

Press Release

12.11.2025

Position statement by the Akademie der Künste Art and responsibility in times of militarisation

On 5 and 6 June 2025, the Akademie der Künste, together with the Goethe-Institut in Lithuania and the Contemporary Art Centre (CAC) in Vilnius, will put on a public symposium on the topic of the increasing militarisation ("Aspects of Presence: Art in Times of Militarisation," see also press release [here](#)). The event is timed to coincide with the stationing of a German Bundeswehr brigade in Lithuania. The Akademie thus addresses an issue that is of concern to its members and to the art scene as a whole: Both the security tensions in Europe and the conflict in the Middle East raise similar fundamental questions: How does artistic work position itself when societal discourse is increasingly dominated by militaristic thinking and polarisation?

This debate is deliberately not conceived of as a substitute for political action, but rather as an artistic intervention in societal reality. Artists have a keen sense of things that political language cannot express: contradictions of life, the complexity of suffering, the uniqueness of the human experience. Art has the capacity to allow incompatibilities to coexist without resolving or equating them. It upholds an essential truth – namely that no one instance of suffering in the world can possibly relativise another. All suffering is singular, incomparable, and stands on its own, even if one instance of suffering is historically linked to another.

Polarization through the Israel-Palestine conflict

Since the terrorist attack carried out by Hamas on 7 October 2023 and the ensuing Gaza war launched by Israel, this stance has been put to the test. As an artists' association, the Akademie der Künste has taken a clear position in unequivocally condemning the terrorist attack and the resurgence of antisemitism, while at the same time making an unconditional commitment to artistic freedom and taking Palestinian voices into account in the discourse.

The Akademie der Künste is a place of memory that brings together different generations and backgrounds in mutual dialogue. Some of its 421 members are Jewish, some are Palestinian, and some are descendants of Shoah survivors. As artists, intellectuals and politically active individuals, many members are deeply engaged with Israel's past and present, and many are active in advocating for the rights of Palestinians.

They are united by a deep shock at the ongoing suffering of the hostages and at the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. The scale of civilian casualties, the destruction of hospitals, schools and residential areas, and the obstruction of humanitarian aid are a violation of fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. The hostages must be released, the violence against the civilian population must end, and humanitarian aid must be delivered without delay. The civilian population is in dire need of immediate and comprehensive support through the supply of essential goods such as food, water and medical care, and must finally be protected.

Solidarity with Israel and the limits of *raison d'état*

The solidarity with Israel, as formulated in 2008 by Chancellor Angela Merkel as Germany's *raison d'état*, is rooted in Germany's historical responsibility for the crimes of the Shoah. However, it must never be an indifferent justification for policies that skirt international law and universal human rights. Otherwise, it risks losing all moral legitimacy.

True solidarity with Israel includes – and in fact demands – democratic criticism of government actions. In view of the dramatic situation in Gaza, it is long overdue

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that German politicians finally address the ongoing violations of international law. And out of this debate must urgently come concrete political action.

The role of art and the essence of its freedom

As a German cultural institution, the Akademie der Künste recognises its responsibility to make an active contribution to this debate. Art is not a place of neutral refuge, but rather an integral part of societal discourse. Many artists, members of the Akademie der Künste among them, and some in Israel, are currently taking great personal risk to stand up against violence and in support of dialogue and human rights.

They do so in part because artistic freedom is increasingly facing the threat of political instrumentalisation. Reducing art to declarations of loyalty – in whichever direction it may be – undermines the essence of this freedom. Art can only unfold its full political power when it is not co-opted. And solidarity retains its credibility when it allows room for critical debate.

The task of art is not to provide ready-made answers. Instead, its strength lies in opening up spaces – for truth beyond propaganda, for compassion beyond partisanship, for reflection beyond ideology. In a time of hardened lines of conflict and of militarisation, the Akademie der Künste takes this task especially seriously. The world needs places of dialogue between differing standpoints, where contradiction and complexity are not diminished but rather discussed and negotiated.

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