

FROM:

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TO:

Ms. Alejandra Frausto Guerrero
Secretary of Culture
Avenida de La Paz 26
Colonia Chimalistac, C.P. 01070
Alcaldía Álvaro Obregón
Ciudad de México
México

Cc: Mr. Marcelo Ebrard, Secretary of International Relations

Cc: Ms. Lucina Jiménez, Director, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura (INBAL)

Thursday, 10 December 2020

Dear Ms. Frausto Guerrero,

We write to you to express our grave concerns regarding the systematic budget cuts being suffered by those public museums of modern and contemporary art in Mexico that are dependent on the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura (INBAL), and on the diverse regional State Secretaries of Culture, the Instituciones Estatales de Cultura through federal programmes known as AIEC and the federal culture programmes that fund regional museums in Mexico under the Federal Budget (Presupuesto de Egresos de la Federación [PEF]). This situation was on-going during 2019 but has worsened significantly during 2020, when museums and artistic communities at large have been drastically impacted by the global pandemic. In writing to you we also recognise the invaluable cultural contribution that these institutions provide not only to the city of Mexico and its people but to the country as a whole, and to communities and museums around the world. We are sending a copy of this letter to the Secretary of International Affairs because we are concerned that the crises facing Mexican museums will have a seriously adverse affect on Mexico's international profile.

Mexico City has, since the 1940s, developed an exemplary ecosystem of public and private museums dedicated to modern and contemporary art that has set a benchmark of best practice in America and the rest of the world. As a linchpin connecting North and South America, Mexico's contemporary and modern art museums and exhibition spaces – sixteen in Mexico City and fifty-six in the rest of the country – have for decades represented a Mexican state that places culture at its core. They have actively demonstrated the importance of a vigorous and diverse artistic output within a strong state. A strong museum system not only supports its artistic communities but also serves society at large through its programmes and by adhering to key values such as plurality, inclusion, equality of rights and freedom of expression.

Each of Mexico's public museums collections build critical diverse narratives for our future understanding of the story of Mexico, its communities and people. Their remarkable exhibitions, education and social programmes have engaged millions of students and families from all over Mexico in a shared experience of the history of a country whose legacy of ancestral and multicultural traditions and practices continues to enrich and illuminate the everyday lives of Mexican citizens. Much of this valuable work has happened as a direct result of the irreplaceable support of Mexico's federal cultural programmes.

The Mexican public museum sector's outstanding educational and social programmes reach a diverse audience including a wide range of lower-income local communities, families and state-funded schools. Mexico's public museums are recognised globally for their achievements in creating inclusive spaces that support a plurality of artistic ideas, expressions and traditions. The country's public museum network is one of the most visited and respected in the world and a cultural icon of Mexico in its own right.

Since April 23, 2020, as per the Presidential Decree, public museums funded by the INBAL have had 75% of their operating budgets capped, and further, have not been notified officially of their assigned budgets which for decades has happened in March; and federal cultural support programmes under S268 that fund public regional museums have since 2018, suffered budget cuts of 76.53%. This situation has only been aggravated by the effects of the pandemic, with the subsequent drastic reduction in self-generated income and the discouragement of fund-raising efforts.

We would also like to take this opportunity to note that a large majority of museum workers are hired on a temporary basis under the category Capítulo 3000 of the 33901 budget line. This status denies them appropriate labour rights and healthcare, fundamental rights at any time but of critical importance during this pandemic.

It is in response to this emergency that I write to you as President of CIMAM, a worldwide organisation comprising over six hundred museum professionals from all across the world, and an Affiliate Organisation of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). We have today taken the decision to publish a text on our website and in our newsletter expressing our utmost concern at the situation facing museums in Mexico. The text has been written by our Museum Watch Committee, which includes directors of several major international museums, and responds to critical situations around the world that impact a museum's ability to carry out its mission and uphold its codes of practice. As CIMAM President, I felt it was only proper also to write to you personally in your capacity as Mexican Secretary of Culture to directly express our concern and to notify you of our planned actions in solidarity with our colleagues in Mexico.

We appeal to you as Mexican Secretary of Culture to restore funding to historical levels and put an end to these damaging and unsustainable cuts – which we understand were put in place as a

temporary measure during the pandemic – and also importantly, to provide official confirmation of annual operational budgets to museums at the start of the year. These actions will guarantee their operational viability in 2021 and into the future. We would also urge you to provide the proper mechanisms to hire proper, dignified labour for the museum field. Also to enable the museums to attract complementary private funds in line with international best practices. Furthermore, the vitality of all Mexico's public museums and artistic and cultural communities has depended on the budgets assigned by the regional State Secretaries of State and the federal cultural support programmes under S268. Since 2018 these budgets have either been eliminated or drastically reduced by 76.53%. In light of this, we urgently request that you restore this funding to previous levels (i.e. \$1363 Million Mexican pesos in 2018) in order to protect and ensure the vitality of Mexican contemporary culture.

CIMAM asks the Mexican Government to urgently restore public funding for the museums under the Secretariat of Culture to historical levels. This critical action will ensure:

- 1) the future viability of these institutions that are at a point of crises;
- 2) the continued conservation of and care for their collections according to international standards of museum best practices as laid down by the ICOM;
- 3) the security of the many professionals that work across the museum network;
- 4) the continuation of their vital exhibition and education programmes, and service to the wider community.

Without this action these museums will not be able to survive creating irreparable loss to Mexico and its citizens.

We also call on you to act as a protector of the artistic autonomy of the public museums in your care. This fundamental right is essential and ensures that each museum can stage its exhibitions, display its collections, and organize educational and social programmes with a right to freedom of speech and a protection from political interference. These are values protected by CIMAM and professional museums worldwide, and we know they are held with high value in Mexico. We raise this now however, because there are concerns being raised by colleagues within the artistic community of Mexico that museum professionals do not consider themselves at liberty to respond publicly to the critical situation that they find themselves in without fear of retribution. This position undermines the essential role museums play in our contemporary civil societies as sites of open and inclusive dialogue and engagement.

Museums are crucial public meeting places that kindle learning and foster well-being, whilst promoting creativity, subjectivity and critical thinking. As such, they are true agents in the construction of an equitable and inclusive society for today and the years to come.

We are aware of the worldwide financial crises created by the pandemic and the difficult choices facing all governments. We nevertheless call on you as the guardian of Mexico's culture to secure the funding urgently needed to ensure the survival of these vital institutions that contribute immeasurably to Mexico's contemporary society and position on the global stage.

Yours sincerely,



Mami Kataoka

President of CIMAM and Director of Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan.

In representation of the CIMAM Museum Watch Committee integrated by:

Bart De Baere, Director, M HKA— Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen. Antwerpen, Belgium.

Sarah Glennie, Director, National College of Art and Design. Dublin, Ireland.

Calin Dan, Director, MNAC Bucharest—National Museum of Contemporary Art. Bucharest, Romania.

Malgorzata Ludwisiak, Independent Art Critic, Curator, Ph.D, Warsaw, Poland.

Victoria Noorthoorn, Director, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires. Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Eugene Tan, Director, National Gallery Singapore and Singapore Art Museum. Singapore.

CIMAM – International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art, is an Affiliated Organization of ICOM.