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Tampa Bay area art group collects pieces of Berlin Wall

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By Pawel Kopczynski, Reuters

A woman rides a bicycle in front of remains of the Wall at Berlin's East Side Gallery. A Tampa Bay area arts organization plans to exhibit 350 sections of the wall this fall.

SAFETY HARBOR, Fla. (AP) — A Tampa Bay area arts organization has begun assembling hundreds of pieces of the Berlin Wall for a series of local and national public art projects.

The Outdoor Arts Foundation unloaded its first shipment of wall pieces on Thursday. The total collection will include 350 sections of the concrete wall that formerly divided East and West Berlin and was torn down in 1989. Each section weighs about 800 pounds.

About 100 smaller fragments painted by Russian artists in 1990 will also be included. Two displays of the painted pieces are scheduled to be displayed this fall.

The collection has been authenticated, and in 1999 was appraised at \$2.5 million.

"We've researched this project for a year and a half, and as far as we know, this is the largest private collection in the world,"

said Jay Goulde, executive director of the non-profit foundation.

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The idea for the project began when the collection's former owner, a Florida resident, contacted the foundation with the intent to broker the sale.

"We decided we didn't want to broker it, we wanted to acquire it," Goulde said.

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