

EMPLOYEES OF THE MMFA SPEAK OUT

Since early July, many people have used the media, written letters and signed petitions to air their strong opinions on the crisis rocking the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA). And they have done so without knowing what really transpired inside the Museum's walls. Confronted with the torrent of commentary and public taking of positions, we have stayed out of it and tried to focus on our work. But enough is enough now. We who have signed this letter are employees of the MMFA; we are the ones aware of what truly happened, having experienced the troubling events first-hand. We believe the time has come to make our voices heard in order to put a stop to the distorted media coverage that is only harming our institution.

Our work environment had been deteriorating over a number of years, resulting in many colleagues leaving and others resigning themselves to silence. The time has come for us to show courage and speak out.

We recognize Nathalie Bondil's vision and her success in further raising the MMFA's profile. But under her directorship, employees' voices were not heard. Professionals' ideas were largely rejected or reformulated by a director general more concerned with her personal reputation than that of the Museum. Worse still, the success of projects developed by employees were rarely credited to them. Instead, credit went to the director general and her close allies.

Harassment and intimidation were daily occurrences, often taking place before witnesses, especially during exhibition installations. Such behaviours were tolerated and even supported by the former director general. Grievances were also blocked, and colleagues were repeatedly frozen out. No team had any professional autonomy in making decisions, and all were systematically forced to wait for the former director general to be available to approve every last detail. This resulted in avoidable overtime, cost overruns and added stress. Projects were carried out—and constantly started over—one after the other, at a frenetic pace without any true consultative planning or post-mortem; the former director general's micromanagement crippled employee workflow. The daily reality was one of non-stop time pressure. Being at work in the evenings and weekends was seen as a sign of commitment.

Given that she was responsible for this chaos, we are deeply offended that the former director general has publicly described herself as the victim of "a lynching." In 2020, this shows a shocking disconnect with the times and the Museum's humanist values she supposedly espouses.

How dare she make such an egregious statement after everything she has done and allowed to happen?

Today, we also address he who is behind the petitions making the rounds among the Museum's Members. This man, a former director of one of the Museum's divisions, is hell-bent on publicly discrediting the Board whose actions have been purely in the Museum's best interests and, more importantly, have served to restore a healthy workplace for employees—something we have been denied for many years. We are dumbfounded by the position of this former director, whose motives are highly questionable. It should be noted that he had been appointed by the former director general despite not being qualified for the position, and that he is among those responsible for the unhealthy climate that prevailed inside the Museum.

As a member of senior management at the time, this “chief petitioner,” along with the former director general, heard the full report presented by the Union’s Executive Committee on the toxic workplace and the deterioration of working conditions, upon the invitation of the Board of Trustees. How can he now accuse the Board of failing to respect rules of governance? It’s a disgrace.

The MMFA should never have been thrown into this media circus. We respectfully ask all those who added their names to the petition to consider the values promoted by the Museum. The Minister of Culture and Communications of Quebec has called for an investigation into the Museum’s governance, which we welcome. We invite her to talk to us for clarification.

Meanwhile, we are continuing our work. Nothing can detract us from our commitment to the Museum and its long history. The last three weeks have seen fresh impetus at the Museum, a new spirit of collaboration and respect for all views among colleagues in a climate free from harassment and intimidation thanks to the good governance of the Board of Trustees who made a responsible and considered decision. For us, the page has turned. We look forward to the future and optimistically await the person who will next head our fine Museum. The MMFA is all of us—employees, Members, donors, lenders, volunteers . . .

Signed by:

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Sylvain Turcotte
Nathalie Vanier
Cristian Vasile
Laura Vigo
Kate Walker

And the following ex-employees :

Danièle Archambault
Charles Blouin
Anne-Marie Chevrier
Alain Drouin
Marie-Eve Beaupré
Magdalena Berthet
Diane Charbonneau
Marie Faugnon
Jeanne Frégault
Diane Lambert
Geneviève Goyer-Ouimet
Christine Guest
Francine Lavoie
Marcelle Marcotte
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