their own men after being convicted of 'cowardice' or desertion during the First World War. Military protocol determined that the death sentence should be carried out at first light, and consequently they have become known colloquially as the soldiers who were 'shot at dawn'.

In Britain, the files on the subject were closed to the public until the 1990s and when they were finally made available, it became clear that in addition to the French, Belgian and German armies who shot their own side, around 1,000 men were executed by firing squads between 1914 and 1918. Although this figure is minute in relation to the vast number of casualties on the frontline, the manner in which these soldiers met their end has generated a great deal of controversy since then. In some cases, shell shock or years of good service were not taken into account when verdicts were reached and official pardons have since been granted.

For months I researched numerous cases, trawling through courts-martial documents, using old aerial photographs and monastery diaries to pinpoint the precise locations where each man was executed. Academics, military experts, museum curators and local historians enabled my work and although many of them have dedicated their lives to researching the

subject, none have identified and visited the sites of execution in such a systematic fashion. Whether slag heap, back of a primary school, churchyard, town abattoir or half-kempt hedgerow, these places have been altered by a traumatic event. By photographing and titling them as I have, I am reinserting the individual into that space, stamping their presence back onto the land so that their histories are not forgotten.'

Edited version of text from Tate Etc., issue 32, autumn 2014

Ireland and the First World War

There is no consensus on the total number of Irish soldiers who served in the British Army and Royal Navy in the First World War; however, it is estimated that approximately 210,000 served of which 140,000 enlisted and 35,000 died. Irish men enlisted for many reasons. Some joined up because they supported the cause, while for others it may have been the need for income or adventure.

Many nationalists joined the British army believing the cause of Home Rule and independence would be reinforced by their support for Great Britain in the war. Unionists joined the British Army believing their support for Great Britain would reinforce the commitment to the Union. Following the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916 and the execution of the leading rebels by the British Army, public opinion in Ireland shifted towards the cause of the republican separatist movement. Irish soldiers returning home to nationalist Ireland from the war received little welcome or acknowledgement of their experiences. Many experienced hostility and had difficulty finding work.

During the First World War, 306 British and Commonwealth soldiers were executed by firing squad for cowardice and desertion. The executions were predominantly of non-commissioned soldiers and included 22 Irishmen.

Artist's Biography

Chloe Dewe Mathews (b. 1982) is an award-winning photographic artist based in London. After studying fine art at Camberwell College of Arts and the University of Oxford, she worked in the feature film industry before dedicating herself to photography. Her work is internationally recognised, with solo exhibitions in Britain and Europe and editorial features in the Guardian, Sunday Times and Le Monde. Public and private collections have acquired her work, including the British Council Collection and the National Library of Wales. Her awards include the British Journal of Photography International Photography Award, the Julia Margaret Cameron New Talent Award and the Flash Forward Emerging Photographer's Award. Her nominations include the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize, the Prix Pictet and the MACK First Book Award. In 2014 she was the Robert Gardner Fellow in Photography at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University.

Shot at Dawn was commissioned by the Ruskin School of Art at the University of Oxford as part of 14–18 NOW, WW1 Centenary Art Commissions. The exhibition premiered simultaneously at Tate Modern in London and Stills: Scotland's Centre for Photography in Edinburgh in November 2014. Following the showing at IMMA it will travel to Ivorypress in Madrid in 2016.

The project is accompanied by a fully illustrated book. Published by Ivorypress, it provides a critical analysis of the work by the celebrated writer Geoff Dyer and expert contextual essays on cowardice, desertion and psychological trauma brought on by military service by the acclaimed historians Sir Hew Strachan and Dr Helen McCartney. The book is available from IMMA at a special price of Euro 39.95 for the duration of the exhibition.

Talks and Events

Gallery Talk: Sarah Glennie
Wednesday 25 November, 1.15 – 2pm, East Ground Galleries, IMMA
Sarah Glennie (Director, IMMA) leads a curator's walk through of the exhibition

Critical Discussion I Alex Danchev
Wednesday 27 January 2015, 6 -7pm, Lecture Room, IMMA
Professor Alex Danchev (School of International Relations, University of St Andrews, UK) draws on his teachings of 'art and war' and 'art and violence', to discuss how aftermath photography and the power of the imagination can best serve historical, political and ethical enquiry today. Danchev has written extensively on art and politics and good and evil in the modern world and is editor of *100 Artists' Manifestos*. A moderated discussion follows.

Art I Memory I Place
A programme of talks and events over the course of 2015–16 will address themes of Art, Memory and Place

Programme Launch and Seminar: art and memory
Saturday 24 October 2015, Lecture Room, IMMA
Centenaries: what are they good for?
3-4pm: Keynote Lecture I Ann Rigney, Professor of Comparative Literature at Utrecht University and Director of the Utrecht Forum for Memory Studies
4–5pm: Art and Memory: artists' perspectives
Presentations by artists Shane Cullen, Cecily Brennan and Chloe Dewe Mathews. Followed by a panel discussion
Chair, Ailbhe Murphy, Director, Create

Booking is essential for all talks. For a full programme of talks, free tickets and to listen to past talks on the IMMA Sound Cloud Channel visit www.imma.ie

Details of Second Level Resources and the Second Level Notebook Project in response to the exhibition are available on IMMA's website.