**Making Decisions With Heart in Times of Crisis**

Maintaining ethical standards in the art world is the responsibility not only of artists, but also cultural institutions and those who support them. Any decision taken by an institution should be made with respect for its public, the people who work for it and the artists who collaborate with it.

The most important criteria to safeguard are trust, sincerity and respect. I always saw biennales as a unique autonomous pedagogic site to explore ideas freely, to define the level of ethics in the art world without the need to prioritise profit, and to emphatically shape the zeitgeist of art in relation to life and society. Now I see that this position is in danger. Biennales cannot avoid their social and ethical responsibilities towards their public, their collaborators and artists when it comes to the source their finances.

The case of the Biennale of Sydney is not about asking individual artists to make decisions according to their own understanding and beliefs. This is misleading. If everyone is truly sincere, we cannot abandon one another. I don’t want to address a single target – not the Biennale itself, the sponsor, the artists, nor Australian Citizens in general. All I know is that we should unite in demanding a change to unethical policies.

I believe artists can have the most powerful impact, if– and when– they come together and share collective creative ideas in this moment of crisis. Even if only a few artists out of 94 participate, there is still an exhibition. But there would be no exhibition without all 94 artists.

It is our responsibility to prioritize collective, progressive, constructive and creative ideas in a moment of crisis such as this. It is time to give up our personal concerns as priorities and examine the real, sincere meaning behind what we all do and what we can achieve.

What I see here is a lack of ethical transparency; a last-minute call from an Australian citizen to boycott; a Biennale team and board that has known of its sponsor’s engagements for a very long time; invited artists left uninformed; as sponsor, Transfield Holdings without a clear distinction from Transfield Services, who is very well aware that their business decision as a major contractor on the highly criticized refugee detention camps at Manus Island and in Nauru is ethically indefensible; and the implications of this both on the cultural scene, and on the broader discussion of Australian citizens demanding an urgent change of policy from the Australian Government.

What we have now is a letter to the board of the Biennale signed by a group of deeply concerned participating artists, a public petition with more than one thousand signatories, and a rather insensitive statement by the Biennale Board in response stating "Artists must make a decision according to their own understanding and beliefs." This turns the issue into an individual matter, and that is what is upsetting, instead of addressing a collective responsibility.

After all this conversation I have come to the conclusion that I must withdraw from the Biennale of Sydney. I would only rejoin the conversation if:

1. A majority group of participating artists decides to have a collective action challenging the current crisis.

2. If the BoS negotiates a transparent and ethical funding agreement with all sponsors.

3. If Transfield Services reconsiders its current agreements with government and the BoS is not implicated in any wealth generated from the mandatory detention policies.

4. If we all work together for a better future of the Biennale of Sydney, while sending a clear message to Australian Government that we will not accept the ethically indefensible policy of the mandatory detention of asylum seekers.

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