

A statement by the International Foundation Manifesta

To withdraw would mean to ignore contemporary voices and emerging generations of Russia

Released 30 August 2013

In 2012 the Manifesta Foundation selected the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russian Federation as host of Manifesta 10. Since announcing the State Hermitage Museum as host institution, the Russian parliament has adopted a federal law banning the 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships' accessible by minors. The legislation has received extensive exposure around the world and subsequently there have been calls to boycott, cancel or relocate international cultural and social events planned within Russia.

In response to those who have expressed deep concerns regarding the situation of LGBT people in Russia and any violations of their human rights, we share your concerns. What is clear is that progressive, contemporary culture in Russia is contested and, as ideas continue to be exchanged across borders, we believe it is vital to play an active role in this dialogue. Manifesta was initiated as a discursive, adaptable artistic entity in response to the new social, cultural and political realities that emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War. Manifesta 10 will investigate these 25 years of changing realities and experiences as they have transformed within this new global world order.

The Manifesta Foundation was founded on principals of engagement, dialogue, debate and education. The nomadic character of Manifesta aims to establish closer dialogue between cultures within the broader, international fields of contemporary art, theory and politics in a changing society and in possibly contested areas. On principle Manifesta cannot and should not only perform in the 'safe haven' of the West or former West. This inevitably involves dialogue with those with whom we may disagree.

Viktor Misiano, Chair of the Manifesta Foundation says:

"Within Russia Manifesta 10 has been welcomed by many individuals who recognise that cancelling or postponing it will be a loss, not only for communities seeking change, but also for developing a progressive contemporary culture as a whole. We are conscious of the political climate and the significant conservative shift taking place in Russia, of which this issue is but one example. It is also helpful to know that the leading LGBT organizations in Russia do not support a boycott of the Olympics or other events. They know engagement is important."

St Petersburg-based LGBT organization Coming Out states:

"We at Coming Out are very grateful for any kind of international support to LGBT citizens in Russia as it is important that people do not feel further isolated in the current climate of repressions, homophobic aggression, and intimidation. We understand the call for a boycott of the Olympics. But we truly believe it is important to keep all channels open and enable all possible communications to challenge human rights violations at every opportunity, whether they are cultural or sporting events, business opportunities or political campaigns."

manifesta

The European
Biennial of
Contemporary
Art

Sjeng Scheijen, Artistic Director of the Russian/Dutch bi-lateral year, says;

“The cultural world in Russia is one of the places where an alternative, independent intellectual life takes place. Manifesta 10 is supported in Russia by a spirited forefront of independent, critical, internationally oriented artists and intellectuals. They have a great need for a platform for meeting and exchange, and seek international models for their own cultural events. They eagerly look forward to the arrival of Manifesta.”

Manifesta Founder and Director, Hedwig Fijen said today;

“Manifesta is an advocate of having mutual respect for any person regardless of their sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, disability, age or sexual orientation. Manifesta Foundation endorses the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention for Human Rights, Council of Europe Recommendations and other decrees by international organizations, of which Russia is a member. Manifesta aims to engage in a genuine dialogue with the larger artistic and general communities in St Petersburg and the Russian federation. To withdraw would mean to ignore the voices of our contemporaries and emerging generations in Russia. In developing this project in Russia we have listened to representatives of the Russian LGBT communities and we have overwhelmingly heard that Manifesta’s presence is both welcomed and necessary. We do not believe isolating Russia is the right direction to take, especially as it deprives younger people of access to a broader scope of voices and points of view.”

Manifesta Foundation

Herengracht 474

1017 CA Amsterdam

The Netherlands

Tel: +31 20 672 14 35

Fax: +31 20 470 00 73

E-mail: secretariat (at) manifesta.org