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The 30th Anniversary of IRSA Institute for Art Historical Research

The Institute for Art Historical Research and IRSA Publishing House started to work in 1980. However, the establishment of a new international art journal, which would publish articles in the four so-called ‘congress languages’: German, English, French and Italian, was preceded by long preparations. At that time, in the mid-1970s, it seemed to me that an international art journal dedicated to interdisciplinary studies was missing, even though there already existed many art historical periodicals. I was a pupil of Jan Białostocki at the University of Warsaw, who taught his students to approach a work of art from a broad perspective. Białostocki himself was in a way an intellectual son of Erwin Panofsky, and directed attention of his students to a wide context of every work of art: social, psychological, archival, that is, merely historical, economical as well as a purely artistic one. The work of art in the historical context, analyzed from many different angles, was his option of art historical research, which he tried to impart to his students. He tried to show the art historical research not only as pure art history, but also in connection with other humanist disciplines.

The idea of creating an art periodical and of founding an international institute for art research came to my mind a few years after I had graduated in art history from the University of Warsaw and moved to Vienna. The painter Henryk Stażewski – after consultations with Jan Białostocki and Jerzy Tchorzewski – nominated me as a scholarship holder of Gottfried-von-Herder-Preis in 1972. It was the award Stażewski received from the German FVS-Foundation established by the Hamburg senator and multimillionaire Alfred Toepfer. The FVS-Stiftung zu Hamburg funded scholarships and awards for eminent artists, scholars, writers and philosophers from the countries behind the Iron Curtain. The goal of Alfred Toepfer during the Cold War was to build bridges and create relationships between artists and scholars on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Many eminent Poles received the Herder Prize in Vienna: Stanisław Lorenz, Aleksander Kobzdej, Jan Białostocki, Krzysztof Penderecki, Zbigniew Herbert, Andrzej Wajda, Wisława Szymborska, Magdalena Abakanowicz, Władysław Bartoszewski, Jerzy Tchorzewski, and Henryk Stażewski, among others. Every prizewinner could designate a young candidate for the scholarship to study at the University of Vienna.

In the early 1970s, to become a ‘Herder-Prize child’, as we later named ourselves (the name being a literal translation of the German ‘Herder-Preiskinder’), presented a unique opportunity as well as an honourable challenge and a moral obligation not to spoil such a possibility.

Every year on the occasion of awarding the Gottfried-von-Herder Prize all former prizewinners and their young scholarship holders were invited to Vienna for a joint celebration, meetings and discussions. There were people from many countries of Central and Southeastern Europe: Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and even Greece. Such meetings were very stimulating and opened many new contacts which in the future turned out to be very important. Most important, however, was the international atmosphere, and the spirit of Gottfried Herder’s ideas of the friendship of different nations. Obviously, the atmosphere of the Herder Prize circle and the ideas of Herder transmitted by Alfred Toepfer’s Foundation were crucial factors in the later concept of IRSA Institute and the art journal *Artibus et Historiae*.

Having completed my doctorate at the University of Vienna, my research on Italian Renaissance painting was supported financially by Prof. Karolina Lanckorońska in Italy. I spent a few years first in Venice at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, then at the Hertziana in Rome, and finally in Florence: first, two years at the Fondazione Roberto Longhi, and then, at Villa I Tatti of the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies. In all those research centres scholars from different countries and continents had a possibility to meet, to exchange ideas, to engage in discussions, and to live a common social life. In various research centres the atmosphere was different and one could learn about diverse aspects of art history; one met diverse methodologies, approaches and attitudes towards a work of art. At the Roberto Longhi Foundation in Florence the ‘attributionism’ was the main and most appreciated approach to the study of works of art. The meetings with Federico Zeri, Mina Gregori, Bruno Toscano or Giuliano Briganti gave us, young scholars, knowledge how to look at a work of art from the stylistic point of view. I remember Giuliano Briganti or Federico Zeri coming with hundreds of photographs to our meetings. These were photographs showing small fragments of paintings: noses, ears, fingers, hands, faces, or draperies covering bodies – all by various artists. Our task was to identify the artist and artistic school or current on the basis of those small fragments, and if not the artist, so at least the period or region. At the Fondazione Longhi I met many of my future collaborators and friends, like Cristina Acidini, Mauro Lucco, Antonio Natali or Vittorio Sgarbi. Later, some of them became – formally or informally – connected to IRSA, for example as members of the Advisory Committee of the Institute.

