

Galeria **Francisco Fino**

**Alfredo Jaar**  
*One Million Points of Light*

25.05.2026 – 26.09.2026

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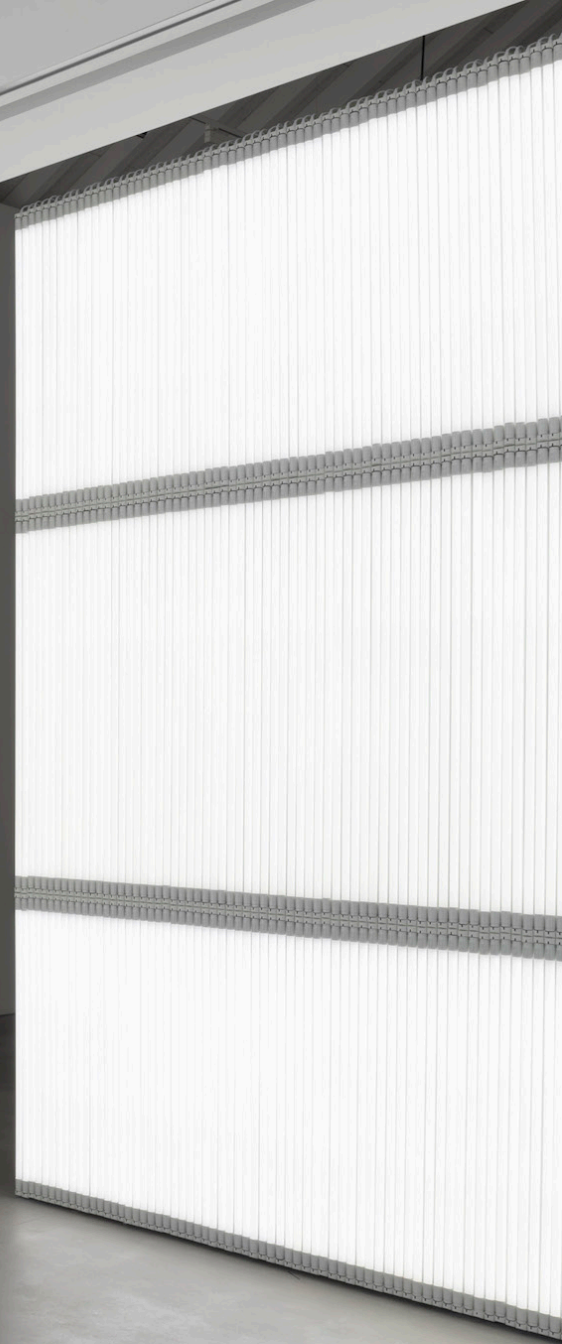
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**ALFREDO JAAR**  
One Million Points of Light

Curated by Maurizio Bortolotti

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# Alfredo Jaar: The Ethics of the Image.

## Maurizio Bortolotti

We live in a world of images. Social media defines the new ecosystem through which we move, a media landscape influential throughout the world. Producing images today using our smartphones is easy, like breathing. In a certain way, we live in an osmotic world made by images that mediate our representation and understanding of reality. The world is globally connected and represented by images, which produce a rhetoric of our actions. This rhetoric represents the new reality we inhabit and is embedded in our communications. The actions represented form an echo, propagating beyond the context in which they are generated, in a feeble representation, accommodating the blunt aesthetic of social media.

In this situation, contemporary artists have swiftly reacted to a world losing ethical values by choosing image-based communication, adopting a strategy to convey human and social values.

Alfredo Jaar is one of the champions of this strategy.

In past centuries, artists were the producers of images for society, but today, through social media everyone can produce them. Jaar's work focuses on the politics of the image. Throughout his entire body of work, he unveils how images reveal the internal and underground correlations within a culture, expressing attitudes, ethics, and society's values. He makes us aware of the power of images.

For his first solo gallery exhibition in Lisbon, Jaar presents two of his key works at Galeria Francisco Fino, both of which constitute a declaration of his poetics and their introduction to the Lisbon audience.

The exhibition's title originates from one of the three works in the exhibition. *One Million Points of Light* (2005) is an image that portrays the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Luanda, Angola. Water represents life as it is the most important element on our planet, supporting every human necessity from the most basic to the most complex. It allows nourishment, trade, and the exchange between civilizations; it is a symbol of regeneration. For Portugal and Lisbon, the ocean has historically been a source of inspiration throughout its history. The image of the ocean with reflections of sunlight photographed by the artist is very beautiful; the sun's reflection offers us a perfect image of life on Earth.

