

Press Release

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FREEDOM
TO CREATE

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2008 Freedom to Create Prize shortlist

20 November, 2008, London – A Ugandan sculptor, a controversial Kurdish singer, a troupe of Brazilian teenage hip-hop artists and a Syrian painter currently imprisoned in Damascus are some of the artists shortlisted for a groundbreaking new arts prize designed to celebrate the role of arts in promoting human rights. The awards for the Prize will be presented in London next week.

The inaugural Freedom to Create Prize has been embraced by artists on the frontline, the global arts in development sector and the human rights community, with 930 entries received from 86 countries. Established by the philanthropic organisation ArtAction, the prize is comprised of three categories – Freedom to Create Youth Prize, which is open to artists under the age of 18, Freedom to Create Imprisoned Artist Prize, which focuses on artists who are currently imprisoned due to their work, and the main Freedom to Create Prize.

All categories are open to individuals or groups that use their creative work to foster empathy and understanding, and confront discrimination and oppression. This is not a typical art prize: it does not simply judge the skill of the artist, but rather it recognises how the artist has used their work to promote awareness and alert people to the plight of others.

The Freedom to Create Prize will be judged by a panel of eminent artists, commentators and human rights experts, including Htein Lin, Carlos Reyes-Manzo, Andrew Dickson, and Ana Tzarev, and carries a total prize fund of US\$ 125,000.

Shortlisted for the main Freedom to Create Prize

The winner of this award will receive \$50,000 (\$25,000 to the artist or group and \$25,000 to a nominated organisation to further the cause the artwork has highlighted). The five shortlisted nominations are:

Belarus Free Theatre (Belarus):

This underground theatre project was founded in 2005 as an artistic means of resisting the censorship and pressure of the Belarusian government under President Lukashenko. Founded by playwrights Nikolai Khalezin and his wife Natalya Koliada, they believe that counterculture offers the most effective way to raise awareness and keep hope alive. Their plays often deal with taboo themes such as torture and sanctioned 'disappearances', and are performed in private apartments. 'Campaign Stop Violence' comprises of four plays and confronts the truths about government by standing up to censorship and repression. The theatre has been actively supported by Tom Stoppard and enjoyed success at the Soho theatre in 2008.

Deeyah (USA):

Billed as "The Muslim Madonna" by The Sun, Deeyah is a Pakistani-Norwegian singer and human rights activist. Since recording her first album aged 14 years old in Oslo, Deeyah has worked with

renowned musicians including Andy Summers from The Police and Bob James. Currently residing in the US, her controversial lyrics about free speech and women's rights have outraged conservative elements in the Muslim community, and she and her family have been plagued by death threats. Despite these attacks Deeyah has continued to sing, releasing her music video 'What Will It Be?' to protest the curtailment of her freedoms.

Cont Mhlanga and Amakhosi Theatre (Zimbabwe):

Cont Mhlanga has been practising protest theatre and challenging state ideologies for over 25 years. Since founding the Amakhosi Performing Arts Academy in 1987 and the Theatre for Community Action his artistic works have stirred audiences to action and led to substantial social change. His play 'The Good President', a politically charged satire depicting Mugabe's dictatorship over Zimbabwe since 1980, has led to state surveillance and death threats by the secret police.

Peter Oloya (Uganda):

Ugandan sculptor Peter Oloya is an award-winning artist who uses art as therapy to overcome his profound personal trauma from his early experiences of war. He works directly with children through his NGO, Art for Community Development, leading creative art workshops to address the trauma of young victims of conflict and abuse of human rights. His work takes the iconography and abstraction of traditional African visual art to depict the savage reality of war.

