

# *Museum Workers Walk Out, Describing Exhibit as Aligned With Zionism*

The Wing Luke Museum in Seattle temporarily closed after employees criticized an exhibition, saying it wrongly conflated anti-Zionism with antisemitism.



By Zachary Small

May 27, 2024

**Want to stay updated on what's happening in Israel and the West Bank and Gaza Strip?** [Sign up for Your Places: Global Update](#), and we'll send our latest coverage to your inbox.

The Wing Luke Museum in Seattle remained closed on Monday afternoon, nearly a week after employees walked off the job to protest an exhibition that includes language they believe frames “Palestinian liberation and anti-Zionism as antisemitism.”

Almost half the museum staff participated in the walkout, which began on Wednesday, the scheduled opening day of “Confronting Hate Together,” an exhibition looking at how communities oppose forms of bigotry, including racism and antisemitism. The 24 employees who staged the walkout said in letters that museum leaders had failed to address their concerns, but the museum said in an online statement that it would remain closed to “listen and earnestly engage in dialog with our staff.”

Lisa Kranseler, director of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society, which collaborated on the exhibition, said the museum was now considering taking down the show because of the controversy. (The museum did not immediately respond to a request for comment.)

“It is very sad,” Kranseler said in a phone interview. “We worked with them for almost a year and a half on the exhibition.”

The sudden closure of the museum was the latest example of how cultural institutions have struggled to navigate the politics of the Israel-Hamas war. Disagreements on how to address the suffering of Palestinian and Israeli civilians have led to executives’ leaving their organizations; artists have also faced censorship and have embedded hidden political messages in their work.

**Sign up for the Israel-Hamas War Briefing.** The latest news about the conflict. [Get it sent to your inbox.](#)

Employees at the Wing Luke Museum — an organization focused on the histories and cultures of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders — said their main concern was an exhibition text that had been developed alongside the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. It stated that “today antisemitism is often disguised as anti-Zionism, with Jews everywhere expected to defend the actions of Israel’s right-wing government.” The panel then described several local examples of antisemitism, including when the Herzl-Ner Tamid Synagogue on Mercer Island was spray-painted with the words “stop the killing” in November.

In a May 19 letter, the protesting staff said the “Confronting Hate Together” exhibition damaged community trust and aligned the museum with Zionism. The employees asked that museum leaders “acknowledge the limited perspectives presented in this exhibition. Missing perspectives include those of Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslim communities who are also experiencing an increased amount of violence, scapegoating, and demonization.”

Zionism has traditionally referred to a belief in Jewish self-determination through the state of Israel. But more recently, the term has been used to critique Israel’s expansion into Palestinian territories.

The museum has not directly responded to the letters. In a statement on social media, the museum said that when it does reopen it will “offer free admission for the community to experience this powerful exhibition.”

“We look forward to continuing to serve our mission to advance racial and social equity together with our staff,” the statement continued, “and welcome them to join us as the dialogue around this important exhibit continues.”

Over the weekend, employees continued to put pressure on the museum, starting an online fundraiser to aid the striking staff and providing a new statement on their protest.

“Museums are not neutral,” the employees said. “The role of a museum is to educate, to provide an artful and peaceful space for reflection, and to foster learning and provide a model for confronting bias, prejudice, or colonialist history.”

Kranseler said the protest had introduced contemporary politics into an exhibition that was fundamentally about stopping division and hatred.

“The original exhibition was always supposed to be a starting point,” she said.

**Zachary Small** is a Times reporter writing about the art world’s relationship to money, politics and technology.  
More about Zachary Small