

Images drive action

THE HAITI PROJECT

where: Uber Gallery, 53 Fitzroy Street, St Kilda

when: February 2–21

preview: Denise Mooney

Haiti's place in the top five most dangerous nations didn't deter independent photographer Christina Simons from documenting the poverty and helping to foster understanding through her work.

The 32-year-old's trip to Port-au-Prince in May last year has resulted in a striking photographic exhibition featuring more than 40 portraits.

US-born Simons says she hopes her work will raise awareness about the country's atrocious human rights record particularly in regard to the "restaveks" – children sold into slavery.

"When I came across the issue of child slavery I found myself really disturbed and also really curious as to how that could be," she says. "So much of me just wanted to try and understand their perspective and then somehow convey it and make a difference with it in some way."

The level of poverty was also shocking to the photographer.

"On my first day I went to an orphanage of 35 children and they hadn't eaten in three days. And then I found out that it only costs \$50 to feed them for a month," she says. "For the first few days I was really struggling but then you kind of push through it ... because it drives you to do something about it."

Simons says one of the most memorable experiences in her month-long stay was a trip to Cite Soleil, a notorious slum in Port-au-Prince. Her guide and "fixer" had to meet with the local gang leader to ensure her safety in a part of the city where white people are routinely kidnapped.

The poverty evident in the images is startling and Simons says this is part of what drives the slave trade – people giving up their children because they aren't able to feed them.

All funds raised through the exhibition will go to charities working with children in Haiti.

