

From the Palace to the Portal: Institutional Activism and the Politics of Marginalised Identities in the FUTURA Cycle

Mario Scorzelli¹ and Ángeles Ascúa²

¹Scholar of Latin American literature and visual culture

Faculty - Universidad Nacional de las Artes and at the
Universidad Nacional de Rafaela (UNRaf)

²Faculty- CIT Rafaela, part of the Consejo Nacional de
Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas and the Universidad
Nacional de Rafaela, Argentina

Abstract

This article examines the transformation of institutional communication at Argentina's Palacio Nacional de las Artes during the COVID-19 pandemic as a form of institutional activism centred on marginalised identities. Drawing on a qualitative case study of the FUTURA digital cycle, the analysis considers social media posts, live-streamed events and official documents in order to explore how the museum reconfigured its regimes of visibility, mediation and legitimacy. The findings suggest that digital communication operated as a site of symbolic dispute in which historically marginalised bodies and subjectivities gained renewed conditions of appearance within a national cultural institution. Rather than functioning merely as an outreach strategy, the FUTURA cycle enabled the museum to experiment with non-conventional forms of cultural activism, reshaping its modes of public address and renegotiating the boundaries between institutional authority and dissident cultural production.

Keywords: *Marginalised identities; Institutional activism; Cultural policy; Regimes of visibility; Digital mediation; Museums during COVID-19*

1. Introduction: Crisis, Institutions and Marginalised Identities

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted a critical event that forced cultural institutions worldwide to reorganise their forms of public presence. For museums and art spaces, prolonged closures did not merely represent an operational interruption but a profound transformation in the conditions of enunciation through which they address audiences and regulate cultural visibility. As physical access to exhibition spaces was suspended, institutional communication ceased to function as a secondary tool of dissemination and became instead the primary arena in which legitimacy, authority and public relevance were negotiated. In this sense, the pandemic can be understood not only as a health crisis but as a reconfiguration of regimes of visibility: a disruption that displaced the spatial authority of the museum and exposed the fragility of its symbolic order.

Museums have long been analysed as dispositifs that organise bodies, objects and narratives within specific regimes of knowledge and power. Drawing on Michel Foucault's (2002) conceptualisation of the dispositif and Tony Bennett's (1995) analysis of the museum as an instrument of civic pedagogy, the institution may be understood as a technology that produces publics while regulating what can be seen, said and recognised. The museum does not simply exhibit artefacts; it structures the conditions under which subjects appear within the public sphere. Its authority rests not only on collections or heritage but on its capacity to stabilise hierarchies of cultural value and to legitimise certain bodies, memories and aesthetics over others.

Within this framework, the politics of marginalised identities becomes inseparable from institutional communication. Feminist, queer and transfeminist critiques have demonstrated that representation is embedded in normative regimes that define which bodies are intelligible and which remain excluded or misrecognised (Giunta, 2021; Wayar, 2018). These critiques are particularly relevant in Latin American contexts, where national cultural institutions have historically reproduced Eurocentric, masculinised and exclusionary narratives while simultaneously presenting themselves as custodians of collective memory. The question is therefore not simply one of inclusion, but of transforming the conditions under which certain bodies are authorised to appear as part of the national cultural imaginary.

This article focuses on the Palacio Nacional de las Artes (PNA), historically known as the Palais de Glace, a state-run contemporary art institution in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Founded in the early twentieth century and long associated with national art competitions and canonical exhibitions, the institution has played a central role in shaping narratives of Argentine artistic heritage. As a public museum operating under the Ministry of Culture, the PNA occupies a strategic position within the country's cultural policy landscape, mediating between state authority, artistic production and public audiences. At the onset of the pandemic, however, the institution faced a condition of double absence: not only were its doors closed due to national lockdown measures, but its historic building had already been undergoing long-term renovations, leaving it without a stable exhibition venue. This material dislocation intensified an ongoing process of institutional redefinition under the directorship of curator Federica Baeza.

