

THE TAMPA TRIBUNE

Symbol Of Divide Unifies Past, Future

By **ESTHER HAMMER** Tribune Correspondent

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TAMPA - The wall that once separated people and nations has the potential to bring them together. Remnants of the Berlin Wall, once a symbol of repression, now are symbols of freedom displayed by people around the globe. Some of these pieces are making their way to Tampa as part of an ambitious cultural project, "Beyond the Wall," involving a cadre of the world's top artists.

"This is the quintessential community art exhibit," said Jan Stein, a co-curator of the project and a longtime local art advocate and consultant.

The two-year project is being organized by the Bay area Outdoor Arts Foundation, a privately funded organization that has hung banners on downtown Tampa buildings and produced such local community art events as the "Manatee Menagerie" and the "Bow Wow Haus." More than 400 sections of the wall, which came down in 1989, will arrive in the area this summer via 10 tractor-trailer trucks and will be transformed into works of art.

Ten of the 3-foot-by-8-foot concrete sections of the Berlin Wall will be cut in half, painted by 20 world-renowned artists and be part of the "Beyond the Wall" traveling exhibit. It will open in the Tampa Bay area in February 2008 and will end in Washington, D.C., in November 2009, in time for the 20th anniversary of the fall of the wall. Following the exhibition, the panels will be auctioned off.

London-based photojournalist Drew Gardner was in Berlin at the time of reunification. He plans to incorporate a photo he took then of a helmeted East German soldier into the panel that he is producing for the show.

"It's a completely unique project, unlike any other I've done," he said in a telephone interview from London. "I've never been able to work on a real piece of the wall before."

On Monday, Ybor City painter Theo Wujcik who also will paint a piece, attended an unveiling of a 3-foot square piece of the wall.

"It said a lot to me," he explained. "It's such a beautiful tablet to work on. That wall, just because of its thickness, its color and the pits in it, it's almost a work of art in itself. It seems that the minimal amount of interference would be appropriate." Also at the unveiling were participating artists Robert Stackhouse and Carol Mickett of St. Petersburg,

"An artist involved in this project has a lot of responsibility," Mickett said. "Because of what the wall symbolizes, you don't just decorate it or arbitrarily paint it." "It's a major piece of 20th century history," Stackhouse said. "We're going to look at it and live with it and see what it says to us."

An Educational Tool

A separate part of the project is the exhibition of 89 panels from the collection that already had been painted at the time of purchase. Those pieces, painted by one American and three Russian artists, will be exhibited at Syd Entel Galleries this year.

"I don't know of anywhere else that these pieces have been exhibited and they're really museum pieces," said gallery owner Susan Benjamin. "We're tapping into not only the art aspect of it, but the historical significance. It will be something so different for this area."

Other plans include a book, a 90-minute PBS documentary and one or more sculptures made from the remaining sections. All of them will emphasize art and education.

"We're using the fall of the wall to ... show how the removal of repressive barricades can promote freedom and democracy," said Jay Goulde, founder and director of the Outdoor Arts Foundation, based in Safety Harbor.

Margaret Miller, professor and director of the University of South Florida Institute for Research in Arts, is eager for the positive impact the exhibit will have.

"These public projects that get a lot of media attention do tend to draw artists and get the public attention, and in a sense it raises arts visibility to the public and makes it more valuable," she said.

A Big Undertaking

It was serendipity that landed the pieces of the Berlin Wall in the possession of the Outdoor Arts Foundation.

Before she retired as Hillsborough County Public Art Program Coordinator, Stein got a phone call from a woman in Plant City, who wishes to remain anonymous, saying she had inherited sections of the Berlin Wall and wanted to make them available as public art.

"I got chills," Stein recalled.

Stein got in touch with Goulde.

It would be a much bigger, heavier and more costly project than any previous project the foundation had coordinated. Each 3-foot-by-8-foot section weighs about 800 pounds. Their size alone made them a logistical nightmare.

But the potential for education won Goulde over.

"It's going to be one of the most historically significant collections in the world. We'll have a group of historically significant artists from every continent creating art work in a central theme on the same historically significant medium," said Goulde, who researched the wall and its authenticity before purchase.

Their authenticity was verified by an American firm that specializes in research and development of concrete. They compared samples from the collection with samples taken from portions of the wall still standing in Berlin.

The wall has been exhibited before. Single sections that were painted on the Western side while the wall still stood now exist in parks, museums, libraries, galleries and personal collections around the world. The wall was dismantled in the weeks after Nov. 9, 1989. Goulde won't say how much the foundation paid for the collection, but it has been valued at \$2.5 million.

"It has the ability to generate so much revenue that it can help create an endowment for OAF and enable us to continue our community art projects," he said. "The project will yield tremendous cultural opportunities, locally and nationally."



Dominique Martinez, of Rustic Steel Creations in Channelside, welds a metal rail to a piece of the Berlin wall that will later be painted by an artist and shown in an exhibit.
By SCOTT ISKOWITZ

The Confirmed Artists for "BEYOND THE WALL"

Richard Anuszkiewicz, Erie, PA
Audrey Flack, New York, NY
Sam Gilliam, Tupelo, MS
Drew Gardner, London, England
Esther Mahlangu, South Africa
Dorothy Napangardi, Australia
Robert Stackhouse and Carol Mickett, St. Petersburg
Lou Stovall, Washington D.C.
Mindy Weisel, Washington D.C.
Theo Wujcik, Ybor City, FL
Michael Vollbracht, Quincy, IL

The 4 artists Showcased in the Syd Entel Galleries' Show

Andre Aksenov
Tamara Dubinovskaja
Robert Indiana
Vladimir Smachtin

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