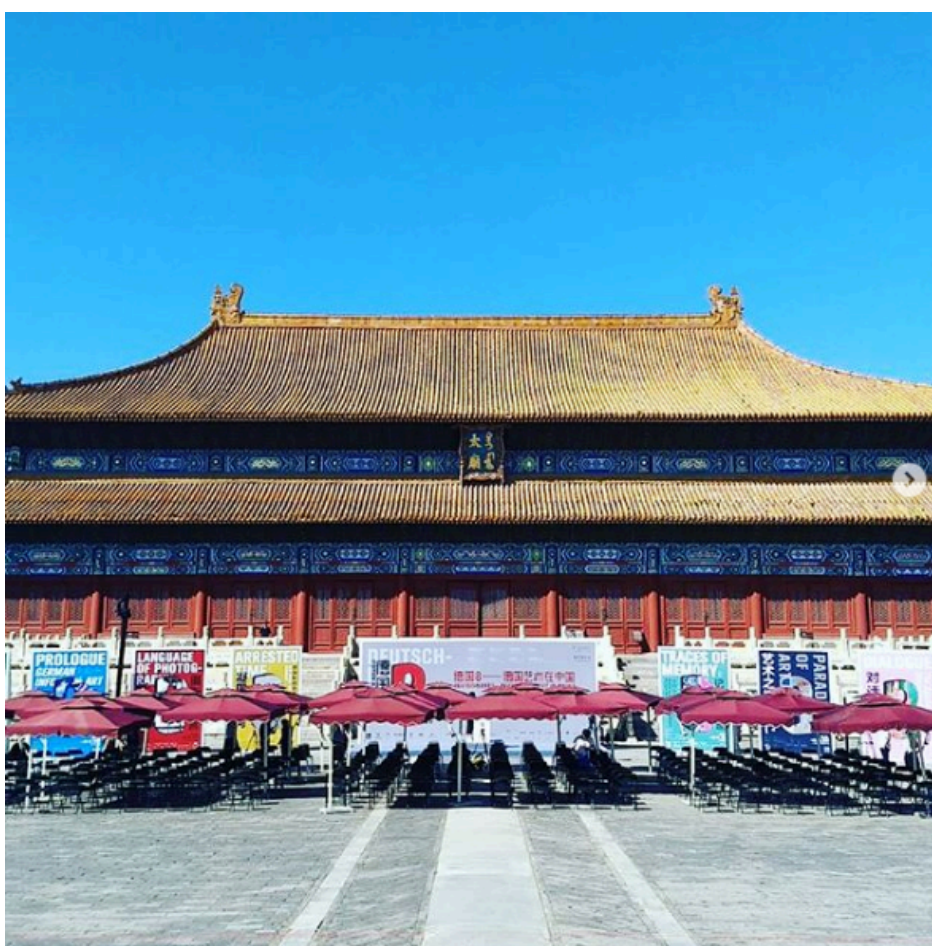


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Benjamin Sutton, "Prominent German Artists Object to Arms Manufacturer's Exhibition Sponsorship," *Hyperallergic*, June 28, 2018

HYPERALLERGIC

Prominent German Artists Object to Arms Manufacturer's Exhibition Sponsorship



Rheinmetall, a Düsseldorf-based multinational defense company, is one of the sponsors of a sprawling exhibition of German contemporary art that recently opened in Beijing.

A group of artists included in *Deutschland 8 — German Art in China*, an exhibition featuring 320 works by 55 contemporary artists spread across eight venues in Beijing that opened on

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Saturday, were alarmed to discover that one of its main sponsors is the German weapons manufacturer Rheinmetall.

“As artists, we refuse to enhance the image of such corporations,” an open letter signed by six of the artists in the exhibition — Antje Ehmman, Marcel Odenbach, Julian Rosefelt, Hito Steyerl, Rosemarie Trockel, and Clemens von Wedemeyer — and the estate of the late Harun Farocki, reads. “We don’t support advertisement for weapons manufacturers under the umbrella of German cultural diplomacy and we explicitly protest the instrumentalisation of our work for this purpose.”

Odenbach told Monopol that the artists only found out about the show’s sponsors when they received invitations to the exhibition, though Rheinmetall’s logo is visible in the “partners and sponsors” section of the exhibition’s website. Organized by the Bonn-based nonprofit Stiftung für Kunst und Kultur and Beijing’s Central Academy of Fine Art, the exhibition’s sponsors also include Air China, Volkswagen, Allianz, and Lufthansa. Rheinmetall’s page about the exhibition and a recent press release tout the company’s booming business in China, where its other main area of business, car parts, is thriving. However, Odenbach was quick to specify: “Our protest has nothing to do with China.”

Rather, the artists highlight Rheinmetall’s dealings in Turkey and Saudi Arabia. In 2016, the company’s South African subsidiary, Rheinmetall Denel Munition, opened a major munitions factory just south of Riyadh, chiefly to supply weapons to the Saudi military. The company’s Italian subsidiary has sold bomb components to the United Arab Emirates military, which have been dropped in Yemen as part of the Saudi-led campaigns there. It also has plans to construct a major tank-building facility in Turkey, which has raised humanitarian concerns due to

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President Erdoğan's tendency to use his tanks to attack and intimidate the country's Kurdish populations.

On Tuesday, in response to the artists' open letter, the board of Stiftung für Kunst und Kultur released a statement.

"The organizers take the concerns of these artists and their moral objections very seriously," the statement reads. "For the critique of the artists touches upon fundamental questions pertaining to the cultural sector and to the relationship between politics, industry, and public-private partnerships in the Federal Republic of Germany." A spokesperson for Stiftung für Kunst und Kultur told Hyperallergic that a public debate is being organized within the context of the *Deutschland 8* exhibition discuss these issues.

The protesting artists have not said what action they will take if their objections to Rheinmetall's involvement are not addressed, though past examples suggest something more than an open letter might be required. In 2014 a group of artists successfully pressured the Biennale of Sydney to end its sponsorship agreement with Transfield — a company that runs offshore detention facilities — by boycotting the exhibition. And in the UK, multiple years-long campaigns by Liberate Tate, BP or not BP?, and other groups have sought to end BP's cultural sponsorships.

The artists' full letter is included below:

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As artists participating in the exhibition Germany 8 in Beijing, China we have been surprised to learn that weapons manufacturer Rheinmetall is a supporter of a show supposed to foster dialogue between both countries.

Even though Rheinmetall's defence arm is not represented in China the corporation counts among Germany's largest defence contractors, supplying vast amounts of ammunition and weaponry to war and crisis zones. Rheinmetall bombs and shells were deployed in actual war zones like Yemen. The company circumvents export restrictions through joint ventures and subsidiaries f.e. by building an ammunitions factory in Saudi Arabia. Rheinmetall know-how will be used to build and retrofit tanks in Turkey, which is effectively engaged in civil war and where human rights are violated within a permanent state of exception.

As artists, we refuse to enhance the image of such corporations. We don't support advertisement for weapons manufacturers under the umbrella of German cultural diplomacy and we explicitly protest the instrumentalisation of our work for this purpose.

for Harun Farocki: Antje Ehmann/ Harun Farocki GbR und Harun Farocki
Institut/Marcel Odenbach/Julian Rosefeldt/Hito Steyerl/Rosemarie
Trockel/Clemens v. Wedemeyer