DRAWING FOR FREEDOM
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The art project “Drawing for Freedom” is a cooperation between the Norwegian human rights organization the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) and the Academy of Fine Art of the Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO).

The thematic focus of the project is political prisoners in Azerbaijan. The project has a clear activist profile, and is linked to a campaign by human rights groups to free all political prisoners in Europe.

During the fall semester of 2015, 20 students at the Academy of Fine Art participated in the class "Drawing as a political tool": Hans Adell, Erla Audunsdottir, Julia Alfe Bylund, Øyvor Hansen Engen, Therese Frisk, Aksel Octavius Norreen Hauklien, Amanda Hårsmar, Heidi Klemetsen, Anna Knapp, Kachun Lay, Janne Maria Lysen, Anna Sofie Mathiasen, Nasim Iranpour Mashak, Lykourgos Porfyris, Elisabeth Samstad, Erle Saxegaard, Love Terins, Linnea Vestre, Morten Jensen Vågen and Suzannah Rehell Øistad. During two 5-day workshops students met with a former political prisoner from Azerbaijan, an activist in exile, a relative of political prisoners currently in jail, and experts on Azerbaijan/oil states/human rights from the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. Norwegian artists with experience with political art/drawing portraits were also involved: Terje Nicolaisen, Morten Krohg, Shwan Dler Qaradaki and Lotte Konow Lund. Terje Nicolaisen was heavily involved in the creative process, also with his own contribution of works.
Artworks made during and after the workshops were exhibited at the City Hall of Paris in December 2015, and later in Stockholm in April 2016 at "Defenders Day", an event gathering human rights activists from all over the world. A selected number of works were also shown during the "OSCE Civil Society Parallel Conference 2015", 1-2 December 2015 in Belgrade, and at Oslo Freedom Forum in May 2016.

In September –October 2016 "Drawing for Freedom" will be exhibited at Akershus Art Centre in Norway. The Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Finnish and Estonian delegations to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) stand behind an application to show “Drawing for Freedom” at the premises of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in January 2017.

During the time span of the project the number of political prisoners in Azerbaijan was reduced from almost 100 to around 70. For more information about political prisoners in Azerbaijan and the campaign to release them, see: www.nopoli calprisoners.org

The art project was initialized by Anne Marit Austbø, artist, political scientist and former NHC employee, developed in close cooperation with artist and professor Jeannette Christensen at the Academy of Fine Art, KHiO and Berit Lindeman, Head of information and Senior Advisor at NHC.

The project has received funding from the Norwegian Fritt Ord Foundation and Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO).
BACKGROUND AND PROCESS

The author Siri Hustvedt writes: “When I draw what I see, I touch the thing I am looking at with my mind [-] it is as if my hand is caressing its outline». What does it mean to touch something “with my mind”, and what are the consequences when you choose to draw another human being? Can choosing to draw another person help us to relate and open up to a form of empathy in ourselves?

The highly acclaimed painter Marlene Dumas has emphasized the importance of drawing and painting (the physicality of the human touch) in a time dominated by digital photos and mass media. Drawing requires the attention of the artist over a certain period of time. The process of drawing can be seen as an interaction between the artist and the object that is being drawn. It is often stated that to draw is to see. This statement is perhaps particularly relevant when the drawings are of political prisoners whom a repressive regime wants us not to see, or to see a twisted image of. However, can artists enter the jungle of political images as activists without losing artistic freedom and risking becoming tools of interests they cannot always perceive?

These were thoughts and questions that made Austbø suggest a joint project between between the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC), a human rights group, and the Academy of Fine Arts in Oslo. She had for several years been working for the NHC as a political scientist, before embarking on a career in art, and was present when the NHC awarded its bi-annual human rights prize to political prisoners in Azerbaijan in November 2015. She knew that there was corruption and human rights abuse in Azerbaijan, but was not aware of the extent and methods of repression.

