
Making the most of the period of the World Alpine Skiing Championships which took place in Crans-Montana, the Olympic Museum opened on, 4th February 1987, an exhibition which can be viewed until 14th May 1987.

This exhibition, devoted to winter sports, is original in that it presents them at three distinct stages of their development, thus illustrating in a striking fashion the acceleration of history which is the major phenomenon of the latter years of the twentieth century.

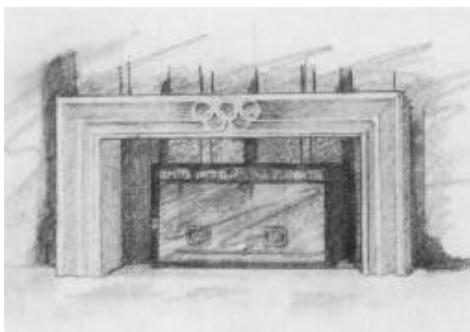
The exhibition's main accent is on the first years of our century, seen through the post cards and colour drawings of the Italian artist, Carlo Pellegrini, who died in Geneva in 1937 and was the winner, at the art competitions of the Olympic Games in Stockholm in 1912, of the gold medal for painting with a triptych, which has unfortunately been lost, depicting winter sports in their infancy. The chief merit of these drawings, with their deliciously unusual style and technique, is the fact that they illustrate, with great precision and elegance, the way in which these various sports associated with snow and ice were really practised.

First of all, we find skiing — the king of winter sports — (the compliment comes from a former ice-hockey goal keeper!), the adepts of which are dressed in baggy trousers known as "knickerbockers". The men wear flat caps, the women long skirts, shawls and thick woollen bonnets. They all wear skis which resemble those of today as a cart resembles a tractor, and use sticks as long as poles.

Then come the graceful skating girls, all wrapped up against the cold, and the pairs who dance, without holding one another, tracing studious arabesques and attempting timid acrobatics.

Next come the bobbys and tobogganists, hurtling down the mountain pathways which they use as tracks, pressing against one another, piled on their unstreamlined contraptions, which often had two handles in place of a steering wheel. No trace of ice-hockey, still unknown in Europe at that time. There are, however, a few images of skaters, armed with sticks resembling those used in field hockey, executing a slalom between obstacles, pushing a sort of puck. As for curling, the drawings devoted to it recall the time when the game — before becoming a genuine competition sport — was above all a pretext for a noisy

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and congenial get-together, followed by a restorative whisky.

To sum up, Pellegrini evokes in a delightful way a time when sports exercises, particularly in the winter, were the exclusive preserve of a limited circle of the privileged and the fanatical.

As he continues his tour of the Olympic Museum, the visitor suddenly comes upon a glass case which brings him forward several decades to 1968, the year in which the Winter Games took place in Grenoble. This case contains all the personal possessions recently donated to the IOC by the three times Olympic alpine skiing champion, Jean-Claude Killy, which are on display to the public for the first time. Alongside the three gold medals, we find the boiled leather cap bearing the emblem of the Val-d'Isère Ski Club, the yellow Muscovy glass goggles (without advertising!), which no Sunday skier nowadays would be seen dead in, the ski-suit which is closer to a jogging suit than to the ultra-clinging plastic affairs used at Crans-Montana, the boots, the right one covered on its

inner side with layers of parafin wax, renewed for each race, to give extra support to a weak ankle, the skis with their still heavy profile and the sticks, one of which has lost its basket. These objects constitute a precious gift from a exemplary athlete and human being, one which helps us to measure the ground covered since Pellegrini's time.

But listen ! From one of the corners of the Museum, we hear the rapturous cries of the commentator and the exclamations of the crowd. The television transports us, without transition, on to the pistes at Crans-Montana, where today's knights of alpine skiing hurtle down the slopes at over a hundred kilometers an hour. Their silhouettes and their equipment — if not their essential sportsmanship — have undergone prodigious changes since Killy's unforgettable achievement.

This threefold comparison brings to light the speed with which all things are gaining sophistication, a result of the acceleration of history which I mentioned just now ; a formidable challenge — in sport as elsewhere — to the spirit, the intelligence, the nerves and the imagination of man. For he must try to adapt without distorting himself, and that means constantly distinguishing that which is permanent from that which is merely transitory, that which essential from that which is incidental. These are formulas which take on their full implications within the context of the Olympic Movement. The child of our century must find a way of combining at all times into a harmonious whole his concern for permanence and his desire for progress, thereby following in the footsteps of one who styled himself a "scout" or pathfinder, Pierre de Coubertin.

A salutary lesson can be learned by letting one's eyes, mind and heart wander, wide open, through the mazes of a Museum which seeks to live up to the name "Olympic".

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