

Dear colleagues of the media,
below please find a statement by the Artistic Director and curatorial team of documenta 14.
Best wishes

We read with astonishment the articles that were published on September 12 in the HNA newspaper in Kassel.

Presenting their opinions as objective facts, reiterating speculations and half-truths, the authors portrayed Adam Szymczyk, the Artistic Director of documenta 14, and Annette Kulenkampff, the CEO of documenta gGmbH, as responsible for what they described as the imminent bankruptcy of documenta. According to them, this was caused by a lack of managerial capacity and a failure of financial oversight on the part of the team of documenta gGmbH. None of the journalists took their responsibility to check their facts with the two protagonists nor seek to gain a more complex picture of the situation.

We acknowledge the responsibility that comes with organizing an exhibition that is partly financed with public funds. Furthermore, documenta 14 is *made public* in a collective and transnational way, beyond the mechanisms of local, regional and national identities and the funding systems associated with them. The argument of responsibility and accountability has to be understood in these terms. With this in mind, we wish to correct the misleading impressions given by this misguided journalism. The dimensions and planned content of the documenta 14 project were proposed by Adam Szymczyk in late 2013. His concept of two venues, in Athens and Kassel, was clearly communicated to all responsible parties at the time, namely all the stakeholders, the Supervisory Board of documenta gGmbH, and the international selection committee. Since the moment of his appointment, all these stakeholders have continually expressed their support for the project and stood behind all steps taken in the process of this two-venue documenta14. Indeed, it is exactly this concept, with its inherent and predictable challenges, that convinced the independent selection committee to propose Adam Szymczyk as Artistic Director of documenta 14 in November 2013. The stakeholders of documenta 14 welcomed and authorized this nomination and committed themselves to its fulfillment. They understood at that time that this great arts event could no longer rely on bringing the world to Kassel, but had to displace itself and become the embodiment of change—in order to rediscover its rationale and legitimacy—as some of the past editions of documenta did.

Given the events of the last few days, however, we must conclude that this approval was much more contingent and limited than we were led to believe. The fact is that the budget and structural funding has not substantially changed from 2012, despite the fact that this new project would necessarily have major and obvious implications on the financial side. Save for one budget adjustment, which was discussed in summer of 2016 and implemented in winter of the same year (the cost of which would be shared between the stakeholders and documenta 14 ticket sales) no additional funds were considered necessary to cover the costs of staging the exhibition in two cities over a total of 163 days of the exhibition—one entire city and 63 days more than any previous documenta.

In a spirit of collective reflection, we believe it is time to question the value production regime of mega-exhibitions such as documenta. We would like to denounce the exploitative model under which the stakeholders of documenta wish the “most important exhibition of the world” to be produced. The expectations of ever-increasing success and economic growth not only generate exploitative working conditions but also jeopardize the possibility of the exhibition remaining a site of critical action and artistic experimentation. How can the value production of documenta be measured?

The money flowing into the city through the making of documenta greatly exceeds the amount the city and region spend on the exhibition.

We have decided at this moment to speak out, and collectively take agency to protect the independence of documenta as a cultural and artistic public institution from political interests. Unfortunately, politicians have prompted the media upheaval by disseminating an image of imminent bankruptcy of documenta and at the same time presented themselves as the “saviors” of a crisis they themselves allowed to develop.

We take a stance as cultural workers who have accomplished the realization of this (certainly controversial) undertaking, documenta 14. We want to stand up in solidarity with the work of Annette Kulenkampff and the administration of documenta gGmbH.

Having no political power as such, we, as organizers of the event, wish to cherish the vivid reception and animated debate that has flowed from our efforts. We will not have them ignored by political expediency. We call upon documenta stakeholders for a moment of reflection. We are living in a moment where time and peace are in short supply. Freedom, artistic and other, is something that we all need to sustain. It seems to us more urgent than ever in today's world. Therefore, we ask everyone, whether involved in this controversy or not, to show solidarity with us in defending the values of a free, critical, and experimental documenta.

We send this statement to German and international media in the hope of generating thoughtful discussion and a new awareness of what is at stake.

The Artistic Director and the team of documenta 14

Adam Szymczyk, Artistic Director
Sepake Angiama, Head of Education
Pierre Bal-Blanc, Curator
Marina Fokidis, Curatorial Advisor
Hendrik Folkerts, Curator
Natasha Ginwala, Curatorial Advisor
Ayşe Güleç, Community Liaison
Candice Hopkins, Curator
Salvatore Lacagnina, Studio 14
Quinn Latimer, Editor-in-Chief of Publications
Andrea Linnenkohl, Curatorial Advisor
Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Curator at Large
Hila Peleg, Curator
Paul B. Preciado, Curator of Public Programs
Dieter Roelstraete, Curator
Erzen Shkololli, Curatorial Advisor
Elena Sorokina, Curatorial Advisor
Monika Szewczyk, Curator
Paolo Thorsen-Nagel, Sound and Music Advisor
Katerina Tselou, Curatorial Advisor

NOTES TO THE PRESS

1. The day before yesterday, the Mayor of Kassel issued a statement to the press, in which no objection was expressed to the content and form of HNA reporting. The Mayor assured that the stakeholders are willing to deal with a possible negative financial outcome, which is certainly the right step to take.
2. Our recent attempts to articulate the position of documenta 14 to responsible politicians were ignored. documenta 14's Artistic Director and the project team were therefore not considered as partners in dialogue, but as bystanders in the process controlled and executed exclusively by political actors and brought to public attention by the media, according to a scenario written by politicians. As Artistic Director of documenta 14, Adam Szymczyk was present as a guest in all previous Supervisory Board meetings of documenta gGmbH since 2014, but he was explicitly not admitted to this extraordinary meeting of the Supervisory Board on August 30, 2017. He also was not invited to meet and exchange with the new Mayor of Kassel, who presides over the Supervisory Board, since his appointment on July 22, 2017. It is undemocratic and non-transparent to exclude the makers of documenta 14 from discussions about the current state of documenta 14 and the larger issue of documenta's existence in the future. We believe the decision-making process around documenta, the exhibition that has significance globally, should be public and transparent and not subject to the closed cabinet politics of the State of Hesse and the City of Kassel.
3. More than 330,000 visits were recorded at the exhibition venues in Athens. Nevertheless, since most of these visits could not be translated into ticket sales they do not exist for the legal

stakeholders of documenta.

4. In Kassel, documenta 14 has already attracted more than 850,000 visitors. The exhibition venues have reached the limits of their capacity. Any demands for further growth spring from a dream of documenta to be yet another cog in the tourist and cultural industry—a generic yet profitable spectacle. By imposing growth demands on documenta we challenge the institution as a public and critical sphere. This political takeover of documenta is not being done by asking documenta to explicitly serve specific political agendas, but rather, in a subtler yet equally effective way, by asking a public cultural institution to become primarily an economic institution subject to the demands of profit and success.