

KUNSTHISTORISCHES INSTITUT
IN FLORENZ

EINHUNDERTJÄHRIGES JUBILÄUM
1897-1997

JAHRESBERICHT
1997



KEITH CHRISTIANSEN, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

On behalf of *Philipe de Montebello*, the director of The Metropolitan, and of the numerous members of the staff of this museum who have, at one time or another, worked at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, I want to extend a warm welcome to you, *Max*. Few things could give me as much pleasure as to be able to represent the museum on the occasion of the Kunsthistorisches Institut's 100th anniversary. The Institut has played an important — indeed an irreplaceable — role for many of us who have worked there.

It was certainly crucial to my professional career, since it was at the Institut, over twenty summers ago, that I saw Sir John Pope-Hennessy working away at one of the tables during his annual, summer-long stay. He was not the most approachable of figures, and I had to gather all my courage to ask him what was a pretty straightforward question about something pertaining to my thesis. I know I should never have done this had he been a visiting professor or lecturer at Harvard, where the distinction between student and professor was strictly maintained. Ulrich Middeldorf made of the Institut a community of scholars with a shared interest in Italian culture, and even Pope-Hennessy seemed less formidable and aloof, despite the fact that he continued to wear a suit and tie throughout the stiffling summer months. In any event, I believe that meeting eventually led to my employment at the Metropolitan.

For all of us here tonight, the Institut has been a nurturing place, not only sending us off to careers, but fueling them over the years. I know that without its photographic collection, the exhibition on Siene painting of the fifteenth century that I organized some years back would not have taken the shape it did, and without its library the catalogue would have been a far more meager affair. Alas, the various projects I have been involved in in recent years have pulled me away from Florence and Tuscany, but the Institut has never been far from my thoughts. Indeed, during the last three years, when working on Tiepolo, I had many occasions to lament the absence of a sister institution of the same caliber in Venice!

It is not my place here to celebrate the contribution the Institut has made to the study of Renaissance art and culture: the people who have gathered here tonight are a far more eloquent testimony to that. The Metropolitan Museum celebrated its 125th anniversary last year and it is comforting to recall that most of that time the Institut has been a haven abroad. Happy one-hundredth birthday.

IRVING LAVIN, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton

When *Max Seidel* invited me two years ago, to participate in the celebrations he was planning for the Institut's centennial, my immediate reaction was that we Americans ought also to be celebrating the Institut. The Italian Art Society was quick to adopt the suggestion, and this evening's ceremony is one of the results of that decision. We are delighted that Professor *Seidel* has been able to join us, and honored by the presence of two distinguished members of the Institutes advisory

board, *Jens Peter Haeusgen* and *Ralph P. Odendall*. For their work in organizing the occasion we are thankful to the President of the Society, *Anita Moskowitz*, who has labored long and hard to make this lovely reception happen, and to *Edith Kirsch*, of whose appointment as a foreign member of the Institut's board we are very proud.

I think of American indebtedness to the Institut as a series of three concentric circles. The innermost circle is my own. When in the early 1950's I began my graduate studies in the history of art at the Institute of Fine Arts in New York, I was lucky to have as my advisor for the Master's thesis H. W. (Peter) Janson. Janson was then deep into his famous catalogue raisonné of the work of Donatello and I undertook to study the sources of Donatello's bronze pulpits in San Lorenzo. A few years later, as I was preparing this work for publication, I was able to visit Florence and frequent for a time the library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut, which was then located in Piazza Santo Spirito. From a material point of view, it was a miserable time. Everyone was poor, there was little heat and less light (one studied with overcoat and gloves and only in daylight hours). But the physical discomfort was more than compensated by the stimulating intellectual atmosphere and, especially for me, by the ready welcome I received from Ulrich Middeldorf, who had recently been brought back from refuge in Chicago as the first post-war Director — a brilliant appointment, healing in every way. Needless to say, he had great interest in and deep knowledge of Donatello, and in a study of the renewed appreciation of Donatello in the early sixteenth century, especially of the late work, Middeldorf had pioneered a theme that had become central to my own understanding of the pulpits-archaistic revival as a kind of subversive leitmotif in Renaissance art. Although we did not see eye to eye on everything, we had several lively discussions, and my visits to the Institut were of seminal importance in my transformation, for better or worse, from a callow student into a professional art historian.

The same sort of things could be said, I am sure, for generations of young Americans enamored of Italian art, and this is the second circle. In fact, I venture to suggest that a study of the numbers and demography of the transatlantic frequenters of the Kunsthistorisches Institut would provide a revealing and valid index to the maturation of American culture generally during the last century.

The third circle consists not of who went to the Institut but of what and who they found there. And here I include not only, perhaps not even primarily, the magnificent facilities, the generous reception and patient assistance we have all enjoyed. I refer about all to the glorious tradition of German humanistic scholarship that the Institut represents, both as an institution and in the persons of the great art historians who have been associated with it throughout its history. They have been an inspiration and model for our own efforts, so much so that I can scarcely imagine — indeed, I shudder to imagine! — what the development of our discipline in America would have been like without that wonderful place we call *tout court*, affectionately and in deep gratitude, the "Kunst".