

Statements

In the framework of Culture Action Europe (CAE), ARJ monitors and reacts to human rights violations in the arts by joint statements and propositions.

Arts Rights Justice Working Group: Statements

February 27, 2015, 11:07 pm

July 2015

12 February, 2016 – Violations of human rights are on the rise

Recently, news of violations seem to be on the rise. Countries affected are not only outside of the EU, but also within. In a personal, non-exhaustive list, Mary Ann De Vlieg, member of the ARJ group, points out some of the important cases of violations.

Belgium: Censorship in a museum for cause of nudity.

Lebanon:

- Censorship of movie for of “provocation of sectarian strife” (petition)
- Theater play ban after unimplemented censorship

Hong Kong/China: Disappearance of booksellers after “provocative book” merchandizing

Saudi Arabia: Death sentence, replaced by eight years in prison and 800 lashes on charges of apostasy

Israel:

- Unexplained circus performer detention
- Black-listing and privileges for “loyal artists”

Egypt:

- Arrestation of cartoonist for “managing a Facebook page without a license”
- Arrestation of poet for “insulting islam”

Nigeria:

- Arrestation of visual artist for performing publicly
- Demolition of artist village
- Imprisonment of write for “libelous” book

ARJ Statement

16 July, 2015 — in support of Association Racines and all Moroccan artists

On 4 & 5 July, 2015, two representations of a theatre performance entitled **“b7al b7al” have been forbidden again, in Tangiers, Morocco**, following a similar incident in Rabat on 13 June. Although the organisers had fully respected all administrative procedures, they were informed on 4 July (15 minutes before the performance after all technical installations had

been prepared and the actors were ready), that the performance couldn't take place. The second representation the following day was also forbidden.

This ban takes place at a time when the migrant communities of the city of Tangiers are living violent, racist events that represent a complete denial of basic human rights and values.

The performance "b7al b7al" relieves tension and strengthens dialogue regarding migration between Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa. It is regrettable that such a performance be forbidden. It offers a place for migrants from Sub-Saharan regions to express themselves, and to make the public aware of the problems they face. It also helps prevent stereotypes and prejudices linked to racism.

The public space should be accessible to cultural actors, artists and organisations representing civil society and should be free of constraints. It is here that art gets closer to citizens, allowing for debates to take place openly on highly relevant issues for society.

Public authorities' role is to facilitate access and insure security of artists and citizens, respecting the freedom of artistic expression is guaranteed by the Moroccan Constitution.

"B7al b7al" is part of Mix City, a project of Association Racines, in partnership with Theatre of the Oppressed in Casablanca and Minority Globe, also in collaboration with the association Visa Without Frontiers, Tangiers. Mix City is part of "Diversity, Drama and Development" co-funded by the European Commission in the framework of Medculture, also supported by the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, the Swedish Foundation and the Heinrich Böll Foundation. It was set up by Minority Rights Group International, Civic Forum Institute and Andalus Institute.

21 members/allies of the Arts, Rights and Justice working group powered by Culture Action Europe support Moroccan artists and cultural operators in their struggle to maintain respect for the freedom of artistic expression and fully condemn this breach of freedom.*

Contact:

ARJ :Arts Rights Justice, an independent working group powered by Culture Action Europe, 2014-16. [Arts Rights Justice Working Group, ARJCAE@gmail.com](mailto:ARJCAE@gmail.com)

* Arterial, Art Moves Africa, Centre for Arts and Politics, European Music Council, Culture Action Europe, IDEA Europe, IETM, IG Freie Theater and European Off Network, Index on Censorship, ICAF (Equity), ITI Germany, ITI Sweden and the ITI Action Committee for Artists Rights, Latin American Network Art for Social Transformation, OncoLogicARts, Vivarta, Angie Cotte, Herwig Lewy (ITI Germany), Laurence Cuny, Mary Ann DeVlieg, Sara Whyatt

ARJ Joint Statement

28 June, 2015 – in support of street artist Shepard Fairey

The felony charges announced late last week against the street artist Shepard Fairey are a disproportionate response to his alleged crime and could repress artistic expression.

While Fairey was in Detroit in May 2015 on a commissioned project to undertake his largest mural to date, he mentioned to the Detroit Free Press that he had plans to "tag" other properties around Detroit with his artwork, for which he was not commissioned. Following this statement, coupled with the cropping up of a dozen of his signature pieces around the city, on May 19 Detroit police issued a warrant for his arrest on charges of two counts of malicious destruction of property. The charges carry a punishment of up to five years in jail

and up to \$10,000 in fines. Detroit police stated that Fairey should turn himself in or face arrest next time he is in Michigan. Fairey has had multiple run-ins with the law before for practicing his street art; typically he faces misdemeanor charges and pays a fine. Detroit's current revival efforts are supported by the large number of artists who live or have relocated there.

These charges raise important questions about the freedom of expression of artists when they are considered, for their artistic work, as a vandal. The undersigned organisations, members of Artsfex welcome the recent decision of a criminal court in Paris, who considered that charges had to be abandoned against street artist Monsieur Chat, accused to have vandalized the subway station Chatelet, although the station was in renovation.

It is regrettable that a bastion of democracy, the USA, puts artists and vandals on the same level. Artists are often the first victims of vandalism, from people, organisations or even institutions that consider their art stifling, ugly or unfit to their own values. Vandalism presupposes a permanent alteration; however, works of street art are neither permanent, nor alterations of the fabric of the walls they temporarily inhabit.

Any damage to personal property caused by impermanent street art should be subject to civil proceedings. Do the felony charges take in account the public's reception of the works concerned? And what if, by his work, the street artist brings a moment of joy, happiness, peace or emotion to the people that are usually obliged to contemplate grey walls in solitude? Street art creates social links between people and for this, a street artist should be acknowledged instead of facing disproportionate charges.

Works of arts are not a crime.

We join other colleagues in condemning the disproportionate charges aimed at Shepherd Fairey:

Freemuse, Index on Censorship, the National Coalition against Censorship, the Observatory of Freedom of Creation, PEN American Center, PEN International

ARTSFEX, the first international civil society network actively concerned with the right of artists to freedom of expression as well as with issues relating to human rights and freedoms generally

ARJ Joint statement

30 April, 2015 – Tania Bruguera

ARJ, together with international coalitions of arts and free speech advocacy groups, issued a letter supporting the Cuban performing artist Tania Bruguera. [click here to read the letter](#)