



## Press Release

**24 international curators nominated 9 contemporary artworks recently censored around the globe. Who shall win the first *Refusés International Prize*?**

### Summary presentation

Everybody's been talking about the fact that contemporary art has gone global. However, while the dissemination of works has never seemed so easy, a surge of censorship can be detected through both liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes. No longer limited to aesthetic or moral criteria, the principles invoked are now overtly political, and often brandished by pressure groups whose impact has been multiplied by social networks.

Many artists and curators won't resign to fatalism and the silencing of art as a whistleblower. It is against the unrelenting, ruthless muzzling of artists that we are awarding the *Refusés International Prize*. We do this in the hope of creating a much needed awareness of this expanding phenomenon.

Each year an international jury of contemporary art professionals elects one censored work for each of 8 regions of the world, and a 9th one representative of censorship on digital networks, then votes for the winner of the Prize among these 9 works.

For this first edition, the list of the 9 nominees is visible on page 3 and the 24 members of the jury are on page 4.

The name *Refusés International* echoes the 1863 Salon des Refusés. This symbol of the freedom to exhibit was a direct response by painters who were refused entry in the French Academy of Fine Arts' yearly "Salon". At the time, such exclusion was a condemnation of invisibility.

Two centuries later, where do we stand in today's freedom of exhibiting works of art? The observation is unfortunately clear: despite its worldwide success, contemporary art is nonetheless still subject to censorship. Worse, this censorship, with the rise of populist and dictatorial regimes or the excesses of cancel culture, is anything but losing ground, while a new wave of hatred seems to be affecting the entire planet.

Arnaud Cohen, Franco-Portuguese visual artist and performer whose work has been presented at numerous biennials for the past ten years (Venice, Bienalsur, Dak'art, Something Else Cairo, Kampala, Contextile, FITE) but whose works are nonetheless regularly censored, has decided to surround himself with friends, eminent curators and art critics, to draw up a map of censorship in the 4 corners of the globe each year. However, from one region to another, this censorship is exercised in significantly different ways: here it emanates from the State, there from pressure from

identity or religious lobbies. Elsewhere, institutions find themselves constrained in their programming by powerful entrepreneurial patrons whose preoccupations are in protecting their brands from any controversy. They sometimes consider artists as mere cultural facilitators.

Choosing not to be exhaustive, the members of *Refusés International* have therefore decided to present 9 works each year, from 9 different regions of the world (among them the new digital networks continent), representative of the different forms of current censorship. One of these 9 works, following a vote by the participants scheduled for the end of the year, will be designated as the *2023 Refusés International Grand Prize* for contemporary art censorship worldwide. This work and the chosen 8 others, are presented online on the dedicated website [www.refusesinternational.org](http://www.refusesinternational.org), and will also soon be exhibited in the physical space of *Babel Mallorca*, the Balearic curatorial residence just created by Arnaud Cohen ([www.babelmallorca.org](http://www.babelmallorca.org)).

These 9 works presented this year were censored between September 2020 and September 2022, exceptionally over a two year period instead of one, due to the pandemic context and the numerous exhibition cancellations that accompanied it.

### **Introduction to the different contexts depending on the area, Arnaud Cohen's point of view**

In many countries it is increasingly complicated to demonstrate censorship. When the level of censorship increases, it often induces greater self-censorship (Japan). But, and this is unfortunately what happens the most frequently in many places, censorship is often imposed at an early stage, before the works are even chosen, through political control of the exhibition spaces. The recruitment of people loyal to the governing party to management positions in art institutions (Russia, Hungary, Poland, Turkey, China, etc.) insures that only the works of artists supporting the power in place are presented there. Spaces for artistic expression then end up being limited to the streets and social networks before sometimes completely dying out. Other countries' censorship, though slightly less, is still supported by the practice of very strong self-censorship: artists and curators do not dare to test the new limits of the regime, so much so that demonstrable cases are here also almost untraceable (Arab Abraham accords countries) and all the less detectable as there exists a strong culture of silence.

The most obvious cases (a work deprogrammed or removed from the wall of a museum) are therefore essentially found in liberal democracies (USA, Western Europe, Israel), or in territories that have just recently fallen into dictatorship. In the latter register, the most striking examples in recent years have been found in Hong Kong. In the case of liberal democracies, censorship and self-censorship are now most often the product of community, identity or religious lobbying on elected officials, heads of art institutions or on the artists themselves.

Virtually devoid of public institutions, Sub-Saharan Africa is undoubtedly the least legible region of the world in terms of censorship. In a paradoxically flourishing market, artists must, to ensure their economic survival, come to terms with powerful regional patrons while seeking to satisfy an often paternalistic Western demand. Not to mention political and religious violence. Self-censorship is therefore most often the rule.

