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THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION THROUGH ART: A BRIEF HISOTRICAL OVERVIEW

Jane Rhoades

"Time," wrote Thoreau, "is but the stream I go fishing in." I had the fortunate opportunity to have a history teacher who instilled in me a sense of wonder about "fishing." She taught me that history was not a neat and narrow man-made waterway, but a broad stream of eddies. She taught me to focus on the process of history and not to be obsessed with memorization of names and dates.

Historians are the scientists of hindsight. They have chronicled culture. They have told the stories of wars and the fall of empires. They have told the story of Man the Creator, of art, music, and literature. Historians are preoccupied with the question: What chain of events made it turn out that way? And the same question underlies this study—specifically, what events precipitated the origin of the International Society for Education through Art—INSEA.

It was 1945. The U.S. had destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. World War II had come to a close—45 million people were dead. In the same year that Europe was climbing out of the wreckage of war, Frank Lloyd Wright was submitting his design for the Guggenheim, and Martha Graham was performing Copland's Pulitzer Prize winning "Appalachian Spring."

The League of Nations held its final meeting in Geneva and turned over their assets to the newly formed organization: on October 24, 1945, the United Nations' Charter went into effect.

During the following year, the U.N. held its first General Assembly in London. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also held its first General Conference. At that time and at the second General Conference, held in Mexico City in 1947, resolutions were adopted to initiate inquiries which would promote international understanding through art education. The Director-General was instructed to appoint a committee of international experts. This committee

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met in Paris during May of 1948. The chairperson, from the United Kingdom, was Sir Herbert Read. The recorder, a representative from the United States, was Dr. Thomas Munro. Read, Munro, and the other committee members laid the foundation for INSEA. This group recommended the establishment of a national committee from each UNESCO member country to serve as facilitators of cultural exchange in the arts. They also recommended Paris as the site for an international office which would serve as a central clearinghouse for world cooperation in the arts.

Having adopted this set of proposals for administrative machinery, they went on to discuss the functions this "machinery" could carry out. They are:

(a) information regarding improved methods for teaching the arts;

(b) circulation of exhibitions, not only of great works of art, past and present, but also students' work illustrating various educational methods;

(c) information regarding sources of supply for materials to be used in the teaching of the arts, such as reproductions, books, phonographic recordings, musical instruments, painting and modeling equipment, films, etc.;

(d) translation and publication of important books and articles in the field, most of which are not available for widespread use by teachers;

(e) encouraging the arrangement of international dramatic and musical festivals;

(f) encouraging the organization of international federations of teachers and other professional workers in the field, and international congresses for the exchange of ideas;

(g) assisting teachers and school systems in search of expert council on educational problems to secure it from the best qualified sources;

(h) aiding and encouraging the interchange of teachers and students, and the establishment of scholarships for research, especially for the purpose of observation and study in foreign countries.

(Munro 1956, p. 151-152)

The UNESCO General Assembly approved the initial committee's "machinery" and early in 1949 a documentation center was established.

This committee's efforts were not focused solely on visual art education. They understood "arts" to include music, creative writing, theater, dance, and cinema. The term 'general education' was understood to cover all ages. It was not limited to school instruction, but included areas such as museums, folk arts, and television.

Read's committee worked at a time when there were continued tensions and unsettlement in the world situation. As normal cultural interchange had not been reestablished since the war, it was felt that constructive international measures along these lines were extremely urgent.

At UNESCO, emphasis was placed on developing positive cooperation among all the peoples of the world. Dr. Munro wrote about the specific role the arts played during these early years:

> Underlying the project for the arts in general education is a belief that the arts can and should be used as a means to international understanding and sympathy, hence to reduce antagonism between racial, religious, social, and political groups, and to develop mutual tolerance and friendship. A second assumption is that the arts should be used in a systematic way, under official or semi-official administration. It is not enough to rely on the work of individuals or small groups, as in the past. They are too weak and limited; they do not utilize the potential social values of art to the full. In the third place, it is not enough to train and encourage artists themselves, or even to help circulate their works among the general public. One should go more deeply into the educational process; work with schools and other educational agencies in disseminating world art, so as to insure its reaching wide areas of population, children as well as adults, laymen as well as specialists, and in the most effective ways.
>
> (1956, p. 153)

Munro felt that art should be used to unite the people of the world. He

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even advocated conducting empirical studies to see what kinds of art best developed "cultural interchange."

The works of Munro and Read will be examined more closely to see how their separate ideas influenced INSEA's origin and also how their ideas worked together in the formation of INSEA. It is known for sure the name of the society, The International Society for Education through Art, is directly related to Sir Herbert Read's book **Education through Art.**

Now turning to some of the "nuts and bolts" in the initial operation—Professor Edwin Ziegfeld told me that the first person to actually hold a position dealing with the arts in education in UNESCO was Mr. Trever Thomas. Ziegfeld also wrote about this Welshman in his article "INSEA: Some Observations on its History, Program, and Problems." He stated:

> He was, as I recollect, nominated for the position by Sir Herbert Read. He originated and began publishing a small magazine, "The Arts in Education," but it did not secure the necessary sustained backing of UNESCO and was discontinued.
>
> (1977, p.5)

As things developed, problems began to arise and it seemed that more expert help was needed. The 1952 UNESCO document called **The Visual Arts in General Education** reported:

> Meanwhile, it had become increasingly evident in the Secretariat that as the project developed, problems were arising which called for further expert advice. Accordingly, a second Meeting of Experts, comprising a larger number of specialists drawn from a wider geographical area, was convened at UNESCO House in November 1949 under the Chairmanship of Dr. Thomas Munro (United States of America) with Mr. Marcel Kuvelicer (Belgium) as the Rapporteur.

