

# Biennale

## Press Release

21 November 2023, Mannheim/Ludwigshafen/Heidelberg

### Cancellation of the *Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie 2024*

The planned fourth Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie in Mannheim, Ludwigshafen and Heidelberg, which was due to open in March 2024, has been cancelled.

This sad and serious decision was made after intensive consultation between the Biennale's Board and the responsible mayors of cultural affairs of the three organising cities and in agreement with BASF, the longstanding main sponsor. The course of several discussions with the curators of the Biennale 2024 Shahidul Alam, Tanzim Wahab and Munem Wasif, which were previously held by the Board and the Management of the Biennale on site in Mannheim and digitally, were considered in the assessment.

The consequences of the cancellation for the Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie and the organising team are far-reaching. They jeopardise the future of the entire event. In the time ahead, we will do everything in our power to maintain the Biennale as one of the largest and most important photography events in Germany and Europe in the long term.

#### Reasons for the cancellation:

- The relationship of trust between one of the three curators of the 2024 Biennale, Shahidul Alam, and the three cities hosting the Biennale, Mannheim, Heidelberg and Ludwigshafen, has been severely damaged since the Hamas terrorist attack on Israeli civilians on 7 October.
- Various posts by Shahidul Alam on his Facebook channel after 7 October have given a platform to content that can be read as anti-Semitic and anti-Semitic content. This includes an uncommented interview by Shahidul Alam with the Palestinian ambassador to Bangladesh, a comparison of the current war with the Holocaust and accusations of genocide by the state of Israel against the Palestinian population in Gaza. Racist and other comparable comments, e.g. with terrorist imagery directed against the Israeli civilian population (paragliders with weapons), are not deleted. The three cities mentioned above firmly reject these posts.
- After these posts appeared, the planned programme press conference was cancelled and direct talks with the three curators were sought instead. On 23 October 2023, the problem of activities on Facebook that could be considered anti-Semitic was addressed by the Board and the Management in order to sensitise the curators to Germany's special historical responsibility for the State of Israel and its right to exist. Similar posts by Shahidul Alam continued to follow in the wake of these discussions. Shahidul Alam is not considered to have assumed any responsibility in his public function as a curator in the Biennale team.
- We would like to take this opportunity to express that we are not specifically concerned here with one-sided pro-Palestinian posts or hashtags such as #bds or #apartheid, which we disapprove of and which were also posted in large numbers by Shahidul Alam, who sees himself as an activist and demands freedom of expression. In this case, it is a matter of content and messages that can be read as anti-Semitic and anti-Semitic content and messages that he has given a platform to.

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- When asked whether they wanted to continue the Biennale without Shahidul Alam, the other two curators Tanzim Wahab and Munem Wasif replied in the negative. As a result, it was clear to the three cities that they would have to cancel the Biennale.

The city and the Board are now holding talks with the invited artists, curators and advisors in an endeavour to find target-oriented solutions.

## **On behalf of the Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie:**

The Board of the Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie, the Management as well as the Cultural Departments of the organising cities of Mannheim, Heidelberg and Ludwigshafen.

### **Press contact**

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