

## **L'Internationale statement in support of Museo Reina Sofia**

L'Internationale wishes to state its support for the right to show the work *Cajita de fósforos* (2005) by the artists group *Mujeres Públicas* in the context of the exhibition *Really Useful Knowledge*. Given a series of complaints issued by various groups about this work in the last days, we feel it is important to take a position in relation to their attacks. To claim that the work *Cajita de fósforos* (Little Box of Matches) and, by extension, the Museo Reina Sofía, incites the burning of churches is to simplify the meaning and context of the work. Like the many other pieces that make up the exhibition *Really Useful Knowledge*, *Cajita de fósforos* alludes to the transformative and emancipatory power of something small and modest (such as a box of matches) when understood within a network of subtle historical references.

L'Internationale believes that a democratic society should expect and require that its public museums are not merely vehicles for the legitimisation and reproduction of established discourses and views of past and present power. The fact is that the right to be present and to represent has to be argued for in the art field and its institutions, despite the modern assumption of aesthetic autonomy. That is why contemporary institutions undertake the unavoidable mission of being open to serious, disruptive arguments that refute the existing symbolic order. This is an imperative to which we commit ourselves, even if it means shaking our very foundations and exposing our contradictions.

The public museum is neither a place for staging harmony in a world that is fraught with conflicts, nor a site for disrespectfully shocking citizens for the sake of avant-garde radicalism. We believe the museum should be a space where questions are posed to visitors that are equally subjects with a critical capacity, open to proposals in the public domain. The best museums should be places where knowledge replaces passive admiration, where judgement displaces prejudice and where agency takes the place of impotence. As a result, society as a whole should vindicate and defend the museum as an essential place where democratic societies not only debate the content of expression – for that purpose there are also other suitable forums – but also the conditions that make this expression possible at all.

The work of the Argentinian collective *Mujeres públicas*, which corresponds to a political struggle at a specific time and in a specific place, forms part of an in-depth exercise of reflection, through learning and collective practice, on the will and capacity of societies to go beyond the structures that confine them.

At stake in this attack on the museum and its exhibition are therefore not only the traditional right of freedom of artistic expression and the exceptional nature of the museum as a space where anything is possible. There is also a threat to the more crucial capacity of maintaining a society that can confront and critically question problematic conditions in its immediate and widest environment through its own public institutions.

**l'internationale**