The government seemed to take care into creating twisted images. People who voiced dissent with the (corrupt) government were systematically portrayed as traitors, drug dealers, hooligans or other criminals, and arrested en masse on fraud charges. Sometimes the authorities would use strong imagery, like when released political prisoners (often after having written a letter of clemency) were made to bow before the statue of the president’s father, and the photos of this situation was published in the press. A sex-video of one of the country’s most famous investigative journalists, Khadija Ismayilova, was posted on the internet in an attempt to blackmail and smear her.

Perhaps drawing these people could mean a recognition of their existence, be a way of saying “we see you”, a way of expressing solidarity with the prisoners, their families and supporters. And also a way of saying “we see them”. Drawing for Freedom is linked to other efforts by several European NGOs to free these prisoners. It is an activist art project in the sense that it explicitly aims at inciting action by complementing more traditional means and language of activism.
In 2012, one of the political prisoners, Rasul Jafarov, had established an initiative called “Art for Democracy”. It made sense to attempt to follow up on his ambitions to use art as a tool to promote human rights while he himself was behind bars, to use art to create more attention around the ongoing campaign by human rights groups.

The extent to which the government of Azerbaijan could carry out their crack-down on civil society with relatively little criticism from other European governments was striking. Azerbaijan’s oil and strategic geopolitical position may account for this, but Azerbaijan is also known as one of the biggest spending foreign lobbies in American and European politics, hiring public relation firms to court politicians and inviting European parliamentarians to all-paid vacations to Baku. “Caviar diplomacy” is the term used to describe the use of gifts and other inducements to shift the opinions of policy makers in Azerbaijan’s favor.

Human rights groups accuse the government in Azerbaijan of “sportswashing” - using major (and expensive) sports events as a way of creating international good-will, publicity and diverting attention away from corruption and human rights abuses. The country has a sponsorship deal with football team Atletico Madrid. The State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) is a top-tier sponsor with UEFA. Baku hosted the European Olympic Games in 2015, and the Formula One Championship in June 2016. The obsession with sports seems to be part of a massive endeavor to establish an image of fun, prosperity and progress, and to hide other images, including facts about the autocratic nature of the regime.

When Christensen was approached with the idea of involving students in a political campaign led by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee she was tempted by the possibility to look into questions concerning human rights and freedom of expression with artistic means. Having earlier experience from working with students on a project raising questions such as: How can we as artists work on a collective trauma, addressing the terror attack of 22 July 2011, and how art can reflect a political and social reality. It seemed like a good opportunity to continue raising and discussing questions regarding what type of society and democracy we wish to fight for.

Way beyond the two workshops we started out with, where drawing was at the core, the students continued to produce works in a large variety of techniques and materials, finding their own way in to the material.

The project’s activist slant challenged the artists to consider their own freedom: Where they becoming tools in a propaganda enterprise? Are human rights only a good thing? How can the artist keep a level head in a jungle of images? What is the position of the artist in political conflicts? Is freedom a meaningful concept if it implies withdrawal from the world of politics?

The works produced by the participants in the project have been printed on campaign material (post cards and posters) used internationally, and have been exhibited at events in Belgrade, Stockholm, Paris and Oslo. Azerbaijan has generously donated to a number of French cultural and art
institutions, including the Cathedral in Strasbourg, the Palace of Versailles and the Louvre. In September 2015, Azerbaijan’s first lady opened a photo exhibition named “Azerbaijan – Land of Tolerance” at the city hall of Paris’s first arrondissement. It was therefore symbolically important when “Drawing for Freedom” was shown for an extensive number of the French cultural elite at the main City Hall of Paris in December 2015.

Drawing for Freedom challenges the image of a prosperous and tolerant country that the Azeri government reportedly has spent billions of dollars to promote abroad. When Drawing for Freedom will be showed at Akershus Art Center in Norway September 2016 it will be open to the public. The facade of the building will be covered with a drawing of the government building in Baku. The audience is invited to enter, behind the facade and see what and who is there.

