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Vicenç Villatoro

Ten years: tool and toil

THIS YEAR, 2012, the Ramon Llull Institute is celebrating its tenth anniversary. These ten years invite one, or even oblige one, to take stock. However, in carrying out such an assessment one should not forget that the Institute is, in fact, just a tool in the service of an objective collective that extends much further: in the task of making Catalan culture known beyond its borders, in giving visibility to Catalan culture in the world, and fostering the participation of Catalan culture in the great debates and great events of our times. The Institute must –and will– account for the work it has done to the Catalan and Balearic Island society. Nevertheless, it is also necessary to take stock not only of the tool and its work but also of the evolution of the underlying aims. Besides asking what the Ramon Llull Institute has done in these ten years, one should also ask how international perception of Catalan culture has developed over these years. The answer, in my view, is extraordinarily positive. In this period, the visibility of Catalan culture and its being perceived as a powerful, contemporary and wide-ranging cultural matrix have greatly increased and –although there is still a long way to go– in this regard, it has probably reached its highest point in history, or at least in contemporary history.

This stock-taking, carried out on the occasion of this tenth anniversary, might seem smug or even routine: let's see what the director of the Ramon Llull Institute has to say... This is not the case. And it is not the case precisely because of this awareness that the Institute is a tool and it therefore only has partial responsibility in such an appraisal. I would say that there are three elements –all three of which are essential but in hierarchical order– that must necessarily play a part if the outcome is to be favourable. The first is that Catalan-language cultural

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production, and the Catalan and Balearic Island cultural production in general must be truly worthwhile and must have the power, the thrust, the quality and variety that enable them to be appreciated around the world. In other words –and please forgive the comparison– having a splendid tool for commercialising and marketing would be pointless if the factory did not manufacture a product of quality.

The second element is that the set comprised by Catalan culture and the institutional world should have a very clear and well-internalised idea of the priority of making our culture known outside its borders, of the need to go beyond them, of taking in the fresh air of the world to revitalise the culture, to generate a positive image of the country and for economic reasons as well. Success in the internal market which, moreover, is divided and fragmented, does not guarantee the prominence that is necessary both for our creation and for our culture industry. Keeping this strength at present levels and, still more, ensuring that it increases, requires moving into other markets. This is especially decisive in times like the present period of economic crisis and resizing of the influence of the public sector, when austerity is a basic requirement. In other words, these are times when defining priorities in the apportioning of resources and their frugal, careful administration are more urgent than ever. Yet it would not make sense if, in order to save a little today, we clipped our wings for tomorrow. The third factor that helps in making a culture known beyond its bounds –when the other two prior, essential factors are present– is to have at one's disposal a good tool and good, constant, professional work with a medium- and long-term perspective, which is what the Ramon Llull Institute has striven to achieve.

Hence, to say that the project of making Catalan culture known abroad has enjoyed and is still enjoying the sweet taste of success is not a matter of a propaganda exercise for the Institute. It means recognising two factors that precede the work it does. One is that, in terms of both creativity and variety, Catalan culture is still enjoying a golden age, as Joan Triadú foresaw. This is a great culture that surprises people, especially when it is projected outside the country because it had become great before becoming visible, and because it is a culture that is yet to be discovered. Second, the cultural and institutional world has now become aware we are staking our future, as a culture and as a community, outside the country. In international settings, in open markets, and in the world. In this regard, I believe that it is also worth recognising the work that has been done by the Ramon Llull Institute in the past ten years. And if those of us who are leading it today can still do this work, it is precisely because ten years have gone by and the efforts, intelligence, commitment and volition of many people and institutions have been accumulating over this period. If there were not a powerful culture behind all this, such efforts would not amount to very much. Since we have a potent culture, I believe that we should be grateful for the efforts and commitment that have been building up in the Institute during these ten years through the people who work and who have worked there, who have taken part in its management and in its governing bodies, who have provided institutional support or who, around the world, have had the receptivity necessary for doors to be opened to Catalan culture. This positive outcome amounts, more than anything else, to recognition of all these people ||