

A few weeks ago we showed our work 'The Eagle and The Tortoise' in New York.

An art space that had planned to exhibit it later in the year has backed out because 'the subject may be too closely aligned with the current conflict in Gaza'.

We share this because we stand against censorship and for a free Palestine.

Dear Kathryn,



Yes, we did make it to the performance, which was lovely.

Unfortunately the subject may be too closely aligned with the current conflict in Gaza for us to present the performance at the moment—I feel very strongly that Center for Book Arts studios need to remain a resource to all (especially now when the need for free speech and the free distribution of ideas is so important). Sadly it is too easy for members of the public to misinterpret programming so close in theme and I wouldn't want to prevent someone from feeling comfortable using our studios. Perhaps we can check in again later in the year.

I remain a supporter of your work and hope to present something in the future.

Dear 

The Eagle and The Tortoise is a work I wrote in 2016-19, about the war by the Turkish state against the Kurdish population, the attempt to destroy a people by destroying their lives, their culture, their language, their homes, the landscape they live in; and the US's shameful complicity in that war.

 I agree, there are many parallels between the story we tell and the genocide that is happening in Gaza. 



In your email you explain that you can no longer present this work, not because of statements calling for a ceasefire and a free Palestine, but because of the parallels between the war and the story we tell in our performance. With that you are silencing not only artists who stand against the war, but any work that may invite reflection, or comparison with it.

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I agree that at this time freedom of speech is so important - but from your email I'm not sure whose freedom of speech that is. Not mine, as this work is my speech. Not those I made this work with, a team that includes Jewish, Kurdish and Turkish artists, as this work is their speech too. If institutions are afraid to program art that has resonance with our contemporary world, what are we left with? Who will be left to speak? And how is this art, how is this freedom?

You say you are not presenting this work because you need to protect the comfort of those who use your studio, but yours is an institution based on an art form with a history of political radicalism. Your archive contains books by artists who've made work protesting wars, governments, racism, homophobia; your community members use your studio to print protest banners; and recently you had an exhibition on artist books as prompts for discourse. This book we made, this performance we made, is not about Gaza, but it could be a prompt for discourse, a third space to think through what is happening.

In this a time of rising fascism, of islamophobia and antisemitism, silence may be comfortable for a few. It is not for many.

 I will withhold your name, but I will share your message and my response, because our community needs to be able to chart the climate of fear and suppression in our institutions, and the attempts at silencing those who speak out. 

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And so that it is clear, although our performance is not about Gaza, we do not hesitate to stand against this genocide, and join the voices that call for a Free

◀ Palestine.

Sister Sylvester, and The Eagle and Tortoise team, including Civan Özkanoglu, Efrîn Özyetiş, Bruce Steinberg, Marin Day.