Anne Marit Austbø
Jeannette Christensen
Oslo, August 2016

To the right, painted by Love Terins:
Khadija Ismayilova, Aliabbas Fakhraddin Rustamov,
Rauf Mirdadirov and Rasul Agahasan Jafarov
House of Government

by Elisabeth Samstad and Aksel Octavius Norreen Hauklien

Digital print on the facade of Akershus Kunstsenter, 22m x 7,5m

Next page: Facade of Akershus Art Centre
**AZERBAIJAN**

Azerbaijan is an oil and gas-rich state with a population of over 9 million, situated between the Caspian and the Black seas, facing Russia in the north and Iran in the south in the region called the South Caucasus. A country of vast variety of high mountains and flat plains, Azerbaijan has a rich history and culture. The territory of Azerbaijan was an important part of the Northern Silk Road and was ruled by Ottoman and Iranian dynasties until it came under Russian rule in the 19th century and later became part of the Soviet Union.

Since gaining independence by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country has been led by an authoritarian regime characterized by corruption, intolerance for dissent and disregard for civil liberties and political rights. The current president, Ilham Aliyev, took over the power from his dying father in 2003 and changed the constitution in 2009 so that he could stay in power indefinitely. The ruling Aliyev family has amassed vast personal fortunes during the times of booming oil prices with an expansive exploitation of the country’s national resources. Although the capital Baku now shows a modern and glittering façade, and many have been drawn from extreme poverty to better conditions, the majority of the population has seen little of the incomes from the oil industry. The regime is also known for seeking influence and goodwill abroad, for example by hosting lavish events like the first European Games in 2015 and the Formula One European Grand Prix race in June 2016.

**Political prisoners in Azerbaijan**

By active use of a repressive legislation and a subservient police and court system the government punishes and silences the opposition and other critical voices. The result is a large number of political prisoners, the highest numbers in Europe. While there have been political prisoners in the country for a long time, the situation reached a critical point three years ago when the Azerbaijani government intensified a systematic crackdown on journalists, media outlets, and independent activists. The authorities imprisoned dozens of human rights defenders, political and civil activists, journalists, and bloggers on politically motivated charges, prompting others to flee the country or go into hiding. Many of the most known and loved human rights defenders and journalists fell victim to the repression.

As of August 2016, the regime holds at least seventy political prisoners. Evidence gathered by human rights groups has showed that these individuals’ efforts to promote basic rights and criticize the authorities in the country have catalyzed the persecution. The political prisoners face a variety of cooked-up charges, including drug possession, extortion, and tax evasion.

The issue of political prisoners on the international agenda dates back to 2002, the year Azerbaijan ratified the European Convention of Human Rights and became a full member of the Council of Europe. In assuming the commitments of membership, Baku pledged to release all political prisoners and stop silencing its critics by prosecuting them on politically
These have been the first good news from Azerbaijan in a long time, but still many important political prisoners remain behind bars. Most notably, this includes the political analyst and leader of the opposition REAL Movement Ilgar Mammadov, whom the government continues to hold in defiance of the European Court of Human Rights’ call for his release. Two other examples are the prominent journalist Seymur Hazi, who has been awarded The Fritt Ord Foundation and the ZEIT-Stiftung Free Media Prizes for Independent Journalism in Eastern Europe; and youth activist Ilkin Rustamzadeh. Yet, the crackdown on independent voices has not ended. In August 2016 several activists were arrested, detained or harassed.

This vicious cycle of politically motivated arrests must be stopped once and for all, and the underlying causes addressed. The existence of political prisoners is the result of the Aliyev regime’s systematic destruction of Azerbaijan’s democratic institutions, which is simply incompatible with the government’s international obligations. Without extensive campaigning for the rights of those imprisoned in Azerbaijan, those prisoners will easily be forgotten.

Berit Lindeman
Head of Information/Senior Advisor
Norwegian Helsinki Committee
Exhibition at the main City Hall of Paris (Hôtel de Ville) in connection with an event celebrating the human rights organization Federation International de Droits de l’Homme. The event was hosted by Paris’s mayor Anne Hidalgo, 8 December 2015.

