



Breakthrough Art Exhibition explores gay, lesbian, transgender community

By Michael Parks

Most modern-day Mongols know the story of The Secret History of the Mongols by heart. The birth of the first Mongolian. The rise of Chinggis Khan. The establishment of the greatest empire in history. But "Beyond the Blue Sky" multimedia art exhibition opening July 2nd at the Mongolian Museum of Modern Art will tell a Mongolian story still truly secret: the story of Mongolia's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities.

According to Fulbright Fellow Brandt Miller, creator of the exhibition, societal pressures prevent most LGBT individuals in Mongolia from being open about their sexual orientation. Through the exhibition, Miller said, "I hope to give a voice to the community, challenge traditional ideas about gender and sexuality, and create a more open dialogue about these issues in Mongolia."

The focus of the exhibition will be a

series of portraits of LGBT Mongolians. To ensure their safety, the subjects of the portraits will all be anonymous, their faces hidden by blue Mongolian hadag (prayer scarves). "The prayer scarves are also symbolic, since it is Mongolian tradition to wrap the faces of the deceased with hadag. Miller said, "These are Mongolian people that can't even show their faces, share their names, all out of fear. This is what they deal with everyday of their lives. So the hadag is partially for their protection, but also to show that they are not fully living."

The exhibition will also feature poetry by gay and lesbian Mongolians, and oral histories about the challenges and realities of being gay and transgender in Mongolia. A silent film, co created and directed by Miller and visiting American filmmaker Sean Devaney, and featuring an original score by famed Mongolian band Altan Urag, will tell the story of the star-crossed love between one young man from Ulaanbaatar and another from the countryside.

Mongolian visual artists Sarantsatsralt Ser-od and Choijil Alimaa will also contribute works to the exhibition, as will artists from the United States and Germany.

The entire exhibition will be translated into both Mongolian and English.

Sponsors for the event include the British Embassy, the Khan Bank Foundation, U.S. Ambassador Mark Minton, the Arts Council of Mongolia, and more.

Miller said, "Many individuals from the Mongolian gay community have also contributed their time and creativity to help produce the exhibition. Because it is unsafe and there is too much gossip for them to speak out, they are eager to participate with their ideas and artwork. In a way, it will be their voices and skills in combination with my own."

Beyond the Blue Sky opening night is by invite only. The show will run from 6 PM-9 PM on July 2nd. On opening night, members of Altan Urag will perform their original film score. Other performers scheduled to appear include Misheel, the Tumen Ekh Dance Ensemble, and Naran.

The exhibition is open to the public from July 3-July 8.

For more information, please call 9525 6645.

Arts Council of Mongolia, Delta Foundation Center, IV floor, Tourists Street-38, Chingeltei District
Tel/Fax: 976-11-319015 E-mail: fundraising@artscouncil.mn Web: www.artscouncil.mn