However, this image is one of shame, reminding us of 14 million African slaves sent to Brazil by the Portuguese between the 17th and 19th centuries, in an unspeakable practice, which characterized Western civilization in the past centuries as part of an ideology of progress, giving this beautiful picture another disturbing meaning. This simple image displays, in an instant, millions of lost lives as flickers on the

surface of the water, revealing the dark side of the so-called Western civilization. This picture denounces a practice as direct communication with the spectator, without indulgence and in a sober manner. And this communicates us the core of Alfredo Jaar's work. It is the opposite of the eloquence of the picture. It disconnects it from the circus of our communication system. It frees it from any amplification the system offers, letting it pose a mute interrogation to the spectator, which uncovers its real meaning, born of an appeal to humanity.

The other major work in the exhibition is *The Sound of Silence* (2006), an iconic work in which the artist presents a short film about a photograph by Kevin Carter, photojournalist and Pulitzer Prize winner, of a famine-stricken boy watched by a threatening vulture. The installation is contained inside a large volume, a theater built for a single image, whose access is controlled by a green and red light.

The extraordinary precision and sensitivity with which the artist treats this image gives it a depth that is not social or communicative, but a set of values, respect, equality, and ultimately, humanity. It considers human life the highest of the values of our condition as human beings on this planet. Jaar does not represent something, but gives us an immediate perception of the most important value: life.

In another work, he makes a simple statement attributed to Ansel Adams: "You Do Not Take a Photograph. You Make It". To observe the artist's ability to immediately convey a value is the key to entering his works. Jaar's process is to choose a single image, charge it with all the expectations and interrogations for which it is the vehicle, and let the image powerfully speak for itself. In some ways, we could say that the image burns in the spectator's eyes, and what remains are the ashes of the value that it transmits.

At the same time, the work is a powerful critique of an entire vision of society. A society that allows famine and slavery to still exist in our current society, in a world drowned in conflicts and violence.

In this process, Alfredo Jaar's work strips bare (or demolishes) the aesthetic as the rhetoric of the image, reaching its ethical essence; for him, the ethic is the aesthetic of the image.

Jaar reminds us that politics is not a separate human activity in society, reserved for politicians, but a fundamental aspect of any person living in a community, and we cannot renounce it in our daily lives.

This exhibition, which recalls the dark past of Portugal and the present of European and Western neo-colonialism, makes a positive appeal to the new generation, who grew up in democracy and respect for human rights, which Alfredo Jaar's art claims as an integral part of social and human activities.

Installation view of *One Million Points of Light*, Galleria Francisco Fino, 2026



**Alfredo Jaar**

*The Sound of Silence*, 2006

Installation with wood, aluminum, fluorescent lights, strobe lights,  
and video projection

Dimensions variable

Ed. 2/3





Installation view of *One Million Points of Light*, Galeria Francisco Fino, 2026

# Alfredo Jaar: The Sound of Silence

Okwu Enwezor

Alfredo Jaar's installations, photographs, films and sculptures are generally marked by their formal austerity but are often packed with technical triumphs and visual and conceptual force. Across more than three decades of practice, Jaar has extensively analysed the relationship between art and politics, bringing aesthetics and ethics, humanism and shocking ambivalence into continuous visible crisis. *The Sound of Silence* is a sculpture that blends several devices – photography, text, computer software, video projection and filmic duration – into one seamless narrative apparatus. Initially conceived in 1995, shortly after Jaar commenced Real Pictures, his mammoth work on the Rwanda genocide, *The Sound of Silence* would not be realized until 2006, when technological advances in computer software made it possible to bring together the disparate elements of the work in one cohesive structure.

*The Sound of Silence* is based on what could be considered a piece of public information: a photograph by the South African photographer Kevin Carter that shows a frail, emaciated Sudanese child who has collapsed while walking to a feeding camp at the height of a ravaging famine in southern Sudan. Published on 26 March 1993 in *The New York Times*, the image shows the child crumpled on the ground with a large vulture patiently crouched behind her, ominously waiting. The photograph became a sensation, provoking angry responses from readers across the world. Jaar was one of those readers. His initial reaction was perplexity at both the image and the responses to it. Having absorbed the grim news of the picture, he carefully clipped the image and story and filed both in his archive with the intention of revisiting them later. When he did so in 1995, he wrote the narrative that serves as the core element of *The Sound of Silence*. In the years between the publication of the photograph and Jaar's narrative, however, Carter was vilified across the world, won the Pulitzer Prize for his image and, a few months later, committed suicide, citing the burden that his line of work had imposed on him.

