

Statement on the Proposed Restructuring of City Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi

The Museum Watch Committee (MWC) **expresses our great concern regarding action by Experience Wellington to restructure the City Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi**, a well-regarded institution of particular importance to the local, regional, and global art scenes.

Experience Wellington, which is a Wellington City Council-controlled and -funded organisation, operates Capital E, Space Place, City Gallery, Nairn Street Cottage, Wellington Museum, and the Cable Car Museum. In April 2021, Experience Wellington announced a confidential restructure proposal for the six institutions under it and later consulted with its 147 staff on the proposed reorganisation. The consultation period ended on 9 May, which was followed by two weeks of internal discussions before the final decision was announced on 26 May. For a publicly funded institution operating a breadth of institutions integral to Wellington's cultural life, Experience Wellington's restructuring process **did not take into consideration the very public it serves**. Its residents have, through various platforms, voiced their disappointment at the lack of public consultation or consultation with the Council under which Experience Wellington operates. As of 29 May, the legality of bypassing the Council [has come into question](#).

Of great concern, and to which much protest has been directed (see: [Open Letters to Mayor Andy Foster](#), [an open letter to the Mayor](#), and various news articles, example [here](#)) by Wellington's public and New Zealand's art ecology is Experience Wellington's plan to **disestablish the roles of director and senior curator** at City Gallery Wellington. The MWC strongly believes that such a change would **destabilise the institution by reducing its ability to develop quality content necessary for a cultural institution**. Removing two key, highly-specialised posts would **strip the Gallery of the expertise required** for the curation of exhibitions, thereby **diluting its reputation as a contemporary art museum** and **jeopardising its current position as a cultural institution of global standing**. While the restructuring makes an attempt to 'de-colonise' the museum and address systematic gaps in representation through the proposed appointment of a curator of Maori art, the suggestion is disingenuous if the institution finds itself otherwise lacking in rigour and credibility.

The fact that this proposal heralds the institution's destabilisation and the degradation of Wellington's cultural milieu is rooted in previous attempts for changes to a similar effect elsewhere in New Zealand—Hamilton, Dunedin, Townsville, Newcastle, Launceston, and most recently in Perth—from which the cities' cultural reputations might not yet be recovered. Experience Wellington's disestablishment of City Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi is, unfortunately, part of an alarming global 'emptying' of museums noted by the MWC, where artistic and academic content is increasingly de-prioritised through diminishing positions of expertise. We have brought attention to a similar occurrence in [South-Eastern and Central Europe](#). This worrying trend in museum governance continues with City Gallery Wellington should this proposal not be reconsidered.

CiMAM

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The MWC reiterates that the cultural strategy laid out with the proposed restructuring of City Gallery Wellington and the institutions under Experience Wellington needs to be rethought, and should further take into account the voices of the people of Wellington who are equal stakeholders in their city's cultural ecology.

We urge Experience Wellington and Wellington Council to work closely with members of the arts in the city and wider New Zealand to re-strategise this proposal for the good of the arts in the country and the world.

In representation of the **Museum Watch Committee** integrated by CiMAM Board Members:

Bart de Baere, Director, Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (M HKA), Antwerp, 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.

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