

# L'Internationale statement: Towards a healthy society

5 May 2020

*Care: "relations [that] maintain and repair a world so that humans and non-humans can live in it as well as possible in a complex life-sustaining web." Puig de La Bellacasa, 2017*

In the midst of the coronavirus lockdown, the L'Internationale museums have firstly been concerned to offer an efficient solidarity to our freelance colleagues who have lost their income or access to healthcare. We have decided to follow a path of care, support and reflection for the immediate future and to focus on health in the broad sense of social and individual well-being. We believe that institutions today should, to the best of their limited resources, support the art environment in general and offer freelancers and collaborators the possibility of future partnerships and scholarships. As museums, we cannot do enough for all of these groups, so we also ask that central and local governments across Europe provide sufficient financial support to artists and cultural workers, as well as the self-employed and non-governmental organisations, to ensure that they can survive the consequences of these exceptional events. The current crisis will hit the third sector the hardest, an area where the vast majority of cultural initiatives operate. Keeping this diverse world of grassroots initiatives afloat is essential for our global culture in the future.

At the same time, we know there will be a time beyond this emergency, we could call it **the day after tomorrow**, when expressions of solidarity towards the art world will not be enough. When we reopen, gently and patiently at first, we need to make a renewed effort to be places where a healthy civil society can rebuild its trust in itself on a public level. We believe public cultural institutions have a wide responsibility, one that is anchored in the power of art and artists to imagine the world otherwise and create the mental and emotional space to realise the impossible. In the face of the virus, governments should begin to understand culture as a refuge from catastrophe, not only because of its emancipatory nature, but also because it helps people live with complexity, uncertainty and doubt without falling apart.

In return, we ask for a renewed commitment to art and culture from governments, businesses and individuals. As local art institutions, we are close to conditions on the ground across Europe, from Istanbul to Dublin; Madrid to Warsaw; Ljubljana to Gothenburg. We realise the coming recovery will take time and that what comes after it will not be a simple return to the past. Many basic conditions will be different and that is both a threat and an opportunity. As major institutions in our home environments, we accept the need to adapt our activities to what civil society wants

and can afford, but we insist that the dynamic interplay between economy, politics and culture finds a new balance. The pursuit of profit for its own sake, the apparent indifference to inequality, the destruction of our planet and its life forms cannot continue as before. We must choose as a society to keep the voices of division, austerity, xenophobia and conflict at bay. In their place, we want to offer the benefits of an interdependent, curious and plural culture in our museums and to be allowed to make our contribution to a future society that is healthy in body, mind and spirit.

Each of our members is attracted by modern art's emancipatory traditions while being critical of its colonial foundations and universalist ambitions. We want to listen to, talk with and be interpellated by the many voices that have been silenced by what is now clearly exposed as an over-confident and complacent global economic system. We want to use this time to reinterpret the histories and geo-political assumptions that have shaped the institutions we have become and to allow new possibilities to emerge from what we have learnt since the transformations around 1989. Above all, L'Internationale wants to join with others to shape a common sustainable and democratic future where art and museums play a positive role in providing the "complex life-sustaining web" integral to a society of mutual trust and interdependence.

More on L'Internationale:

L'Internationale confederation gathers seven major European art institutions: MG+MSUM (Ljubljana, Slovenia); Museo Reina Sofía (Madrid, Spain); MACBA (Barcelona, Spain); M HKA, (Antwerp, Belgium); MSN (Warsaw, Poland), SALT (Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey) and Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, the Netherlands). L'Internationale works with complementary partners such as HDK-Valand (Gothenburg, Sweden) and NCAD (Dublin, Ireland). The confederation and its partners are working now within the frame of the project *Our Many Europes*, co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union, featuring over 40 public activities including exhibitions, workshops and research.

L'Internationale was formed at the outset of the 2007 financial crisis by a number of European art museums that understood the need to align our policies and develop common support structures. We achieved this through a focus on the idea of 'constituent museums' as cultural institutions that are continuously reshaped by their societies and always in states of becoming. The consequence of that is a primacy of relations – of dissent and consent –and, as such, we seek to build sustainable relationships with communities and collections, while reaching out to work with people and histories in our neighbourhoods. Now, in the face of a new existential challenge, we want to renew and strengthen our confederation as one committed to solidarity, commonality, trust and caring for our different constituencies.

The main online platform of L'Internationale is [www.internationaleonline.org](http://www.internationaleonline.org) a platform for discursive political museology where we commission texts, artists' interventions, reports and e-pubs on mutually significant research topics.

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