

## INTRODUCTION

I HAVE been asked to give a brief account of how the Conference came about, and what was in the minds of those responsible for its organisation. As a professional organization, the International Association of Art was naturally concerned with the problems of professional training, and it had long been obvious that many of the traditional methods of teaching had fallen into disrepute. The usefulness of schools of art fettered with outworn routines and faded ideas was much in question, and the impact of twentieth century art movements on these traditional methods had resulted in widespread confusion as to aims and practice in the schools of art. It was generally recognised that this was a highly controversial issue. As a preliminary step, it was decided to invite representative views from artists in many countries; a questionnaire was circulated, and from the replies there emerged a variety of views which could form the basis of a useful discussion. (Appendix One).

The United Kingdom National Committee of the I.A.A. was especially keen on the idea of a Conference. In no country was there perhaps more debate and readiness for change than in Britain. Here, we were in the process of an active re-organization of art education on a large scale, initiated by the Government itself. It had introduced the unusual innovation of entrusting vital decisions concerning the future of schools of art to especially constituted bodies of practising artists, whose recommendations were to be the basis of the proposed reforms. The whole exercise had stirred up strong feeling and ideas, and it seemed to us that this was a very proper time to get together with artists from abroad and exchange views with them.

We, therefore, proposed to our parent Association in Paris that an international conference should be held. This was agreed upon, and we were charged with the task of preparing the agenda and with organising the conference itself. We decided that the discussion could usefully be pursued under two headings, one which would consider the various types of schools in existence, the other to tackle the more general problem of disciplines thought to be valuable in the light of contemporary developments in art. At least we hoped for a useful exchange of information between countries. In considering the different kinds of schools, e.g. traditional academy, atelier-libre, municipal schools of art and craft, university art departments, etc., we felt that some examination of the relative advantages and defects of the various types might in itself prove fruitful.

We were also mindful of another aspect of art education which was becoming a matter of keen argument, not to say controversy. This was the place of History of Art and the increasing introduction of non-studio subjects, sometimes known as Liberal Studies. Here we were particularly interested to learn of the experience in the U.S.A., where the university art department system prevails.

Finally, it should be made crystal clear that, at no time was there, in the minds either of the U.K. Committee or of the Central Association, any idea of trying to arrive at agreed methods of teaching which would be universally applicable. Traditions in each country vary so much; practical conditions are so different; and, in an organisation comprising so many countries, it would have been ludicrous to think in such terms. Likewise, we had no thought that the discussions would be exhaustive; in fact, it was our hope that such a conference—the first of its kind on an international scale—would prove its value not only in the immediate exchange of information and ideas, but in stimulating a chain of further discussion and a continuing exchange of views.

MORRIS KESTELMAN  
*Vice-chairman*  
*United Kingdom National Committee*