The pandemic accelerated this redefinition. As activities migrated to digital platforms, the architectural authority traditionally associated with the museum was displaced onto screens and interfaces. This shift did not simply translate exhibitions into online formats; it rearticulated the relationship between a national cultural institution, dissident artistic practices and digitally mediated publics. The museum became, in effect, an interface: an institutional body expanded through digital mediation and exposed to immediate feedback, contestation and symbolic conflict. Under these conditions, communication emerged as a privileged site for negotiating who could appear under the institution's name and how that appearance would be framed.

Against this backdrop, the FUTURA digital cycle, launched in May 2020, functioned as more than a temporary response to crisis. It can be read as a form of institutional activism that renegotiated the conditions under which marginalised bodies could appear within a national cultural institution. Rather than merely incorporating dissident voices into an unchanged framework, the programme exposed the museum to conflict, discomfort and public dispute, unsettling established hierarchies of legitimacy. By analysing the communicational strategies, performative interventions and digital frictions that shaped the FUTURA cycle, this article argues that institutional vulnerability itself became a political resource—one that redefined the museum's role in relation to marginalised identities and the democratic negotiation of visibility in contemporary Argentina.

2. The Museum as a Regime of Visibility

To understand the significance of the FUTURA cycle, it is necessary to conceptualise the museum not merely as a cultural venue but as a regime of visibility: a dispositif that regulates appearance, recognition and legitimacy. The museum is not

a neutral container of artistic practices but a structured field in which communicational, spatial and symbolic operations determine what can be seen and under what conditions.

Drawing on Michel Foucault's (2002) notion of the *dispositif*, the museum may be understood as a heterogeneous assemblage of discourses, architectural arrangements, administrative procedures and pedagogical narratives that organise bodies within a field of intelligibility. Tony Bennett (1995) similarly describes the modern museum as a civic technology designed to produce self-regulating subjects through exhibitionary practices. In this sense, exhibition is never merely display: it is a political act that stabilises hierarchies of value while naturalising specific forms of cultural authority. The museum's power lies less in censorship than in regulation—less in prohibition than in the structured orchestration of visibility.

Within such a framework, institutional communication cannot be reduced to an instrumental function of dissemination or branding. Communication participates in the production of the institution itself. As scholarship on media and activism has shown, communicational practices shape public meaning and political contestation rather than simply transmitting pre-existing content (Carragee, 2018; Castells, 2012). In digitally mediated environments, institutions do not stand outside networks of discourse but are embedded within them, exposed to feedback, dispute and reinterpretation. Communication thus becomes a terrain of struggle over narrative authority and symbolic legitimacy.

Studies on institutional communication in Latin America further emphasise that state cultural organisations operate within complex negotiations between bureaucratic rationality, political mandates and social movements (Godoy, 2017;

Tarullo, Frezzotti 2020). In such contexts, communication is never neutral: it mediates between official discourse and grassroots demands, between heritage preservation and contemporary claims for recognition. When institutions address historically marginalised communities, the act of communication itself participates in redefining the boundaries of inclusion. The question is not only who speaks, but who is authorised to appear under institutional endorsement.

This issue becomes particularly urgent when examined through transfeminist and dissident critiques of representation. Authors such as Marlene Wayar (2018), Paul B. Preciado (2013) and Andrea Giunta (2021) have demonstrated that visibility is inseparable from normative regimes that render certain bodies intelligible while relegating others to invisibility, hypervisibility or spectacle. From this perspective, inclusion within institutional frameworks does not automatically guarantee emancipation; it may reproduce asymmetries if the underlying conditions of appearance remain unchanged. The politics of representation therefore requires interrogating the institutional apparatus that confers legitimacy in the first place.

When the museum is approached as a regime of visibility, its architectural space appears as only one component of a broader regulatory system. Exhibition design, curatorial discourse, educational programming and communication strategies collectively produce the institution's public body. The building stabilises authority through spatial separation – between artwork and viewer, expert and audience, centre and margin. Yet these separations are not immutable. They are historically contingent arrangements that can be rearticulated, especially under conditions of crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the spatial foundation of the museum by suspending physical co-presence. As institutions migrated to digital platforms, the architectural dispositif was partially displaced by platform-based logics structured by algorithmic visibility, immediacy and interactivity. This shift did not simply dematerialise the museum; it transformed the conditions under which institutional authority is performed. In social media environments, visibility is no longer exclusively curated by experts but co-produced through comments, shares and affective reactions. The institutional voice becomes entangled with user-generated responses, creating zones of friction that exceed the controlled temporality of the exhibition space.