Photo right side: Mokhtar Trifi, 2015 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, in front of portrait of human rights defender Leyla Yunus painted by Love Terins. Leyla Yunus was conditionally released on December 9, the day after the event.
Artists Anne Marit Austbo and Terje Nicolaisen, and Berit Lindeman, NHC, were in Paris to install the exhibition.

Newly released Anar Mammadli and Rasul Jafarov in front of their portraits painted by Linnea Vestre
Open Letter from Kurdakhani prison by Khadija Ismayilova
February 6, 2015

Please forgive my long silence. I was put in solitary confinement after my last letter was passed through these prison bars and published. My cell was searched and all my notes, including lists of things I was requesting from home, were taken. I have not received these back. I guess there are many devoted readers of mine at the penitentiary. They are taking turns reading my notes. That is why it is taking them such a long time to return what they have taken from me.

I have not been allowed to see my family, either. The arbitrariness of the penitentiary system allows me two phone calls each week that I use to speak with my mother but, contrary to the law, denies her and my lawyer regular visits. I have access to very little information. At least I have books to keep me company. I am translating one of these — “Children of the Jacaranda Tree” by Sahar Delijani — a novel about history and memory that is woven around the interlocking stories of three women imprisoned in Iran, and the people who support and are supported by them.

Maybe I will write a sequel to tell the stories of my five cellmates, and what their incarceration says about this country and its future. Among us we have created a family, a tiny ecosystem that gives us strength and helps us stay strong. My cellmates are also my new audience, that most precious thing that every journalist must have, even a journalist whom the
government is trying to silence and pack away. I am no longer on the air, but inside these walls I’m connected to the struggles of Azeris in a more direct and personal way.

“Why am I here?” is a question that everyone in prison asks themselves, no matter the crime. Corruption is the reason I am in my prison, but the regime’s corruption, not mine. The only way to prove oppressive regimes wrong is to continue exposing corruption, and I have promised more investigations for 2015. Yes, there is a price to pay, but it is worth it! My arrest proves one more time that we must build a new reality where telling the truth will not require courage.

But what about the real crimes — the theft, the contempt for the law? What pushes people to commit these crimes?

In a country where unpunished crimes are at a record high and deeply rooted in all levels of government, there is a simple logic that prompts people to commit crimes. “If it is good, why can’t I do it?; if it is bad, why are they doing it?” And then the conclusion: “If they can do it, I’ll do it, too.” This is the mentality bred by a morally bankrupt regime that has turned my country’s justice system into a corrupt machine.

But the heart of the matter goes deeper than this. It is about power and greed, beginning with the president of the country down to the petty officials who showcase the most dramatic examples of corruption and impunity. This a country where money and power can cover up any crime, and where truth and deception have traded places. As a result, there are some 100 political prisoners behind bars in Azerbaijan. Think about the significance: In a very small, yet strategic and potentially volatile
country bordering Russia and Iran, 100 of its best and brightest, its most aware, active and internationally engaged citizens have been removed from public life for the crime of seeking decency and fair play.

We also constantly ask ourselves where are we going, and what will we get in the end? In Kurdakhani prison, where I am now, the usual answer is three-to-five or five-to-12 years in jail. But my answer is that there is no end. The fight between good and evil goes on, and the most important thing is that this fight should not end. If we can continue to reject the thinking that is imposed on us and believe that human dignity is not for sale, then we are the winners, and they, our jailers both inside and outside prison, are the losers.

Prison is not frightening for those trying to right a twisted scale, or for those who are subject to threats for doing the right thing. We see clearly what we must fight for.
Life is very complicated, but sometimes we get lucky and are offered a clear choice, between truth and lies. Choose truth and help us.

NHC web page 26/05-16: Khadija Ismayilova Freed!

