

**NATIONAL**  
**COALITION**  
**AGAINST**  
**CENSORSHIP**

**NCAC CONDEMNS GREEK FOREIGN MINISTER'S CENSORSHIP OF NYC ARTIST**

12/21/23—In a disturbing act of censorship, the Greek government has suppressed an artwork by a New York artist held at the Consulate General of Greece in New York.

Although this act of censorship stems from the Greek government, it affects a New York based artist and deprives New York City audiences of an opportunity to view their work. It violates the free expression values of the Consulate's host, the right of local audiences to see diverse and challenging work, as well as Greece's own history and constitution.

Georgia Lale, a Greek-born and New York-based artist, was invited by the Consulate and its arts advisory committee to display their work. The exhibition was to be the first of a new consular arts program called *The Carte Blanche Project*, a title which suggests that participating artists would have complete freedom. It is therefore ironic that the initiative has fallen victim to censorship.

Lale's exhibition, *Neighborhood Guilt*, consists of two quilted works made from bedsheets donated by women living in Greece and draws attention to the country's increasing rates of femicide and domestic violence. One of the works, *Flag*, is a large representation of the Greek flag, made with fabrics in varying shades of white and pink; while the other work, *Neighborhood Guilt*, is a quilt of twenty-two panels memorializing the 22 known victims of femicide in Greece in 2022. Each composite panel depicts a house and information about each victim.

Shortly after the exhibition's opening on December 15, far-right Greek Parliamentarian, Dimitris Natsios, demanded the removal of Lale's *Flag* from the consulate because, he claimed, it "mocks" Greece's national flag. In response, on Monday, December 19, Foreign Minister George Gerapetritis ordered the Consulate to remove the work, which was taken down by the following day. In defense of the decision to censor the work, Mr. Gerapetritis stated that "The consulate is obliged to uphold the emblems and symbols of the country intact, serve the expatriates, and maintain a neutral character."

This is a particularly troubling response from a country whose history is often credited with developing early principles of democratic governance, and whose constitution protects work such as Lale's. The Greek Constitution's Article 16 reads, "Art and science, research and teaching shall be free and their development and promotion shall be an obligation of the State." Greece is also a signatory of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, whose Article 19 protects freedom of expression. It appears that, in trying to "uphold" a symbol "intact," Mr. Gerapetritis has shredded fundamental constitutional and human rights principles. Rather than helping maintain the "neutral" character of the Consulate, he has let a political voice coming from a small party on the

extreme of the political spectrum determine what should be exhibited there. Instead of serving expatriates, he has silenced a Greek born artist living in New York.

The use of national flags in art is often controversial, but it is also a long established and protected practice. Jasper Johns, Faith Ringgold, Barbara Kruger, Keith Haring, David Hammons, Dread Scott and many other artists have represented the U.S. national flag in their artworks, often in critical ways. The questions that such works pose are fundamental to democratic exchange, particularly as they relate to questions of national experience, identity, and power. In spite of frequent controversies, democratic governments, including the U.S. government, have consistently recognized the expressive power carried by the flag and have refused to censor such expression.

In liberal democracies such as Greece and the United States, publicly supported art projects should not be censored because a politician opposes the viewpoints they express. We hope that the Greek government reconsiders its denial of freedom of expression to the Consulate's *Carte Blanche Project* and truly upholds the values enshrined in its flag: the values of democracy and the Greek constitution.

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National Coalition Against Censorship

Since its inception in 1974, the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) has functioned as a first responder in protecting freedom of expression, a fundamental human right and a keystone of democracy. Representing 59 trusted education, publishing, and arts organizations, NCAC encourages and facilitates dialogue between diverse voices and perspectives, including those that have historically been silenced.