

MUSEUMS *Continental Europe*

Directors woo their Chinese counterparts

Spanish head of Cimam sets out group's global aims

CONTEMPORARY ART

Barcelona. The rapidly growing number of contemporary art museums in China has spurred an international group of directors and curators to build stronger relationships with institutions in Asia. The new president of the Barcelona-based International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art, known as Cimam, says that engaging with museums in China is a priority, as is supporting institutions and colleagues threatened by censorship.

Bartomeu Marí, the director of the Museu d'Art Contemporani in Barcelona, who was appointed the head of Cimam in August, says: "Higher membership

The group of directors and curators hopes to hold its annual conference in the Middle East or Africa

in China has been an objective for the past few years. China is the country with the highest number of new contemporary art museums." He also stresses Cimam's role in drawing attention to cases of censorship, corruption and violence, and striking a balance between public service and private interests. "Ethics should be global, or else they are non-existent," he says.

China has been the world's biggest museum-builder in recent decades. In 1949, the country had 21 museums, a number that had increased to 348 by 1978. Now there are around 3,400, most of them privately run, according to

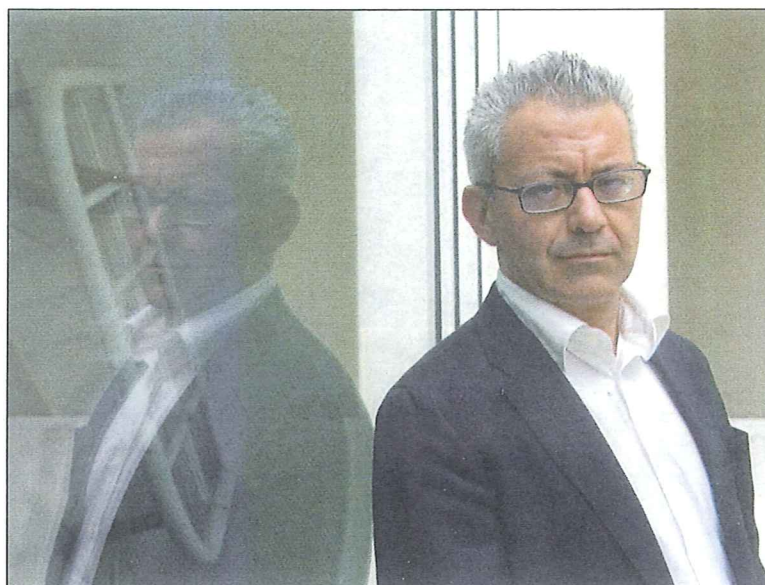
Guo Xiaoling, the director of Beijing's Capital Museum (*The Art Newspaper*, May, p15). Two private institutions, the Sifang Art Museum near Nanjing and Shanghai's Yuz Museum, are due to open this and next month respectively.

Kian Chow Kwok, the executive vice-chairman of the Yellow River Arts Centre, which is due to open in Yinchuan in north-west China next year, is a member of Cimam's board. He will play a key role in expanding membership in Asia. The organisation has 29 Chinese members, compared with 62 in the US.

The organisation has 521 members in 78 countries. They include directors, curators, art historians and independent art professionals. One member of the

board, Abdellah Karroum, the director of the Doha-based Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, says that he hopes to eventually bring the group's annual conference to the Middle East or Africa. Another board member, Jaroslaw Suchan, the director of the Muzeum Sztuki in Lodz, Poland, says that the organisation also wants to support projects in places such as Africa, where the institutional base for contemporary art activities is still weak.

"I would like to see a focus on how museums can support local art scenes and relate more closely to artists' initiatives, rather than galleries and the



Bartomeu Marí is leading a membership drive

commercial market," says Charles Esche, the director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, in a statement on Cimam's website.

Marí is also wary of the commercial sector, emphasising that museums should "absolutely not" follow the art market, though he is prepared to embrace the private sector. "I don't believe that 'public' equals pure, innocent and good, or that 'private' means evil. Public and private [sectors] should work together but with clear rules and clear roles," he says.

Fighting censorship

Marí says that the Contemporary Art Museum Watch advocacy programme will remain a key strand of Cimam's strategy. As part of the initiative, the group has taken a stand on issues such as "corruption, censorship and violence".

In June, Cimam voiced support for Marta Gili, the director of the Jeu de

Paume, after the Parisian museum was forced to defend a show of works by the Palestinian artist Ahlam Shibli. The controversy centred on "Death", a series of images exploring how dead or imprisoned Palestinians were presented in public and private spaces. Cimam subsequently released a statement that declared: "Art institutions are for freedom, respect and debate; never for repression, violence or censorship."

Marí will also take a tough stance on deaccessioning, in line with Cimam's 2009 policy that the committee is opposed to the financially motivated sale of works of art from public collections (the exception is when proceeds are used for acquisitions or the direct care of the collection). "Deaccessioning should be a completely transparent process, only to be implemented in extraordinary cases. The rules must not be broken," he says.

Gareth Harris