

A young militiaman jailed in Rwanda has devised an ingenious sling to watch the outside and forbidden world.

Picture by
Francesco Zizola



A leaf in the wind

Italian photographer **Francesco Zizola**, 1996 winner of the World Press Photographer Award, has embarked on a world-wide documentary of street children called 'Heirs of 2000: Children of the new era'. Rhodes photojournalism lecturer, **Montgomery Cooper**, explores this body of work.

Zizola is a quiet person and as keynote speaker of the Second World Congress of Professional Photographers, he was almost invisible. But his documentary essay has certainly made the plight of the world's children very visible.

He has spent the last three years documenting the children of Brazil, North Korea, Kurdistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Angola and Kenya. These children are living on the streets; they are sex slaves, labourers and casualties of war.

Zizola strives to develop a relationship with his subjects and spent nearly a year in Brazil working, living and recording street children.

A compassionate and thoughtful photojournalist, he is concerned with the images he captures, the people he is photographing and how their lives will change after his pictures.

In Brazil his photographs are peopled with little kids. Despite the horrific content of his work, his photographs evidence a concern with balance, framing and the creation of contrast. The works are, at times, almost too beautifully composed. For example, one photograph shows a child in the streets of Rio, lying untended, dead, with newspapers barely covering him, blood seeping away down the gutter. The amazing shot makes the child look like some tragic sculpture.

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His work on Thailand is about the child sex industry. He says he tries "not to capture images voyeuristically". He doesn't want to "perpetuate the visual selling" of the sex industry. One image shows a child being sold for a television set.

He describes the horrific lives of the slave children of Bangladesh through such shots as the one of a small child, aged about nine, with colossal gloves, hacking away in the monstrous sugar cane plantations. "Children do not exist in Bangladesh - they are not allowed to be kids," he says.

Zizola doesn't just portray what is in front of him, he tries to add a "second dimension to the reality", capturing the other side of the horror of war through the eyes and lives of children.

His work is reminiscent of Cartier Bresson in that he does not crop his images, and so we see all the reality that the photojournalist sees, "fit to print", to quote Zizola.

Zizola has an almost unbelievably calm response to the degradations he sees around him.

But he says: "I feel like a leaf in the wind - only talking about the results of war."