

A Short History of CIHA

Thierry Dufrene

**Secrétaire Scientifique, CIHA
Institut Nationale d'Histoire de l'Art and Université de Paris X**

From the creation of CIHA to the New York Congress: 1930-1961

The founding of CIHA (the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art) precedes both that of UNESCO and UNESCO's academic arm, CIPSH (the Conseil International de la Philosophie et des Sciences Humaines). CIHA was founded in 1930 at the Brussels Congress. Its purposes were "to organize a congress every three years, to maintain continuing relationships among the national committees, and to oversee the preservation of works of art." The 1930s favoured the development of CIHA both because of improvements in communication systems and the increased number of chairs of art history in many universities. The CIHA commission appointed at the 1961 New York Congress and directed by Professor George Kubler developed new statutes. They took effect when they were approved by the General Assembly at Madrid on June 3, 1963, and were published in the first Bulletin of CIHA (Jan-Mar-Jun 1965). The first version was composed of thirteen articles which defined the objectives of CIHA; its composition; the national committees; the central office; its legal status (an international academic association as defined under Article 60 of the Swiss Civil Code); its resources; its structure; the composition and role of the General Assembly, Board, and permanent secretariat; its relationships with other organizations belonging to CIPSH; the conditions for its dissolution; and provisions for its internal regulation and the amendment of its statutes. At that time the Board had seven members: the President (Millard Meiss, USA), four vice-presidents (Josef Cibulka, Czechoslovakia; Herbert von Einem, Germany; J.G. Van Gelder, The Netherlands; Mario Sami, Italy), a scientific secretary (André Chastel, France); a treasurer; and an administrative secretary (H.R. Hahnloser, Switzerland). In conformity with the new formula established by UNESCO, the statutes of CIHA provided for the holding of two scientific colloquia between each Congress.

1964-1972 The Consolidation of CIHA

CIHA's statutes were revised on 14 September 1964 at the Bonn Congress (in particular article VI, 3), and again on 15 September 1969 at the Budapest Congress (articles II, 1 and 3; VII, 1 and VIII, 1), but were not completed until a dozen years later. As Jacques Thuillier, the then scientific secretary, has recalled, at the New York Congress of 1961 Professors Hahnloser and Kubler drafted the regulations which were noted by the General Assembly in Budapest in 1969, debated at the General Assembly in London in 1971, and adopted after some corrections by the General Assembly in Lisbon in 1972. These regulations further specified the provisions for the selection of the members of the national committees, the deputy members, and the General Assembly, as well as procedures for the organization of the international Congresses and colloquia (principles, logistics, intellectual organization), assessment of dues, and conditions for the

cancellation of membership.

1975-1992: The Problem of Geographical Expansion and the Information Revolution

In 1975, as this consolidation was proceeding, a preliminary appraisal underlined inadequacies in the functioning of CIHA, especially in relation to the development of its scholarly activities, the absence of collaboration with the national committees as well as the lack of a newsletter. These issues were also raised by CIPSH's critique of CIHA, which pointed in particular to CIHA's orientation towards the Western tradition and lack of representatives from Africa and Asia. The preliminary report analysed the functions of the Congress and colloquia from a financial perspective and in relation to scientific efficacy. It suggested some ways of remedying the situation, urging a greater emphasis on current scholarship and the revitalization of international collaboration. At the time of the preliminary report, CIHA could count three publications with international relevance: *Le répertoire d'art et d'archéologie*, the *Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi*, and the *Glossarium artis*. To correct the structural deficiencies related to the isolation of researchers and the absence of financial resources, the report proposed to strengthen ties with the large research institutes and to take on the role of catalyst for new programs and the establishment of standards.

In response to the criticisms articulated by UNESCO during the General Assemblies of CIPSH at Salzburg (1971), Rio de Janeiro (1973), and Dubrovnik (1975), the statutes were revised on 1 July 1977. Article I,1, "The International Committee on the History of Art has as its purpose the development of the systematic study of artistic phenomena, particularly of the post-classical West and its relationships with world art," was modified as follows: "The International Committee on the History of Art has as its purpose the development of the systematic study of the history of artistic phenomena." The goal of this change was, of course, to counter the accusation that CIHA was Euro-centric. In his role as assistant academic secretary, Jacques Thuillier thus resumed his efforts to develop the international role of CIHA (June 1 1977):

It would...seem to be in conformity with the mission of CIHA:

1st to expand unhesitatingly and without reserve CIHA's interests in the art of non-Western nations, particularly Asia and the Middle East. This cannot but have positive results for the study both of those arts and of Western arts.

2nd to bring into CIHA countries in which there are specialists in art of international standing. We must act on this point with great prudence. But we should consider:

that all racism be avoided, and that the national committees may without hindrance bring together art historians of whatever origin who are directly attached to the countries concerned

that far from putting pressure on CIHA, in relation to countries where art history is often badly organized and even regarded with indifference, it is important to be wary of excessive concern

that the mission of CIHA is precisely to assist the field of art history to obtain in these countries the development and the coherence that it lacks

At the meeting of the Board in December 1978 professor Andre Chastel underlined that the Congress of Bologna should “mark a turning point in the evolution of CIHA.” For him, as for Jan Bialoskocki, “the international expansion of CIHA was a clear necessity. The expansion of CIHA must be conducted with clarity, beginning with a theoretical reflection on the place of artistic phenomena in human activities and its role in different cultures.” The next year, at the Congress of Bologna, Bialostocki “emphasized that CIHA would from now on interest itself in the arts of all countries and not just in Western art. It seemed to him that “conclusions should be drawn at the level of methodology and that it would be appropriate to consider the function and place of art in different civilizations as well as the possibility and the conditions of a truly international history of art.”