A different atmosphere prevailed in the Florentine Harvard University Center at Villa Berenson, i.e. Villa I Tatti in via Vincigliata in Florence. The meetings there, especially at lunches and dinners, had a more sophisticated and more social character. On the one hand, there were scholars from different fields, not only art historians but also of music and musicology, theatre studies and history. It was, and still is, a meeting point of many different humanist disciplines. The atmosphere was closer to what I was interested in and at that point absorbed into: the interdisciplinary art research. To mention all the scholars I met there and by whom I was influenced, would make a long list. Many of them later published in *Artibus et Historiae* or authored books published by IRSA. I shall try, however, to recall at least a few of them: Craig Hugh Smyth, the revised edition of whose fundamental book “Mannerism and *Maniera*”, edited in collaboration with Elizabeth Cropper, was published by IRSA; André Chastel, who was a rare but welcomed guest, and who introduced us to many private Italian collections, otherwise inaccessible. Further – the much regretted W. Roger Rearick, Artur Rosenauer, Pierre Rosenberg, Janet Cox Rearick, Sylvie Béguin, Peter Humfrey, George Kubler, Lionello Puppi, Eduard Safarik and David Rosand, to mention only a few.

In Rome Bibliotheca Hertziana was still a place of silent work among the books. But, after the library closed for the day, scholars would meet for dinner or for a cup coffee, during which they exchanged ideas and new discoveries. During the stay in Rome I met such important future friends, later also authors of articles published in *Artibus et Historiae*, and collaborators and supporters of IRSA, as Philipp Fehl, Giulio Carlo Argan, Claudio Strinati, Mario Praz, and Maurizio Marini. In Rome I stayed mostly at the ‘Institutum Historicum Polonicum Romae’, founded by Karolina Lanckorońska and Walerian Meysztowicz, first in via degli Scipioni, and later in the second and final seat of the Institute, in via Virginio Orsini. The Institute edited and published archival sources in a series of books and periodicals, such as *Elementa ad fontium editiones*, *Antemurale*, and *Acta nuntiaturae Polonae*.

The evening conversations with Professor Karolina Lanckorońska at dinner table, as well as breakfast meetings with her were occasions to appreciate purely historical and archival research, which – for me, as a pupil of Jan Białostocki – was at first not necessarily the most interesting and attractive aspect of a historian's work.

While looking for the roots of IRSA Institute and of the art journal *Artibus et Historiae*, I must mention also my stays in the United States and meetings with scholars like Horst Waldemar Janson, best known for his *History of Art and Sculpture of Donatello*. At the time I met him, he was a president of the College Art Association (CAA) and editor of the *Art Bulletin*, as well as a founding member and president of the Renaissance Society of America (RSA). During our first meeting at New York University he had put me to a test. He pointed to a sculpture behind him, asking me for attribution. My answer – Carpeaux – gave me a credit, and Professor Janson recommended me later to many eminent American scholars. His recommendation was extremely useful and helpful at the moment of creating the new Institute and a new art historical periodical. Especially the meeting with the Austrian art historian, Konrad Oberhuber, at that time a professor at Harvard University and later director of the Graphische Sammlung Albertina in Vienna, had important consequences for IRSA Institute, then *in statu nascendi*. The contacts and suggestions of Konrad Oberhuber had helped to build a solid basis for IRSA.

However, the idea to create a new art journal, one that would open possibilities to publish the results of their research for both young and established scholars who were working in the fields on the border of art history and other disciplines, was developed during my Italian years, in the mid-1970s. Most art historical periodicals were connected to an institution, a particular university, museum, research centre, and a possibility to publish interdisciplinary studies was usually difficult to find. The first idea was to publish an art historical journal which could allot space to interdisciplinary research in the field of fine arts in the largest sense, including e.g. film (obviously in its visual aspects).