From a technopolitical perspective, platforms operate as infrastructures that distribute attention unevenly while amplifying conflict and affect (Castells, 2012). For cultural institutions, inhabiting these environments entails negotiating between state legitimacy and networked publics. The museum's communicational body becomes porous, subject to reinterpretation and contestation. The authority traditionally anchored in walls and collections must now be enacted through interfaces and metrics, where recognition is shaped by algorithms and digital circulation.

This transformation intensifies pre-existing disputes over representation. If the museum regulates appearance through spatial and curatorial dispositifs, digital platforms introduce additional layers of mediation that can both expand and constrain visibility. Marginalised identities may gain unprecedented access to institutional channels, yet their appearance remains framed by communicational strategies that risk either domestication or tokenisation. The pandemic thus amplified a structural tension: how can a national cultural institution host dissident bodies without neutralising their disruptive force?

Understanding institutional activism requires situating it within this dynamic field. Activism, in communicational terms, is not limited to explicit political messaging; it involves interventions that challenge dominant frames and redistribute visibility (Carragee, 2018). When such interventions occur within state institutions, they generate a paradoxical configuration: the institution becomes both regulator and site of contestation. Rather than opposing the museum from outside, institutional activism operates from within, exposing the instability of its own authority.

In this sense, the museum's communicational practices during the pandemic must be analysed as performative acts that reshape its regime of visibility. The shift to digital platforms did not merely compensate for physical closure; it foregrounded communication as the primary mechanism through which the institution constituted itself. The absence of architectural space made visible what is often naturalised: that the museum's power resides in its capacity to orchestrate appearance.

The theoretical convergence outlined here leads to three central propositions that frame the analysis of the FUTURA cycle. First, the museum regulates the conditions of appearance by organising visibility through discursive and spatial dispositifs. Second, institutional communication is constitutive rather than instrumental; it actively produces legitimacy and public meaning. Third, the pandemic intensified disputes over visibility by relocating institutional authority into digital environments governed by technopolitical logics.

It is at the intersection of these dynamics – regulatory power, communicational production and intensified visibility struggles – that the FUTURA cycle can be examined as a form of institutional activism. Rather than understanding it as a

simple programme of digital outreach, it must be read as an intervention within the museum's regime of visibility itself: a reconfiguration of who could appear, how, and under what institutional endorsement.

3. Double Absence and Institutional Reconfiguration

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Palacio Nacional de las Artes (PNA) was already operating under conditions of spatial instability. Its historic building in Buenos Aires—long associated with national art salons and canonical exhibitions—had been closed for extensive renovations. Unlike other museums that faced sudden lockdowns in March 2020, the PNA had already been displaced from its architectural centre. When nationwide restrictions suspended all cultural activities, this prior condition of material absence was intensified. The institution found itself doubly absent: without a building and without the possibility of physical encounter.

This double absence did not simply interrupt programming. It destabilised the spatial foundation upon which the museum's authority traditionally rests. The architectural body of the museum functions as a guarantor of legitimacy: it frames artworks, disciplines circulation and separates institutional space from the contingencies of everyday life. Without walls, galleries or ceremonial entrances, the symbolic coherence of the institution becomes more precarious. The absence of a physical site exposed the extent to which the museum's power is anchored in spatial arrangement.

Under these circumstances, communication ceased to be ancillary and became constitutive. Social media channels, streaming platforms and digital announcements were no longer promotional tools but the primary site through which the institution performed its existence. The museum's body

was displaced onto screens and interfaces. Its authority had to be enacted discursively, through posts, captions, live broadcasts and visual identities that substituted for architectural presence.