*The Sound of Silence* consists of a free-standing architectural box. The side that it first presents to the viewer is densely covered with rows of blinding white fluorescent tubes that evoke Dan Flavin, and their intense light, which gives off little heat but irritates the gaze, forces an immediate physical confrontation. To find the entrance to the box, one circles around to its far side, where a green and red neon signal indicates whether one may enter. Inside the box is a projection space with seating and a large black screen flanked by two strobe lights on stands. The eight-minute video begins with a text composed by Jaar in a stream of one- and two-line sentences, a silent narrative telling Carter's story and the story of his photograph. Near the end of

the tale, the image appears on the screen briefly, followed an instant later by a flash from the strobe lights, causing a momentary white-out and subsequent after-images, before the last lines of text conclude the narrative. With this momentary cessation of seeing, vision is called into question – a contestation prompted not only by recent technical shifts in the creation and circulation of documentary images but also by the unresolved debates concerning the status of these images in contemporary art. The resulting work thus functions on several planes, integrating different discourses of documentary realism and the latter's effects on humanism, representation, violence, ethics and photojournalism. This places *The Sound of Silence* on that tremulous line where the image is caught between the representable and unrepresentable – or, as Jacques Rancière has defined it, the tolerable and intolerable.

in *Defining Contemporary Art – 25 years in 200 pivotal artworks*, Phaidon, 2011



Installation view of *One Million Points of Light*, Galeria Francisco Fino, 2026

**Alfredo Jaar**

*You Do Not Take a Photograph. You Make It.*, 2013

Lightbox with b/w transparency and printed matter

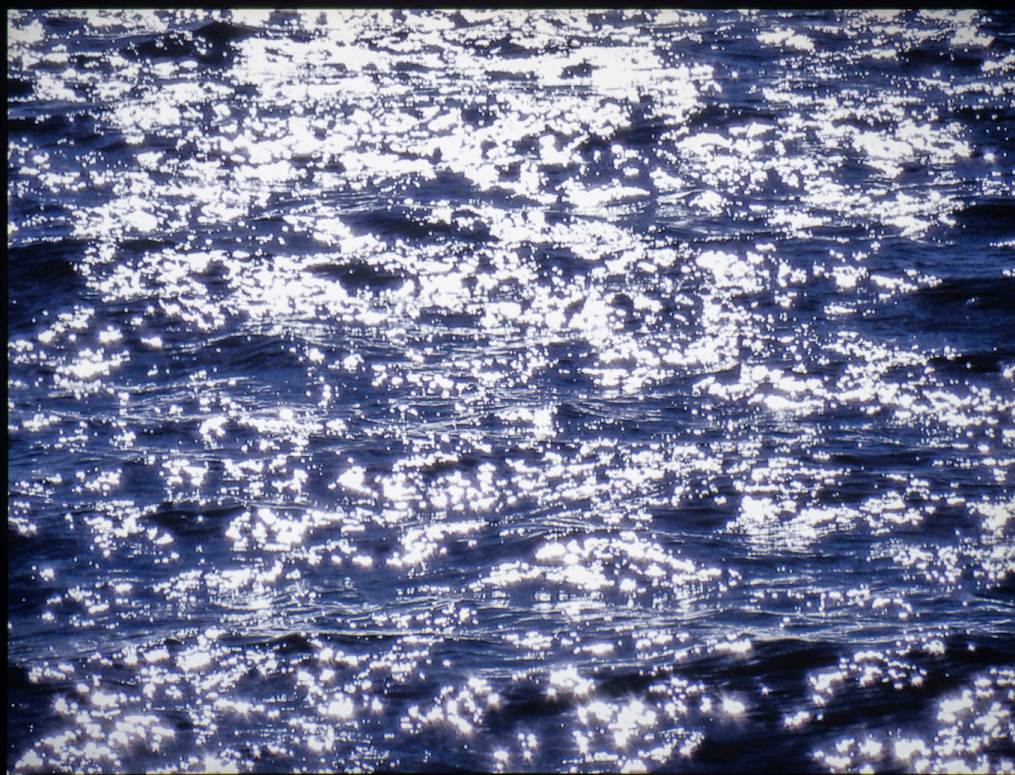
Lightbox: 150 x 150 cm

Printed matter: 70 x 70 x 70 cm



**YOU DO NOT  
TAKE A  
PHOTOGRAPH.  
YOU MAKE  
IT.**

Detail of *You Do Not Take a Photograph. You Make It.*



**Alfredo Jaar**

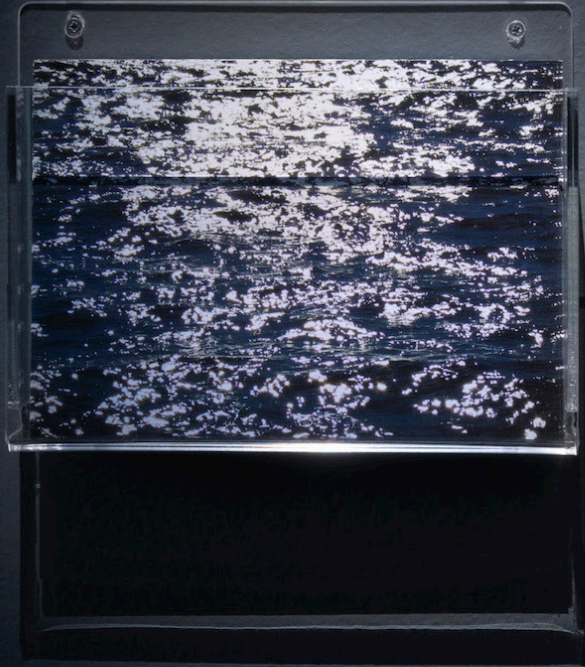
*One Million Points of Light*, 2005

Projection and printed matter

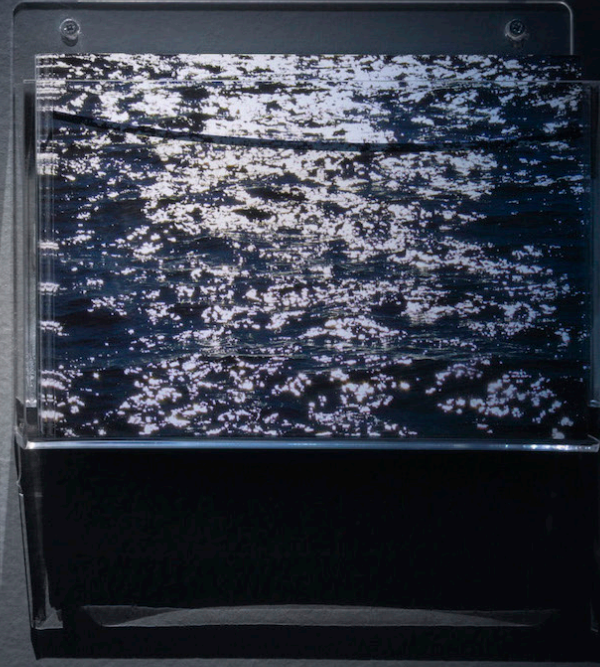
Dimensions variable

Ed. 1/3 + 2 AP

EN



PT