However, despite this crisis of conscience, the desired geographical expansion was impeded by several problems; Thuillier mentions in particular the troubling situation in the Middle East, the difficulty of forming ties with Australia and India, and he remarks that in Asia only Japan has been very active.

The CIHA newsletter had been intended to appear regularly between 1965 and 1970, but due to a lack of financial resources and poor collaboration among national committees it had not appeared. (Antwerp colloquium 28 July 1977). During the Mexico colloquium (6-10 Oct. 1980) Professor França (Portugal) announced a subvention from the Gulbenkian Foundation. One issue was published, but was sent only to Board members and not to the representatives of all the national committees. Professor Fillitz (Austria) suggested that the country organizing the next Congress should take responsibility for its publication until the following Congress, and this proposal was unanimously adopted.

The 1980s marked the beginning of a concern with new information technology. At the Vienna Congress (4 September 1983) the General Assembly adopted the following motion:

“CIHA draws the attention of the community of art historians to the transformations that information technology will bring to our discipline, and recommends the adoption of standards for its use, in particular for inventories of print rooms, descriptions of images and any other domain where such technology could be used.” At the meeting of the Board in London (29 November 1983) it was proposed that a working group on information technology be constituted. Andre Chastel emphasizes the importance of the moment: “art history is at a crossroads and must make a decisive choice. It is necessary to undertake the creation of a great database of art historical information. CIHA must claim intellectual ownership of this project since the idea is born was formulated within the organization, and must establish itself as the overseer of the work of TAU, as well as eventually other repositories of art historical documentation.”

During this period, article II, 1 of the statutes, which establishes the composition of CIHA, was modified (6 September 1989, 15 July 1992), specifically in relation to the conditions for admission and the length of mandates. The admission of members of CIHA had been subject to the approval by a two thirds majority of a plenary session of the Committee. According to the new version, “the Committee brought together in plenary session must normally accept these nominations except in exceptional circumstances. Where an objection has been presented by one of the members present, the Assembly will adopt or reject the objection through a simple majority in secret ballot.” The Committee also introduced a limitation to the mandates: “the members of the Committee are normally elected for a period that will not exceed the time period between one Congress and the third following Congress.”

During this period, despite CIHA’s inadequate financial resources and almost exclusive dependence on membership fees and minimal support from UNESCO, its general political orientation evidences a crisis of conscience regarding CIHA’s fundamental stakes, arising from its awareness of the universal dimension of art and the technological revolution that was unfolding. The 25th Congress took place in Vienna in 1983. The commitment of presidents such as Argan, of academic secretaries such as André Chastel and Jacques Thuillier, and of vice-presidents such as Jan Bialostocki (to name just a few of the most illustrious), permitted CIHA to adapt itself to its changing context.

1992-2007

The following period is marked by new revision of the statutes (London, 7 September 2000] and further reflection on what it means to have an international history of art. The rules for colloquia were also modified to take into account the difficulties of organizing committees to finance the travel and accommodation of all the Board members (Paris, spring 2006).

In the case of the statutes, the order of the articles was modified: the composition of CIHA became the topic of article III; the limitation of mandates was reaffirmed (III, 5; III, 6). The conditions for the representation of individual countries and the nominations to CIHA were refined, and the role of the academic Secretary was expanded (III, 2,3,4, 10). Article IV, which defined the composition of the Board, replaced Article VII; and the responsibilities of the President, Academic Secretary and Administrative Treasurer were defined. The article concerning the General Assembly and that concerning the national committees also increased their responsibilities, notably in relation to initiatives and the implementation of research. These new statutes also introduced a new paragraph establishing the official languages of CIHA as German, English, Spanish, French, and Italian.

In addition, a new paragraph (number 5) was introduced to article I concerning the dissemination of information, which now became one of the objectives of CIHA-- although at the same time, mention of a CIHA newsletter was removed.

At the Board meeting of 24 September 1995, dedicated to the organization of the 1996

Amsterdam Congress, some members expressed concern about the under-representation of whole regions of the planet and non-Western art, and in response the organizers issued a number of specific invitations intended to correct the situation. Less than a dozen years later, the Montreal Congress of 2004 and the forthcoming Melbourne Congress of 2008, suggest the progress that has been made during the intervening years. Geographical expansion was evidenced by the admission of China and South Africa at the meetings of the Board and the General Assembly held during the recent colloquium in Paris (June 2007), and CIHA was also strengthened by the re-admission of Italy and Spain. Furthermore, the themes of the Montreal and Melbourne Congresses, which reflect on the conditions needed for the development of a truly international art history, are directly in line with the new direction desired by Jan Bialostocki. In exploring important facets of this problem, such as mobility and conflict, these Congresses foster a central concern of CIHA, putting into play its very legitimacy as an international organization.

July 2007

Translated by Ruth Phillips