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NEWS



Candice Breitz, *Love Story*, 2017.
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CANDICE BREITZ URGES ARTISTS IN NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA TRIENNIAL TO JOIN PROTEST AGAINST REFUGEE ABUSE

Artist Candice Breitz has changed the name of her artwork that will be displayed in the inaugural National Gallery of Victoria Triennial in protest of the institution's employment of a security firm that has been accused of abusing refugees in Australia's offshore detention centers, and she is asking other artists in the exhibition to do the same.

Asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat have generally been sent to either the island nation of Nauru or Papua New Guinea's Manus Island, and then held in indefinite detention. Wilson Security, one of the companies that had been hired to monitor the camps, has faced intense public scrutiny since allegations emerged that its employees were involved in the sexual assault of women and children on the islands. Since the publication of more than 2,000-pages of incident reports, the company has been accused of lying about

the conditions of the centers and the treatment of the refugees. The Manus Regional Processing Center on Manus Island was officially closed on October 31 by the Australian government after years of controversy dogged its existence, leaving its detainees and asylum seekers stranded with island locals.

In response to the NGV's decision to hire Wilson Security, Breitz has temporarily renamed her seven-panel-video work, originally titled *Love Story*, as *Wilson Must Go*. The piece, which was previously on view in the South African pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale, features Alec Baldwin and Julianne Moore. The actors tell the stories of refugees in an attempt to use their celebrity status to make the migrants' voices heard.

In a statement posted on Facebook on Tuesday, December 12, the artist wrote: "The new title will remain in effect for as long as the work is on view at the National Gallery of Victoria, or when the work is exhibited in any other exhibition context on Australian soil, until the NGV severs its relationship with Wilson Security. Until that point, the work will continue to speak its objection to being under the surveillance of a security contractor that commits human rights abuses in Australia's offshore detention centers."

While the National Gallery of Victoria assured Breitz that the contract with Wilson Security is only temporary, Breitz said she felt it would be "morally remiss" if she didn't act. "I trust that the NGV will receive this gesture as one of solidarity, solidarity with the Triennial's focus on forced displacement, but more importantly, solidarity with all refugees and asylum seekers who have been or remain subject to the cruelty of the Australian offshore detention regime, as enforced by agents like Wilson Security," she wrote.

According to *The Guardian*, the company ended its contract with the Australian government in October. Wilson Security was originally subcontracted by Broadspectrum to oversee the camps in 2012. Papua New Guinea's Supreme Court ruled that the Manus Island detention center was "illegal and unconstitutional" in April. Despite closing the facility on the island, the Papua New Guinea and Australian governments have not yet decided where the people being detained there will go.

Other artists are now heeding Breitz's call: ArtAsiaPacific now reports that Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer has renamed his artwork—originally titled *Recorded Assembly—Wilson Must Go/The Sequel*. Additionally, he has pledged to donate the proceeds from his participation in the triennial to a refugee support organization. Irish photographer Richard Mosse, the winner of the 2017 Prix Pictet, hasn't changed the title of his exhibited piece per se, but he has made a notable change to his 16-channel video installation in the triennial. The video has been edited to include a statement from Kurdish filmmaker and journalist Behrouz Boochani, who was held in the Manus Island detention center and is still regularly covering the situation on the ground for *The Guardian*. Writer Nana Oforiatta-Ayim, in response to Breitz's original Facebook post, has noted that she is going to see if time remains to change the title of the essay she wrote for the exhibition's catalogue.

Candice Breitz's statement, reprinted in full, is as follows:

"I am one of many artists participating in the National Gallery of Victoria's inaugural NGV Triennial, an exhibition that is scheduled to open in Melbourne this week. 'Movement' is one of five themes that frame the Triennial. Consequently, the exhibition includes a number of works that engage with and represent the global crisis of displacement. My own work, LOVE STORY, a video installation that evolves out of interviews with six individuals who have fled their countries in response to a variety of oppressive conditions, has been enabled and acquired by the NGV for the Triennial, via a generous artist commission.

It has come to my attention, via the Artists' Committee (an informal association of Melbourne-based artists and arts workers), that security services at the NGV are currently provided by a private security contractor called Wilson Security. On their website, Wilson claims to 'offer the highest level of protection and peace of mind for [their] customers across myriad industries and complex business scenarios.' Under contract to the Australian government, however, Wilson security has violently enforced the imprisonment of refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia's offshore immigration detention centres. The horrific effects of indefinite mandatory detention are well-documented. The allegations against Wilson Security since the commencement of their contracts on Manus

Island and Nauru in 2012 are extensive and disturbing. While I am grateful for the immense support I have received from the NGV, it would be morally remiss, in light of the above knowledge, for me to remain silent in the context of the current conversation that is taking place around the Australian government's ongoing and systematic abuse of refugees.

I have been assured by the NGV that the contractual relationship between the gallery and Wilson Security is of a temporary nature. I have been told that the tendering process that will culminate in the appointment of a more permanent contractor is at an advanced stage. As such, the response that this statement articulates is itself potentially of a temporary nature:

With immediate effect, the work of art that was formerly known as LOVE STORY will carry the new title WILSON MUST GO. The new title will remain in effect for as long as the work is on view at the National Gallery of Victoria, or when the work is exhibited in any other exhibition context on Australian soil, until the NGV severs its relationship with Wilson Security. Until that point, the work will continue to speak its objection to being under the surveillance of a security contractor that commits human rights abuses in Australia's offshore detention centres. Until that point, all NGV publications of any nature, all public discussions hosted by the NGV, any educational conversations conducted around the work at the NGV, any and all press communications issued by the gallery, and all wall texts and captions, shall refer to the work as WILSON MUST GO. The title of the work will automatically revert to LOVE STORY if and when Wilson goes. Should they wish to, I invite other Triennial artists who may share my discomfort at having their works under the surveillance of Wilson Security, to temporarily rename their own works WILSON MUST GO.

It is extremely unfortunate that individual security workers who are currently engaged at the NGV may experience negative repercussions as a result of this intervention. The NGV has assured me that fair treatment of their security staff is of high priority. I have every reason to believe that the NGV will provide secure working conditions for their security staff, and wish to make clear that this intervention in no way wishes to target specific individuals who currently provide security services on NGV premises.

The moral failure characterising the Australian government’s refugee policy is all the more deplorable in ‘a nation that has been forged through stories of mobility.’ As the NGV Triennial catalogue states, ‘The challenge of hospitality is not an abstract philosophical problem or a minor political issue.’ I have experienced my interlocutors at the NGV to be deeply attuned to the horrific conditions and challenges facing refugees and asylum seekers worldwide. I trust that the NGV will receive this gesture as one of solidarity, solidarity with the Triennial’s focus on forced displacement, but more importantly, solidarity with all refugees and asylum seekers who have been or remain subject to the cruelty of the Australian offshore detention regime, as enforced by agents like Wilson Security.”

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