# Alfredo Jaar

Alfredo Jaar (Santiago, Chile, 1956) is an artist, architect, and filmmaker whose practice spans more than four decades and is marked by a rigorous and uncompromising engagement with the world. Working across photography, film, installation, and new media, Jaar develops hybrid artistic strategies to address urgent socio-political realities and the ethical limits of representation. His work invites viewers to reflect critically on how humanitarian crises, human suffering, and global inequalities are perceived, mediated, and often neglected within international discourse, while maintaining a strong formal and aesthetic presence. Over the course of his career, Jaar has persistently examined issues such as genocide, forced migration, and the imbalances of power between industrialized and developing nations, challenging audiences to confront what is too often overlooked or suppressed.

His work has been shown extensively around the world. He has participated in the Biennales of Venice (1986, 2007, 2009, 2013), Sao Paulo (1987, 1989, 2010, 2021) as well as Documenta in Kassel (1987, 2002).

Important individual exhibitions include The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1992); Whitechapel, London (1992); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (1994); The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1995); and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome (2005). Major recent surveys of his work have taken place at Musée des Beaux Arts, Lausanne (2007); Hangar Bicocca, Milan (2008); Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlinische Galerie and Neue Gesellschaft für bildende

Kunst e.V., Berlin (2012); Rencontres d'Arles (2013); KIASMA, Helsinki (2014); Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK (2017); Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town, South Africa (2020); SESC Pompeia, Sao Paulo (2021), Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima (2023), and KINDL, Berlin (2024).

The artist has realized more than seventy public interventions around the world. Over eighty monographic publications have been published about his work. He became a Guggenheim Fellow in 1985 and a MacArthur Fellow in 2000. He received the Hiroshima Art Prize in 2018 and the Hasselblad Award in 2020. In 2024 he was awarded the IV Albert Camus Mediterranean Prize. In 2025 he was selected as the recipient of the Edward MacDowell Medal and received the 11th Prix Pictet.

His work can be found in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art and Guggenheim Museum, New York; Art Institute of Chicago and Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; MOCA and LACMA, Los Angeles; MASP, Museu de Arte de São Paulo; TATE, London; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Centro Reina Sofia, Madrid; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; MAXXI and MACRO, Rome; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlaebeck; Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art and Tokushima Modern Art Museum, Japan; M+, Hong Kong; and dozens of institutions and private collections worldwide.

## [More about the artist](#)

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