

Toronto 2005: Outlook and Objectives

Wilfried von Bredow writes: “Many foreign policy doctrines underline the importance of cultural policy as part of the positioning of the state on the international scene. It is, however, sobering to learn that this acknowledgement remains far too often lip service.” As an antidote to such hollow attestations regarding the role of culture, von Bredow issues the following call: “The cultural sector **itself** is asked to respond to the challenge.”

To take seriously this challenge, we must not simply enlist artists to contribute to social solutions as entertainers, but in a way that uses their knowledge of art and its functions: to interrogate, hypothesize, argue, and potentially alter consciousness. Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf points to this last capacity in an interview: “Art influences,” he says, “by changing the viewer’s outlook. And when someone’s outlook changes, [their] behaviour changes.”

Whether cultural change begins with individuals or governments remains a subject for debate. The unique aspect of our project is the commitment to bringing artists to the table, to join political scientists and policy-makers in discussion about culture’s role in defining and achieving human security. To that end, the conference in Berlin will showcase work by 7 international artists, work located at the cutting edge of politics and culture that demonstrates the singular way in which art can address problems of human security—ranging from AIDS to refugees to cultural intolerance.

Through a series of round tables (*débats*) the participants will also consider the ways in which such work can fuel, support, and even transform the shape of existing policy. In von Bredow’s words: “The long list of problems human security has to deal with... can be more successfully tackled when people in the cultural sector with their special talents contribute to focus our minds on these problems.”