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee welcomes the Supreme Court’s decision in Azerbaijan to release Azerbaijan’s leading investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova. It’s indeed happy news to those who know Ismayilova and her important work as a courageous journalist and civil society leader tirelessly exposing corruption in Azerbaijan, including activities involving the members of the president Aliyev’s family. Her reporting had caused her arrest in December 2014.
Sari Gəlin (Yellow Bride)

You don’t braid the end of your hair,
you don’t pick a dewy flower.
yellow (blond, fair) bride

What a love is this love!
they will not give you to me.
what can I do? aman! (secure me! / help! / please!) aman! (×2)
yellow bride

The tallest of this valley,
shepherd, return back the lamb,
yellow bride.

I wish that one day I could see
the face of my playful love
what can I do? aman! aman! (×2)
yellow bride.

Could there be a day I would see (correct translation?)
the face of my playful love
what can I do? aman! aman! (×2)
yellow bride.

Soundpiece by Nasim Iranpour Mashak based on a well known folklore song of Azerbaijan.
In May 2014 eight activists belonging to the youth organization NIDA were sentenced to between 6-8 years in prison. The activists chose to deliver one common speech during the court procedure. As of August 2016, all these activists had been released, with the exception of one, Ilkin Rustemzade. Four other NIDA members have been arrested.
Cathedral painting by Linnea Vestre.
Five stained-glass windows of the Strasbourg Cathedral Church related to the 14th century have been restored within the “Address of tolerance-Azerbaijan” Project of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation. For this purpose, financial assistance was allocated to the Church by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation in June of 2009. Scenes from the lives of Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ have been depicted on the stained-glass windows installed in 1320-1340.
- A land of tolerance? Of course it is. Paintings by Linnea Vestre

- You have many political prisoners in jail now in Azerbaijan. It's not true. Just get correct information
FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS
IN AZERBAIJAN

LAND OF TOLERANCE?
FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS IN AZERBAIJAN

Poster by Suzannah Rehell Øistad
Poster by Lykourgos Porfyris

INTIGAM ALIYEV - LAWYER, NOT CRIMINAL

Poster by Anna Sofie Mathiasen

FINALLY RELEASED: LEYLA AND ARIF YUNUS

FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS IN AZERBAIJAN

DRAWING FOR FREEDOM

DRAWING FOR FREEDOM
Cells Unlocked
September 2016

follow-up
on previous
issue (How to
Free Creativity)

How to
Create
Freedom

Cells Unlocked is entirely made from reports by
the Correspondents

Poster part of installation by Hans Adell

FINALLY RELEASED:
RASHADAT AKHUNDOV
FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS IN AZERBAIJAN

Poster by Terje Nicolaisen
Woven image by Amanda Hårsmar. The image is based on parts of a photography of Nijat Aliyev, repeated as a pattern.

Drawing by Amanda Hårsmar: Araz Guliyev, Abdul Abilov, Faraj Karimov, Hilal Mammadow, Nijat Aliyev, Omar Mammadow, Parviz Hasimli, Rauf Mirkadirov, Seymur Hazi
Tracks on Tracks, drawing by Kachun Lay
Mixed media installation: Soundpiece, racing tracks, text and drawings
based on 2016 Formula 1 Grand Prix of Europe, Baku

Lino prints by Suzannah Rehell Øiestad
Farid Nadir Aghayev, aquarelle and drawing by Therese Frisk
Intigam Aliyev, painted by Shwan Dler Qaradaki

Intigam Aliyev, collage by Morten Jensen Vågen
FINALLY RELEASED: RASUL JAFAROV
FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS IN AZERBAIJAN

Poster by Terje Nicolaisen

Part One: Life (by Emily Dickinson)
Text on glass and lit frame by Julia Alfe Bylund
Ilkin Rustemzade, drawing printed on canvas by Erla Audunsdottir

Drawing with Light, collage by Heidi Klemetsen
The Aspect of Time
2-channel animation by Anna Knappe
Letters by Øyvor Hansen Engen
Khadi paper and silk thread, Ink and coffee

The needle is pushed through the stiff khadi paper. The silk thread is soft. The wounds the needle inflicts on the paper makes it softer, vulnerable.
Dear

You don’t know me, and I don’t know you. But I have seen your face on a picture. I am an art student from Norway.

