

THE MUSES' PENTATHLON

In order to enhance the Olympic Games and give them yet greater nobility, their restorer Pierre de Coubertin wished to add a cultural section which he called "the Muses' Pentathlon", to be judged by juries made up of distinguished international experts in the various artistic disciplines covered by this competition. These were to include a number of IOC members.

It had been decided that the first art competition would take place **in 1908** during the Games of the IVth Olympiad **in London**. Their organisation was entrusted to the *Royal Academy*, but, unfortunately, the deadlines were too short to enable the project to come to fruition.

In Stockholm in 1912, in spite of opposition from Swedish artists and writers, the competitions took place, more under the direction of the IOC than that of the Organising Committee. Pierre de Coubertin, under the pseudonym Hohrod and Eschbach, won the gold medal in the literature event with his "Ode to Sport". In architecture, a special competition held in Paris on the theme "Plans for a new Olympia" was won by two Swiss architects, Messrs. E. Monod and A. Laverrière. There were no winners in the other competitions, as the works entered were not considered of a high enough standard by the Baron de Coubertin and the other members of the juries.

THE ART COMPETITIONS

The only moderate success of the art competitions at the Games **in Antwerp in 1920** can be clearly seen from the results. No gold medals were awarded in painting or architecture, and in the latter discipline, as in music, there was no bronze medal.

The Olympic "performances" in architecture and music did not subsequently improve, as there was no gold medal in either discipline **in Paris in 1924** and no medal at all in the latter. In literature, however, the poet Géo Charles came out the victor with his work "The Olympic Games".

It was not until **1928**, during the Games of the IXth Olympiad **in Amsterdam**, that each competition was divided up into various subsections : architectonic subjects and

urban constructions for architecture ; lyrical and contemplative, dramatic and epic works in literature ; vocal and orchestral compositions, pieces for solo or accompanied instrument and chamber music in musical composition. Painting comprised three sections : paintings, drawings and graphic works. Sculpture was divided into sculpture-reliefs and medals. Amsterdam too produced an incomplete set of medallists, as there was a lack of quality entries in certain disciplines.

In Los Angeles in 1932, the distribution of medals was, for the first time, almost complete. Among the members of the jury was the French writer André Maurois of the Académie Française. This jury gave an "honorable mention" to Avery Brundage, future President of the IOC, for his essay "The Significance of Amateur Sport".

The art competitions of the Games of the **XIth and XIVth Olympiads** did not leave truly lasting impressions, as the quality of the works entered was mediocre and it was not possible to award all the medals.

In view of these poor results, and considering the fact that entries came almost exclusively from professional artists, the IOC decided at its 44th Session in Rome in 1949 to replace these art competitions with exhibitions. This decision provoked lively reactions among the IOC members. Angelo Bolanaki, IOC member in Greece, wrote a report on the subject, suggesting total exclusion of art from the Games failing the reinstatement of art competitions in the programme. Two years later, the 46th IOC Session restored the art competitions to the Games. However, in spite of all, the Organising Committee for the Games of the XVth Olympiad in Helsinki in 1952 was unable to organise these competitions due, once again, to lack of time.

It was thus **in London in 1948** that the last art competitions, such as their founder Pierre de Coubertin had envisaged them, took place. In 1956, following a decision by the IOC, the Olympic Games were accompanied by the first art exhibitions.

Special thanks to Miss Fani Kakridi of Olympic Museum for her research of this subject.