

International Bureau of Exhibitions

Famed architectural designer Lawrence G. Zimmerman once wrote that world exhibitions, properly conceived, are an "environmental cosmos".

Les Floralties internationales de Montréal is part of that cosmos, an undertaking that meets all the strict criteria set down by a world organization of overseers and rule-makers known as the International Bureau of Exhibitions, based in Paris.

An Ottawa man, Patrick Reid, minister of public affairs in the London offices of the Canadian High Commission, is president of the Bureau, on which 36 countries are members. He has represented Canada six times as a commissioner-general and was chairman of the Steering Committee at Expo 74 in Spokane and of Expo 70 in Osaka.

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Canada's home-based delegate to the Bureau is John Powles, of Ottawa, general manager of the World Exhibition Program of the government's Department of External Affairs. He works in cooperation with a Paris-based delegate named Jacques Noiseux, counsellor in the Embassy of Canada in the French capital.

It was in London in 1851 that the first "universal and international" exposition was held, as such an exhibition is now understood. All the world was invited to take part in the presentation at the Crystal Palace-- the Great Exhibition of Industry of All Nations.

Paris came next, organizing exhibitions in 1867, 1878, 1889, and 1900. Other large cities, too, decided to welcome the craftsmen and manufacturers of the world and among the most successful expositions were those held in Vienna, Amsterdam, Brussels, Barcelona, St. Louis, and Philadelphia.

The early era of the expositions sponsored the first international yacht race (London, 1851), introduced the elevator (New York, 1854), and the ice cream soda to a fascinated world (Paris, 1868). One of the best-known landmarks of the world, the Eiffel Tower, was built for the 1889 Paris exhibition. It was later painted golden yellow for the 1900 exposition and covered in neon for the 1937 show.

Zimmerman, a student of international expositions for 40 years, has a large collection of memorabilia, selections of which have been shown at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and elsewhere. He is considered an authority on the subject and says that throughout their history expositions have managed to advance knowledge among peoples.

He believes the expositions "still leave a clear mirror of their times, reflecting, like succeeding editions of an encyclopedia, the products, exhibit techniques and architecture of their periods".

Inevitably, the exhibitions gave rise to conflicts of interest and an international agreement became necessary. After various attempts in 1912 and 1914, the international agreement of 1928 put order into the field of expositions by regulating their frequency and defining the rights and obligations of the participants and the organizers. To oversee the application of the convention, the IBE was established.

The protocol put an end to what former Bureau President Max Troendle called an "anarchistic régime" lacking in properly-established guarantees of sound organization for participating nations. The results of the new regulations were amply reflected in the efficient organization and operation of the three post-Second World War universal and international exhibitions--Brussels in 1958, Montréal in 1967, and Osaka in 1970.

"The increasing complexity of the technical arrangements for modern expositions is a major reason for the need for a continuous dialogue in an organized fashion between the exposition authorities on the one hand and the foreign participants on the other," says Bureau President Reid.