

Why Should Museums Remain Open and Operational?



In 2020, museums and collections all over the world were deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; consequently, many public-facing institutions were required to take a position on their operations. The Museum Watch Committee saw the extent to which museums played a specific role in the discussions on COVID-related lockdown measures within wider fields such as arts and culture, entertainment, and leisure.

To monitor the roles and positions of institutions internationally, **the Museum Watch Committee asked CiMAM members to identify the main arguments used worldwide to keep museums open and operational** in these difficult times. It launched this project in November 2020.

This call to action activated contemporary art professionals worldwide, spanning **Argentina, Australia, Belgium, India, Italy, Peru, Russia, Singapore, Spain, and the United States**. They presented their main arguments to keep their museums open or reopen them soon and shared their experiences from the pandemic.

**INTERNATIONAL
COMMITTEE FOR
MUSEUMS**

**AND COLLECTIONS
OF MODERN ART**

The below conclusions and examples **aim to encourage and inspire** modern and contemporary art museum professionals worldwide to keep their museums operational.

1.MUSEUMS ARE SAFE SPACES

The scale of exhibition spaces, temperature and air controls, as well as crowd management make museums some of the safest public spaces. Museums have established very clear protocols and guidelines to enable both staff and visitors to remain safe in the museum and workspace.

2.MUSEUMS ARE AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE

Art and culture are essential to our individual and collective well-being. They offer one of the most positive ways of engaging with complexity and uncertainty in these difficult times. Museums contribute by engaging with and supporting the emotional and intellectual health and growth of citizens. They offer much-needed contact with the material, the physical, and the real, in a safe environment.

3.MUSEUMS ARE DRIVERS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Museums support thousands of jobs and should be seen as drivers for economic recovery in the cities and countries where they are situated. Each museum is encouraged to demonstrate the numbers of jobs that it sustains in its city.

4.MUSEUMS CAN ACT COLLECTIVELY

Museums are advised to come together with other museums and cultural institutions in their city. To have a common position and voice. To get stronger and stand collectively to push forward their petition. During the pandemic, many museums and cultural associations have worked closely with one another for the betterment of cultural sectors as a whole.

5.MUSEUMS CAN ADAPT

Without access to physical spaces, museums have seen an increase in the digitalization of their programs and activities. Either for survival or as an opportunity, museums have taken advantage of technology to upgrade their online presence and build new online audiences from all over the world. While many museums have seen their international visitor numbers reduced, they are now focused on engaging and attracting new local audiences.

6.MUSEUMS SHOULD MAINTAIN DIALOGUE WITH THE GOVERNMENT

Whether or not the government supports arts and culture, it is of key importance to maintain an open dialogue. Museums should keep insisting on their significance to society at large, leveraging on arguments for why they are crucial spaces for citizenship and economic recovery.

About the Museum Watch Committee

In 2012, **CiMAM**, the International Committee of Museums and Collections of Modern Art, founded the **Museum Watch Program**, an advocacy initiative that provides a framework of analysis, support, and solidarity to assist modern and contemporary art museum professionals affected by crises of governance and economy.

In 2020 alone, the Museum Watch Committee led by six CiMAM Board Members—**Bart de Baere (Chair)**, **Calin Dan**, **Sarah Glennie**, **Malgorzata Ludwisiak**, **Victoria Noorthoorn**, and **Eugene Tan**—have analyzed over twenty international cases, of which seven have resulted in public statements:

- **Brazil** - January 11, 2020: Critical financial situation at the Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR). CiMAM urges the City Government to continue its support.
- **Japan** - January 31, 2020: Aichi Triennale reopens thanks to the efforts of artists and curators.
- **Serbia** - March 18, 2020: Belgrade: A Leading Institution Damaged by Local Politics
- **Bolivia** - July 2, 2020: La Paz: International Museum Best Cases in Danger
- **South Africa** - December 3, 2020: A Question of Governance in South Africa
- **Mexico** - December 10 - 2020: An Ecosystem in Danger: Mexican Museums
- **Slovenia** - January 14 - 2021: Trends and dangers in the governance of cultural institutions in the European context.

The Museum Watch Committee **examines each situation**, either detected by the Committee or brought to their attention by CiMAM members and non-members. **Their approach varies depending on the case:** they could **hold private correspondence** with the professionals involved or **act publicly** in the form of official letters to persons and organisations that hold responsibility, and public statements to inform and express concern to the global professional community. This may also have an effective impact to let a situation develop into a positive sense, such as with the **Aichi Triennale**, not only a shining example of resistance to political pressure and censorship through responsible collective action, but also being reopened, or as with the **Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR)**, that has come stronger out of its crisis.

While a multitude of issues of great urgency plague the field of museums and institutions of modern and contemporary art today (censorship, ethics, and social justice just to name a few), the Museum Watch Committee focusses on issues stemming from an aspect of

museums that receives less attention, but is likely to have the greatest structural impact on institutions today: **governance**. As governing bodies and organising authorities take increasingly blunt action in the governance of institutions, for many, there is growing uncertainty about the very foundations of their organisations.

The main objectives of the Museum Watch Program are:

- to **enhance understanding of developments in the public positioning and functioning of contemporary art institutions**, by analyzing specific situations of crisis and to document them for the CiMAM archive.
- to **assemble and disseminate this information to generate a deeper understanding of these cases** within the field, as well as to **inform the CiMAM community** and society at large about critical situations that impact the museum's ability to maintain international standards of best practice.
- to **provide a framework of support, solidarity**, and where necessary, activism to support CiMAM Members and our wider network of international colleagues.
- to **publicly advocate for a vision of museums and institutions of modern and contemporary art, the good governance of them, and best practices** within them.