This shift foregrounded a fundamental question: if the institution no longer occupied a stable physical space, where did its body reside? The notion of the “institutional body” becomes particularly productive here. The museum is not only a building but a symbolic configuration that organises recognition. Its body is composed of collections, staff, narratives and communicational gestures that collectively produce institutional identity. When the architectural component is withdrawn, the remaining elements – especially communication – must sustain that identity.

The appointment of curator Federica Baeza as director formed part of this process of redefinition. Her curatorial trajectory, associated with gender perspectives and dissident artistic practices, signalled an intention to rearticulate the institution’s symbolic framework. Rather than merely awaiting the reopening of the renovated building, the administration pursued an active strategy of repositioning. The crisis thus became an opportunity for institutional reconfiguration, not simply a period of suspension.

However, this reconfiguration unfolded within structural tensions. As a state-run institution, the PNA operates within bureaucratic frameworks that stabilise certain narratives of national culture. At the same time, contemporary cultural debates in Argentina have been shaped by feminist and transfeminist movements that challenge exclusionary traditions within art history and museum practice. The institution therefore stood at the intersection of state authority and dissident demands for recognition. The double absence

intensified this intersection: without the stabilising effect of physical space, the symbolic negotiation of legitimacy became more visible and more vulnerable.

The displacement to digital environments further transformed the dynamics of authority. On platforms governed by immediacy and public commentary, institutional discourse is exposed to immediate feedback and potential controversy. The museum cannot fully control interpretative frames; its communicational acts circulate within broader networks of debate. In this context, every post becomes a performative act that shapes the contours of institutional identity. The absence of architecture amplifies the visibility of discourse.

This amplification redirected attention toward the politics of appearance. If the museum's body was now primarily symbolic, constituted through communication, then the question of who could appear under its endorsement acquired renewed urgency. The absence of walls did not eliminate regulation; rather, it relocated it. Decisions regarding invited artists, thematic focuses and visual representation became decisive gestures in defining the institution's rearticulated body.

The double absence thus produced a paradox. On one hand, the lack of a physical venue threatened institutional authority by dissolving the spatial markers that traditionally confer prestige. On the other hand, it opened a space of experimentation in which the museum could renegotiate its representational boundaries. Freed, at least temporarily, from architectural constraints and exhibition logistics, the institution operated within a more flexible symbolic field. Yet this flexibility also heightened exposure: symbolic redefinition unfolded in real time, under public scrutiny.

In this context, institutional reconfiguration cannot be understood as a purely administrative adjustment. It involved a reimagining of the museum's corporeality. If the building historically stabilised a normative image of national culture, the shift to digital communication foregrounded the possibility of assembling a different institutional body – one composed not only of canonical artworks but of voices and subjectivities historically marginalised within the museum's narrative.

The crisis, therefore, should not be interpreted solely as an external disruption. It functioned as a catalyst that revealed the museum's dependence on spatial authority while simultaneously forcing a relocation of its regulatory power to the symbolic plane. Physical absence generated communicational centrality; communicational centrality intensified disputes over visibility; and these disputes, in turn, redefined the contours of institutional identity.

It is within this configuration of double absence and symbolic intensification that the FUTURA cycle emerged. The programme did not simply fill an empty calendar during lockdown. It operated within a museum whose body had become discursive, whose authority had to be performed online, and whose legitimacy was increasingly entangled with the politics of marginalised identities. The absence of space thus became the condition for a renewed struggle over appearance – over which bodies could inhabit the institutional frame and under what terms.

4. FUTURA as Institutional Activism

Launched in May 2020, the FUTURA cycle was presented as a digital programme designed to sustain artistic activity during lockdown. Yet to read it merely as a strategy of continuity would obscure its deeper implications. Within the context of

double absence and communicational centrality, FUTURA functioned as an intervention in the museum's regime of visibility. Rather than simply filling a void left by physical closure, the cycle rearticulated the institutional body by staging forms of appearance historically marginalised within national cultural frameworks.

