HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS OF SOVIET GULAG IN THE SPOTLIGHT OF NEW DOCUMENTARY BY BOSTON COLLEGE FILMMAKERS

"Frozen Memories of the Russian Gulag" to be shown at Museum of Fine Arts: Jan. 18

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (Jan. 09) – The story the Soviet Union Gulag, considered one of the worst violations of human rights in history, is the subject of a new documentary to be screened at the Museum of Fine Arts, Remis Auditorium, 465 Huntington Ave., Boston on Sunday, Jan. 18. "Confronting Amnesia: Frozen Memories of the Russian Gulag," produced by Boston College filmmakers John Michalczyk and Ronald Marsh along with Sy Rotter, will be shown at 6:00 p.m. Tickets are $10 ($8 for MFA members, students or seniors). The MFA Box Office can be reached at (617) 369-3306 or online at http://www.mfa.org/calendar/event.asp?eventkey=36960&date=1/18/2009.

"Frozen Memories of the Russian Gulag" (56 min. 2009) tells the story the Soviet Union’s network of forced labor camps used to imprison millions of citizens. The camps, particularly during the reign of Joseph Stalin, were a tool for repression of political opposition and the setting of millions of executions as well as deaths due to exhaustion, hunger and disease.

Michalczyk felt that the story of the human rights violations of the Gulag needed to be told visually to combat what has been called Western blindness to the Soviet Gulag. "Somehow, the enormity of the evil perpetrated in the Gulag has generally eluded the collective consciousness of Americans and Western societies," he said. "One expects a shared visceral impact akin to that felt in our reaction to the Holocaust testament. Both offer the quintessential demonstration of Man’s capacity to inflict organized suffering on vulnerable populations."

Filmed on location in Siberia, Moscow, Perm and St. Petersburg, the film tells several stories including the search Jon Utley conducted to learn the fate of his father who was taken from the family’s home in Russia in 1936. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Utley was able to uncover documentation of his father's his arrest, indictment and execution order. Utley's father was killed for leading a hunger strike in a Siberian labor camp.

There is a segment on Jesuit priest Walter Ciszek who was picked up at the outset of World War II as a Vatican spy and spent 20 years in the Gulag. He was finally exchanged for two KGB spies in the early 1960s.

The documentary also highlights the human rights group Memorial Society in Russia which struggles against the current government's attempt to whitewash the past and resurrect the image of Stalin.
The film was co-produced by Boston College Fine Arts Professor John Michalczyk, an accomplished documentary filmmaker whose work has been seen on public television and in film festivals. His films explore issues of social justice, discrimination, war and conflict resolution. He produced “Confronting Amnesia: Frozen Memories of the Russian Gulag” along with Etoile International Productions partner Ronald Marsh of BC’s O’Neill Library and Sy Rotter of the Foundation for Moral Courage.

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