

A complex piece by South African-born artist Siemon Allen—he now splits his time between Richmond and Washington—seems to explore American attitudes toward the world outside. Allen has taken two years' worth of issues of *The Washington Post*, and two years of the *Washington Times*, and looked at their coverage of his native land. He pins up a page from either paper when it features an article with a mention of South Africa and veils all the page's other stories behind tissue paper. His newspaper-lined gallery gives a kind of pseudo-statistical impression of the paucity of coverage of his native land, and of the form that coverage takes.

Allen says the project came more from some inchoate, intuitive compulsion than as an illustration of a tidy thesis, and it's hard to take a simple message home from it. But it clearly has more to do with the longings and frustrations of a person far from home than with specifically American phenomena or failings. (I'm sure that South Africa would not get much different play in *Le Monde* or the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.) The piece is not so much about the American Effect as it is about the Immigrant Experience, as it could be lived out almost anywhere on Earth.

"The Whitney uses a Long Lense
for its US Close-up"

THE WASHINGTON POST

Blake Gopnik

August 24, 2003