

Xenofon Kavvadias

"The Law is no less conceptual than Fine Art"

Lord Carlile of Berriew QC

An art installation proposal

Since 2000, Counter Terrorism legislation has resulted in a large number of arrests, prosecutions and more than 120 convictions; many of them based on pieces of literature and other documents. The wide definition of terrorism has created a huge number of potentially illegal documents. Nevertheless, public interest in the phenomenon of terrorism is still high and results in a huge number of people downloading pieces of literature and other documents that have the potential to put them at risk of prosecution.

In my work I am particularly interested in sections 57 and 58 of the Terrorism Act. In these sections it is stated that; "a person commits an offence if he collects or makes a record of information of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism". I am also interested in the 2006 Act where it is stated that "a person commits an offence if he publishes a statement in which he glorifies terrorism or is likely to be understood by members of the public as direct or indirect encouragement or other inducement to the commission preparation or instigation of such acts or causes another to publish such a statement."

During the last six years I followed terror trials in the U.K. and created an extensive archive. I intend to create an Art installation where I plan to show pieces of literature that may be deemed illegal under counter terrorism legislation. I will display as much literature and other relevant documents as possible, of what Police presented as evidence to Courts of Law during terror trials. In the installation I will explicitly state that the documents neither express my views nor have my endorsement. As a pacifist I reject violence in every form.

I want to build an environment of calm, respect, unity, equality, thoughtfulness and reflection so that the viewer will hopefully position him/her self in front of them without fear, force, tension, urgency, pain, and feelings of injustice, death, and torture. The emotional state that is often associated with or which follows war, terrorism and contemporary politics, often eliminates the possibility of an in depth inspection. I will try to create a unique space in the gallery where the viewer will be able to enter and distance him/her self from the contemporary condition, so as to understand, judge and reflect on the texts only in relation to their deep, honest and fundamental qualities and beliefs.

I am also trying to return part of what has been denied or lost in the last ten years due terrorism and war. During the show a space of freedom and equality will be created, visitors will be able to encounter freely without any didactic attitude, or fear, part of what has been denied to them during the last decade through terrorism and counterterrorism.

In my show alongside Islamist books I will include books that one may claim glorify terrorism in the strict meaning of the word. Deuteronomy, and T.E. Lawrence's "The evolution of the revolt" are examples of this. There is a huge number of documents from the past, like the story of national independence of many countries, The American War of Independence for example, that can be considered to glorify terrorism as it is defined today. David Miliband found himself having problems when he defended the practices of African National Congress (ANC) against the Apartheid regime.

Are thousand of UK households who posses these books breaking the counterterrorism law? Should not they be informed about it? Should they not be required to destroy the book? Is this a solution within the spirit of law? For if we ban a book, how far are we from forcing the owner to destroy it? For if we ask or force the owner of a book to destroy it how far are we from burning this book? I am convinced that in this country only a tiny minority is prepared to burn books. The last book I can recall being burned was a copy of Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses in Bradford.

I believe that in the country where the Magna Carta was signed and Milton delivered the "Aeropagitica" it is not impossible to differentiate between those who are against the values of 800 years of democratic tradition from those who cherish and believe in them. It is this strong belief that forces one to move outside the comfort zone in order to defend these values and attempt to reclaim valuable ground that has been lost in a long standing war that the people of this country never really wanted.

Xenofon Kavvadias 11/10/2010

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