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PRESENTATION OF GEORGE KUBLER, PLENARY SPEAKER IN THE
XXVITH CONGRESS OF THE HISTORY OF ART, WASHINGTON, D.C.

AUGUST 15, 1986

By Beatriz de la Fuente
Vicepresident of CIHA

Professor Irving Lavin, President of this Congress and now President of the Committee International d'Histoire de l'Art made me an honor by inviting me to present Professor George Kubler. This is the second time that I have been requested to do this; the first one was when the Academy of Arts in Mexico received him as Honorary Member.

I do not think that George Kubler needed to be introduced to the colleagues present here. I will only make some remarks on his very abundant contribution to the history of art.

George Kubler was Kress Professor in the Center for Advanced Studies in the National Gallerry of Art in 1985-1986. He was before named Professor Emeritus in Yale University in 1983, where he had been professor the since 1932. The wide scope of the vast work of Kubler reveals his multiple and always renovated concerns: the various ways to approach artistic facts, its multiple theoretical and methodological resources. Among this apparent dispersion there is nevertheless a reason that gives structure and order the diversity of his studies: that is philosophical humanism, that finds, according the theme of study, different ways.

In 1985 Yale University Press published Studies in Ancient American and European Art. The Collected Essays of George Kubler, edited by Thomas F. Reese. The book is divided in the four aeres in which Kubler has mainly worked: Colonial, European, Precolumbian and Method. The sequence of topics follows that of his major books. The bibliography of Kubler presented by Reese until 1982, include 135 books, articles, reviews, and 5 works in process.

I will quote some paragraphs of the Rees's Preface:

"The book The shape of Time; Remarks on the History of Things now Translated into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Polish and Arabic, would have earned George Kubler, a prominent place in the annals of twentieth century historical thought, even if he had published nothing else. Linked to the works of Henri Bergson, Henri Flocillon whose Vie des formes he translated in 1942, and Alfred Kroeber, it is not an abstract theory of time art or culture. It is a treatise on the representations of historical time that drew on this direct experience in the preparation of five monumental studies and six smaller books, all published before his fiftieth year".

Few readers of The Shape of Time know the main body of Kubler's scholarship, composed of concrete studies in Precolumbian American and European Art. Although the subjects and approaches are diverse, many common threads connect this corpus of scholarship and assure its essential unity. Some are historical, some thematic, some aesthetic and some methodological. Each of Kubler articles, like a strandlike clusters of form-problems that he proposed to describe works of art, is a complexly interwoven structure in which numerous methodological concerns coexist in varying states of resolution and harmony.

Building the Escorial, begun in a seminar with Panofsky was published in 1982. In some studies Kubler applies a single method, old or new, which will yield new data and provide new perspectives of his subject. The knowledge is the added to the total picture. In other studies, his lense is more kaleidoscopic, circling a work of art or some problem, viewing it from many different vantage points, reading is position in multiple systems. It can be paralleled

to the Concept that gave name to this Congress World Art: Themes of Unity in Diversity.

I feel identified with Rees when he writes: "Kubler has led me to see the wholeness of things, the importance of cross-fertilization, among the many methodological and aerial specializations in the history of art, and the interrelatedness of the history of art and thought in almost every other realm of investigation, besides he has restored my faith in the value of a single human life: monumental achievement is still possible, even in a period and environment where institutions threaten to swamp and bury too many of us".

I will finally say that George Kubler has given to us, Mexicans, a universe of artistic richness he has conquered. His studies on Mexican Art have propiciated integration and unity. He has dedicated a great part of his life to study and understand our art with true love and deep respect.

One more thing, as a scholar in the history of art he has made possible the inclusion of pre-columbian art in the concert of universal art. With his works he has proven that pre-columbian art is an art in its own right.

George Kubler has been my friend, and I might say my teacher in the history of art for many years, even I have not been his student at Yale, he has taught me something more valuable: the profound and fundamental human relations we have.