Ferhat Tunç (Turkey):

Since 1985 Ferhat Tunc has been a prime target for Turkish authorities, media and ultranationalists for his dedication to human rights and social and cultural problems. Singing in his native Kurdish language, which is strictly forbidden, he has faced judicial obstructions at every concert and album launch. As well as receiving death threats his work has been banned and he was tortured in 1988 and imprisoned in 2004. A defining moment in his life was witnessing the massacre of unarmed civilians at Cizre where people gathered for a traditional Newroz festival. The second placed artist will receive \$15,000 (\$7,500 to the artist or group and \$7,500 to a nominated organisation) while the third placed artist will receive \$10,000 (\$5,000 to the artist or group and \$5,000 to a nominated organisation).

Shortlisted for the Freedom to Create Youth Prize

The Freedom to Create Youth Prize is open to artists who are under the age of 18 with the winner receiving \$25,000 (\$10,000 towards an education scholarship and \$15,000 for a nominated advocacy issue). The five shortlisted nominations are:

City of Rhyme (Brazil):

This entry is from a group of 14 young hip hop artists who live in the favelas of Recife, in Northern Brazil. Under the guidance of DJ Big, they were instructed in all areas of digital music recording and writing as well as being taught political science, mathematics and cultural studies. The final recording tells of their life in the favelas and how violence has permeated and distorted their reality. Recife is Brazil's most violent city, with the murder of children a regular event. Tyrannical gangs control daily life and hunger and abuse is rife. The lyrics of the children's work condemn the violence whilst calling to the conscience of the public.

The Canaan Tale Production (Israel):

The Canaan Tale is comprised of a group of 14 actors aged between 13 and 14. The play is bilingual and based on the experiences of Palestinian and Jewish teenagers from the Israeli cities of Jaffa, inhabited by Arabs, and Holoen where Jewish citizens are the majority. It tells the story of the problems that have resulted between the two groups that share a common territory but hold differing customs and traditions. Jewish and Arab youths seldom interact, and those that do are often seen as 'traitors' and subjected to harassment. The performers remain undeterred though, and will continue to showcase their message to the young in spite of verbal and physical threats.

The Freedom Theatre Photography Group (Palestine):

This photography group's work involved the children of Palestine's Jenin Refugee Group crossing checkpoints and roadblocks to travel to Bethlehem for the first time. Documenting their journey via photography, the children come face to face with the Separation Wall for the first time and their trip results in a provocative and moving work of photojournalism. During the project the children were intimidated and threatened by soldiers whilst crossing checkpoints and photographing the wall, as well as facing the danger of indiscriminate attacks by the Israeli Defence Force. The children also had to contend with the conservative elements within their own society in the camp where youths have no voice and the rights of the child are disregarded with tragic consequences.

Iraqi Children Living in Amman (Jordan):

This group of Iraqi child refugees living in one of Jordan's refugee camps, created a mural to reconnect with their rich cultural heritage and to express their desire for a peaceful future. Almost all Iraqi refugee children in Jordan have no access to education, health services or even food, as the country struggles to cope with the massive influx of refugees. The simmering tensions in the confines of the camps between Shiites and Sunnis can easily erupt, misunderstandings are common and often with violent outcomes. The children participating in the art project risk antagonising these people further by participating in a 'Western-led' project. Despite this the mural, which is painted on canvas and celebrates the significant aspects of Iraqi history, culture and landscape, gave them a sense of hope for the future.

Mobile Mini Circus for Children (Afghanistan):

This acrobatic and circus movement provides educational and informative entertainment for children in war-torn Afghanistan. Through acrobatic feats, such as building human pyramids, artistic and physical tools are taught to improve social interaction and attract youths to the advantages of the 'social circus' movement. They perform 55-minute long sessions throughout a country where almost no forms of entertainment exist, infusing their entertainment with messages about education, women's rights and landmine awareness and health education. The project aims to move victims of war beyond 'survival mode' and rebuild the creative and artistic potential of a country by focusing on its children – the agents of its lasting peace.

