

Press Release

Alfredo Jaar

50 Years Later

19 April – 19 May 2023



Detail: Alfredo Jaar, *Public Interventions (Studies on Happiness: 1979-1981)*, 1981

Cecilia Brunson Projects is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar (b.1956), in collaboration with Goodman Gallery. *Alfredo Jaar: 50 Years Later* marks the time passed since General Augusto Pinochet's coup over Chilean President Salvador Allende's democratic government on 11 September 1973. It is against the backdrop of this, one of the harshest military dictatorships in the southern cone, that Jaar produced some of his most poignant work, including his iconic project *Public Interventions (Studies on Happiness 1979-1981)*.

The exhibition includes vintage and editioned photographs from this series, depicting signs and billboards in public spaces in Chile, which ask '¿Es usted feliz?' (Are you happy?). The project involved interviews and surveys in which members of the public were given mints as a token to vote on whether they were happy. The question, innocuous enough to evade censorship, created a space for critical discussion during military dictatorship, and the importance of providing an opportunity to vote cannot be understated. Jaar was studying architecture in Santiago at the time of the coup, and these early works produced in Chile constitute the inception of an artistic career marked by an incisive and openly critical tone and an impulse to respond directly to political events. He has said of this time: "I don't know if it is due to my training as an architect, but I have been unable to create a single work of art that is not in response to a real event."

Other works chart Jaar's obsessive investigation into the role of Henry Kissinger in backing the Pinochet regime. *'Nothing of Very Great Consequence'* (2008) displays the recently declassified telephone conversation between Nixon and Kissinger on September 16, 1973, five days after the coup, in which Kissinger notes that 'nothing of very great consequence' had occurred. In *Searching for K* (1984), Jaar lays out every illustrated page from Kissinger's memoirs (*The White House Years*, published 1979 and *Years of Upheaval*, published 1982), showing his numerous interactions with world leaders, and completes the narrative with a photograph of Kissinger shaking hands with Pinochet, deliberately excluded from the volumes. Kissinger will celebrate his 100th birthday in May 2023, and it is in keeping with Jaar's darkly comic tone to mark the anniversary with a presentation of these indictments.

The neon installation *Cien Años de Soledad [No Realmente]* references Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and its imagining of forgotten lands in Latin America. Jaar suggests that Latin America has never been forgotten or left at peace, always a strategic element at play in North American politics. Amongst an exhibition of works which incorporate historical documents and journalistic materials, this seemingly poetic work, detached from real events, stands in contrast. However, it encapsulates Jaar's commitment to exposing the fundamental importance of culture and media, and of rewriting the narrative from the margins.

We are proud to present these works here in London, a city that was pivotal in providing refuge for Chileans during the dictatorship. These works will later travel to the Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago as part of the national commemoration of this 50th anniversary on September 11th. This exhibition constitutes the most comprehensive review of Jaar's work on Chile in recent years, with key historic pieces that established him as one of the most eloquent and uncompromising commentators on state-sponsored brutality and violence to date.

Alfredo Jaar: 50 Years Later runs concurrently to another solo presentation in London by Alfredo Jaar, titled *IF IT CONCERNS US, IT CONCERNS YOU* (18 April - 17 May), at Goodman Gallery. This exhibition, which chronicles Jaar's forty-year critique of the Western media, features important works which span the artist's career, from the early 1980s through to new works created in 2022, which have not been exhibited before. It is the largest presentation of Jaar's *Press Works* series to date.

Event:

Private view and walkthrough with the artist
April 19th, 2023
PV: 6:30 PM | Walkthrough: 7:00 PM

Press:

Alexia Menikou
am@alexiamenikou.com

Enquiries:

Dom Christie
dom@ceciliabrunsonprojects.com