### **Refusés International, the art exhibition**

Cohen's immaterial projects such as *ArtSpeaksForItself*, *Babel* and now *Refusés International* are no less artworks in their own right, carrying the same assemblage and reuse aesthetics as the sculptures or installations he also creates. The *Refusés International Prize* is therefore available as an artwork to be exhibited, with its aesthetics, visuals and texts situating these visuals in their regional, sociological, cultural and geopolitical environment.

**The 9 nominated for the 2023 *Refusés International Grand Prize***

ALEXANDER GRONSKY,  
censored by FONDATION PALAZZO MAGNANI, Fotografia Europea, Reggio Emilia, Italy

FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE,  
censored by the MUSEUM OF ART AND DESIGN, Miami Dade College, Florida, USA

JIA CHANG,  
censored by the SEOUL OLYMPIC MUSEUM OF ART

OH DE LAVAL,  
censored by SPOTIFY

IZINSIZ,  
censored by the TURKISH JUSTICE

TANIA BRUGUERA et HAMLET LAVASTIDA CORDOBI,  
censored by the CUBAN POLICE AND JUSTICE

TRACEY ROSE,  
censored by SUE WILLIAMSON, South Africa

The ULI SIGG COLLECTION,  
censored by the M+ Museum, Hong Kong, China

YOULIA TSVETKOVA,  
censored by the RUSSIAN JUSTICE

## The members of the 2023 jury

- **Bénédicte Samson** (Senegal), Artistic director, curator and executive producer at theMatter, Dakar, Senegal.
- **Deepak Ananth** (India/France), Indian art historian and art critic based in Paris.
- **Diana Wechsler** (Argentina), Artistic director of BIENALSUR and Head of contemporary art at the UNTREF Museum in Buenos Aires.
- **Enrico Lunghi** (Luxemburg), Art critic and independent curator, Head of the national Museum of Modern Art in Luxembourg (MUDAM) from 2009 to 2016.
- **Florence Derieux** (USA/France), Independent curator, former exhibition director at Hauser & Wirth NYC and former head curator of the Centre Pompidou Foundation.
- **François Salmeron** (France), Treasurer of the french branch of Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art, journalist for Quotidien de l'Art, co-director of la Biennale de l'Image Tangible.
- **Hafida Jemni** (France), Director of the Contemporary Art of Africa & Diaspora departement at the IESA school in Paris.
- **Imma Prieto** (Spain), Director of Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani, Palma de Mallorca.
- **Isabelle de Vasconcellos** (UK), former Director of Sculpture for the Messums Wiltshire Art Center, and Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, London.
- **James Porter et Shelly de Vito** (USA/France), Founding directors of Les Moulins de Paillard contemporary arts center and art residency, France.
- **Khai Hori** (Singapore), Director of Chan + Hori Contemporary, Singapore, former Deputy Director of Artistic Programming at Palais de Tokyo, Paris and Senior Curator at the Singapore Art Museum.
- **Zhang Lexing** (China/Latin America), Independent curator and founding director at ART LEXING, a creative agency and gallery space in Miami, Florida.
- **Marie-Caroline Chaudruc** (France), Managing director of Château de Montsoreau -Museum of Contemporary Art, since 2016.
- **Maxence Alcalde** (France), Art critic and journalist, professor of aesthetics and digital culture at ESADHaR, Le Havre, co-founder of the academic journals Marges and Radial.
- **Moataz Nasr** (Egypt), Founder of Something Else Cairo Biennale and head of Darb 1718 Art Center. Multimedia artist, he represented his country at the Venice Biennale in 2017.
- **Mounir Fatmi** (France/Spain/Germany), Visual artist living in Mallorca. Exhibitions at Centre Georges Pompidou, Brooklyn Museum, Mori Art Museum, Mathaf, Victoria & Albert Museum.
- **Paul Ardenne** (France), Independent curator, art historian, writer and journalist for Art press, Archistorm, INTER.
- **Simon Njami** (Cameroun/Switzerland), Writer, and independent curator. Former head of Dakar Biennale, founder of Bamako Encounters, curator of the first African Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.
- **Stephanie Seugmin Kim** (UK), Independent curator, former founding curator for London's Korean Cultural Centre, founding director of Sleepers Summit and Iskai Contemporary Art.
- **Vassiliki Tsanakou** (Greece/UK), Independent curator and member of the Gallery Climate Coalition initiative in London.
- **Li Zhenhua** (China/Germany), Curator of FILM at Art Basel in Hong Kong, since 2014.
- **1 anonymized member** for his professional and personal safety.
- + Steering Committee Administrator: **Damien Brachet**
- + President of the jury: **Arnaud Cohen**