IRSA was established in 1979 as an institute devoted to art historical research. The decisive stimulus came at the CIHA (Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art) congress in Bologna in 1979. There I put forward to a small group of younger and older art historians an idea to establish an institute with the purpose of publishing a new periodical and a series of books. I received then a strong support from Jan Białostocki, André Chastel, Giuliano Briganti, René Huyghe, W. Roger Rearick, Jerzy (George) Zarnecki of the Courtauld Institute in London, as well as from Hermann Fillitz, then director of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Walter Koschatzky, director of Albertina, and Artur Rosenauer from the University of Vienna. With the support of those masters and colleagues I could face, not without great problems, the initial difficulties and sometimes scepticism of some other important fellow art historians, who didn't believe in the success of the new venture. Some of those most sceptical colleagues, like Adam Miłobędzki, who at the beginning of the undertaking in Bologna took distance with spiteful jokes, but a few years later started to publish in *Artibus et Historiae* and became our close friend, later became our faithful friends and supporters.

Once the idea became real, I invented the title of the new periodical: ARTIBUS ET HISTORIAE. The first part of the title – ARTIBUS – has its origin in the identical inscription on the tympanum of an old and very prestigious art exhibition hall, ZACHEŃTA, founded 1860 in my native Warsaw. As a young schoolboy and later as a student, I frequented the exhibitions organized there, and the Latin inscription in dative ARTIBUS – “(dedicated) to the arts” – had a magical strength for me. The second part of the periodical's title – ET

HISTORIAE – is a tribute paid to the late Countess Karolina Lanckorońska (1898–2002), founder of the Institutum Historicum Polonicum; the Latin title also honours her, who venerated the languages of the Antiquity. The title came to my mind during one of my travels, on the train from Florence to Rome.

In 1980, the year after the CIHA congress in Bologna, IRSA established itself as a research institute and a publishing house. In the same year the first issue of *Artibus et Historiae* came out, followed by the first book from the series ‘*Bibliotheca Artibus et Historiae*’.

Artibus et Historiae encourages interdisciplinary studies – particularly art history in conjunction with other humanistic fields, such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, and literature – as well as other unconventional approaches. The profile of the publication is a result of its founder’s experience gathered at Warsaw University, in the Viennese circle of the Gottfried-von-Herder Prize laureates with its international atmosphere, of the influence of his stays in many Italian research centres, as well as the influence of some great humanist scholars mentioned before.

IRSA is an acronym for the Italian name of the institution: *Istituto per le Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte*. The research Institute and IRSA Publishing House was initially based in Venice (1979–1982), where W. Roger Rearick lived and took care of the activities of the young institute. In Italy our Italian friend, prince don Maurizio Ferrante Gonzaga, descendent of the family which yielded a Polish Queen, Ludwika Maria Gonzaga, wife of two Polish kings, provided us with us logistic suport for establishing the new undertaking. This Polish connection gave Maurizio Gonzaga energy and motivation to help us in organizing IRSA in Italy.

From Venice IRSA moved to Florence; then for years its headquarters had been in Austria. In Vienna, IRSA Institute bought a block of three houses around a small courtyard in the Rudengasse, in the 3rd district in Vienna. It became a place of meetings in the spirit of Herder of many international scholars. By that, I tried to give back what I have taken before, to repay for the opportunities I gained from Herder. In the difficult period of the 1980s, under communism and the martial law in Poland, we tried to help especially the scholars from the Eastern-European countries, by inviting them to Vienna and helping them to travel around Europe for scholarly purposes. IRSA in Vienna helped not only art historians. It was a time when an invitation from abroad was necessary for citizens from the countries behind the Iron Curtain to be granted permission for travelling abroad. In the 1980s we, as IRSA, sent out a lot of such official invitations to scholars of different fields, under a pretext of organizing some fictive seminars or congresses of psychology or biology, which we actually did not do. But with such an official invitation scholars could obtain passports and visa, and travel across Europe. As I mentioned before, in Vienna we bought three old neighbouring tenement houses in Rudengasse with about hundred and twenty quite neglected apartments. My wife and me renovated them, making them, step-by-step, accessible for scholars, our guests, invited from different countries to do research and to prepare the publications for IRSA or other publishers. The restored apartments were completely independent residential units, furnished with everything necessary for living and scholarly work: photocopy machines, telephone, fax etc.

Later in the 1980s IRSA started collaboration with Asian countries, especially with Japan. It was a time of vivid exchanges of scholars and students. I was constantly invited to Japan with lectures and conferences, and Japanese scholars and students came to Europe, staying often in IRSA apartments in Rudengasse. Before the fall of the Iron Curtain, IRSA, acting from

Vienna, encouraged and helped many scholars from Central and Southeastern Europe and from Asia to undertake or continue their research, the results of which were later published in *Artibus et Historiae*.

