

# ARTFORUM



**Demonstrators in Rotterdam rally on behalf of Afghans protesting and fleeing the Taliban.** Photo: Donald Trung Quoc Don/Wikipedia Commons.  
August 25, 2021 at 5:16pm

## **HUNDREDS OF ARTISTS SIGN OPEN LETTER CALLING FOR US TO OFFER ASYLUM TO AFGHAN CULTURE WORKERS**

More than 350 cultural workers including artists Coco Fusco, Joyce Kozloff, Susan Meiselas, Naeem Mohaiemen, Walid Raad, Michael Rakowitz, Martha Rosler, Hank Willis Thomas, Cecilia Vicuña, and Martha Wilson, as well as writers Teju Cole, Hari Kunzru, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Lynne Tillman, have lent their signatures to a fiery open letter from Arts for Afghanistan demanding that the US government “do everything in its power” to assist at-risk Afghans fleeing the country in an attempt to escape the newly ascendant Taliban rule. According to the authors of the letter, released August 24, the members of this group—among them artists, curators, writers, filmmakers, and performers—were in a precarious position even before the militant Islamist coalition’s

swift rise to power, thanks to their efforts in illuminating Afghans' daily lives and aspirations often with the approval and assistance of the US government, which has now effectively abandoned them.

In the letter, Arts for Afghanistan calls for the US government to expedite visas for cultural workers and drop the stipulation that the visas be processed in a third country. Reaching out to countries beyond the United States, the missive's writers additionally "call on governments of all nations to facilitate the evacuation and resettlement of Afghan refugees by offering asylum and aid," asserting, "We insist on the protection of all who have devoted themselves to fostering free expression and civil society in Afghanistan."

"Art is a proxy for humanity," said Eric Gottesman, a political scientist and one of the letter's coauthors. "As we can see unfolding in real time in Afghanistan and elsewhere around the world, the voices of artists are considered dangerous because they speak truth to power."

Also signing the missive were arts and humanitarian organizations the Authors Guild, CECArtsLink, Creative Capital, For Freedoms, Magnum Foundation, and PEN America, the last of which recently called on the US government to protect its writers in Afghanistan after two Pen Afghanistan members were murdered by the Taliban.