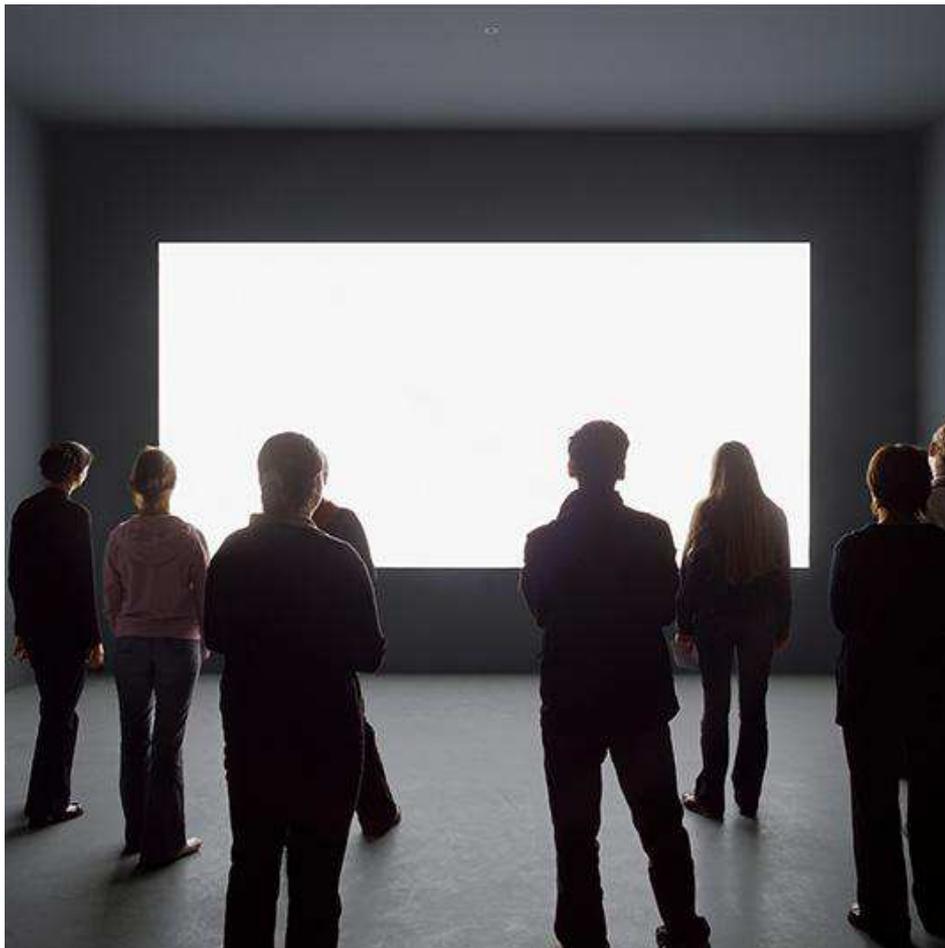


this is tomorrow

Contemporary Art Magazine

Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Mannerheiminaukio 2, 00100 Helsinki, Finland

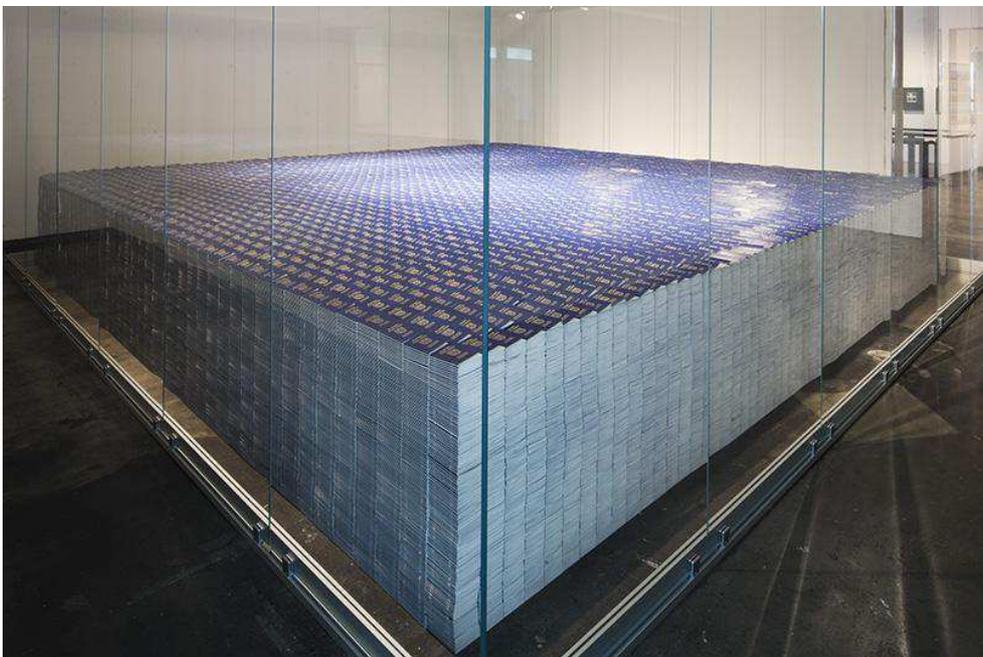
Alfredo Jaar: Tonight No Poetry Will Serve



