02 2023

Letter in Support of Manuel Borja-Villel

Institute of Radical Imagination

We give our full support to Manuel Borja-Villel, until a few days ago director of Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid, and who in the recent weeks has been the subject of a defamatory and violent campaign by some right-wing Spanish media.

We read what's going on not as an isolated occurrence. In Spain, just like in Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Poland, Hungary, and many other European territories, there is an awakening of the right-wing political apparatus busy building campaigns to delegitimize the openly anti-fascist and anti-authoritarian culture in defense of social and civil rights. The far-right has realized the importance of building cultural hegemony and is fighting with all its strengths to destroy, piece by piece, the European cultural ecosystem, in order to be able to replace it with nationalist, conservative apparatuses enslaved to a commodified idea of culture. An example of this is the current Italian Minister of Culture under the new far-right government led by Giorgia Meloni, affirming the importance of rebuilding a hegemonic right-wing cultural identity by spreading paradoxical fake news such as the one that sees the figure of Dante Alighieri father of the Italian language, relocated to the register of fascist thinkers.

Manuel Borja-Villel and the Reina Sofia team have worked well in these 15 years of the museum's management. The Reina Sofia has become one of the most outstanding contemporary art institutions in Europe and a point of reference for a dense Latin American institutional network. A point of reference because it put itself at the service of that decolonial process which weighs on the history of Spain. Reference point for having updated that Guernica that makes the museum famous worldwide, precisely because it takes root in the anti-fascist foundation of twentieth-century Europe.

The work carried out in recent years has updated Guernica not only by redesigning the role of the permanent collection, but also by turning the museum to the Lavapiés district, making the museum a porous institution and breaking down social barriers where architecture had raised walls, however elegant. Transforming the Reina Sofia into a "situated museum", not only in the neighborhood and the city of Madrid, but also in Athens, Cairo, Istanbul, Venice, Buenos Aires, Berlin, Warsaw, Palestine, Milan, Naples, St. Petersburg, Barcelona, etc. A museum located in all these territories because its projects are devices for the political activation of hundreds of communities and networks. Because Manuel Borja-Villel and his team have been able to promote this idea of transforming networks and relationships into infrastructures for cultural production. New infrastructures for the museum which, however, expand beyond its borders.

Together, we have named this practice of trespassing, this movement, a new instituting artistic form. Reason why the right-wing is afraid of the figure and work of Manuel Borja-Villel, because it does not control the power of the networks with which and on which in those recent years the Museum was fed, because the right-wing disavows and abhors any constituent practice such

as that which took place under the direction of Manuel Borja-Villel.

For us at the Institute of Radical Imagination, the Reina Sofia has been a fundamental point of reference for alter-institutional experimentation, political and artistic prefiguration, and for its strong ethic against the elitism and cultural fascism of the current historical moment. We at the Institute of Radical Imagination have had many collaborations with Reina Sofia (research groups, conferences, exhibitions, symposia) which have been fundamental to craft our political and artistic vision and mission. Manuel Borja-Villel's Reina Sofia has generated around it a connective tissue of intellectuals, artists, cultural institutions and social centers which has constituted a real community of reference for IRI. It is not only the political and artistic vision of Borja-Villel that is being attacked. It is also his ability to understand and interpret important historical transformations through a radical and anti-bourgeois framework but at the same time with pragmatism and "common sense" – qualities that go against the stupid extremisms of our current era.

A new phase opens for the Museo Reina Sofía from February 2nd on: we hope that this constituent process will succeed in determining a future in continuity with the work of Manuel Borja-Villel, through all the collective intelligence of the workers who crossed the museum, of the artists who contributed to his program and the networks of cultural operators, academics and activists who are linked to him.

We make an international appeal to support the Museo Reina Sofía team in this moment of transition and change and to determine together what is to come.

Sign the letter: Institute of Radical Imagination