News



A combination photo shows Jesuit Father Marko Rupnik at the Vatican March 6, 2020, and an artist with Centro Aletti in Italy, working on a mosaic at Sacred Heart University's Chapel of the Holy Spirit in Fairfield, Conn., Sept. 30, 2009. (OSV News/Tracy Deer-Mirek, courtesy Sacred Heart, CNS)



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Rome — August 1, 2024

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The artistic community founded by Father Marko Rupnik, the Slovenian priest accused of sexually, psychologically and spiritually abusing multiple women, dismissed calls from survivors to remove the artist's work, saying such decisions are a symptom of "cancel culture."

In a statement published July 24, Maria Campatelli, director of the Centro Aletti, said that while the center has remained silent as it awaits the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith's investigation into the accusations, it viewed calls for the removal of the priest's artwork as an attack against art and also a "desire for destruction."

Though the art center has not commented on the Rupnik case before, "in the face of growing pressure for the removal of the works of art created by Centro Aletti," the statement said, "we feel obliged to express our great concern regarding the widespread diffusion of the so-called 'cancel culture,' and of a way of thinking that legitimizes the 'criminalization' of art," Campatelli wrote.

A former Jesuit, Rupnik, 69, was briefly excommunicated by the church in 2020 for absolving an Italian novice with whom he had sex. The excommunication was lifted after he repented.

Nevertheless, the Jesuits disclosed in December 2022 that it had suspended the Slovenian artist after allegations of abuse had surfaced. However, the Jesuits said the doctrinal dicastery dismissed the claims because the allegations surpassed the

statute of limitations.

In June 2023, Rupnik was expelled from the Jesuits for refusing to obey restrictions imposed upon him related to the sexual, spiritual and psychological abuse of some two dozen women and at least one man over the course of 30 years. He was incardinated into the Diocese of Koper in his native Slovenia in August 2023.

The alleged victims of Rupnik have called for the removal of Rupnik's artwork, saying it is a painful reminder of the abuse they suffered. French Sister Samuelle, one of Rupnik's victims, told OSV News she was abused while they were putting up a mosaic.

Patrick Kelly, the Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus, announced July 11 that the Catholic fraternal organization would cover mosaics created by Father Rupnik at the St. John Paul II National Shrine in Washington and the Holy Family Chapel at the Knights' headquarters in New Haven, Connecticut.

"Shrines are places of healing, prayer, and reconciliation. They should not cause victims further suffering," Kelly said.

In her statement, Campatelli said the center was awaiting the outcome of the proceedings and emphasized that Rupnik has denied the allegations against him.

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Citing the presumption of innocence, Campatelli said forgetting the legal principle leads to the "paradox of issuing a sentence without the possibility of appeal before the judgment has been rendered, and asking for the sacrifice of a kind of scapegoat on behalf of victims, taken generically."

"In the concrete case of Fr. Rupnik, this means that anyone who has suffered a wrong or an act of violence on the part of any Church representative is legitimized in feeling offended by the art created by the Atelier, or art workshop, of the Aletti Center," she wrote. "But justice cannot be pursued by means of injustice. What does not have its origins in the good cannot bear good fruit."

Campatelli also argued that although the Slovenian priest's art is featured heavily in

the center's work, the art itself "does not bear the signature of just one person" but rather that "the sole author of this art is the communion in prayer and creativity of dozens of artists and theologians."

She also argued that "the removal of a work of art ought never to be thought of as a punishment or a cure" and that doing so creates further suffering "not only (for) the artists and theologians who participated in their realization but also of a great many believers who through these works of art have been able to contemplate the Word of God, oftentimes at a difficult moment in their life."

Campatelli's statement came over a month after Boston Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley, as president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, called on the dicasteries of the Roman Curia to exert "pastoral prudence" in displaying Rupnik's artwork in a way "that could imply either exoneration or a subtle defense of alleged perpetrators of abuse."

O'Malley also said that while the presumption of innocence should be respected, Vatican offices should "exercise wise pastoral prudence and compassion toward those harmed by clerical sexual abuse."

"Pope Francis has urged us to be sensitive to and walk in solidarity with those harmed by all forms of abuse. I ask you to bear this in mind when choosing images to accompany the publication of messages, articles, and reflections through the various communication channels available to us," the cardinal said.