

To the organizers of "The Spring Curatorial Program 2022: Art Geographies,"

To the curator of The Spring Curatorial 2022, Jelena Petrovic, dear Jelena,

To Johan Frederik Hartle, Rector of the Institute for Art Theory and Cultural Studies, Vienna

To Verein K, Vienna

To Karola Kraus, Director, Museum of Modern Art Ludwig Foundation, Vienna

May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022

I was appalled and scandalized when I learned why and how you canceled Walaa Alqaisiya's lecture scheduled for May 30, 2022. She had been invited to speak at "The Spring Curatorial Program 2022: Art Geographies," organized by Verein K, the Academy of Fine Arts and Mumok (Museum of Modern Art Ludwig Foundation).

You gave in to the pressure of pro-Israel groups, including the council of Jewish students in Austria and KESHET Austria which have falsely accused Walaa Alqaisiya of antisemitism. You know that the accusations are preposterous, libelious and an insult to all scholars who have the right to disagree with the politics of the State of Israel. These politics have been denounced by organizations such as Amnesty International, United Nations, Human Rights Watch and Israeli human rights groups, which have called them "apartheid."

Walaa Alqaisiya is a respected scholar, attached to three major universities worldwide: Cà Foscari University of Venice (Italy), Columbia University in the City of New York (USA) and the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics (UK) and who has published extensively. By canceling her lecture, you have become complicit with slander and defamation. These attacks are not only detrimental to a scholar's reputation but also a source of stress. And insult was added to injury. Not only she learned by a phone call (!) that her lecture was canceled but she was invited to come and engage students on academic freedom at the same institution that had allowed the cancellation of her lecture!

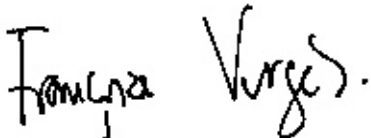
Your decision is so much in contradiction with your commitment to *"transcultural aesthetics with an emphasis on postcolonial, queer-feminist and capitalism-critical perspectives,"* that one wonders what do you mean by "emphasis"? Further, when one reads the following sentence in the presentation of "The Spring Curatorial Program 2022: Art Geographies program": *"Following emancipatory ways of social subjectivation (the politics of belonging) rather than representative modes of geopolitical identification (the politics of identity), the program focuses*

*on critical, decolonial, feminist and material dimensions of planetary co-existence,"* one concludes that the instrumentalization and commodification of feminist, decolonial and anti-capitalist concepts are a blanket to avoid confronting structural racism within the institution.

Had I known that you had cancelled Walaa Alqaisiya's lecture, I would have refused to talk at "The Spring Curatorial Program 2022: Art Geographies program" on May 24<sup>th</sup>. I deeply regret to have contributed to an event which did not respect its own engagement, and thus, to have, in a way, been complicit to the weaponization of antisemitism against Palestinian academics. Silencing, defaming and erasing Palestinians and their narratives are racism. Uncritically accepting the material and ideological reality imposed by Zionist and pro-Israel groups is being their accomplice.

As a minimal gesture of reparation, you should make all this public: the invitation to Walaa Alqaisiya, the content of pressures and why you decided to bow to the pressures. Walaa Alqaisiya will decide if she wishes to bring the matter to court, but whether she does or not, you should not hide what happened. If institutions of learning and teaching do not denounce these attacks and allow the canceling of Palestinians and their allies, they cannot claim to encourage creativity, decolonial feminism, queer thought and anticolonialism.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Françoise Vergès". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Françoise Vergès