



## Why we need artists to carve tomorrow's Europe

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As we approach the European elections and the political discourse increases in toxicity, the time has come to restore the true meaning of the European Union to avoid it becoming once again the scapegoat of countries' inability to face the transformations of the 21st century.

Europe is a place of extraordinary cultural and artistic richness and vibrancy, as well as immeasurable cultural heritage and linguistic and cultural diversity. For centuries, artists, merchants, academics and the clergy exchanged and collaborated beyond the constantly changing borders of nation states, creating a cultural European space. As the famous

Italian opera and theatre director Giorgio Strehler stated in 1979, "Europe is a certain idea of man- before it was a system of governance."

Nonetheless, surprisingly, culture has been absent from the dominant political discourse.

We know that many of the challenges we face today - including man-made environmental changes, social tensions both within our local communities and right up to the level of international relations, our inability to adapt our political systems in an ethical and proactive manner to the increasingly rapid changes brought about by the international digital revolution - can only be confronted constructively if we place culture at the centre.

Like in the Renaissance, we need to empower citizens to become actors of their lives, to recreate a sense of agency, with culture and the arts driving creativity and acting as a catalyst for change.

It has been demonstrated that culture and cultural practice have a positive correlation with democracy, allowing for a shift in perspective, active engagement and empowerment.

We know that culture and the arts enhance community cohesion, promote inclusive societies and ensure intercultural exchange. They allow us to see difference as an asset and to benefit from its positive potential. They promote constructive criticism and open reflection.

Cultural learning and education, both in a formal and informal manner, allow us to understand about our histories and create our present and future. For as Umberto Eco in Foucault's Pendulum rightly points out "what we become depends on what our fathers teach us at odd moments, when they aren't trying to teach us. We are formed by little scraps of wisdom."

Artistic practice and engagement are associated with higher levels of wellbeing, less anxiety in changing environments, openness and a positive self-image, leading to higher levels of life satisfaction.

Culture shapes how we interact, communicate, believe and dream about our present and our future. And, perhaps most importantly, arts are central to who we are well - beyond any perceived "utility".

Culture and the arts touch us on a profoundly emotional level, going beyond rational comprehension. Emotions are important, also in politics and governance - let us not forget that.

But the monopoly on arts and its emotional charge is not only held by open and democratic visions of Europe.

Isolationist and nationalistic movements often abuse the concepts of culture and identity, employing them in a narrow, static sense and making use of their emotional potency.

We need to ensure that these anti-democratic tendencies do not gain ground; we need to overcome them through an enhanced sense of belonging and empowerment, through a diverse and open understanding of why we are in it together with the help of artists.

Europe has always been diverse and is created by migratory movements, both within our space, and through emigration and immigration. Migration is part of our cultural heritage- and should be an integral part of our reflections on an open, inclusive and fluid interpretation of our history. Any politician stating that refugees and migrants should be kept out of Europe, in clear denial of the principles of solidarity and human rights for which the EU stands strong, needs to be taught a lesson in history. Ensuring an open and critical understanding of our pasts helps us to construct our present and future.

For all this, I have put culture at the centre of my priorities. For all of this, I have decided to support this



artists-led campaign

for a united Europe, more democratic, more inclusive, more ecological, more welcoming, more dynamic, more aware of its strengths, its creativity and cultural wealth.

[#LEuropaebella](#) to reignite this love

While we may not be satisfied with the functioning of the European Union today, we are convinced that the populist, extremist and nationalist tides, which may be strengthened in these upcoming elections, are not the right way forward. On the contrary, such developments will create tensions, conflicts, regression and will lead to stagnation rather than re-dynamise Europe.

Together, we can drive a creative, open and democratic Europe. We, therefore, appeal to all European citizens to go and vote, and to defend our fundamental values which make our Europe a place of an open culture: of freedom, peace and democracy.