

FAREED ARMALY

DOCUMENT  
2025 KÄTHE KOLLWITZ PRIZE

AUGUST 7, 2024

My response to the Akademie der Künste,  
declining the award and outlining the grounds  
for my decision.

TIMELINE

JULY 24, 2024

Notification received of my selection  
for the 2025 Käthe Kollwitz Prize.

AUGUST 7, 2024

My response to the Akademie der Künste,

AUGUST 27, 2024

Letter received from President Manos Tsangaris,  
Akademie der Künste, in response to my statement.

2025

The Akademie der Künste issued their official  
statement regarding the 2025 Käthe Kollwitz Prize.

DOCUMENT SOURCE

[www.fareedarmaly.net](http://www.fareedarmaly.net)



## Background

On July 24, 2024, I was notified by the Akademie der Künste in Berlin that I had been awarded the 2025 Käthe Kollwitz Prize. The jury was comprised of artists Ayşe Erkmen, Mona Hatoum, and Eran Schaerf.

On August 7, 2024, I sent my response to the Akademie, stating that while I was honored by this recognition, I would respectfully decline the award and provided the reasoning for my decision.

In 2025, the Akademie released their press statement on the Käthe Kollwitz Prize, which does not reflect the central reasoning behind my stance. Now that this prize and my response have entered the public record, I am sharing my full letter here for reference, as it provides the full context and considerations behind my decision.

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**Akademie der Künste**

Pariser Platz 4 | 10117 Berlin-Mitte

**President**

Prof. Manos Tsangaris

Berlin, 7 August, 2024

**Subject:** awarding of the Käthe Kollwitz Prize 2025

Dear Prof. Manos Tsangaris,

I am writing in response to your letter informing me that I have been awarded the 2025 Käthe Kollwitz Prize, an accolade I am honored to receive.

This recognition is particularly significant to me for several reasons. As it is named after the respected German artist, the prize embodies a legacy that encourages a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes the work of an artist. Fittingly, it acknowledges the sustained effort and evolution of an artist's work over time, which I value. The fact that the Käthe Kollwitz Prize is awarded through the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, one of the oldest institutions of its kind in Europe dedicated to the arts and artists, adds another layer of significance for me.

My selection is made particularly meaningful to me by the award jury comprised of artists Ayşe Erkmen, Mona Hatoum, and Eran Schaerf, with the latter two adding insights as former prize recipients. Having all three artists as jurors for such a prestigious German award strongly resonates with my generational experience of transforming European cultural and artistic fields, which I entered in the late 1980s in (West) Germany. At that time, while rigidly controlled borders continued to define nations and geopolitics, the field of contemporary art emerged as a space for modeling open and dialogical transnational exchanges. In my experience, this exchange generated cross-border networks shaped by artists and younger galleries, drawing from various fields and disciplines through a critical dialogue with institutions. These networks embodied collections of meeting points in which to encounter difference within the space of art, even as definitions of identities, nations, and geopolitical boundaries were being disruptively reconfigured on the ground. In Germany (as well as in Europe at large), I was an American artist, where my Arab name signified the difference at work—the play of hyphenated identity through which my practice would be generated. I was interested in a contemporary art context that felt historically integrated into social and cultural spheres. My attention was drawn to the ways European cultural institutions as well as societal discourses were shaped by instabilities, faultlines, and historical disjunctions—notably postwar and post-'68 currents—intensified by the post-'89 new and complex mix of subjectivities, histories, and cultures emerging into a new version of Germany. These institutions are always in transition, thereby producing historical gaps through which my artistic practice entered, generating the contemporary forums, frameworks, and new spaces within them (even holding official roles, such as curator or artistic director).

I focused on the question of artistic practice intertwined with an open definition of art, informed by a politics of culture, nation, identity, and representation. Thus, I situated my projects in dialogue with institutional frameworks, articulating epistemic fields at the intersection of postcolonial and diasporic practices and theories through architectures, media and archaeologies.

Today, I am being awarded the Käthe Kollwitz Prize at a historically precarious moment, marked by a disturbing trend of censorship in Germany. For several years now, there has been a highly politicized, reactionary shift in official cultural policies, aimed at silencing advocates for Palestinian rights under international law. This shift has led to a growing list of official cancellations—honors, book awards, exhibitions, teaching contracts, panel and lecture invitations—for an array of scholars and artists with diverse solidarities and affiliations, becoming normalized. Despite numerous open letters of opposition signed by scholars from all backgrounds, unified in argument against these forms of censorship as intolerable interferences and means of silencing voices, these practices persist. The spectre of litmus tests and loyalty oaths, combined with anti-intellectual arts and culture media voices, targets critical discourses and studies and contributes to structural racism. In such a context of intimidation, liberal cultural institutions appear to adopt complacency and self-censorship. All this, consciously or unconsciously, structurally performs the ongoing dehumanization of Palestinians by obscuring and abstracting their agency and voice.

Käthe Kollwitz's century-old oeuvre and biography reveal a complex understanding of how the personal and political merge with themes of art, justice, and the social domain. While her artworks focused on invoking empathy for those rendered voiceless and powerless—historically, materially, and structurally—her actions activated the role of the artist with a sense of agency. The accumulation of recognitions, refusals and removals associated with her, serves as a reminder that liberal cultural and art institutions constitute identities that are not established in isolation, but in how they interpret their correspondences with their national, and government frameworks. And in turn, how the artist speaks through this.

I once again wish to express my deep respect for the institution of the Käthe Kollwitz prize, the Akademie der Künste, and the jury for awarding me this honor as a recognition of my work. There have been numerous periods during my productivity as an artist in Germany that I would have gladly accepted this honor. However, at this historical juncture, I am unable to align myself with any institution operating under the current cultural policy framework of the German government. To maintain my voice as an artist and speak meaningfully through your act of recognition, I must decline this award.

Respectfully,

Fareed Armaly

