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Freedom of Expression: The Art of Peter Sís

January 24 — March 8, 2008

Mary Ryan Gallery is pleased to present “**Peter Sís: Freedom of Expression**,” Peter Sís’s first gallery exhibition in New York. The exhibition spans more than 30 years of the artist’s career and includes drawings from Sís’s most recent book, *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007). The title of this exhibition is a truism for Sís, who not only grew up drawing in secret and reading banned books, but who as a young adult eventually used his art and abilities to flee Communist Czechoslovakia. In celebration of freedom and of the individual that distinguishes himself from the masses, his books often focus on explorers, adventurers, and radical thinkers.

The Wall tells the story of Sís’s struggle to preserve artistic freedom growing up in Communist Prague, and his eventual liberation through art. The book has received praise from

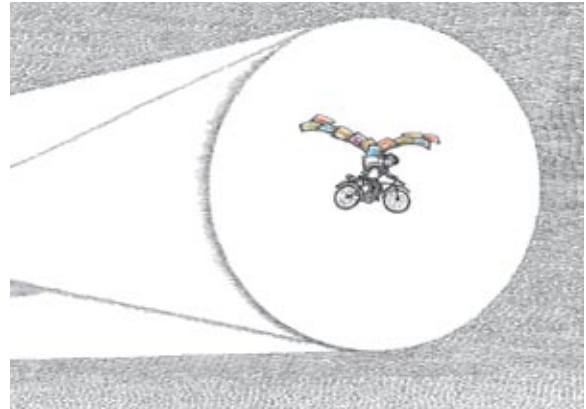
The New York Times Book Review,
The Washington Post, *The Wall Street Journal*, and former

president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, who said that Sís’s book “...is most of all about the will to live one’s life in freedom and should be required reading for all those who take their freedom for granted.”



The exhibition will also feature a selection of animated films and preparatory drawings, as well as original artwork from Sís’s acclaimed books *Madlenka’s Dog*, *Tree of Life: Charles Darwin*, *Follow the Dream: The Story of Christopher Columbus* and *Tibet Through the Red Box*.

This exhibition provides an experience for viewers to absorb Sís’s work without any accompanying narrative. His meticulous drawings blend the real and imaginary, simultaneously exploring the micro and macro through maps and mazes, and are often framed by his distinct, playful borders. Sís’s art, whether for a book or any other specific project, stems from his continual amusement and fascination with a subject or idea. He begins with the artwork, and then develops a story. For this reason Sís’s drawings are worlds in and of themselves. Imagery and meaning are layered and subtle, providing the viewer with a unique visual experience. Known for his exquisite and finely detailed line work, Sís creates stunning, intricate worlds that exist somewhere between reality and fantasy.



Sís was born in Brno, Czechoslovakia in 1949 and attended The Academy of Applied Arts in Prague as well as the Royal academy in London. He began making animated films in 1975, drawing each image and frame entirely by hand. The 1977 film *Island for 6,000 Alarms Clocks, A Modern Fairy Tale*, which is on view in this exhibition, was banned in Czechoslovakia, and both *Heads* (1980) and *Players* (1982) won awards at the West Berlin Film Festival and Toronto Film Festival, respectively. In 1982, the Czech government sent him to Los Angeles to produce a film for the 1984 winter Olympics, but when the project was cancelled and the government ordered him to return home, he decided to stay in the United States and was granted asylum.

In 1984 Sís moved to New York and began his career as a children’s book author/illustrator. Since then he has become the recipient of numerous awards such as the *New York Times Book Review* Best Illustrated Book of the Year (seven time winner), *The Boston Globe-Horn Book Award*, a the Society of Illustrators Gold Medal, and the Caldecott Honor. In 2003 Sís was named a MacArthur fellow in the Visual Arts.

Beyond writing and illustrating, Sís has contributed editorial illustrations to *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Esquire*, and has published close to 1,000 drawings in the *New York Times Book Review*. He has completed public commission for 86th Street/Lexington Avenue subway line in New York City, the Baltimore-Washington International Airport, the University of Minnesota, and created the “Whale” poster for New York City’s Metropolitan Transit Authority, which was displayed in subway cars throughout the city.

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