

More than 300 British artists demand Turner Contemporary take stand against “ongoing genocide in Gaza”

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More than 300 British artists, curators, writers, designers and others have addressed an open letter to the Turner Contemporary, the contemporary arts space in Margate, Kent, demanding that the venue take a stand against the Israeli mass murder in Gaza. The group also includes musicians, actors, composers, teachers and educators, photographers and students.

The Turner Contemporary commemorates the association of English painter J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) with Margate. As its website explains, built “on the site of the boarding house” where the artist stayed “during his visits to Margate, the gallery is inspired by the life and work of the celebrated artist, who found inspiration in the town’s skies and light and believed in the power of art as an agent for change.”

The letter of protest addressed to the Turner Contemporary refers to the “the horrific dehumanisation of the Palestinian people, the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation in the West Bank.” It points out that “hundreds of leading scholars,” UN experts and the South African government have all either publicly warned about or accused Israel of mass murder.

The letter refers to the “inconsistent” position of the Turner Contemporary, which boasts on its website about its various “progressive” social and political positions. The gallery, for example, claims to be “on a mission to protect the planet from the pressing environmental challenges it faces—from pollution and habitat destruction to loss of biodiversity and resource depletion.”

Furthermore, the institution insists that “we are committed to promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in all areas of our work. We stand in solidarity

with the fight for racial justice and recognise the importance of being an anti-racist organisation.” The Turner website goes on: “We want to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all, where everyone feels a sense of belonging and can experience the transformative power of art.”

Despite all this hot air, as the open letter points out, “the Turner Contemporary has failed to publicly denounce the genocide in Gaza, call for a permanent ceasefire or take a clear stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine.”

The letter argues that as an international cultural institution “which has for many years supported a diverse range of artists from around the world and exhibited a wide range of socially and politically engaged art,” the Turner Contemporary’s “failure to speak out at this moment on an ongoing genocide is ethically inconsistent and untenable.”

It notes that the worsening humanitarian crisis, with victims of famine and disease “now adding to the already unbelievable death toll, is extremely distressing for many in the arts community.” Many of those who have worked with Turner Contemporary,

including both those from the local arts community and the global creative community have been very vocal in support of Palestine and feel strongly that Turner Contemporary needs to take responsibility for their position as an employer and supporter of the arts by making a clear statement in solidarity with the Palestinian people and offering its support as an institution at this time.

The open letter asserts that British institutions “have a profound responsibility to address the injustice wrought upon the Palestinian people, given the UK’s historical and ongoing complicity in Israel’s brutal regime of genocide, occupation and settler-colonialism.” The Turner Contemporary’s

voice and platform are powerful factors at this critical moment in our human history. Breaking your silence by speaking up now would be an important act of solidarity not only with the Palestinian people but with the countless artists and art workers who have done so while putting their livelihoods at risk in the censorious culture that has emerged around this crisis.

It concludes:

As cultural workers and audiences for art at Turner Contemporary, we ask the following:

1. Turner Contemporary makes an unequivocal statement in support of the Palestinian people
2. Turner Contemporary calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza
3. Turner Contemporary engages with local and national organisations to take positive action towards pushing for change and justice for Palestine

The open letter is signed by a number of Turner Contemporary staff members, both anonymous and self-identified. More than one hundred of the signatories describe themselves as artists, the largest single group. The two dozen writers include Charlie George, Amber Trentham, Rosa Woolf Ainley, Daniel York Loh, Jemma Desai, Raman Mundair, Pauline Goldsmith, Matthew Hill, Devjani Bodepudi and Sally O’Reilly.

Musicians Brian Eno, Adnan Joubran, Taru Dalmia, Oliver Izod, Steph Dickinson, Rena Minegishi and Said Anazoure added their signatures, along with curators Anne Duffau, Warren Harper, Sophie Williamson and Helen De Witt, filmmakers Miranda Pennell, Mania

Akbari and Toral Dixit and actors Ruth Lass, Pauline Goldsmith and Freya Warsi.

British artists and actors in large numbers have continued to take a stand against the campaign of mass murder in Gaza, the joint effort of the Netanyahu fascist regime and the Biden White House.

In mid-October, more than 2,000 British filmmakers, actors, visual artists, playwrights, musicians, photographers, poets, authors, comedians, producers, curators, DJs, architects and designers signed an open letter asserting that “Our governments are not only tolerating war crimes but aiding and abetting them.”

More than a thousand British and Irish actors, writers, artists, directors, critics, musicians and playwrights added their names to a petition in November and December demanding that art institutions stop their censorship of pro-Palestinian artists and individuals in the cultural field who were seeking to defend the Palestinians from the Israeli genocide. Among the better known figures were actresses Olivia Colman, Harriet Walter, Juliet Stevenson, Nicola Coughlan and Aimee Lou Wood.

A large group of electronic music DJs and musicians in Britain signed an open letter in November speaking out “against Israel’s brutal and ongoing attack on Gaza.” The signatories indicated that they were “troubled to see that most of London’s electronic music venues and collectives have been silent in response to Israel’s horrifying and ongoing violence against the 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza, with the financial and political support of Western states.”

Early in the Israeli onslaught, 8,000 primarily British and US artists, writers and other cultural workers signed an open letter denouncing the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian population of Gaza and demanding an immediate ceasefire.



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