

Art and Sport: An Olympic Union

Though many people are surprised to learn that there will be an Olympic Arts Festival associated with the 1988 Olympic Winter Games in Calgary, such a linking of art and sport is hardly new. The juxtaposition of art and the Olympics began in 1906 when Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of modern Olympic Games, organized a conference in Paris to study the extent to which art and literature could be incorporated into the celebration. Baron de Coubertin felt strongly that the Olympic ideal was a philosophy to celebrate the complete individual, not just athletic ability.

Out of the conference came a proposal to create five competitions — architecture, sculpting, painting, music and literature — with prizes to be awarded in each category for new works of art directly inspired by sport.

From their beginning at the 1912 Stockholm Games, the arts competitions suffered not only from their own problems but also in comparison to the athletic competition. There were difficulties in mustering large orchestras to play new works, troubles with transporting exhibits, and problems even with getting first-class competitors — prospective artists who already enjoyed prominence in their fields preferred to judge rather than to be judged.

In spite of de Coubertin's efforts, the quality of competition declined as the number

of categories increased. By 1948, the original 5 categories had grown to 13, including town planning, medals, songs and reliefs. Frequently, prizes were not awarded because judges felt that the entries were not worthy of Olympic-class recognition.

In spite of the difficulties, the arts competitions were often staged in grand style. At the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles, for example, there were 1 100 works of art submitted by artists from 32 countries. Thornton Wilder, an eminent American playwright and novelist, was a judge in the literary contest. Winners were announced in the same way as athletes in their categories, including an awards ceremony complete with the playing of the winner's national anthem.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) eliminated the arts competition after the 1948 Games. Since then, the Olympic arts program has consisted of an exhibition or festival.

The IOC added a section to its charter which directed the organizing committee for each Olympic Games session to arrange exhibitions and demonstrations of the host country's art, which the charter defines as "architecture, literature, music, painting, sculpture, photography and sports philately." The charter allows "theatrical, ballet, [and] opera performance or symphony concerts" and

specifies that the art section of the Olympics "shall be on an equal standard . . . as the sports events."

Each committee has had the option of choosing the type of arts festival it would offer. Montreal in 1976 and Moscow in 1980 presented artists from their respective countries. Munich in 1972 and Los Angeles in 1984 had international festivals.

Typically, the Olympic Winter Games are held in locations that offer magnificent facilities for the sports events, but little in

the way of venues for arts and cultural activities. But Calgary's superb theatres, concert halls, galleries and museums will make possible the most comprehensive and longest-running arts festival ever held as part of a Winter Olympics. Encompassing classical and contemporary music, dance and theatre, top-flight exhibitions, and, for the first time in 40 years, a major literary component, the 1988 Olympic Arts Festival will showcase the full spectrum of the arts in Canada, with enhancement by major international events.

