

A visual connection to Darfur



LYNSEY ADDARIO

BY MICHAEL PETROU • Leslie Thomas's life was changed by a photograph of an infant girl with a bullet hole in her back. Late one night, after nursing her son, Nico, Thomas found the image posted on the Internet by Mihad Hamid, a Darfur refugee who had escaped an attack on her village by Sudanese government helicopter gunships and their janjaweed militia allies. She looked at her son, looked back at the photograph of the wounded Sudanese girl, and broke down in tears. Since then, Thomas, a 42-year-old architect from Chicago, has worked with some of the world's best photographers to assemble a travelling exhibition of projected digital images about the conflict in Darfur, where at least 200,000 people have been killed and two million displaced since 2003.

She wants those who see the photographs to feel connected to the people in them. "They're not statistics," she says. "We have an obligation to care about them, just as if they lived down the street." The exhibit, titled *Darfur/Darfur*, has already been shown at venues across Europe, the United States and South Africa, and will appear at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto from Sept. 8 to 17. It may also be shown at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, from Sept. 26 to Oct. 3, although this has not yet been finalized.

Thomas is pleased with the response the exhibit has generated but downplays its utility. "If you are living on the ground in Darfur, your life is not better this year than it was last year," she says. "Until there's peace, I don't think we've really done anything at all. But I do feel, for the first time, that perhaps you can say you're doing the best you can. I did nothing during Rwanda. I did nothing during Cambodia. I wasn't alive during the Holocaust. I wanted to be able to tell Nico that I tried something." **M**

Hunger and want: (this page, from top) Malnourished children rest at a feeding centre in Bahai, Chad, not far from the border with Sudan; refugee children learn their Koran at an open-air Islamic school; a soldier in the rebel Sudanese Liberation Army on guard

Fire and wind: (opposite) The village of Um Ziefa burns after being set alight by janjaweed fighters; rebel soldiers with their equipment stuck in the mud during a sandstorm



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Life and death: (opposite page, from top) Refugee women await food rations inside a camp; in Bahai, Sudanese refugees dig a grave for a fellow unfortunate

War and its consequences: (this page, clockwise from top) A disabled child in Nyala; women displaced from the village of Tama, a week after it had been attacked by janjaweed soldiers; a destroyed village near Nyala; SLA soldiers train at Haskanita



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