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Action Programme of the Council of Europe in the field of the preservation and development of ancient buildings and historical or artistic sites

Report

tabled by the Committee on Culture, Science and Education

The Assembly,

Having regard to Recommendation 128 (1957) on the participation of the Council of Europe in the major UNESCO project entitled " mutual appreciation of Eastern and Western cultural values ";

Considering that the European countries ought, by a generous gesture, to display their sincere interest in efforts to secure better appreciation of Western cultural values in the East,

Recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

1. should invite the Governments of member countries to make available to the Council of Europe works of art in sufficient numbers to constitute a museum of Western art which would be offered, either as a gift or on permanent loan, to an Asian country;
2. should instruct the Committee of Cultural Experts to prepare, in co-operation with UNESCO, a scheme for the museum on the basis of the offers made by member countries and to supervise its implementation.

Explanatory Memorandum

In the course of the discussions of the Advisory Committee on the major UNESCO project " mutual appreciation of Eastern and Western cultural values ", which held its first session in Paris in April this year, the representatives of the Eastern countries repeatedly stressed the desirability of setting up museums of Western art in Asia. The number of collections of European art accessible to the general public appears to be negligible, especially in India.

The importance which a fine collection of original masterpieces of European art—at New Delhi, for example—would have for the " mutual appreciation of Eastern and Western cultural values " scarcely needs stressing.

The question arises whether this is not a unique opportunity for the Western countries to display their good intentions regarding the implementation of an important project, by the generous and impressive gesture of presenting a museum of European art to one of the great Asian countries.

To do this, it would suffice for each member country of the Council of Europe (or Party to the European Cultural Convention) to make available three to five paintings from the reserves of their national museums; one of these should be a work of art of the highest order, one or two of slightly less interest and the others of medium importance.

With such a contribution, it ought not to be difficult for a committee of art experts to compose an exhibition which, in a succession of rooms, would offer a representative survey of the great periods of Western art. Some period pieces (furniture, curios and tapestries) would help to complete the special character of each room, which would have as its centrepiece a painting .by a great master



In view of the very large number of high-class canvases which form part of the national heritage of the various European countries only the great master would represent a real sacrifice for each country—a sacrifice which should be alleviated by the fact that each country would select its gift from among the works of a national artist of which it has a large stock.

Moreover, a single Rubens, Van Gogh or Munch would be of inestimable value in a Western art collection in Asia, whereas they are lost in Western collections where paintings by Rubens, Van Gogh or Munch are numbered by dozens.

If the Committee of Ministers approved the idea of the gift of a European art gallery to an Asian country, the following procedure might be contemplated :

1. Each member country would be invited to submit a list of works of art which it was prepared to offer for this purpose; the list should preferably include alternative offers.
2. The committee of art experts would be instructed to prepare a plan for the " Gift Museum " on the basis of the offers from the various Governments.
3. UNESCO would be formally notified of the results of this preparatory work. The country to receive the " Gift Museum " would be chosen in agreement with UNESCO.
4. The negotiations should also cover the question of the premises where the collection would be housed and the question of transport expenses. The following alternatives might be contemplated in connection with these two problems :
 - a. The premises might either be provided by the recipient country or be erected at the expense of the donors.
 - b. The transport costs would be part of the gift, or would be borne by the recipient, or would be borne by UNESCO.