

**A Statement from Faculty Artists and Scholars of Art
at the University of Minnesota
on the Administration's Censorship of Our Colleague Stephanie Arado**

We write to condemn the University administration's violation of the academic freedom and freedom of expression of a faculty artist, Stephanie Arado, who was invited to perform at a memorial event following the devastating murder of an alum of the College of Liberal Arts, Alex Pretti, at the hands of federal agents.

After Border Patrol agents shot and killed Pretti, a 2011 CLA alumnus, in South Minneapolis on January 24, University of Minnesota administrators decided to hold a virtual community gathering for him. When they reached out to the head of the School of Music to find a musical performer for the event, he invited proposals via email to the entire School of Music faculty, and subsequently sent a specific invitation to Associate Professor Stephanie Arado. She has verified this accounting of events.

Arado, an accomplished violinist who has performed nationally and internationally and who previously held the post of Assistant Concertmaster of the Minnesota Orchestra, agreed to a solo performance during a webinar to be held Monday, January 26. That afternoon, she went through sound check at a largely empty Best Buy Theater in Northrop Auditorium, from where the webinar was being broadcast, and was about five minutes from performing when an unidentified staffer approached her and told her if she wanted to perform, she would have to change her clothes.

Arado was wearing a black tunic similar to the professional attire she has worn for many other performances. However, for Pretti's memorial, she had ironed on silver letters that said "THE EVIL MUST END NOW" on the front side of her clothing. On the back side, she had used the same letters to write "ICE OUT." She had made the modifications specifically for this invited performance, for which she had also selected the music, Malinconia, the second movement from Eugène Ysaÿe's Sonata No. 2. Those who had invited her had not placed any parameters on her performance. Arado and the staffer had an exchange during which the staffer told her that the memorial was meant to be solemn, not a political occasion; the university wasn't taking sides. Arado noted that her clothing did not detract from the solemnity of the occasion but was connected to the memorialized person's cause of death. Indeed, at

least one person working on the sound check had thanked her for what she was wearing.

After the exchange with the staffer, who did not identify herself, Arado packed up her instrument and left the backstage area to go into the adjoining hallway. It was empty, and she stood there, thinking about what had just happened. Within a few minutes two UMPD officers appeared at the end of the hall and approached her. They informed her that she had to leave the premises. She did so, and Pretti's memorial ended without the performance she had prepared to honor and mourn him.

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This story comes from Stephanie Arado; we write with her knowledge and consent and she has attested that this letter is accurate. In recounting these events, Arado told one of the writers of this letter that the clothes she had chosen were what she felt she had to have with her to deliver an authentic performance that honored Pretti's life.

In a subsequent conversation with Professor and CLA Assembly Chair Michael Gallope, a signatory to this letter, University President Rebecca Cunningham said the choice to forbid Professor Arado's clothing was hers, and proceeded to defend the decision.

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As artists and scholars of art witnessing federal agents blatantly violating civil and human rights in the streets of our cities, we write to express our alarm, frustration, and anger that the leaders of our university have similarly devalued our work and diminished our freedom of expression on campus. [The AAUP accords academic freedom to research, teaching, and creative expression equally.](#) The President has no business attempting to scrub a basic ethical statement from our faculty colleague's artistic performance. That this latest violation happened at a community gathering to memorialize an alumnus of our university who was a victim of state-sponsored violence is appalling.

As tenured and tenure track faculty and practicing artists and scholars of art at the University of Minnesota we write to condemn this act of censorship and to stand in solidarity with our colleague. We are entitled to freedom of expression as artists. As educators, we also know the importance of modeling this freedom of expression for our students, who are themselves practicing and aspiring artists. We are horrified that our university leadership invited an artist to perform and then called the police when her individual expression of mourning did not fit into their unspoken rules for a campus community gathering.

We send this letter out of a strong desire to protect our university against the forces of authoritarianism and fascism that would see us silence ourselves preemptively. A university community is supposed to be dedicated to a fearless search for truth and a steadfast commitment to ways knowledge can serve the public good. We urge our university leaders to resist the temptation to do the work of fascists for them and to model moral courage for our campus community.

We demand that this university administration attest that this type of censorship will not occur again.

Signed,

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Christine Baeumler, Professor and Chair, Department of Art

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Peter Champion, Professor of Creative Writing

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Artistic Director, Ananya Dance Theatre

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Immanuel Davis, Professor of Flute, School of Music

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Department of Theatre Arts & Dance

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Sonja Kuftinec, Professor, Theatre Arts and Dance
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Kristen Sanders, Lecturer, Department of Art

—submitted to administration Thursday, Feb. 5 around noon with a link to this site—

Additional signatures from the UMN community (to sign, fill out this [form](#))

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