Shortlisted for the Freedom to Create Imprisoned Artist Prize

The final prize category focuses on artists who are currently imprisoned due to their work. The winner will receive \$25,000 towards supporting their family, paying legal costs and supporting advocacy efforts. The five shortlisted artists are currently imprisoned in some of the most oppressive countries in the world:

Nurmuhemmet Yasin (China):

This young freelance writer was arrested in November 2004 for the publication of a short story called 'Wild Pigeon' which was considered critical of Chinese policy on the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region – formerly known as East Turkistan. 'Wild Pigeon' attracted the attention of the Chinese authorities, who viewed the short story as a tacit criticism of their government in the Xinjiang region, a region invaded and claimed by the Chinese in 1949. Nurmuhemmet's arrest over the publication of the story clearly marks his imprisonment as a violation of his freedom of expression defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which China is a signatory. Nurmuhemmet has reportedly not been allowed visitors since his arrest.

Dr Kamal al-Labwani (Syria):

A Syrian doctor, human rights activist and painter, Dr. Kamal al-Labwani is currently serving a 15 year prison sentence for 'inciting foreign aggression against Syria' and 'insulting the Syrian president'. His paintings reflect on his experiences in prison and the Emergency Laws that have been in force in Syria for the past 40 years. As a General Practitioner Dr al-Labwani has seen the fear, poverty, lack of proper medical facilities and education that is partly a result of human rights abuses. Amnesty

International says that his arrest came after President Bashar al-Assad promised to increase tolerance for free speech, which drew dozens of activists and artists to speak out against human rights abuses only to be imprisoned shortly after. Dr. al-Labwani is now held in an overcrowded cell of 50 men.

Ko Win Maw (Burma):

Ko Win Maw is a 46-year-old singer from Burma who has been twice imprisoned by the military, first in 1996 on charges of singing anti-regime songs and secondly in 1997 when all three of his band members were sentenced to seven years hard labour and his music banned. Ko Win Maw's body of work has not been submitted as an entry for the Freedom to Create Prize, but rather his experience and example, as an artist and singer in Burma using his platform and talents to promote human rights causes. Arrested again in 2007 for unknown charges that may be linked to song writing he was recently jailed for 6 years.

Zarganar (Burma):

Zarganar is a Burma's best known media celebrity, having achieved fame as a comedian, actor and director and writer. His work is in the tradition of Burmese satire and draws inspiration from the daily struggles of the Burmese people in the grip of nearly five decades of military dictatorship. He has been banned from performing or producing any work since 2006. Zargana was again arrested on June 4, 2008 after he performed satire before the media during his private relief efforts to deliver aid to victims of Cyclone Nargis. Media reports say officials were outraged after he mocked an article in a state-run newspaper in which it was said cyclone survivors could exist on what they could scavenge in the country side rather than on chocolate bars from Western aid groups. On October 2008, Zarganar was sentenced to 45 years in jail.

The winners of the Freedom to Create Prize will receive their awards at a reception hosted in London at the Swiss Re building, 30 St Mary Axe, from 6:30-9:30pm on Wednesday 26 November 2008. For more information about the Freedom to Create Prize please visit: www.freedomtcreateprize.com

About Freedom to Create:

Freedom to Create (www.freedomtcreate.com) is an initiative that seeks to improve lives by addressing society's ability to support and sustain creativity. The initiative focuses on those societies in greatest need.

For creativity to flourish, it's critical to have certain foundations in place – things like education, trust, and freedom of expression. The Freedom to Create initiative concentrates on these foundations. Through our ArtAction arm (www.artaction.com), formerly ArtVenture, we support arts-driven projects that try to strengthen those foundations where they are weak. Through our annual Freedom to Create Prize (www.freedomtcreateprize.com), we celebrate artists who are beacons of inspiration for social change working in the most challenging conditions around the globe. Collectively our efforts seek to drive future prosperity by enabling creativity to flourish.

Freedom to Create is backed by R.F. Chandler (www.rfchandler.com), a Singapore-based private investment group with more than 20 years' experience investing in emerging markets.