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Haiti, Poverty and the Power of Film

02.19.2010 | Culture and Society, Fine Arts Independent Christian filmmaker Gerry Straub is sometimes haunted at night by images of the desperately hard life of the Haitian people he filmed — three weeks before the devastating earthquake of Jan. 12.

One week after that 7.0-magnitude earthquake, Straub returned to Haiti with a group of pediatric surgeons to film the aftermath and recovery efforts and hear the stories of those who are suffering.

Straub will share his videos and the stories of what he experienced in a presentation called "Putting the Power of Film at the Service of the Poor" at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 23, in Kennedy Union Boll Theatre. The event is free and open to the public.

Straub is president and CEO of The San Damiano Foundation, which recognizes the power of film to touch and inspire people. He creates videos to shed light on poverty and its crushing impact in both human and spiritual dimensions and to raise money for Christian charities that aid the world's poor.

In December, he spent a week in Haiti filming at Cité Soleil (City of the Sun), a village Straub described on his blog as so destitute that its residents "eat pies made of clay and dirt, pigs rummage through rubbish and women and children squat in the rancid, insect-infested rubbish to defecate and urinate."

Straub spent much of his time in Cité Soleil with the Rev. Tom Hagan, a former chaplain at Princeton University, who has served the people of Haiti for nearly 20 years.

Straub had planned to return in February to continue filming, but then disaster struck.

"I felt this deep need to be one with the suffering people of Haiti, to see their anguish, to feel their pain," he wrote on his blog (see the related link). "I believe the film we will produce, with powerful footage from before the earthquake and with footage from immediately after the earthquake will be so intense, so compelling that it will raise a ton of money for people like Father Tom, who have been quietly working in the shadows for years, doing what they can for the truly neediest of Port-au-Prince, truly living the self-emptying love Christ asks from all of us."

Straub has posted two 10-minute videos on his blog featuring footage from both trips, before and after the earthquake.

The presentation is sponsored by the University's Institute for Pastoral Initiatives, the Program for Christian Leadership, Campus Ministry, the religious studies department and the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community.

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