

Press Release  
Kassel, June 23, 2022

## FURTHER MEASURES INITIATED BY THE MANAGEMENT OF DOCUMENTA GGMBH

ruangrupa, the Artistic Team and the artists had assured documenta there would be no room for antisemitism at documenta. I had stated we would intervene immediately if—within the complex structure involving so many participants—antisemitic content were, nevertheless, discovered. I have now done so in order to prevent further damage to the current documenta fifteen and all upcoming documenta exhibitions.

Immediately after the antisemitic figure motifs on the banner *People's Justice* (2002) became known, I pointed out to ruangrupa and Taring Padi on Monday how this hurtful depiction has crossed the line. As an immediate measure, the mural was initially covered up and, in coordination with the documenta Supervisory Board, removed the following day.

I remain committed to the concept that our liberal democratic society gives art the freedom it needs. But this cannot and must not justify antisemitic depictions. Which is why I have immediately initiated further measures. Those responsible will have to make a statement within a short timeframe on how the insufficient inspection of the banner and the violation of the agreement could have happened.

Due to potential omissions by those responsible, we are now having the exhibition, which extends over 30,000 m<sup>2</sup> at 32 locations, inspected for further critical works. It is possible that individual parts of the exhibition will be closed for a short time for this purpose. I have asked ruangrupa to fulfill their curatorial task and role as Artistic Directors in this process. They are supported by recognized experts such as Meron Mendel, Director of the Anne Frank Educational Center in Frankfurt, and with proven legal expertise. Clearly antisemitic representations will be removed, and in the case of controversial positions, an appropriate debate will be conducted. We also reserve the right to exclude individual artists. We will likewise keep in mind that the exhibition is constantly evolving according to ruangrupa's concept.

Lastly, we will begin the announced dialogue next week, on Wednesday, June 29, 2022, at 6.30 pm in UK 14 with a panel discussion co-hosted with the Anne Frank Educational Center. This is also intended prelude to further discussions. In cooperation with other civil society actors, the Anne Frank Educational Center will also set up a meeting and information stand on Friedrichsplatz, where visitors, but also artists can enter into dialogue on the issues of antisemitism and racism.

From the very outset, the absolute freedom of the Artistic Direction and curators has been a constitutive element of documenta as an international art exhibition. The tasks of the management lie in organizing the exhibition. I am not responsible for the artistic program, but for giving the Artistic Team the technical freedom to implement it. Selecting artists' stances, projects, and works is one of the core tasks of the Artistic Direction, which all curators of past documenta exhibitions have insisted on and will always insist on. It is not the responsibility of the management to preview and approve the works. This would contradict documenta's artistic freedom just as much as approval by a panel of experts.

The decision in favor of the Indonesian artists' collective ruangrupa was made by an international and national Finding Committee. The nomination was perceived as a great opportunity to enter into a dialogue with the Global South. ruangrupa approached the exhibition with a completely new curatorial concept. They initiated an open-ended process that envisages a worldwide network of artists and collectives. In the meantime, this network has grown to more than 1,500 people. ruangrupa do not see themselves as conventional curators who bear sole responsibility for the selection of works or their location in space. They, too, are part of the global network whose guiding motifs are sustainability, solidarity, sharing of resources, participation, and orientation towards the common good. This has produced a thought-provoking, joyful, and inviting documenta fifteen, "an image of a world made up of many worlds, without hierarchy or universalism," as the international Finding Committee writes.

The flip side of this open process is that the different cultural experience spaces of all participants in combination with the collective decision-making as well as the Covid-related, purely digital preparation also led to misunderstandings and undesirable developments, which ruangrupa did not fully control in the ongoing process and thus did not resolve. The artists and their works arrived in Kassel very late. All this unfortunately led to the public presentation of the work *People's Justice* by Taring Padi, which features intolerable antisemitic imagery. The gGmbH and I personally have expressly distanced ourselves from this.

The banner in question was part of a plethora of works by Taring Padi that arrived late in Kassel by shipping container. It was only when the banner was being put up for display that it was noticed that the twenty-year-old banner, consisting of four individual parts, was so damaged that it had to be reinforced by an outside company to fix it in place. For this reason, the work was not hung by the Wednesday, but only on Friday afternoon. Since it is a highly detailed painting, the antisemitic figures were not noticed until after the close of the tightly scheduled opening weekend.

It is not appropriate to place the entire exhibition, with its thousands of works and projects, under general suspicion: documenta fifteen provides food for thought and generates impulses for solidarity and community, which is perceived positively by the public. This should continue to be appreciated accordingly, despite all the criticism.

**DOC**  **MENTA** JUNE 18 —  
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Kassel

**Press Contact**

Johanna Köhler  
Head of Communications and Marketing  
documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH

Henriette Sölter  
Head of Press  
documenta fifteen

T +49 561 70727-4030  
[presse@documenta.de](mailto:presse@documenta.de)  
[www.documenta-fifteen.de](http://www.documenta-fifteen.de)

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