Artist : Alfredo Jaar
Title : Lament of Images
Date(s) : 2002
Website : <http://www.kiasma.fi/>



Artist : Alfredo Jaar
Title : Culture = Capital
Date(s) : 2012/2014
Material : Metal, plexiglass, LED lights
Website : <http://www.kiasma.fi/>
Credit : Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Petri Virtanen



Artist : Alfredo Jaar
Title : One Million Finnish Passports
Date(s) : 1995/2014
Material : Printed matter
Website : <http://www.kiasma.fi/>
Credit : Collections, Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Petri Virtanen

Alfredo Jaar: Tonight No Poetry Will Serve
Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki
11 May – 7 September 2014
Review by John Gayer

Since the 1970s Alfredo Jaar has been concerned with issues of social and ethical significance. Not one to shy away from tackling unpopular issues or even forbidden topics, he uses art to raise awareness regarding the deceitful tactics employed by power wielding individuals and organisations, and the predicament of the underprivileged as well as the broader general public. Though numerous works stand as elegantly crafted meditations on man's inhumanity to man, they not only reference cases involving physical brutality, but also the influence and effects of political corruption, population displacement, international commerce, censorship and their long term consequences.

The crises considered by Jaar occur in diverse contexts and at various scales. He, for example, focuses on the plight of particular individuals and groups, and reveals how news coverage of their tragic situations has been delayed, downplayed or ignored by the popular press. His alternative perspectives attempt to redress this state of affairs and make correlations between the politics of media, cultural and social issues. They make us aware of the complex nature of images – especially the power they hold.

The complexity and power of images, as delineated by Jaar in this retrospective 'Tonight No Poetry Will Serve', is something that one comes to comprehend gradually when passing through the exhibition and later, while reassessing the impressions that linger in the mind. I first began to sense this in the placidity of magazine covers – witness 'Searching for Africa in LIFE', which shows how over a six-decade period Africa received next to no exposure on the covers of this popular American publication – and this sense intensified with the encounter of the million identical slides of eyes in 'The Silence of Nduwayezu'. Supplement these works with the 'The Sound of Silence', which relates the tragic circumstances of Pulitzer Prize winning photojournalist Kevin Carter's life, and the installation 'Lament of the Images', the centrepiece of which consists of a large, blank rectangle filled with nothing but light, and Jaar produces something that really hits home. These works not only urge us to reconsider how we think of pictures, but also to be aware of their history and the context in which they were made, how they are used, who controls them and what their restriction or complete absence might entail.

Ultimately, one comes away from the exhibition cognisant of a pronounced disequilibrium in the world and with feelings of regret for people who, for a variety of reasons and despite their appalling circumstances, were misunderstood, neglected, even abhorred. Select borrowed statements, which Jaar has reiterated as posters, neon lighting and the exhibition title that derives from one of Adrienne Rich's books, lend weight to his viewpoint. And the use of immense quantities of material in 'The Silence of Nduwayezu', 'You Do Not Take a Photograph. You Make It' and 'One Million Finnish Passports', produces similar effects.

Many of Jaar's works speak of the strange relationship between one and many. For example, the extensive amount and variety of printed matter and photographic material here bring about consideration of the unique and the mass produced. The exhibition also spells out that there is more than one kind of world: the world as it is and the world as it is depicted in the media. But despite the gravity and predominance of melancholic themes, the work avoids being wholly distressing since Jaar never sentimentalises his subjects. His approach to unveiling inequity conveys scrupulousness; it bears frankness and clarity. The survey is buoyed by his sincerity.

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