

# PRESSING ISSUES

## *Alfredo Jaar* on how Africa is covered in the WESTERN MEDIA

VICTIMS OR ANIMALS: for Alfredo Jaar, the inhabitants of the African continent are rarely portrayed as anything else by the Western media. The Chilean-born, New York-based artist is best known for his Rwanda project, an ongoing exploration of the 1994 genocide which uses film, photography and installation to put forward a quiet polemic about the portrayal of Africans, the ethics of photojournalism and the value of art as an instrument of progress. This spring, his first solo show in the UK for 15 years will illustrate his conviction that the West is “guilty of a pornography of violence and victimisation” with works such as *The Sound of Silence* (2006), a silent-film installation based around a famously controversial image of a dying Sudanese girl stalked by a vulture. *From Time to Time* (2006) revisits an earlier work, *Searching for Africa in Life* (1996), which documented *Life* magazine covers from the last 60 years, of which only nine featured images of Africa (all were of wild animals). *From Time to Time* suggests that times are changing: nine *Time* covers devoted to Africa move from stock safari images to, eventually, scenes of human suffering. The apparently positive message – a growing consciousness of humanitarian crises – still contrasts with Jaar’s view that “we must be able to talk about violence without using violent imagery, to be able to talk about victimisation without humiliating the victims.” That’s why in 1999, Jaar installed red lights on a Montreal building that flashed whenever anyone entered a homeless shelter. The project was cancelled by Montreal’s mayor, embarrassed at how many homeless his pretty city clearly contained. It’s testament to another of Jaar’s beliefs, perhaps the most important of all. “I believe in the capacity of culture,” he says firmly. “I believe it can change things.” Laura Allsop

Alfredo Jaar is at the South London Gallery from February 16-April 6.  
[www.southlondongallery.org](http://www.southlondongallery.org). Right: Alfredo Jaar, *From Time to Time* (2006).  
Courtesy the artist

