

Anonymous Stateless Immigrants statement on Post-Peace exhibition censorship

As artists in “Post-Peace” we express our discontent over the decision by Akbank Sanat to cancel the exhibition over “the delicate situation in Turkey.” As members of ASI, we proposed to create a “Refugees Cultural House” envisaged after Alexandra Exter’s (1882-1949) “A Stage For Tragedy.” This platform was designed to bring together refugees interested in culture in Istanbul together to produce and perform music, theater, and dance for the duration of two aration for the exhibition began in October 2015, and continued unhindered by interruption for five months. We were promised an exhibition budget and participation fee. Talks between curator Katia Kruppenova, Akbank Sanat, and other artists increased during these months. Materials were purchased and performances were confirmed. The musicians Hozan Peyal, Maryana Golovchneko, Hannibal Saad and Moutaz Arian were all invited and confirmed to perform, each promised an artist fee.

Notice of exhibition’s cancellation was delivered to us via email by Katia Kruppenova on Thursday, February 25, 2016, four days prior to the opening. Few artists participating were already in Istanbul, flights were paid for, hotels and accommodations booked, then cancelled by Akbank Sanat, leaving several artists stranded and in desperate need of last minute accommodation upon arrival to Istanbul. We strongly condemn Akbank Sanat’s malicious and irresponsible behaviour in this regard. By cancelling the exhibition a mere four days prior to the opening, then cancelling accommodations for artists already either in Istanbul or en route, they left many in dire financial straits by forcing them into expensive hotels at their own cost. Akbank Sanat’s official reason for the cancellation was pitiful. When pressed by members of the media to elaborate on reasons for the cancellation, Akbank Sanat responded with the following meagre and unexplanatory statement:

We have been organizing International Curator Competition for 4 years. We have supported and hosted many curators and artists during these exhibitions. As you all know, the last competition was held 5 months ago. In the intervening months, we worked very hard on the project and gave it our full support in anticipation of a wonderful exhibition.

However, over the course of our preparations, Turkey went through a very troubled time. In particular, the tragic incidents in Ankara are very fresh in people’s memories. Turkey is still reeling from their emotional aftershocks and remains in a period of mourning.

In accordance with Akbank Sanat’s sense of responsibility in the Turkish contemporary art world and following various considerations regarding the delicate situation in Turkey, the exhibition has been cancelled.

In response, curator Katia Krupennikova stated:

In October 2015 I won the Akbank Sanat Curator Competition with an exhibition project which brings together artists from a variety of origins to question how war and peace appear today. The title of the show is “Post-Peace,” a term that is a possible name for our difficult and confusing present. It was planned to open on 1 March 2016 and run until 7 May, 2016 in Akbank Sanat, Istanbul.

The project was selected by an international jury consisting of Bassam El Baroni (independent curator and theory tutor at Dutch Art Institute, Arnhem), Paul O’Neill (curator, writer and

Director of the Graduate Program at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, New York), Iris Dressler and Hans D. Christ (directors of the Württembergisch Kunstverein Stuttgart). Developed and coordinated by Basak Senova, the competition is intended to provide support for emerging curators, reinforce interest in curatorial practices, and encourage new projects in the field of contemporary art.

On the 25th February, 2016, a few days before the opening, the exhibition was cancelled by Akbank Sanat.

The official explanation letter to myself and the jury states the following reasons:

“...over the course of our preparations, Turkey went through a very troubled time. In particular, the tragic incidents in Ankara are very fresh in people’s memories. Turkey is still reeling from their emotional aftershocks and remains in a period of mourning. Therefore, many events, including – but not limited to – exhibitions, concerts, and performances, are being cancelled every day.”

I, along with the artists in the show, believe this to be a case of political censorship. I fully recognize the tense political atmosphere in Turkey right now, and the reasons why Akbank Sanat may not wish to be associated with the exhibition. But this is also why it is essential to have open discussions and a place for people to engage with different perspectives on issues relevant in the Turkish context and beyond.

This situation is a very complicated one, and that is why I am currently in discussion with several institutions in Istanbul to host conversations about the ethics and responsibilities of art professionals working in tense political and social environments. I am also proposing to these institutions to co-host events and parts of the exhibition. I believe that turning this unfortunate situation into a critical dialogue is the best and most constructive decision.

We stand in solidarity with Kruppenova and all the other artists who have been censored. Since our voices have become silenced, we would like to use this occasion to state that such a contemporary system of organizing contemporary art has no integrity to art, artists nor creation of content and context for discussion and formation of alternative communities. Accordingly, censorship can be seen as a byproduct of biopolitical control undermining even the possibility of alternative initiatives through the reproduction of fear and spatial polarization.

All told, censorship reminds us of the power of art and culture to act outside dominant hegemonic structures and interests. This might be the only advantage of a broken arm when censorship becomes a form of readymade political art.

Anonymous Stateless Immigrants collective

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