



Italian Museums Open up to Foreign Directors (Again)

Roberta Cutillo (January 31, 2020)



13 positions are now available in the direction and upper management of public Italian museums and they are once again open to foreigners.

The direction of Italian national museums will once again be open to foreigners. This decision was announced by Dario Franceschini, who resumed his role as the Italian Minister of Culture in September, a position he previously held from 2014 to 2018 before it was taken over by Alberto Bonisoli of the Five Star Movement during the first Conte government, which lasted from June 2018 to September 2019.

During his time in office, Bonisoli implemented measures limiting the autonomy of Italian museums by removing their independent boards of trustees and tightening government oversight into their spending and loans, causing more than a few problems including the battle with France regarding loans for the Louvre's big Leonardo Da Vinci exhibit.



Last Summer, in typical nationalistic spirit, Bonisoli signed a decree ending the experiment which involved hiring seven foreign museum directors, including Eike Schmidt, who revolutionized Florence's Uffizi Gallery. Though he never officially forbade foreign applicants from applying for the direction of Italian museums, the former minister did state that there was "enough talent at home" and a few contracts were abruptly terminated, causing other international directors to fear for their own positions and in some cases begin looking for jobs elsewhere.

It was Franceschini who first allowed non-Italian professionals to take the lead of the country's most renowned museums (something which only happened in 2014) in an effort to open up and modernize these institutions, to help them reach their full potential. Now that he's back, he plans to continue on the same track, reversing Bonisoli's measures.

"Autonomy and quality directors are a winning mix for museums and territories," Tweeted Franceschini, who is also bringing his popular Free Museum Sunday initiative back into full force.

The ministry of culture is currently looking to fill 13 directorial and upper managerial positions at national museums: The Galleria Borghese, Vittoriano complex and Palazzo Venezia (now merged), and Museo Nazionale Romano in Rome; Ostia's Archaeological Park, the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna, the Girolamini Library and Monumental Complex as well as the Palazzo Reale in Naples; Mantova's Ducal Palace; the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche in Urbino; Cagliari's Archaeological Museum; the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo in L'Aquila; Matera's Museo Nazionale; and the Sibari Archaeological Park in Cosenza.

All of which are of course open to international applicants. However, in some cases, it might take some time to repair the damage done by the last shift in policy.

While some such as German art historian Cecilie Hollberg (who has been invited to reprise her position as the Director of Florence's Galleria dell'Accademia, the country's most visited museum after having been fired last Summer) are expected to return to Italy, other valuable experts may have been lost forever. For example, the former director of the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua, Peter Assmann, who is now at the head of the Austrian National Museum in Vienna, will not be resuming his role.

And given the track record and the country's ongoing political instability, it might be a while before foreign museum directors decide to trust Italian institutions again.

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