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Venice Biennale Jury Excludes Russia and Israel From Awards Considerations

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The Russian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Art. **Felix Hörhager / dpa / TASS**

Jurors at the Venice Biennale have disqualified Russian and Israeli artists from consideration for the prestigious Golden and Silver Lion awards this year, citing International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrants for the leaders of both countries.

"This jury will refrain from ⊠the consideration of those countries whose leaders are currently charged with crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court," the five-member panel said Thursday.

While the statement does not mention specific countries, the decision directly impacts Russia and Israel, where President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu face active ICC warrants for alleged war crimes in Ukraine and Gaza, respectively.

The Biennale, which runs from May 9 to Nov. 22, made the divisive choice last month to allow Russia to reopen its national pavilion for the first time since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Organizers defended the move by arguing that the Biennale is an "open institution that

rejects any form of exclusion or censorship of culture and art."

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EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas this week called Russia's participation in the Biennale "morally wrong" and said Brussels plans to cut funding to the festival following the decision to readmit Russia.

"While Russia bombs museums, destroys churches and seeks to erase Ukrainian culture, it should not be allowed to exhibit its own," she said.

Kallas has not issued similar criticism for Israel, which has faced widespread accusations, including from human rights groups and some governments, that its war in Gaza amounts to genocide. More recently, Israel, alongside the United States, has been accused of striking and damaging Iranian cultural and historical sites.

Since its inauguration in 1914, the Russian pavilion at the Venice Biennale has been closed only three times: in 1922, between 1938 and 1954, and between 1978 and 1980.

AFP contributed reporting.

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