

CIMAM questions the decision of the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs to withhold the funding granted to the Aichi Triennale 2019



Organizers of the art exhibition "After 'Freedom of Expression?'" announced in Nagoya that they and the host of the exhibition agreed on a three-day reopening of the exhibition.

Statement

CIMAM expresses its deep concern at the recent reports that the Japanese state Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACA) has withheld the funding it had granted the Aichi Triennale 2019. The Agency states that this decision was made as a result of procedural inadequacies, explained as the failure of the Aichi Government to make explicit at the time of the application for the grant that the work involved in the exhibition *After 'Freedom of Expression?'* could invite controversy. The Agency also states that it was not kept abreast of the protests as they happened and that the resulting closure meant that the project was not completed as planned. The Agency claims that the decision to now withhold funding is not related to the content of the exhibition but solely due to stated 'procedural errors'.

CIMAM questions this course of action and the reasons given for it. A number of factors throw the statements of the ACA into question. Firstly, the potentially controversial nature of the exhibition *After 'Freedom of Expression?'* was clear from the start of the process as it was a curatorial response to the exhibition *Freedom of Expression?* held in Tokyo in 2015. Secondly, the ACA contacted the Aichi Prefecture as soon as the problems emerged so it clear that they were aware of the controversy. Finally, the funding withheld, 78 million yen, was allocated towards the entire Triennale and the exhibition in question had an overall budget of 4.2 million yen. In this context the decision to withhold the entire grant as a result of procedural errors relating to a small section of the project appears a disproportionate reaction.

In light of these concerns CIMAM questions whether the decision is in fact based on procedural errors or if it represents an act of state censorship. CIMAM advises the ACA to be aware of the seriousness with which the international museum community views state censorship of cultural expression and this cause of action could damage the reputation of Japan's cultural policy internationally.

CIMAM notes that the action of the ACA is particularly disappointing in light of the commendable efforts of the organisers of the Aichi Triennial to address the difficulties raised by the closing down of the exhibition *After 'Freedom of Expression?'*. The efforts to restore the autonomy of the Triennale from political pressure and the establishment of an open platform for free and vigorous discussion on the incident represent an appropriate response to the serious

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concerns expressed by the artists involved in the Triennale and the international art community. The declaration by the Aichi Prefecture that the exhibition will now be reopened in its original form creates hope that this critical situation can be resolved.

CIMAM is hopeful that the decision to withhold funding is a result of a misunderstanding between the parties involved and calls on the Agency for Cultural Affairs to restore its grant to the Aichi Triennale 2019.

10 October 2019

The Museum Watch Committee of the CIMAM Board 2017–2019:
Bart De Baere, Calin Dan, Corinne Diserens, Sarah Glennie, Sunjung Kim, Jaroslaw Suchan, and Eugene Tan.

CIMAM – International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art – is an Affiliated Organization of ICOM.

Online Petition

→ change.org [NO to censorship! Reinstate funding for Aichi Triennale 2019!](#)

CIMAM Statement

→ 27 August 2019. [Deep concern at cancellation of the exhibition “After ‘Freedom of Expression?’”](#)

Related Articles

→ The Japan Times, 30 September 2019. [Organizers and Aichi Triennale hosts agree to reopen 'comfort women' exhibition for three days.](#)

→ The Japan Times, 26 September 2019. [Aichi art festival won't receive state subsidy after controversy over 'comfort women' exhibit.](#)

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