The programme brought together a heterogeneous group of artists, performers and cultural producers associated with queer, transfeminist and experimental practices in Argentina. Figures such as Nancy Rojas and the collective El Pelele signalled the cycle's alignment with dissident aesthetics and performative risk. However, it is through three specific cases—Diego de Aduriz, Naty Menstrual and Mabel—that the dynamics of institutional activism become particularly legible. Each instance did not simply add content to the museum's digital feed; it produced friction within the institutional frame, testing the limits of endorsement and visibility.

Diego de Aduriz: Conflict and the Exposure of the Institutional Frame

The participation of Diego de Aduriz generated immediate controversy in the comment sections of the museum's social media channels. Rather than focusing on the aesthetic qualities of the performance, a significant portion of audience responses questioned its legitimacy, tone or perceived political positioning. The digital interface transformed reception into visible dispute: disagreement was not contained within private interpretation but inscribed directly beneath the institutional post.

From an analytical perspective, what matters is not the specific content of each comment but the way conflict became publicly attached to the institution. By hosting the performance, the

museum effectively assumed responsibility for the symbolic consequences of its visibility. The comment thread functioned as a site where the boundaries of institutional legitimacy were contested in real time. Supportive messages coexisted with hostility, irony and rejection, producing an unstable field of recognition.

In traditional exhibition settings, institutional authority absorbs controversy within spatial and temporal distance. Digital platforms, by contrast, collapse that distance. The museum's endorsement and public reaction appear simultaneously on the same screen. In this configuration, FUTURA did not merely represent dissident practice; it exposed the institution to the risks of that representation. Institutional activism here operates through deliberate vulnerability: by allowing conflict to remain visible rather than neutralising it, the museum destabilised the expectation of consensual cultural authority.

The case of de Aduriz thus reveals a shift in the museum's regulatory function. Instead of filtering dissent to maintain symbolic coherence, the institution permitted the coexistence of friction and endorsement. Visibility became agonistic rather than harmonious. In doing so, the museum redefined its authority not as the guarantor of aesthetic consensus but as a platform capable of sustaining dispute.

Naty Menstrual: Scatology, Dissident Corporeality and the Limits of Respectability

If the de Aduriz case foregrounded conflict, the participation of Naty Menstrual intensified the question of corporeal legitimacy. Known for a poetics that embraces excess, profanity and bodily materiality, Menstrual's intervention confronted the museum with forms of expression traditionally excluded from respectable cultural space. References to excrement,

sexual dissidence and abject humour unsettled the decorum historically associated with national institutions.

The analytical significance lies not in cataloguing provocative elements but in understanding how their institutional framing altered their meaning. When such language and imagery circulate in independent or underground spaces, they function as countercultural gestures. When they appear under the emblem of a state-run museum, they acquire a different resonance. The museum's endorsement disrupts the implicit boundary between high culture and abject corporeality.

This disruption does not eliminate asymmetry. The institution still controls the frame of presentation. However, by legitimising a dissident body whose aesthetics challenge norms of propriety, the museum intervened in the distribution of cultural respectability. The performance did not simply add diversity to programming; it strained the symbolic alignment between national culture and sanitized representation.

Digital mediation amplified this strain. On social media platforms, the performance circulated beyond specialised art audiences, encountering viewers who may not share the interpretative frameworks of queer or transfeminist communities. The institutional post thus operated as a relay between subcultural aesthetics and broader publics. The discomfort expressed in certain reactions underscores the political dimension of this circulation: what is at stake is not taste but the recognisability of dissident corporeality within the national cultural body.

In this case, institutional activism manifests as a recalibration of respectability. By hosting Menstrual's poetics without dilution, the museum reconfigured the threshold of what can appear as legitimate culture. The abject body did not remain outside; it entered the institutional frame, compelling a renegotiation of visibility's normative limits.

Mabel: Fall, Transformation and the Fragility of Institutional Identity

The intervention by Mabel, centred on themes of fall and transformation, offers a different modality of institutional rearticulation. Rather than provoking explicit controversy, the performance enacted vulnerability at the level of metaphor and gesture. The imagery of falling—whether literal or symbolic—resonated with the museum's own condition of instability during renovation and lockdown.

