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James T Hong: *Apologies v 2016.2, 2021*

As of October 13, the Jewish Museum Vienna is presenting the video installation *Apologies* (*Entschuldigungen*) at the Museum Dorotheergasse. In the work of Taiwanese-American film artist James T. Hong, world leaders apologize for crimes ordered or sanctioned by the state.

Calling the apologies into question

Beginning with Willi Brandt, who fell on his knees in front of the monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1970, apologies are strung together without comment. Each speech lasts just a few minutes, then the next head of state follows with the next apology, in chronological order, up to the most recent past. Each person reads his or her prepared text; only their facial expressions and gestures differ. Every apology must be called into question. Is it taken seriously or simply lip service? Does the symbolic act have an effect?

Several heads of state are visibly emotional, others read the apology in a seemingly unmoved manner. Some apologies seem genuine, others seem forced. Some heads of state, such as Barack Obama or the Pope, apologize several times in the video, some appear only once.

The ritual nature of staged acts of remorse

Lasting more than an hour and a half in total, *Apologies* evokes emotions: because while one apology follows the next, the crimes continue – and what comes after that is the next apology. *Apologies* makes the viewer doubt humanity and think about political responsibility as well as cheap excuses, which often help the perpetrators more than the victims.

The literary scholar and Auschwitz survivor Ruth Klüger observed: “One says ‘Never again’ and then you look at all the massacres that have happened in the meantime. It is absurd to say it should not happen again.” For this reason, *Apologies* has its place in the Jewish Museum Vienna. The work reflects the ritual nature, but also the empty phrases of acts of

repentance staged by the state and asks how we want to deal in the future with the injustice suffered and even more so with the injustice committed.

“Originally designed as a video installation, *Apologies* is a compilation of modern political apologies and a timeline of political progress as unrepentant recidivism and contrite repetition. It is a continuing work-in-progress, and this version ends with 2016. Dozens of apologies are collected every year, and they will be added as time permits.

The passage of time does not heal all wounds; it cannot settle all accounts or resolve all disputes. But the identities of the perceived perpetrators can change, and a national apology’s task is to document, to put on record, a symbolic act as a prelude to possible reconciliation and forgiveness. To achieve these ends, one’s sincerity is paramount, especially when reading from a script.” James T. Hong

James T. Hong: *Apologies v 2016.2, 2021* can be seen from October 13, 2022 to February 12, 2023 at the Jewish Museum Vienna, a Wien Holding museum. The presentation of the video installation was curated by the Jewish Museum Vienna team.

The Jewish Museum Vienna, Dorotheergasse 11, 1010 Vienna, is open Sunday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The second location, Museum Judenplatz, Judenplatz 8, 1010 Vienna, is open Sunday to Thursday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. (wintertime), respectively 5 p.m. (summertime).

Further information can be found at www.jmw.at or info@jmw.at.

Queries

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Photos and press material for the current exhibitions are available on the Jewish Museum Vienna website at www.jmw.at/presse.



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