

4th of April, Bergen Norway

OPEN LETTER TO KATRINE HAAKONSDATTER HJELDE

Head of department for Faculty of Art, Music and Design at the University of Bergen

Dear Katrine Hjelde,

On January 27th, I submitted my exhibition information sheet detailing the specifics of my planned artwork for the Master of Fine Arts Graduation Exhibition in Kunsthall:

“A large-scale mural, approximately 2.2 meters in height and 10 meters in width, to be painted directly onto the wall of the exhibition space. The mural will feature bold, striking text designed to provoke thought and engage audiences.”

The school accepted this submission without any objections or reservations.

However, it appears that my proposal caused significant concern within the institution. While the University of Bergen previously supported my work titled *We’re Sorry*—currently under legal challenge by a multibillion-dollar Icelandic corporation in the High Court of London—it is now the university itself attempting to suppress artistic expression.

Supporting freedom of expression in theory is one thing; upholding it in practice is another.

On February 24th, you and other university and Kunsthall officials convened and decided to exclude my work from the MA exhibition. This decision was communicated to me via multiple emails. When I requested documentation of this decision, the university refused—not by denying the documents’ existence, but by denying me access. This is just one of several violations of my legal rights.

Following media inquiries, you and the university claimed that I needed to undergo a Health, Safety, and Ethics risk assessment before being permitted to exhibit. This justification,

mirroring internal communications I received, constitutes unlawful pre-censorship under section 100, fourth paragraph, of the Norwegian Constitution and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Your actions demonstrate not only a failure of judgment but a profound misunderstanding of your role. You have undermined the integrity of the University of Bergen and damaged its credibility as a fine arts educational institution.

Artists and students must be free to explore, critique, and provoke. They must be allowed to fail and challenge authority—without being buried in bureaucratic barriers or subjected to vague and arbitrary standards determined by the daily mood of the administration.

The chilling effect this creates is real. Students are now more likely to self-censor than risk academic punishment. And this is not an isolated case—there have been repeated conflicts in recent years at the University of Bergen surrounding student expression on war, genocide, institutional critique, and other urgent socially relevant issues.

It was only after sustained public pressure—through media coverage, legal support, and backing from artists and organizations—that the university retracted its demands. On April 3rd, the university stated in a letter that it never intended to pre-censor me and apologized for the multiple public and internal contradictory statements.

This reversal came only after the removal of my main tutor, who had previously informed me that I could not proceed without a mandatory risk analysis and other preemptive censorship efforts.

The damage, however, is already done.

My process is not ancillary to the artwork—it is the artwork.

This is not merely an academic dispute; it is a direct assault on the artistic process, student rights, and the role of institutions that claim to foster critical, experimental practices. It serves as a warning to future students that any work deemed too provocative or uncomfortable may be suppressed through administrative decisions rather than supported, exhibited, and debated.

Conceptual art should not be treated as an anomaly at an institution claiming to train contemporary artists. My practice is rooted in culture jamming—a historically grounded artistic tradition—and this has been evident through internationally recognized projects like *We're Sorry* and *MOM Air*.

And yet, I often find myself having to explain what conceptual art is—to the very faculty tasked with guiding it. This is unacceptable.

KMD must take accountability, apologize, and make amends for the damage caused—not just with words, but through concrete action.

As part of that accountability, I call on you, Katrine Hjelde, to resign from your position as Head of Department at KMD. Your mismanagement, repeated disregard for academic ethics, and failure to uphold the values of freedom of expression have not only damaged my educational experience, but have stripped the University of Bergen of its credibility as a fine arts educational institution.

This letter is shared publicly not only in defense of my own rights, but in the interest of all students and artists whose voices risk being silenced in institutions meant to empower them.

Sincerely,

ODEE

Cultural Activist, Artist and Master's Student at the University of Bergen – KMD