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36 Artists Question Democracy with Powerful, Controversial Results to Start People Talking

– *“Speak Up St. Louis,” the new multi-media exhibit at The Gallery at the Regional Arts Commission, engages viewers in conversations about today’s complex issues –*

ST. LOUIS (July 3, 2007) – Zlatko Cosic knows how it feels to be watched. For this refugee, it began in Bosnia where he experienced firsthand the heavy surveillance of his local government during the war. As his rights were slowly stripped from him, Cosic dreamed of America—of freedom and democracy. Now living in St. Louis, the video artist still feels Big Brother breathing down his neck and he uses his work to reflect his fears.

Cosic is one of almost forty artists who raise their voices to address the complex issues facing America in the upcoming show “Speak Up St. Louis” on view from Friday, July 20 to Sunday, August 26 at The Gallery at the Regional Arts Commission. The show addresses everything from identity and homelessness to bureaucracy and poverty. Curated by Michael Crane, director of the Art Center Gallery at the University of Central Missouri, the exhibition gives local artists a chance to voice their opinions with the goal of engaging and informing St. Louisans. As Crane explains, “This is *not* just another angry rant, but an opportunity for serious reflection.”

Cosic agrees. As an independent producer and creator of many multimedia projects, he uses the medium of video to spread awareness. “Surveillance is killing democracy and freedom. It makes people afraid to act and participate.” At the “Speak Up St. Louis” exhibition, Cosic is watching *you*. His video installation *LookTalkListen* projects video images of eyes, ears, and mouths onto a wall, forcing people to experience what it’s like to be watched.

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“Speak Up St. Louis”

First and Last add

The exhibit also includes work by artist Jane Barrow, director of the painting program at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Concerned by the War in Iraq, her dark, mixed media collage *Fighter Jet 4* is large in scale and represents a collision of power and dysfunction. “This project has allowed me to exhibit a different side of my art and myself,” explains Barrow, who had been apolitical in earlier years. “As a teacher, I am prompted to share this experience with students and to challenge them – as I have myself—to take risks and visually explore what is deeply important in life.”

“Speak Up St. Louis” is a continuation of the American Democracy Project, which began in 2003 to combat the decline in political and cultural participation, especially among the country’s youth. More than 400 colleges and universities are involved with the project in some way, including the University of Central Missouri where Crane curated “Raise Your Voice.”

The July 20 opening is one of The Gallery’s largest events to date:

- **5:30pm:** The Psychotronics, an improvisational instrumental rock band, performs.
- **6pm:** St. Louis Artworks/Uppity Theatre Co. will perform a play about what democracy means to today’s youth in the Studio next to The Gallery
- **7pm:** Njideka Ezenwa-Eke performs an African-style dance about democracy. The opening also features a live interactive net.art piece by Michael Zolman.

The exhibition **opens from 5:30pm to 7:30 pm on Friday, July, 20, at The Gallery at the Regional Arts Commission** located at 6128 Delmar Blvd. For more information call 314.863.5811 or visit www.art-stl.com.

The following artists will be featured in “Speak Up St. Louis:”

Ambrose Wesley	Amela Sinanagic	Aunia Kahn	Billie Price
Christina Licata	Christine Ilewski	Community CollabARTive	Dail Chambers
Dan Rule	Elka Kazmierczak	Gallina Todorova	Jane Barrow
Jane Linders	Janice Nesser Chu	Jeane Vogel	John Jennings
Judy Lazarus	Julie Kendall	Katherine Rhoads Fields	Leah Nguyen
Leslie Holt	Linda Jones	Margaret Travis Jaspering	Mariella Funk
Mark Fisher	Martha Mahon	Michael Bolton	Michael Zolman
Milton Holmes	Njideka Ezenwa-Eke	Psychotronics	Robert Yemm
Rockleigh Wolfe	Tuan Nguyen	Zlatko Cosic	

St. Louis Artworks / Uppity Theater Co.

About the Regional Arts Commission

Founded in 1985, the Regional Arts Commission (RAC) is a cultural catalyst in the St. Louis area, providing financial, technical, promotional and other support for arts organizations. Directed by a board of fifteen commissioners appointed by the chief executives of St. Louis City and County, RAC is a pivotal force in the continuing development and marketing of the arts in the region. In May 2007, 209 of the area’s arts organizations, consortiums and cultural programs, large and small, received grant awards totaling more than \$3.5 million, funded by a portion of the hotel/motel room sales tax. RAC’s four-story facility including the area’s first Cultural Resource Center is located at 6128 Delmar Blvd., St. Louis, Mo., 63112 in the exciting new stretch of The Loop neighborhood. Contact the organization by calling (314) 863-5811 or by visiting www.art-stl.com.

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