Here, the analytical emphasis shifts from conflict to identification. The performance mirrored the institution's precarious state, staging fragility as a generative condition rather than a failure. In doing so, it suggested that transformation requires the suspension of stable ground. For a museum deprived of its building and displaced into digital space, such imagery acquired reflexive force.

Institutional activism in this instance does not operate through overt provocation but through symbolic alignment. By endorsing a performance that thematises collapse and reconstitution, the museum implicitly acknowledged its own transitional status. Authority was not presented as intact and unshaken; it was articulated as undergoing change. The fall becomes a metaphor for institutional reconfiguration.

This alignment complicates conventional understandings of state institutions as rigid or immobile. The museum appears instead as a body capable of transformation, albeit within constraints. The performance did not dissolve institutional hierarchy, but it contributed to a narrative in which instability becomes a shared condition rather than a hidden weakness. Visibility, in this sense, encompasses not only marginalised bodies but also institutional vulnerability.

Beyond Programming: Activism as Reconfiguration of Appearance

Across these cases, a pattern emerges. FUTURA did not simply increase representation; it altered the conditions under which representation occurred. Conflict was not erased but displayed. Abject corporeality was not marginalised but institutionally framed. Fragility was not concealed but thematised.

Nancy Rojas and El Pelele, among others in the cycle, reinforced this orientation toward performative experimentation and dissident aesthetics. Collectively, the programme assembled an institutional body that diverged from canonical images of national culture. The emphasis on performance, digital immediacy and embodied discourse foregrounded subjectivities often excluded from museum narratives.

To describe FUTURA as institutional activism, therefore, is not to attribute explicit political campaigning to the museum. Rather, it is to recognise that the programme intervened in the distribution of visibility within a state framework. Activism here operates at the level of institutional form: through communicational decisions that redistribute recognition, expose authority to dispute and recalibrate thresholds of legitimacy.

Crucially, this activism unfolded within digital platforms whose technopolitical logics intensified exposure. Comments, shares and algorithmic circulation ensured that institutional gestures could not remain insulated. The museum's endorsement became inseparable from public reaction. This entanglement destabilised the asymmetry between institution and audience, even if it did not eliminate it.

In this sense, FUTURA exemplifies a shift from representational inclusion to structural renegotiation. The programme did not merely place marginalised bodies inside an unchanged museum; it modified the museum's own mode of appearance. The institutional body became discursive, contested and porous. Authority was performed through vulnerability, and legitimacy emerged through engagement with friction rather than its avoidance.

The significance of FUTURA lies precisely in this recalibration. Within the context of double absence and intensified digital mediation, the cycle functioned as a laboratory for reimagining the museum's regime of visibility. By hosting performances that generated conflict, embodied dissidence and staged transformation, the institution redefined the parameters of who could appear – and how – under its name.

Institutional activism, in this configuration, is neither external protest nor rhetorical declaration. It is a practice of reconfiguring the apparatus of visibility from within. FUTURA did not dismantle the museum as a *dispositif*, but it displaced its coordinates, demonstrating that even a national cultural institution can renegotiate the conditions of appearance when confronted with crisis and symbolic instability.

5. Digital Friction and the Politics of Discomfort

The conflicts generated by the FUTURA cycle cannot be understood as secondary reactions to artistic content. They must be analysed as constitutive elements of the event itself. Instagram, the primary platform through which the programme circulated, is not a neutral channel of dissemination but a technopolitical environment structured by visibility metrics, affective immediacy and algorithmic amplification. Within such an environment, institutional communication becomes inseparable from public response.

Unlike the spatial separation that characterises the traditional museum—where disagreement unfolds privately or through delayed criticism—Instagram collapses institutional voice and audience reaction into a single interface. Posts, captions, images and comment threads coexist in real time. The museum's endorsement of dissident performances thus became inseparable from the visible reactions they provoked. Hostile comments, moralising objections and ironic dismissals did not occur outside the institutional frame; they appeared directly beneath it.

