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Breakthrough Art Organization Established to Promote Art as a Means to Overcome Challenges; Inaugural Program to Champion Freedom of Expression in Face of Repression

Funded By a Grant from Federal Republic of Germany, Opening Exhibition Celebrates 20th Anniversary of German Unification; Will Tour U.S. From April-December, 2010

February 16, 2010 – Inspired by the struggles and triumphs of artists living under the repressive East German Communist regime prior to German unification, Jeff Thinnies, an American specialist in U.S.-German relations, announces the founding of **Breakthrough Art Organization** to showcase and study the work of artists worldwide using art as a means to overcome political, social and personal challenges.

The new Washington D.C.-based nonprofit will launch its inaugural exhibition and education program, *"Breakthrough! -- Twenty Years After German Unification – Critical Perspectives of Berlin Artists,"* with a five-city tour of the United States from April through December, 2010. The tour will mark the 20th anniversary of German Unification by exploring the motives and consequences of East German artists who chose freedom of expression over promotion of a prescribed political ideology, Thinnies said. Thinnies spent three years in Berlin from 1990 to 1993 as deputy director of the Aspen Institute, an international policy and leadership organization.

The program will feature works by and discussion forums with 10 East German visual artists who endured repression, exile and in some cases imprisonment before the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall. Breakthrough also is developing an online curriculum for the program designed to expose students throughout the country to the importance of free expression. The five-city tour is tentatively scheduled to open in April in Nashville, Tennessee in collaboration with the First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, and close in December after touring five cities. The program is substantially underwritten by a grant from the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as contributions from participating foundations.

“Our celebration of unification is also a celebration of freedom’s ultimate triumph and of overcoming division and separation, which is why we strongly endorse and support the mission of Breakthrough,” said Germany’s Ambassador to the United States, Klaus Scharioth.

“Throughout the decades of Germany’s division, courageous artists in East Germany fought oppression with camera lenses, paintbrushes and sculptor chisels despite enormous risks. Breakthrough not only sheds light on their sacrifices, but reminds us that we should never take freedom of expression for granted.”

Beyond the 2010 tour, Breakthrough will be a vehicle for championing and illuminating the impact art and artists can have on overcoming political, economic and social obstacles. “We will pursue opportunities for Breakthrough to support and showcase the perspectives of artists operating in extremely challenging environments, whether photographers, writers, or painters persecuted by dictators; or teenagers in Harlem who choose dancing and music rather than gangs and drugs,” Thinnies said.

The specific governmental department funding Breakthrough’s inaugural program is *The Transatlantic Program of the Federal Republic of Germany with funds of the European Recovery Program of the Federal Ministry for Economy and Technology*. Participating artists are: Gerald Hahn, photographer; Harald Hauswald, photographer; Peter Herrmann, painter; Thomas Klingenstein, painter and writer; Wolfgang Petrick, painter; Frank Roedel, painter; Inge Schmidt, painter; Reinhard Stangl, painter; Robert Weber, sculptor. The exhibition’s curator is Helen Frederick, Professor, School of Art, George Mason University.

For more information on Breakthrough, please visit www.breakthroughart.org.