

German Museum Will Give Artist Walid Raad Prize Despite City's Objection

Aachen withdrew its decision to award the Lebanese-American artist a €10,000 (~\$10,900) prize for providing an "evasive" answer to an inquiry about his position on the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

by [Hakim Bishara](#) October 2, 2019



A Walid Raad installation at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (by

Hrag Vartanian/[Flickr](#))

On Monday, September 30, the German city of Aachen [announced](#) that it had withdrawn its decision to award the Lebanese-American artist Walid Raad a €10,000 (~\$10,900) prize. The cause for denying Raad the prize, according to Aachen Mayor Marcel Philipp, was the artist's refusal to distance himself from the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which calls for a cultural boycott of the state of Israel. But the city's decision was soon challenged by one of its partners in the prize, the Association of Friends of the Ludwig Forum for International Art, which [decided yesterday](#) to hand over the award to Raad despite the Mayor's opposition.

"According to research, we have to assume that the designated prize-winner is a supporter of the BDS movement and has participated in several measures in the cultural boycott of Israel," [Philipp said](#). The mayor said the decision was reached after the city approached Raad with an inquiry about his position toward the BDS. "Raad's answer is not only evasive but should be perceived as 'mocking and smug,'" [Philipp added](#). "The answer does not do justice to the seriousness of the topic."

According to a report by German news network WDR, the Ludwig Forum's board decided to defy the city's decision in a meeting on Tuesday night. WDR's report adds that the board members found no evidence to back up the city's charges. Michael Müller-Vorbrüggen, the Ludwig Forum's CEO, told the German publication [Deutschlandfunk](#) that the museum had obtained the funds to give out the award without the city's help or permission.

Raad, an acclaimed international artist, was initially awarded the prize for his 15-year *magnum opus*, [The Atlas Group](#) (1989–2004), a fictional foundation that studies and examines the contemporary history of Lebanon. The artist was scheduled to receive the award on October 13.

Raad's only public involvement with the BDS movement was in 2014, when he signed a [public letter](#) calling on artists to withdraw from Creative Time's traveling exhibition [Living as Form](#), which was hosted by the Israeli Technion Institute. The Technion is a university in Haifa with extensive research-and-development links to the Israeli military and defense technology industry.

Hyperallergic reached out to Raad and the city of Aachen for comment but has not yet received responses.

In May of this year, the German parliament [passed a resolution](#) condemning the BDS movement as antisemitic. Aachen's decision to deny Raad the prize is the latest in a series of BDS-related controversies in the country. Last month, the German city of Dortmund [withdrew its decision](#) to award the British-Pakistani novelist Kamila Shamsie a literature prize, citing her support for BDS as the reason. And in June, the director of Berlin's Jewish Museum, Peter Schäfer, [resigned from his post](#) after facing backlash for tweeting out an open letter opposing the labeling of the BDS as anti-Semitic.

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