



Artist Alert August 2009

Art, in any form, constitutes a key medium through which information and ideas are imparted and received. Artist Alert, launched by ARTICLE 19 in 2008, highlights cases of artists around the world whose right to freedom of expression has been curtailed and abused, and seeks to more effectively promote and defend freedom to create.

Against the backdrop of Burmese democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi's renewed house arrest, and 21 years after the popular protests of 8 August 1988, ARTICLE 19 publishes *Simmering Under Ashes*, a collection of Burmese poems, testimonies and art works.

The anthology was launched at an event – Burma: Between the Lines, a Celebration of Art and Survival – in London at the Free Word centre which houses ARTICLE 19 and other free speech organisations. The evening proved popular with London-based Burmese citizens and activists and friends of the pro-democracy movement. The event

also showcased the first performance of the theatre play *Seven Years with Hard Labour* and a short film by highly-regarded film director, Rex Bloomstein.

Simmering Under Ashes is available at www.article19.org/advocacy/campaigns/burma/simmering-under-ashes.php

Burma: supervised right down to their choice of colour

The Burmese military regime goes to extreme lengths to control artistic expression in the country. Artists must get their work passed by a censorship board before they are allowed to show it. According to one internationally respected artist that wishes to remain anonymous: *“The regime will go as far as questioning which colour we use*

*“Lies for tortures
Forever you will hear
While our friends, brothers and sisters
Became the victims of fear
‘The fear that corrupt power’
The butchers to slice you in hunger
The hunger for power
That creates luxury in Myanmar
And the measures all you can do for Burma
Still need to meet for sure
To secure the Burma's lives
To be safe and free from fear alive.
The Students have gone since 88?
Here The Monks gone again in pain
How many of martyrs are claimed?
Though there are still in millions
Should we pray or Fight for Freedom!
Broken bricks or stones for Generals?
No way, should we get to Fight for Freedom!
Freedom for Everyone!”*

Written by Nay Yu

and why; if they do not like your answer, or think the colour may symbolise something, they simply ask you to change the colour!"

Any hint of political or sexual content is enough to get an art exhibition closed down permanently, and such signs are judged entirely at the whims of the censorship officer.

Last year, the regime jailed many more artists, poets and musicians. Poets such as Saw Wei and hip-hop artists such as Zeyar Thaw have also been given long sentences for "hidden messages" and "leading underground movements" respectively. Even performance art shows have to be performed before a censorship panel.

Azerbaijan: crackdown on Eurovision voters

Music-lovers have been summoned to the National Security Ministry in Azerbaijan after voting for Armenia's entry in the 2009 Eurovision song contest.

According to Azeri newspapers, neighbouring Armenian duo Inga and Anush, and their song, "Jan-Jan" received 43 votes by text message from inside Azerbaijan. Following the competition, the National Security Ministry requisitioned the relevant mobile phone records and contacted all 43 voters. A number of individuals have come forward and publicised the summons, in which the Azerbaijani ministry asked them to explain their actions. They have not yet been charged with any offence.

Eurovision has been criticised in some spheres for being increasingly politicised, with old political rivalries strategically voting along political or geographic lines, especially amongst newer participants from the former Soviet block. Azerbaijan and Armenia have a long-standing dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

The European Broadcasting Union has begun an investigation into the accusation.

France: concerts cancelled over sexist lyrics allegations

Ten concerts by French rapper Orelsan have been cancelled after prominent members of the French Socialist Party, including former Presidential candidate and party leader, Ségolène Royal, complained that his song lyrics encouraged violence against women.

According to the BBC, Orelsan was dropped from a festival, *Les Francofolies*, after Royal warned that the Poitou-Charentes regional council, which she heads, would withdraw their funding. Event organisers have accused Royal of having "positioned herself as a master-blackmailer".

President Nicolas Sarkozy and Culture Minister Frederic Mitterrand have stated that Orelsan should be free to express himself and that his concerts should not have been cancelled.

Orelsan's songs, which include titles such as "Dirty Bitch", have also been removed from public libraries across Paris.

USA: Yale removes all images from book on Mohammed cartoons

Yale University Press has withdrawn all images of the prophet Mohammed in a new book entitled *The 12 Little Drawings that Shook the World: The Danish Cartoons and the Clash of Civilization*. The book, written by Jytte Klausen, examines the visual history of depictions of the prophet Mohammed, and the recent rioting associated with derogatory cartoons.

Before going to print, Yale approached unknown “experts” for advice on the book’s content, and decided to not only remove the 12 controversial cartoons that were published in a Danish newspaper in 2005, but also to remove all other images of the prophet Mohammed. These included an Ottoman print, a drawing for a children’s book, and a nineteenth century illustration by the artist Gustave Doré.

The author, Klausen, was unable to read the expert opinions, which were written by unknown diplomats and Islamic and counter-terrorism specialists, after refusing to sign a confidentiality agreement. Klausen asked that the opinions become public and refuted the removal of all images, explaining that they are all freely available on the internet. All academics should have the freedom to express their views without censorship.

United Kingdom: commissioned art too shocking to show

The Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art has refused to show art works at its *shOUT* exhibition, apparently because they contain nudity and references to drugs and sexual acts.

The three art works were commissioned by the gallery for its exhibition portraying gay life and were created by artist-in-residence, Dani Marti. Marti has accused Culture and Sport Glasgow, which runs the city’s art galleries, of compromising free speech and enforcing the very same censorship that the exhibition aims to confront: taboos and restrictions on talking publicly about being gay and disclosing HIV status.

Turkey: transsexual novel banned for under-18s

Third Class Woman, a book by Anil Alacaoglu, has been banned from sale to children under 18 and banned from advertising by a prime ministerial board which regulates broadcasting and publications for minors.

Alacaoglu describes the book as being about “*the loves, sexual experiences, separations, discrimination and problems experienced by a transsexual from childhood into their twenties.*”

The notification from the Prime Ministerial Board stated that the book “*praises homosexuality, which Turkish society does not accept as moral, and anal relations with people of the same sex, which is again not normal for Turkish traditions and*

customs. Of course such abnormal and perverted relations would affect the mental development of children negatively.”

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information: please contact Oliver Spencer, oliver@article19.org, +44 20 7324 2500
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.