

# Royal Academy in London censors anti-Gaza genocide art work by young people

David Walsh  
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Giving into pressure from pro-Israel organizations, the Royal Academy of Arts (RA) in London has removed two artworks that condemn the current genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. Such works reflect the elementary feelings of tens of millions of people in Britain and around the world in the face of the endless cruelties being perpetrated by the Israeli military, with the help of Washington and London, on the Gazan population.

The two works were included in the annual Young Artists' Summer Show at the RA. One, by an 18-year-old, Kausar, is simply a photograph of someone holding up a sign (which hides the person's face) that reads, "Jews say stop genocide on Palestinians: Not in our name."

The other, by 16-year-old Andy, is a charcoal drawing in the center of which are three screaming women in headscarves with a swastika above them. The youthful artist explained that he was "inspired by the recent conflict in Gaza."

According to the Royal Academy, the young people's event, now in its sixth year, "is a free, open submission exhibition for students aged 4–19 studying in the UK. Artworks are judged by a panel of passionate artists and arts professionals, with selected artworks displayed online and on-site at the Royal Academy of Arts."

The website adds that more "than 21,000 students participated this year, thanks to the commitment of teachers, parents and guardians who are championing the role of art in education. Our judges were overwhelmed by the insight, imagination and inspiration in the artworks they saw as they selected the artworks exhibited."

All of that went out the window, however, once the pro-Israel lobby, with connections at the highest levels in both the Labour and Tory parties, went into motion.

A July 15 letter from Andrew Gilbert, Vice President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, addressed to Axel Rüger, the Royal Academy's Chief Executive, expressed

"significant concern" about "three recent works which the RA is exhibiting."

In addition to the two works included in the Young Artists' show, Gilbert complained about a work in the RA's Summer Exhibition 2024, Michael Sandle's charcoal drawing, "THE MASS SLAUGHTER OF DEFENCELESS WOMEN & CHILDREN IS NOT HOW YOU DERADICALISE GAZA."

The drawing features a pilot in an aircraft, emblazoned with the Star of David, and in the background, a mass of bodies in burial shrouds. Sandle (born 1936) is a member of the Royal Academy and a well-regarded sculptor and artist, known for his anti-war and anti-establishment pieces. He has been exhibited internationally and his works are held by museums and galleries in the US, Brazil, Germany, France, Japan, Australia and other countries, as well as the UK.

According to the RA's own website, the artist's "work voices criticisms of what Sandle describes as 'the heroic decadence' of capitalism, in particular its appetite for global conflict. He has also attacked the media for packaging and sanitising the destructiveness of war." So far Sandle's piece in the Summer Exhibition has not been removed.

Gilbert's fatally dishonest letter of protest presents the "tragic" conflict in Gaza as having been "precipitated by Hamas." The events of October 7, according to this logic, had nothing to do with 75 years of Zionist barbarism against the Palestinian population, the mass expulsion of 1948, the continuing theft of land, the destruction of villages and orchards, the killing of thousands of Palestinians, the abuse, jailing and torture of thousands of others.

"We would question," Gilbert writes, "the judgement of allowing these pictures with their highly politically charged and controversial messages into the RA's summer exhibitions, particularly with no attempt to present any

context or contextualising works which might express a contrary view.” It risks giving the impression, he goes on, “that the RA is taking a political stance on a very controversial issue, which would seem at odds with its objectives, not to mention its charitable status.” The latter, of course, is a not so subtle threat.

The July 15 letter patronizingly observes there is a “long and admirable tradition of anti-war art,” but claims that “some imagery and content relating works mentioned above comprise antisemitic tropes and messaging as defined by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.” Where is there any hint of antisemitism in these works? There are instead strong and legitimate indictments of Israel’s policy.

But the IHRA definition includes this as one of its “contemporary examples of antisemitism”: “Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.”

But the problem here does not lie with the artworks or the artists but with Israeli government policies—aimed according to a UN commission’s findings last month at the “extermination” of the Gazan population—as well as the faulty IHRA definition.

As the WSWs explained in June, the UN commission “concluded that the Israeli military and government ‘committed the war crimes of starvation as a method of warfare; murder or willful killing; intentionally directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects; forcible transfer; sexual violence; outrages upon personal dignity; and [sexual and gender-based violence] amounting to torture or inhuman and cruel treatment.’”

If Gilbert is upset with artists comparing the Israeli government and military to the Nazis, he should take that up with Netanyahu and his accomplices in Washington, London and elsewhere.

Royal Academy officials, like their counterparts across the globe, capitulated immediately upon receiving Gilbert’s letter.

Of course, this meant going against the decisions of the organization’s own judges, that “panel of passionate artists and arts professionals” so highly praised in the exhibition information.

In its weasel-like media statement, the RA wrote

We are aware of concerns about two artworks that relate to the Israel/Palestine conflict. We have discussed the matter thoroughly and have also

received external guidance. We recognise that an exhibition for young people and artwork by young people is not an appropriate environment for volatile public discourse. We offer a duty of care to the artists we exhibit and the visitors to our galleries, particularly our youngest and most vulnerable. We chose to include these works in the show. However, having reviewed and considered the matter carefully, we feel that by continuing to display these artworks, with limited opportunity to provide context or discourse, we would risk causing undue upset and could put people at risk. We have therefore made the decision to remove these two artworks from display.

We apologise for any hurt and distress this has caused to our young artists and to our visitors. We will learn from this experience and we are reviewing our processes, so we can continue to celebrate the creativity of young artists in a safe and responsible way.

Heaven forbid that young people should protest against daily atrocities and even “extermination”—the deaths of as many as 186,000 people, according to *The Lancet*, including tens of thousands of women and *children*. They should learn to be as “safe and responsible” as the RA officials themselves, turn a blind eye to Nazi-like crimes against humanity and shut their mouths confronted with world-historic mass murder.



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