As an act to support freedom of speech, we, a group of artists are making portraits of people who have been imprisoned for stating their beliefs. The portraits will be exhibited in places where people will get a chance to see the faces of persons being a victim of injustice. As a part of this project/act I want to start a dialogue based on drawings. I will give you one or more self-portraits of people participating in this project, and I will ask you to make a self portrait and send it back to me. The drawing skills does not matter at all. The focus lies in the act of making a self portrait, on the lines put down on a surface. It can be a drawing on a piece of paper, made with what ever you have available. The portraits that I get in return, I will use to develop post stamps.

You don’t know me, and I don’t know you. But I have seen your face on a picture.
I send you a self portrait, and ask in return a self portrait of you. Make marks on a piece of paper, don’t be shy. Specific skills is not required. Any shape is welcome.

Best regards,

Janne Maria
Hello,

I´m sending you this letter to ask for your help and participation. I am an art student from Norway taking part in an art project focusing on political prisoners in Azerbaijan. (For more info see: http://www.nhc.no/no/nyheter/Drawing+for+Freedom+project+-+exhibits+in+Paris’+Hotel+de+Ville.wlvG4D.ips#tipafriend)

As part of the art project I would very much like to get in touch with political prisoners in Azerbaijan. I know that this is very difficult, that many of them are under strict control. I definitely do not want to put anyone in danger or a in a difficult position. I would like to send a letter, but know that the letter would most likely never be received. One way to send information that will reach the person in prison is doing it verbally, not literal. My question to you is if you could in any way be able to pass my information and request on to the prisoner you are representing? Either the letter itself, or simply explain the content to the prisoner? And if you succeed, send the results back to me? I would be very grateful for any help.
Dear friends. This is third letter that I've written to you. First two letters I had not been able to costs. Because, we investigate they seriously. Only papers :D. If I write this writing how is crossed, you would astonish.

Feeling is the best, if you know people which are in a distance of thousands kilometers do something for you. I want to thank each of you, because of this. My English is not good, because of I can't write you a big letter. But, you may be sure, I am writing this letter with my heart.

Poison is not more difficult, for people who live with ideals. They are your Dependencies. But it in your heart, and a hope, you will tolerate everything. I know that to your character optimaizers there are no expressions. And, I understand you can't imagine life without girls, fire, football. :)

But in my box there are many good songs. With help these songs, I can keep my Jerry level up. I want to write you one of my

*When I feel bad, I am singing with help this song:*

*When you walk through the storm:
Hold your head up high,
And don't be afraid, at the dark.*
Dear friends. This is third letter that I've written to you. First two letters I had not been able to cross. Because, me investigate they seriously. Only papers ( :D ). If I wrote this writing how is crossed, you will astonish :)

Feeling is the best, if you know people which are in a distance of thousands kilometres do something for you. I want to thank each of you, because of this. My English is not good, because of I cant write you a big letter. But, you may be sure, I am writing this letter with my heart.

Prison is not more difficult, for people who live with ideas. There are some difficulties, but if in your heart has a hope, you will tolerate everything. I know that in your democratic countries there are no repressions. And, I understand you cant imagine life without girls, beer, football :~) ^^

But in my box there are many good songs. With help these songs, I can keep my feeling level up. I want to write you one of this list, my favorite song. When I feel bad, I am repearing with help this song:

When you walk, through the storm
Hold your head, up high.
And don't be afraid, of the dark
At the end of a storm, there is a golden sky
And your sweat, slyver song, of a lark.

Walk on! ___________________________

Thank you for Everything!
As not writing till these time sorry.
I hope you will apologize ;)

Liberté
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Zohrab Ismayil, Rasul Jafarov and Anar Mammadli in front of the Council of Europe