This digital proximity transforms friction into spectacle. The comment section functions as a site where competing regimes of visibility collide. For some users, the appearance of transfeminist or queer performances under the emblem of a national museum represented an expansion of cultural recognition. For others, it signified an unacceptable deviation from established norms of artistic value and public decorum. The hostility expressed in certain threads reveals not merely aesthetic disagreement but a defence of a classical regime of visibility—one grounded in assumptions about neutrality, heritage and the separation between art and explicit political discourse.

From this perspective, conservative reactions can be interpreted as attempts to restore a familiar symbolic order. When users question the legitimacy of dissident bodies within a state institution, they implicitly invoke an image of the museum as a guardian of stable tradition. The discomfort provoked by FUTURA thus exposes the underlying expectations that structure institutional authority. The digital platform renders these expectations visible by allowing them to be articulated spontaneously and publicly.

Importantly, the museum's decision not to systematically suppress or neutralise critical comments altered the dynamics of authority. By permitting the coexistence of endorsement and hostility within the same digital space, the institution allowed friction to remain perceptible. This does not imply the absence of moderation or responsibility; rather, it signals a willingness to inhabit discomfort as part of institutional practice. The museum did not retreat into silence nor retreat from the dissident programme. Instead, it maintained its position while exposed to contestation.

Digital friction therefore becomes politically productive. It reveals that visibility is never simply granted but constantly negotiated. Marginalised identities do not enter institutional space without resistance; their appearance destabilises pre-existing hierarchies. The hostility visible in comment threads demonstrates that the museum's rearticulation of its symbolic body encountered active opposition. Yet this opposition confirms the stakes of the intervention: if visibility were inconsequential, it would not provoke such reaction.

At the same time, the technopolitical structure of Instagram intensifies polarisation. Algorithms privilege engagement, and conflict often generates heightened interaction. The platform thus amplifies affective responses, potentially magnifying hostility beyond its proportional scale. Institutional activism within such environments entails navigating a paradox: digital circulation expands reach while simultaneously exposing the institution to amplified backlash. The politics of discomfort are inseparable from the logics of platform capitalism.

This dynamic connects directly to the question of marginalised identities. Transfeminist and queer bodies have historically been subjected either to invisibility or to sensationalised hypervisibility. Within FUTURA, their appearance was

institutionally framed yet digitally contested. The comment sections illustrate how recognition is never secure; it remains vulnerable to delegitimising discourse that seeks to confine dissident subjectivities to peripheral spaces. The defence of a “neutral” museum often masks a desire to preserve exclusionary norms.

Thus, digital friction should not be treated as noise surrounding the programme. It is an analytical lens through which the reconfiguration of institutional authority becomes legible. Instagram functioned as a battleground where competing understandings of culture, nation and legitimacy were articulated. The discomfort produced by FUTURA was not an accidental by-product but evidence of a shifting regime of visibility.

In this sense, the politics of discomfort extend beyond individual performances. They signal a broader transformation in how national cultural institutions operate within networked publics. When the museum relocates its authority into digital space, it relinquishes some degree of control over interpretation. What emerges is a more porous, contested and affectively charged institutional presence. The appearance of marginalised bodies within this space does not stabilise inclusion; it initiates an ongoing negotiation over the boundaries of legitimacy.

Digital friction, therefore, marks the threshold at which institutional activism becomes visible as struggle. It is within this contested interface—where endorsement and rejection coexist—that the politics of appearance are most sharply defined.

6. Conclusion: Beyond Inclusion

The FUTURA cycle cannot be adequately described through the vocabulary of inclusion. To suggest that the Palacio Nacional de las Artes simply “included” marginalised identities would imply the extension of an unchanged institutional framework to previously excluded subjects. Such a formulation leaves intact the regulatory apparatus that determines who may appear and under what conditions. The case analysed here demonstrates something more unstable and politically consequential.

Rather than incorporating dissident bodies into a stable structure, the museum produced conflictive conditions of appearance. Through its digital programme, it reconfigured its regime of visibility at a moment when its architectural authority was suspended and its communicational presence had become primary. In doing so, the institution did not merely diversify its programming; it exposed its own normative boundaries to public dispute.

