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Ai Weiwei Staged an Impromptu Protest at Munich's Haus der Kunst to Show Solidarity With Workers Facing Layoffs

The Chinese activist-artist has criticized Haus der Kunst's plan to lay off 48 staff members.

Kate Brown, September 16, 2019



Ai Weiwei, one of China's most controversial artists, looks on during his solo exhibition "So Sorry" at Haus der Kunst in 2009. Photo: by Miguel Villagran/Getty Images.

The Chinese artist and activist [Ai Weiwei](#) has taken a stand in solidarity with Haus der Kunst's staff, who are currently facing layoffs as the Munich institution looks at an internal restructuring due to ongoing financial woes.

The 62-year-old artist, who has been based in Germany for years since his exile from China (though he recently announced plans to move to the UK), visited the museum over the weekend and staged an impromptu action, posing at the entrance to the galleries and appearing to check tickets for the [Markus Lüpertz](#) show as visitors entered. Ai also posted a more controversial photo a day later, showing him in a deep conversation with Haus der Kunst's managing director, Bernhard Spies.

Spies, who was enlisted to head the museum after celebrated curator Okwui Enzwor stepped down, was expected to turn the tide on the Haus der Kunst's finances issues. He cancelled exhibitions by artists Joan Jonas and Adrian Piper that were in the works, before introducing a show by the established German painter Markus Lüpertz.

"The management is sticking to its promise to make the restructuring process as socially acceptable as possible, while maintaining as many jobs as possible and without any loss of income," said the Haus der Kunst in an official statement shared by the German newswire DPA. The cash-strapped institution had previously announced that it was considering laying off 48 staff members, about two-thirds of

its part-time workers, as a part of a financial restructuring. Jobs cut would include front-of-house workers, cashiers, and security guards, many of whom had worked at the museum for up to 20 years.

Ai, who had a solo show at the museum in 2009, reportedly criticized the museum's management for buying expensive works of art "while people with low pay [could] be dismissed," according to Deutschlandkulturfunk.

Some media reports and social media users initially said that Ai Weiwei was removed from the museum during the protest, but the artist has denied these claims. "The fact is no one ever threw me out," Ai said, according to *The Art Newspaper*. "We left after the end of the protest. NB: I have never been thrown out by anyone and I'm sure there will be a time to come."