

American University Statement Regarding Peltier Statue

American University strongly supports the mission of museums to present thought-provoking art to inform and educate. Within the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, we have hosted numerous exhibits of political and sometimes controversial art.

The decision to host the Peltier statue required a more thorough assessment of the implications of placing the piece in a prominent, public space outside the museum. With the benefit of a fuller review, the university decided to remove the piece from this location for three reasons: to correct an improper implication of institutional advocacy, to protect the art from damage and to maintain the safety of the AU community.

The statue was displayed in a highly visible location overlooking Ward Circle in Northwest Washington DC, one of the most highly trafficked roundabouts in DC. The nature of the display improperly suggested that American University assumed an institutional position advocating clemency for Mr. Peltier, when no such institutional position has been taken. Communications which threatened harm to the statue and created risks for members of the AU community prompted the university to act, in order to maintain public safety and protect the statue from damage.

The AU Museum has offered to work with the artist to find an alternative organization that would be willing to exhibit the art. In the meantime, we have moved the statue in storage with other works of art to ensure its security.

We affirm our commitment to the AU Museum and will ensure that its mission is fully supported in the Katzen Arts Center.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Why did AU put the statue outside its museum overlooking Ward Circle and why didn't AU move it inside after the objections? We initially agreed to display the artwork for a time period that coincided with other displays which were already installed in the museum. Consequently, when assessing the availability of alternative locations for the statue, it was determined there was not sufficient space at the Katzen.

By removing the statue after objections, isn't AU censoring art? AU didn't remove the statue due to objections. We removed the statue because the nature and location of the piece incorrectly implied AU had adopted a position of advocacy on the issue of clemency for Mr. Peltier, when no such institutional position has been taken. In addition, threats were made that put the security of the piece and the safety of the community at risk. We removed the statue for these three reasons.

What kind of threats were made, and how were they evaluated? The university's police department followed its normal threat assessment protocols to evaluate threatening communications that described a variety of activities and which would have endangered the safety of the statue, members of the AU community and the university's campus, while also creating a heightened risk of harm to each.

Doesn't AU have a contractual obligation to display the Peltier statue? The agreement outlines that the statue was loaned to AU for “the purpose of an exhibition” but it does not require AU to exhibit it. AU has relocated the statue to a safe location and, as required by the agreement, is treating it with the same care it provides to its own works of art.

What is AU's stance on the Peltier clemency petition? The university does not have an institutional position on the Peltier clemency petition.

What is AU's response to FBI agents who objected to the display of the statue? The university has shared its statement pertaining to the statue.

Did AU's law school sponsor a symposium in support of Peltier's clemency petition? No. The law school's Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law hosted events for Human Rights Week, including a [conference](#) on December 10 entitled “U.S. Prisons: Conditions of Confinement.” The conference discussed indigenous rights and likely addressed Peltier's imprisonment as an example.

What is AU's stance on artistic freedom and political advocacy going forward? AU is proud to host art of a political nature with the purpose of fostering educational awareness and dialogue. As an institution of higher education, AU believes one of its core missions is to educate, challenge preconceived notions, and foster intelligent dialogue without rejecting points of view that may be objectionable to some. However, the university will also act as necessary to correct improperly implied or perceived suggestions of institutional advocacy where no such advocacy exists. Academic freedom, including artistic freedom, is a central tenet of the American higher education experience and the university's support of those ideals remains unchanged.

How does AU respond to the artist saying the university had not been in touch with him and is preventing him from speaking to anyone at AU? Through his attorney, the artist contacted the AU General Counsel's office. When he asserted he was represented by legal counsel, the University was required to redirect all communications through his counsel, which we have done. Because the artist and his attorney are threatening legal action against AU, we believe all communication with him are best redirected to our General Counsel's office, which is best equipped to handle matters of potential litigation.

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