

Twenty-Seventh International Congress of the History of Art
Strasbourg, September 1-7, 1989

Opening Remarks, Sept. 1

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M. Le Ministre, Messieurs les Présidents, Mme. Le Maire, Colleagues and Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank heaven, it is the tradition at such occasions that the Président of the Comité speaks in his own language. I am happy, therefore, at this congress in France, merely to have to apologize for my bad English!

Many of you know better than I that political, military and social historians have great difficulty in deciding just what is a Revolution. If one takes a broad view, however, and defines revolution as something like “épater les bourgeois” or “bouleverser l'établissement,” then we art historians now have a new and very clear lesson on the meaning of the term. When it was first proposed to hold a Congress in Strasbourg in 1989 on the theme of Revolution, to celebrate the bicentennial of the French Revolution, the art-historical establishment (including your humble servant) was incredulous, to say the least. Who ever heard of a revolution in Strasbourg?—inappropriate, impossible, incredible! Yet, the Strasbourg Congress has not even officially begun, and the art-historical establishment has already been bouleversed. Personally, I can only say that the warm reception, the efficient organization, and the fine papers we have already enjoyed, have made me a happy victim of this happy art-historical revolution, and in the name of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art I am happy now to declare its twenty-seventh international congress officially open.