

Alfredo Jaar

(Santiago de Chile, 1956)

For more than thirty years, Alfredo Jaar has pondered the social responsibility of art in a global context marked by injustice, humanitarian crises and political oppression. With multi-faceted projects that embrace installation, performance, video, photography and incursions into the public space, he deploys as 'aesthetic of resistance' – from the title of a 1992 work – which has no fear of taking a stand before the most pressing issues of contemporary history. This is deeply rooted in his experience as an artist who trained in the Chile of Pinochet's military dictatorship, and debuted just after the coup in 1973 with a series of works in which criticism of the regime is clear but carried out with very subtle strategies.

Although he has not lived in Chile since the start of the 1980s, in 2013 he was invited to represent his country at the Venice Biennale. For the event, he produced *Milan, 1946: Lucio Fontana visits his studio on his return from Argentina*, a photograph in black and white mounted onto a lightbox that shows the Italo-Argentinian artist standing on the rubble of his studio destroyed by the bombings. Jaar, who on various occasions has reflected on the condition of the intellectual through the figure of an extraordinary thinker such as Gramsci, chooses this powerful image to celebrate art as a force for regeneration. Shot at the end of a war by which Italy had been destroyed from various points of view, the photograph demonstrates how it is the ruins themselves that make cultural rebirth possible. And as Fontana exploited it to rethink his practice in spatial terms, likewise Pasolini, Ungaretti and Moravia with their writings and most of all Visconti, Fellini, Rossellini and De Sica with neorealist cinema were able to bring Italy back to the international stage right up to Jaar, who has never denied being indebted to them.

The communicative power of the images is a recurring theme in the Chilean artist's production, and cannot but interweave with the reflection on the role of the media. A device that he often uses in his installations is that of a very strong light emitted suddenly from a screen, in order to remind the audience of the constant bombing of information that blinds us and which at the same time makes us insensitive to the pain of others. It is again around these motives that *The Rwanda Project* is articulated: his best-known and most appreciated operation, with which he denounced the genocide of a million Tutsi which took place in Ruanda in only one hundred days in 1994. Jaar, who was an eye witness to this silent tragedy, for six years tirelessly produced over twenty works, some of which examine the understanding of events in the West on the basis of the media, which for many weeks intentionally avoided giving any news of the genocide.

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