The outcome of this second "Meeting of Experts" reaffirmed the general principles outlined by Read's group, but offered some more specific suggestions. In particular, the ways information could be obtained and dissem-

inated, and the kinds of publications needed. Most importantly, this second group strongly recommended that their efforts not be dissipated over too wide a range of subjects—but be limited to the visual arts.

This committee favored an event which would bring together specialsits and teachers who were directly concerned with the practical problems of art education.

At UNESCO's Fifth General Conference session in 1950, approval was given for the continued exchange of information on the visual arts. Also, exchanges of children's art work were encouraged. The need to organize a seminar was emphasized.

> The seminar is a specialized form of UNESCO activity which has been evolved particularly in relation to education and work in libraries, and which has been found over and again to be one of the most effective modes of operation. A seminar is an international working meeting, attended by specialists and teachers selected by the governments of Member States and conducted by a Director of UNESCO's choice. The participants pool their experiences and compare ideas, seek the most effective methods and train themselves in their use, prepare materials appropriate for the techniques thus evolved and draw up plans for their pracical application and improvement. Seminars are also experiments in international understanding.
>
> (UNESCO 1952, p. 4)

Professor Ziegfeld said that after the fifth session, Mr. Thomas began organizing an international seminar on the teaching of art in general education. It was through the support of a United Kingdom National Commission that the location was set which was Bristol, England.

In the early 1950s, there were between sixty and seventy Member States in UNESCO. A letter of invitation to participate in a seminar was sent, along with a document of information. This document outlined the objectives of the seminar:

> To examine the theory and practice of the visual art education at different age levels in various types of educational

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> institutions with reference to conditions prevailing in various countries; to consider the ways in which the teaching and appreciation of the visual arts can enrich national cultural life and contribute to international understanding; to provide a basis for future UNESCO activities which would serve to stimulate and facilitate art education in Member States and promote cooperation for this purpose.
>
> (UNESCO 1952, p. 4)

Dr. Ziegfeld reported (1977, p. 5) that only nineteen Member States sent delegates—les than one-third. He stated,

> Were the same thing to happen now, I do not believe that the proportion responding favorably would be much, if any, higher; although I believe that there would be some substantial response from the communist countries, many of whom have recently shown a deep interest in INSEA and have participated in it.
>
> (1977, p. 5)

The point made of communist country involvement is an interesting one. Why initially did communist Member States not participate in INSEA but now show interest? If there is information to be found, would I have access to it? For example, would I find out from Russian documents why they did not participate in the early years but have shown interest in the last fifteen years? Is INSEA an organization where "East can meet West" on nonpolitical grounds as it was intended to be, or is INSEA an organization easily manipulated and used for political advantage?

Returning to the seminar, Mr. Charles Dudley Gaitskell was appointed Director of the Seminar. Mr. Gaitskell was the Director of Art at the Ontario Department of Education during the time Dr. Ziegfeld was designated as a specialist-consultant. There were thirty-six delegates who took part in the Seminar July 7-27, 1951. Thus far, I have had the opportunity to interview two participants of this Seminar and gather some published data (although two of the books are in Arabic) which I will deal with more

extensively in the future.

The report of the seminar, which serves as a summary statement, is as follows:

> . . . an important aspect of the seminar lies in the fact that some forty people, virtually strangers to each other, coming from twenty different countries with as wide a range of background, cultural, language and environment as one might expect to find, became within a few days wholly united in a common enterprise and a mutual interest in the arts and their understanding. This was in itself the living manifestation of the basic belief they all shared, whatever might be the incidental differences of their teaching practice, in the unfathomed power of the creative arts to enrich and illuminate the quality of human relationships.
>
> (1952, p. 5)

This exciting seminar, the first international meeting of art educators, was the birth of the International Society for Education through Art.

From that point they developed their first constitution and elected officers. In Article II of their Constitution they outline the purpose of the organization:

> The purpose of the Society shall be the encouragement and advancement of creative education through art and crafts in all countries and the promotion of international understanding. Their purpose shall be archived by such means as the publication of a bulletin or journal, the exchange of information, persons and materials; the organization of exhibitions of original works, reproductions and illustrations of methods of art education; the organization of conferences, meetings and study groups; the encouragement and coordination of researchers concerned with art education; the establishment of an international institute for art education.

It will be interesting to see how the various administrators have held to this purpose over the last thirty-five years. There are still questions to be

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answered and I am hoping to answer them through my historical "fishing expedition."

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