

# **Sports and Art: The function of Art and Olympic Art Competitions**

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After the Olympic Games of 1904 Coubertin planned to re-establish the original beauty of the Games by adding the Arts and Art competitions. The main purpose was to dignify the Games, bring them closer to the classical ideal, and distinguish them from ordinary sporting competitions. Coubertin wanted to create a

symbiosis of sports and art as it used to be in ancient Greece as a manifestation of the comprehensive agonal principle. At the same time Coubertin planned artistic forms for the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic Games in the sense of a Gesamtkunstwerk, he experimented with fireworks, dance and sculpture, distinguished form of victory ceremonies to provide a magnificent setting for the Games. Coubertin, an ardent follower of John Ruskin, the founding father of the British Arts and Craft Movement and Slade Professor of Art Criticism at Oxford, applied the principles of aestheticism of this expert to the Olympic Games.

The first art competitions were to take place in London in 1908, but due to organizational difficulties solely some of Coubertin plans for the aestheticism of the Games could be realized, but the art competition was to start only in Stockholm. Medals could be won at first in five categories: Architecture. Literature, Music. Painting and Graphic Art, and Sculpture. Coubertin entered the Literature competition under his (well known) pseudonym - and won. Eventually Architecture was split into Buildings and Design for Town Planning; Sculptures was split into three categories: Statues, Medals, and Relief; Painting and Graphic Art was diversified into Painting, Drawings and Water Colors; Applied Graphics, and other Graphic Arts. Literature was divided into Lyrics, Epics, and Dramatics; Music into compositions for Songs. Compositions for one Instrument, and Compositions for Orchestra.

The paper discusses the reasons for the rise and eventual fall of the Olympic art competitions which were held for the last time in 1948. It is surprising that Avery Brundage, then president of the IOC, an enthusiastic art collector and connoisseur. whose collections eventually filled several museums, stopped the art competitions as they were difficult to judge (Coubertin himself being an example for the chances to influence a jury), the participants were no amateurs, the winners could considerably profit from the Olympic medals, there was no equivalent in the American sport scene which served as point of reference to Brundage. Art exhibitions without the competition have remained ever since within the Olympic Games context, drawing considerable crowds. Some cities, like Barcelona in 1992, have staged splendid art festivals in conjunction with the Olympics (Olimpiada Cultural). Although some countries like Germany protested the disappearance of the art competitions, the decision to cancel them was upheld. But Coubertin's other ideas of aestheticism with the Olympic Ceremony have been increased ever since and distinguish the Olympic Games successfully from mere super world championships.

The paper discusses several pieces of sport art to demonstrate its potential beauty and aesthetic value. This does not only include the categories of the former Olympic art competitions but also expressive dance. The author points out that in spite of the difficulty to evaluate art in the context of a sporting competition, and the

difficulty to grant just prices the artistic elements have an important **and** rightful place in the Olympic Movement,