The analysis of the FUTURA cycle has shown that this reconfiguration operated on multiple levels. First, the museum displaced its authority into digital platforms, where endorsement and reaction coexist in the same interface. Visibility was no longer orchestrated solely through curatorial mediation but entangled with comments, algorithmic circulation and affective polarisation. Second, the programme hosted performances that strained conventional alignments between national culture and aesthetic respectability, thereby unsettling assumptions about what can legitimately appear under the emblem of a state institution. Third, the museum did not retreat from the friction generated by these appearances. By sustaining the programme despite hostility and discomfort, it accepted the possibility of symbolic destabilisation.

This acceptance entailed risk. Institutional legitimacy – particularly within national cultural frameworks – depends on perceptions of authority, continuity and symbolic coherence. By foregrounding dissident corporealities and allowing digital conflict to remain visible, the museum exposed itself to accusations of excess, politicisation or deviation from tradition. The controversy surrounding certain interventions did not occur outside the institution; it unfolded directly within its communicational space. In this sense, institutional activism involved a willingness to confront the potential erosion of consensual authority.

To characterise this process as activism is not to conflate it with external protest or partisan messaging. Rather, activism here refers to a transformation in institutional form: a recalibration of the apparatus that regulates appearance. The museum did not dismantle its regulatory function; it rearticulated it. By shifting the thresholds of legitimacy and staging its authority within contested digital environments, it destabilised the normative image of the institutional body as neutral, coherent and uncontested.

The concept of the institutional body has been central throughout this analysis. Traditionally anchored in architecture and canon, that body appeared stable and self-evident. Under conditions of double absence – renovation and lockdown – it became discursive and exposed. The FUTURA cycle assembled a different institutional corporeality, one composed of performances that foregrounded vulnerability, dissidence and transformation. This assemblage did not resolve tensions between state authority and marginalised identities; it rendered those tensions visible.

Such visibility is not inherently emancipatory. Digital platforms amplify hostility as readily as recognition. Yet the

willingness to inhabit discomfort marks a departure from models of institutional neutrality that often mask exclusionary norms. By permitting conflict to emerge within its own communicational frame, the museum acknowledged that the politics of culture cannot be insulated from the politics of recognition.

The broader implication of this case extends beyond a single programme or national context. As cultural institutions continue to operate within hybrid physical-digital environments, their authority will increasingly depend on how they negotiate contested visibility. The FUTURA cycle suggests that institutional vulnerability—understood as the exposure of authority to friction and potential loss of legitimacy—can function as a democratic practice. It signals a shift from protecting symbolic coherence to engaging with the instability inherent in plural publics.

Beyond inclusion, then, lies a more demanding task: the reconfiguration of the conditions under which bodies appear within institutional space. In embracing that task amid crisis, the museum did not simply adapt to circumstance. It enacted a form of institutional activism that unsettled its own normative boundaries and redefined what it means for a national cultural institution to be publicly accountable.

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Mario Scorzelli

Mario Scorzelli is a scholar of Latin American literature and visual culture. He holds degrees in Curatorship in Art from the Universidad Nacional de las Artes (UNA) and in Image and Sound Design from the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA), and a Master's degree in Cultural Studies from the Universidad Nacional de Rosario (UNR). He is a PhD candidate in Territorial Studies at the Universidad Nacional de Quilmes (UNQ). He teaches at the Universidad Nacional de las Artes and at the Universidad Nacional de Rafaela (UNRaf). His research focuses on speculative fiction, fantasy, modernity, and the intersection between aesthetics, technology, and ideology in Latin American cultural production.

Ángeles Ascúa

Ángeles Ascúa works at the CIT Rafaela, part of the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas and the Universidad Nacional de Rafaela, Argentina. She holds a BA in Fine Arts from the Universidad Nacional de Rosario and an MA in Visual Arts Curatorship from the Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero. She is currently a PhD candidate in Arts at the Universidad Nacional de las Artes with a doctoral fellowship from CIT Rafaela (UNRaf/CONICET). She participated in the Artists Program at the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella and studied at the Freie Universität Berlin through a DAAD scholarship.