# Political cartoons exhibition censored for being 'too offensive' in Kingston venue



An exhibition showcasing political cartoons by some of Britain’s most prominent cartoonists was censored shortly before its public opening at a venue in Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey. The event, titled Licence To Offend, was scheduled to open following a private viewing at the Kingston Riverside 'TownSq co-working' space but was abruptly taken down after objections from the venue management.

The show was organised by photographer Paul Mowatt and artist Zoe Dorelli of Whitelight Projects and was set to feature a wide range of satirical works spanning the political spectrum. Among the cartoonists included were celebrated Daily Mail artists Mac and Pugh, as well as Martin Rowson, known for his politically charged cartoons in the Guardian.

According to Zoe Dorelli, after the private view, the venue requested the immediate removal of the artwork, citing concerns that the pieces could be considered “too offensive.” She told the Daily Mail that the venue management explained their reluctance was partly due to their interactions with multiple councils across the country, which made them cautious about permitting any content that might cause offence or be seen as too political.

Mac expressed bewilderment at the decision, remarking, “It’s crazy. Everyone is so incensed. In bygone days satire used to be absolutely savage, but suddenly we can’t express any opinions.” He pointed out that the cartoons had already undergone editorial scrutiny and had been published in national newspapers without issue.

Jonathan Pugh, whose work includes a cartoon referencing a recent incident where police visited the home of Daily Telegraph columnist Allison Pearson over social media posts, said the venue had been aware of the exhibition for weeks but appeared to have developed second thoughts. “They are caving into something that really is rather unlikely to cause offence,” he said.

Other cartoonists such as Rob Murray, whose works have appeared in Private Eye and the Sunday Times, described the decision as “ridiculous” though not unprecedented, citing previous experiences of censorship by local council authorities.

A spokesman for TownSq Kingston explained the venue’s position, stating: “Whilst we have not felt the exhibition was offensive, Kingston Riverside is a workspace, and our policy is to remain politically neutral. Once we were made aware that the art is not in keeping with a professional workspace, we respectfully asked the artists to remove them after the exhibition. We are still allowing the artists to hold their exhibition at the space for free, but the current art will not remain in place later.”

The censored exhibition has raised questions about the boundaries of political satire and expression in public and professional spaces, particularly as it involves work from established cartoonists known for their sharp and often provocative takes on contemporary issues.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/analysis/2024/03/the-battle-over-free-speech/> - This article discusses the challenges faced by UK museums and galleries in balancing free speech with public sensitivity, highlighting instances where exhibitions were censored due to concerns over potential offense.
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/artist-claims-commons-committee-tried-to-censor-exhibition-517647.html> - This piece reports on an artist's claim that the House of Commons committee attempted to censor his exhibition, underscoring the tension between artistic expression and institutional control.
3. <https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/4570/on-the-importance-of-the-right-to-offend> - This article emphasizes the significance of the right to offend in artistic expression, arguing that freedom of expression must include the freedom to be offensive.
4. <https://artquest.org.uk/artlaw-article/freedom-of-expression-part-1/> - This resource outlines legal considerations related to freedom of expression in the arts, including potential offenses like insults, profanity, and indecency, which can lead to censorship.
5. <https://www.workersliberty.org/comment/5582> - This commentary defends the publication of controversial cartoons, arguing against censorship and advocating for the freedom to offend as a component of free expression.
6. <https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/1752/right-to-offend> - This article explores the concept of the right to offend in art, discussing historical instances of censorship and the evolving boundaries of acceptable expression.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14661933/Free-speech-row-cartoons-banned-exhibition.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data