

Painting of Anne Frank in a keffiyeh ‘trivialises the Holocaust’

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A German museum’s exhibit of Costantino Ciervo’s work has prompted a criminal complaint and led to accusations of ‘trivialising the Holocaust’

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, Berlin

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Comune — The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict, by Costantino Ciervo

An image of Anne Frank wearing a keffiyeh that has become associated with Palestinians on display at a museum in Potsdam has drawn criticism from the Jewish community and a criminal complaint by the head of the German-Israeli society.

The acrylic-on-canvas painting of the Holocaust victim, who died from typhus in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945, is among five works by Costantino Ciervo, an Italian artist, being exhibited at the Fluxus+ Museum under the heading, “*Comune — The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict.*”

It shows Frank, who famously wrote a diary while in hiding from the Nazis during the Second World War in Amsterdam, sitting upright at a desk holding her pencil above a tablet, with a red and white keffiyeh wrapped around her shoulders.



Anne Frank in 1942, two months before she and her family went into hiding

The image has been criticised since it went on show on November 16. In a post on X, the Israeli embassy in Berlin accused Ciervo of “a completely ahistorical distortion, delegitimisation of Israel and relativisation of the Holocaust”.

The embassy wrote: “He wants to suggest that Jews are the Nazis of today. Unfortunately, this is a prime example of trends in the cultural scene: under the guise of artistic freedom, historical distortion, antisemitism — and ultimately terrorism — are being normalised.”

Volker Beck, the president of the German-Israeli Society, said he had filed a criminal complaint against the curators of the exhibition because it trivialised the suffering of Holocaust victims and was an assault on their dignity and memory.

Beck said the painting suggested that “just as Anne Frank was treated by the Nazis, so the Palestinians are treated by the Israelis and the [Gaza](#) war is a Holocaust”. He added that while

Ciervo was shielded by artistic freedom, curators had a “responsibility to neutralise attacks on the right of Jews to be respected and recognised”.

Potsdam’s Jewish community and the antisemitism commissioner of the state of Brandenburg have been demanding for weeks that the painting be removed, but the museum has refused to comply.



The Fluxus+ Museum in Potsdam

MICHAEL BAHLO/DPA/ALAMY

Tamás Blénessy, the managing director of the museum, has denied that the work was antisemitic. “There was and is no place for antisemitism in our institution, and there never will be,” he said.

He added that Ciervo pursued a political agenda and had formulated legitimate criticism of the actions of the state of Israel, going back long before the attack by [Hamas](#) on October 7, 2023, where more than 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals were killed, and 251 hostages were seized.

Ciervo, 64, whose works address capitalism, alienation and oppression, said he was being targeted by a “smear campaign”.

The Naples-born artist, who lives in Berlin and whose works are on display in collections around the world including at the World Bank in Washington DC, said in a video message posted on social media: “I vehemently reject this accusation that I am an antisemite.”

Ciervo, who exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1993, added: “The exhibition isn’t about pitting one ethnic group against another, but about a vision that in Palestine, Jews and Palestinians live together with the same rights, in peace.”