

## THE FLORENCE APPEAL

### A decisive gesture for Europe : teaching of history of art in all the countries of the Union

Each year, millions of members of the European Union, the very ones who are invited to vote on 7 June, benefit from freedom of movement to discover the landscapes, museums, vestiges of the past and contemporary art works of their European neighbours. How best can we exploit this remarkable mobility, these numberless discoveries, to create cultural capital, and provide resources for Europe's edification? By utilising the teaching of history of art in schools to transform what is linked to consumption into a process of acculturation, by promoting awareness of a common patrimony, by appropriating an artistic history that has thrived on the process of exchange, for thousands of years, from Segovia to Cracow, from Athens to Edinburgh and Copenhagen, from Florence to Munich and Budapest.

Giving a European dimension to this mode of art history teaching, which exists only in some countries to date, entrenching it in all the countries of Europe, this would be to connect the future citizens of Europe with their own history, and give a great boost to the creation of a European culture.

Whereas European history over a long period has consisted of conflicts that set its peoples in opposition to one another, treaties that arbitrarily divided up territories, languages that were imposed unjustly, and dominant cultures – whereas the workings of the Union are experienced as being complicated and faraway – the history of artistic forms implicates Europe in a continuous process of exchange, and mutual enrichment at every level of creation within the common space, from the modest village stone-mason (who employs knowledge and architectural references derived from different countries) to Leonardo da Vinci, Picasso and Ingmar Bergman. Thus Rome gained from the contribution of the 'barbarians', and was able to renew the artistic heritage of Greek civilization; in the Spain of the Ummayyads a brilliant synthesis was realized between Arab and European cultures, especially in the field of architecture; before the First World War, Art nouveau (also known in respective countries as Jugendstil, Stile Liberty, Modern Style or Modernismo) brought together, despite national and linguistic tensions, a European community of the arts.

Introducing the teaching of history of art in schools throughout all the countries of the Union would enable all its inhabitants to appreciate the spirit of artistic community that has united Europe for more than three thousand years. When studied in their historical dimension, works of art, from the mosque of Cordoba to the Bechers' photographs of Water Towers, are the best introduction to the religions, intellectual movements and civilisations that have forged the history of the continent, and to the artistic position that Europe claims within the global civilisation of the present day, at a period when artistic forms are diversifying and multiplying.

The language of images, omnipresent in the most up-to-date forms of expression, is held in common by all the citizens of the Union. In the 27 countries of the Union, a programme of at least of hour a week in history of art would represent for every young European a precious moment of encounter with the artistic riches of their city, their country, and Europe as a whole; also an encouragement to travel across the continent, and appreciate the cultural integration of Europe in terms of its history. From the industrial patrimony to the traditional fine arts, from archaeological remains to the most contemporary creations, this teaching would naturally be open: open to all the constituents and populations that make up the Europe of the present day, and so well suited to placing the objects of European civilisation in the context of other world cultures; open to the future, by being thoroughly integrated with the living arts.

The teaching of history of art, at all school levels, in all the countries of Europe, is a gesture the Union has to make in the interests of Europe, its generations to come, and the awareness of its future.