

CİMAM statement about the Greek National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST)

The latest developments around the management of the Greek National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST) are raising concerns in the international community that CİMAM, as the professional organisation representing curators and directors of contemporary art museums, must address.

EMST has already had a complicated history since its establishment in 1997. The appointment of the first director, Anna Kafetsi marked a good start and she was in charge of the development of the current venue designed by 3SK – Stylianidis Architects and Kalliopi Kontozoglou (2003). The renovation process was subject to numerous delays due to legal proceedings, government instability and the identification of asbestos in the venue, with the result that EU and local funding was lost. In 2014 Anna Kafetsi was fired by the Minister of Culture after a period of conflict with the Museum's Board.

Katerina Koskina, then President of the Board of the Thessaloniki Museum of Contemporary Art and Director of the Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art, was appointed director in December 2014, working with a new board. Despite the complicated financial and logistical circumstances, with the building only completed in 2016, Katerina Koskina managed to profile EMST internationally, as a main venue of Documenta 14, whilst presenting simultaneously part of its collection in the Fridericianum, Kassel. Further, Koskina extended the collection and built its international profile through exhibitions in different international institutions including the most recent one at NAMOC, the National Arts Museum of China, Beijing. During this time her situation remained precarious. She was issued a series of short term contracts, firstly for 14 months, extended to 18 months, followed by another contract for 12 months which was due to expire on December 5th this year.

On November 4th, the new Minister of Culture, Myrsini Zorba, announced in an interview that she would extend the renewable mandates of those Directors of Greek cultural institutions that she felt were functioning well. When asked about EMST, the answer given was that the position of Director would be opened for competition. An announcement to that effect was published in Greek only on November 6th, with a deadline for applications given as December 14th.

On November 15th during the annual press conference of EMST, where a €3.000.000 grant from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation was announced, a press release was issued by the Ministry of Culture presenting a negative evaluation of Koskina's Directorship. Koskina responded in the press the next day, refuting the allegations point by point. On December 4th, EMST opened two new exhibitions, one of new acquisitions, the second an exhibition of video work from the collection of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Rome accompanied by a Bottoe Bruno project produced by the Fondazione Merz. The day after EMST was without a Director.

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CİMAM is concerned that a senior colleague of international standing has been dealt with in such a way. The Ministry has not acknowledged the important work she has achieved in difficult circumstances, instead turning her into a scapegoat for a difficult situation, whilst once again endangering the institutional continuity of EMST.

CİMAM is also concerned about the lack of transparency in relation to the governance of EMST. A museum needs a clear framework through which the relationship between the government, Board, executive and staff is managed. This should include a transparent and clearly articulated processes for the selection and evaluation of the Director. It is international good practice that the recruitment of a Director of a contemporary art museum of the scale of EMST should include an international open call and the involvement of international arts professionals as part of the selection process.

CİMAM would like to congratulate Katerina Koskina for what she accomplished during the last few years, leading up to the realization of the Greek National Museum of Contemporary Art, 21 years after it was established. CIMAM hopes that the Greek state will allocate an operating budget appropriate to a museum of this scale and international standing. Art museums are a critical space within civil society for important public debate and engagement with the issues of our time.

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CİMAM
International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art,
Affiliated committee of ICOM

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