



Artist Alert October 2010

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.

China: leading artist's studio to be demolished

One of China's leading artists, Ai Weiwei, has been informed by the authorities that his new \$1.1 million studio in Shanghai must be demolished. The BBC reports that Ai, who was involved in the design of the Bird's Nest Olympic Stadium in Beijing, was initially invited to build the studio in an emerging arts district, but the building has now been ruled illegal for not following proper planning procedures. The artist, a vocal critic of human rights abuses in China, was held under house arrest for two days in Beijing, while supporters held a protest party at the studio on 7 November to mark the demolition. The Tate Modern gallery in London is currently displaying Ai's latest work of art: a giant installation made up of hundreds of thousands of tiny, hand-painted replica sunflower seeds.

"China is a nation that still has very limited freedom of speech and access to information"

**Ai Wei Wei,
7 November, *The Guardian***

Turkey: Ferhat Tunç acquitted - and immediately charged again

The Kurdish singer Ferhat Tunç has been informed by the Turkish authorities that he must answer new charges only a day after being acquitted by a court in Diyarbakir of crimes brought under anti-terrorism legislation. The Freemuse award winner had been accused of "*spreading propaganda for the [Kurdistan Workers' Party] organization*" by the prosecution, and "*committing a crime on behalf of an illegal organization without being a member of the organization.*" Judges in Diyarbakir had ruled that there was no evidence of any crime being committed in a case that gained international support for the singer. After his latest run-in with the government Tunç wrote to Freemuse saying: "*Such is my life! Tomorrow I will have to present myself once again to the police.*"

Singapore: Shadrake found guilty over death penalty book

British author Alan Shadrake has been found guilty of insulting the Singapore judiciary after alleging that judges were insufficiently impartial in their use of the

death penalty, and has been sentenced to six weeks imprisonment. As reported in the previous *Artist Alert*, Shadrake's book tour to promote *Once a Jolly Hangman - Singapore Justice in the Dock* was severely curtailed by the authorities. After landing in Singapore on 19 July, Shadrake was taken into police custody and detained for a series of interrogations, and will now be sentenced for contempt. The crime is punishable by imprisonment or a fine or both, with no maximum limit set on either, although the Attorney General's Chambers (AGC) has called for a jail term of at least 12 weeks. ARTICLE 19 partnered with 27 other free speech organisations in calling on Prime Minister Lee to intercede with the authorities and withdraw the charges. Shadrake, who is also facing separate charges of defamation, is expected to be sentenced on 16 November.

Denmark: Artists' exhibition cancelled over royal orgy cartoon

A retrospective exhibition of the satirical Danish duo *Surrend* (a.k.a. Jan Egesborg and Pia Bertelsen) was cancelled when the pair told organisers they would be using a pornographic depiction of the Danish royal family. According to *The Art Newspaper*, the show had been due to open at the Danish Poster Museum, in Aarhus on 13 October. Thomas Bloch Ravn, the director of *Den Gamble By*, the open-air village museum where the Danish Poster Museum is located, accused the artists of attention-seeking and said that he will no longer work with *Surrend*. Ravn denies censorship, saying that the artists are free to publish their works elsewhere. Egesborg, for his part, has accused the people of Denmark of hypocrisy, arguing that while it was happy to allow Kurt Westergaard's controversial cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed to be published, it has different rules regarding the royal family.

Malaysia: Cartoonist Zunar challenges cartoon book ban in court

Political cartoonist Zulkiflee Anawar Ulhaque, better known by the pen name of Zunar, has brought a legal action challenging a government ban on two of his cartoon books, 'Funny Malaysia' and 'Perak Darul Kartun'. In a separate case, the cartoonist is facing charges of sedition for a collection of satirical works, 'Cartoon-o-phobia'. Zunar was arrested and bailed in September, and faces a possible three-year jail sentence if found guilty of the charges. Speaking about his work, Zunar said: "*I have always liked political books, which is very different from practising politics. I don't belong to any party. In my view, a political cartoonist must be well informed, he must know about legal matters, human rights and so on. I hope that, through my cartoons, people understand what is going on. I would like to be a pioneer and for other young cartoonists to take this road. I have already worked with several of them.*"

Israel: Funding to be cut for artists who boycott settlement performances

An increasingly impassioned debate over whether government-funded artists have the right to choose where they perform has reached new heights in Israel, after Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman vowed to penalise artists who are boycotting a new theatre in the illegal Jewish settlement of Ariel. Three days before the Ariel Cultural Center was set to open in the northern West Bank settlement, artists and academics published an open letter calling on performers to boycott the theatre, arguing that Ariel "*is an illegal settlement which violates international law and the Geneva Conditions.*" Lieberman has hit back at those who signed the letter, saying that "*These artists can practice freedom of speech but not on taxpayer's money. Those*

who refer to Israel as an apartheid state cannot enjoy its fruits.” According to the *Jerusalem Post*, Culture and Sport Minister Limor Livnat has announced that her ministry will introduce a legal amendment to force theatre companies to provide services regardless of geographic location.

India: Award-winning author besieged by nationalist protesters

The Delhi home of Indian author Arundhati Roy was surrounded by around 150 members of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) women's faction, who demanded Roy leave India after making remarks about the legitimacy of India's claims to the disputed territory of Kashmir. Roy, whose novel *The God of Small Things* won the influential Booker Prize in 1997, had told a conference that “*Kashmir has never been an integral part of India. It is a historical fact.*” According to *The Guardian*, the BJP protesters gathered outside the author's home while she was inside, chanting slogans for her to withdraw the statement or leave the country.

Earlier in the month, another leading Indian author, Rohinton Mistry, strongly criticised the decision of Mumbai University to withdraw one of his books from its literature syllabus, following threats from the right wing Hindu political group Shiv Sena. The Shiv Sena had publicly burned copies of Mistry's novel *Such a Long Journey*, which it claimed contained disparaging comments about the organisation.

Venezuela: ‘Narco-novela’ soap operas banned from television networks

Venezuela's Nacional Telecommunications Commission (Conatel) has banned television stations from airing two ‘telenovela’ (soap operas) whose main protagonists are drug-dealers. Conatel has said that the shows hurt the social and psychological well-being of children and adolescents, and has banned the Colombian-produced shows under the controversial Radio and Television Social Responsibility Law, according to BBC Mundo. ‘El Capo’ tells the story of a drug dealer who becomes president, while ‘Rosario Tijeras’ depicts a young woman drug dealer and killer, and is a spin-off from the successful 2005 movie of the same name. Telenovela writer Leonardo Padrón told *El Universal* newspaper that the censorship was an act of “*absurd puritanism*”, adding, “*If it's a measure to reduce violence, it should be applied on the streets.*” The ban comes weeks after Venezuelan courts prevented the media from publishing “*violent, bloody or grotesque images*”, and adds to the growing pressure on freedom of expression in the country.

China: Two Tibetan writers released conditionally

Two leading Tibetan writers have been released conditionally by the Chinese authorities. Tagyal, known by the pen name *Shogdung*, was arrested on 23 April at the Qinghai Nationalities publishing house in Xining, in the province of Qinghai. He spent six months in a detention centre, during which time visits from family members were forbidden, after the Chinese authorities accused him of inciting separatism in his writings. Tagyal was released on bail on 14 October but under a form of parole pending trial that does not protect him from being arrested again. Kalsang Tsultrim, writing under the pseudonym *Gyitsang Takmig*, was arrested on 27 July in Sichuan province, most probably for expressing his concern about the Tibetan people. He was released on 15 October on condition that he does not participate in political activities.

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- 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.