Finally, a few years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, as late as in 1996, IRSA Institute moved to Poland. Because of the Polish background of IRSA's founders, one of the initial aims of the Institute was to introduce Polish art and Polish art history, as well as the art history of Central and Southeastern Europe, into the 'international mainstream'. Next to those endeavours, IRSA has maintained for many years vivid contacts with the Chinese and Japanese communities of art historians, including specialists in Oriental as well as European art.

During these thirty years of existence, IRSA has achieved a considerable success in bringing together scholars from different countries and of various cultural backgrounds. Our main goal was to promote art historical research, produce publications, and organize exhibitions. Among the most notable exhibitions I would like to mention: *Konfrontationen* held in the Albertina in Vienna, an exhibition organized with Konrad Oberhuber, where also Polish artists were represented, and whose catalogue was published by IRSA. Then, together with Prof. Aleksander Gieysztor and Prof. Andrzej Rottermund, IRSA co-organized *Opus Sacrum*, a major exhibition, being a selection of masterpieces from the collection of Barbara Piasecka Johnson, which was shown both at the Royal Castle in Warsaw (1990) and in Vaduz, in Liechtenstein. For many years IRSA had helped Barbara Piasecka Johnson to build this collection. To mark the inauguration of Cracow's International Cultural Centre and the conference of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), held in Cracow in 1991, IRSA co-organized a show at the Royal Wawel Castle of the earliest work of Jan Vermeer van Delft, *Saint Praxedes*, discovered as a result of research carried out under the auspices of IRSA Institute. At the same time IRSA prepared a monograph on Leonardo da Vinci's *Lady with the Ermine*, loaned by the Princes Czartoryski Museum in Cracow to the monumental exhibition, *Circa 1492. Art in the Age of Exploration*, held at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C. (1991–1992). The monograph gave insight into the meaning and history behind Leonardo's masterpiece, published with the aim of familiarizing foreign audiences with a splendid work of art at that time rarely, if at all, seen outside Poland. In this publication IRSA made accessible for the readers of English all of the most important Polish publications dealing with Leonardo's masterpiece. Several exhibitions followed: the Wojciech Fibak collection featuring paintings of the *École de Paris* – in Cracow, Wrocław (1998) and Łódź (1999); the retrospective show of Stasys Eidrigėvičius – STASYS 50 – in Cracow (1999) and Wrocław (2000). IRSA also organized exhibitions of Polish artists abroad, like that of Leon Tarasewicz (*Leon Tarasewicz meets Michele De Lucchi, Milano 2003*) in Milan. More recently, IRSA presented the works of Iwo Zaniwski, *New Harmony Paintings*, in Today Art Museum, Beijing (2008), and at the Wisom Art Center, Shanghai (2008).

The collaboration with Chinese colleagues not only yielded some exhibitions that IRSA prepared in China (e.g. an exhibition of Polish posters, travelling through many Chinese university centres), but has had substantial scholarly results. One of them is a stimulus to undertake by Chinese students a master or doctoral theses dealing with subject of Polish posters.

For many years IRSA has had a branch in Japan, at the Tohoku Daigaku University in Sendai, where Prof. Hidemichi Tanaka had been very active. His special interest in European art, and his rare skill for languages helped him to introduce an international dimension at the art history department in Sendai, and thanks to him the collaboration of IRSA with Japanese

scholars was very vivid. Since he retired from the Tohoku Daigaku University, we have not been able to find such an open and active link in Japan as he was.

After thirty years of IRSA's presence on the art historical scene, we decided to establish IRSA Foundation, a body which shall guarantee the further existence of the Institute and Publishing House, with a particular objective to continue and strengthen the publication of *Artibus et Historiae*. The Foundation shall collaborate with various institutions supporting culture in Poland and abroad, and it shall also co-operate with private persons interested in the fine arts and in the art historical research.

Since their beginnings thirty years ago, IRSA and *Artibus et Historiae* have invited for collaboration scholars from various countries, with a special interest on the co-operation with art historians from Asia (especially from Japan and China), as well as from Central and South-Eastern Europe. We hope that with the establishment of IRSA Foundation in 2010, we give IRSA Institute a new perspective for continuation of its endeavours in the future.