

To the signatories of the open letter of August 12th

We have read your open letter of August 12th, titled “In Defense of Freedom of Expression”. First of all, I would like to apologize once again regarding the strong sense of indignation and disappointment you feel about the works that are no longer on view, which were created by your fellow participants in the Triennale. Further, I would like to express my profound sympathy towards your demonstration of solidarity with these artists, and with your desire to defend freedom of expression, which is at the heart of all artistic activity. I also understand that you are dissatisfied with our response, feeling that it has been too slow.

I would like to state here that, as organizer of an international art festival that sets “contributing to the global development of culture and art” as part of its mission, I also view freedom of expression, which forms the very foundation for realizing this mission, to be of the utmost importance. The conception and realization of the exhibition “After ‘Freedom of Expression?’” as part of Aichi Triennale 2019 was an extremely challenging endeavor in today’s Japan – a society rife with intolerance towards opinions and attitudes different from one’s own, which has led to widespread self-regulation. A project of this nature is unprecedented in Japan’s public museums or art festivals. It is precisely because of the value we set on freedom of expression that we worked so hard to overcome numerous difficulties and realize this exhibition. But ever since August 1st, when the exhibition opened, threats beyond our expectations, malicious and abusive phone calls, and warnings about inhumane acts of terrorism have been unceasingly directed against us. The closure of the exhibition was a decision to prioritize the lives of visitors and staff who were in a position of imminent danger. Our greatest respect for freedom of expression, however, has remained constant throughout.

As mentioned in your letter, there have been several attacks made on our freedom of expression. We are deeply perturbed by this and intend to face such threats with fortitude.

The attacks on freedom include: (1) Nagoya mayor Takashi Kawamura’s unfortunate comments calling for the permanent closure of “After Freedom of Expression?”; (2) a statement made by Chief Cabinet Secretary, Yoshihide Suga, threatening to cut off future funding to the Triennale through the national Agency for Cultural Affairs; (3) numerous anonymous calls harassing the exhibition staff; (4) a fax threatening terrorist action unless the section be closed.

(1) (2) I stand with you in objecting to the comments made by Nagoya Mayor Takashi Kawamura. I strongly feel that they are in violation of Article 21 of the Constitution of Japan, which guarantees freedom of expression. Furthermore, the fact that many public officials have spoken against the exhibition infringes on the freedom of expression and the right to know, and could potentially inhibit cultural and artistic activities on a national scale. This cannot be left unchallenged. There have been many outcries, both from public officials and from members of the public, about using taxpayer money for an exhibition of this nature. However, the aim of our undertaking, which sought

to honor freedom of expression, was to provide a broad forum for public debate. I believe, therefore, that it was an appropriate use of public funding, aimed as it was at serving the public good. It goes without saying that these comments have not influenced our decision to close the exhibition in any way.

(3) In terms of the phone calls harassing the staff at our office and at our associates' offices, we have so far been unsuccessful in finding legal measures to prevent them. This is one of the most troubling concerns right now, and the biggest reason why we have yet been unable to offer you a clear answer as to whether we can resume the exhibition. Some of the callers have made deplorable threats of a specific nature, warning, for example, that they would track down and cause harm to the families of the staff members answering the phones.

(4) Regarding the FAX message that warned of a potential terrorist attack, we actively cooperated with the police without giving in, and as a result, the culprit is now under custody. We will continue to cooperate with the police in their efforts to identify and arrest the other offenders.

As for the reopening of "After 'Freedom of Expression?'" , the third-party The Future of Aichi Triennale Review Committee was established on August 16th. It is currently evaluating the whole process that has led to this point – from the exhibition's preparation and implementation to its suspension – and discussing what path the Triennale should take from here on. I will refer to the committee's interim report in assessing various possibilities for reopening the exhibition.

Instead of having different entities and individuals express their viewpoints through separate statements, we are also currently exploring ways to assemble a community of such people with common beliefs, and put out a joint declaration on freedom of expression. To that end, I will continue to listen to the opinions of artists such as yourselves and of the viewers, and to deliberate with art experts and associated organizations both in Japan and overseas. And my stance is to clearly denounce the rise of hate and historical revisionism. Freedom of expression matters to us too.

Aichi Triennale 2019 Artistic Director
Daisuke Tsuda