

# AMERICAN SPORT ART MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

## The Other Olympics – Art and Culture

(continued from front page)

the Academy and its American Sport Art Museum and Archives. ASAMA underlies the Academy's participation on the IOC's Commission for Culture and Olympic Education. People around the world know the Academy's academic programs in sports. As the following highlights show, the Academy also works hard to endorse art and culture.

### (Other) Olympic Origins

The roots of the other Olympics—art and culture—extend to ancient Greece. Historical records indicate that the Olympic Games began in Greece in 776 B.C. and continued without interruption until A.D. 393. For 1,170 years the Games occupied a central place in Ancient Greek life.

The first venue for the competition was Olympia, located in the ancient district of Elis, on the Peloponnese (mainland Greece's southern peninsula). It was considered a sacred place. Architecturally masterful temples to the gods Zeus and Hera stood there. After 432 B.C., so did one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: the colossal ivory and gold statue of Zeus. One legend of the origin of the Olympic Games involves the mythical King Pelops of Olympia, said to have founded the contests.

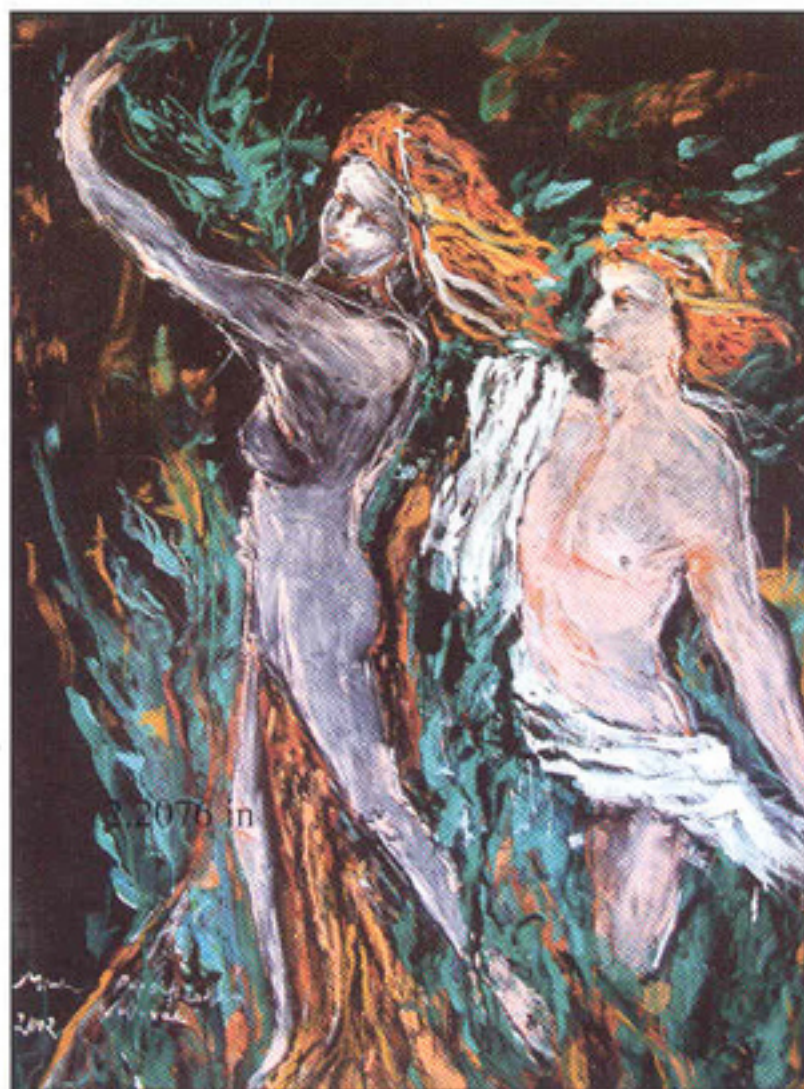
Ancient Greece's city-states warred with each other enthusiastically. But during the month of each ancient Olympic Games, the *ekecheiria* was observed, a sacred truce that banned all hostile acts and permitted athletes, artists, and their families to travel safely to Olympia. Another tradition of the ancient Olympiads was a festival honoring the civilization's artists, held just prior to the Games that honored its athletes.

### Pentathlon of the Muses

Eventually, during a campaign to impose Christianity as a state religion, the ancient Olympics were suppressed. Olympia was destroyed by earthquake in the 6th century, and it was not until the dawn of the 20th century that Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin, formed the International Olympic Committee and became father to the modern Olympics.

A French educator, de Coubertin saw sports education as vital to young people's personal development. He believed art and sports should be integrated, and his zeal led to the creation in 1912 of Olympics-based competitions in music, sculpture, painting, literature, and architecture. Like their athletics counterparts, winners in the so-

called pentathlon of the muses received gold, silver, and bronze medals.



At the entrance to ASAMA hangs a painting of the mythological Daphne (pictured above), created by Greek artist Mina Papatheodorou-Valyraki, the Academy's Sport Artist of the Year 2002.

### Olympic Laurel Wreath

Before there were Olympic medals, however, there were Olympic wreaths to distinguish the fastest, strongest, and best. The laurel-leaf wreaths presented to Greek cultural heroes are another tradition linking sports and art. The tradition was based in Greek mythology, according to which the god Apollo fell in love with the mountain nymph Daphne. When his rival for her affections, Leucippus (a mortal) was killed, Daphne's father, the river god Peneus, changed Daphne into a laurel tree to shield her from Apollo's unrelenting pursuit. But Apollo claimed the tree, saying "You shall assuredly be my tree. I will wear you for my crown." Devotees of Apollo traditionally depicted him in a laurel-leaf crown. It also became customary to place laurel wreaths on the heads of favored writers, poets, athletes, and artists.

### Daphne, Home of the Academy

Coincidence may account for the Academy campus being located in the city of Daphne, Alabama, USA. But it is no coincidence that the Academy has worked to build both the world's largest sports university and the world's largest fine sport art museum, the American Sport Art Museum and Archives.

The Academy and ASAMA were founded by Dr. Thomas P. Rosandich. He participated in 10 Olympiads, from the Melbourne Games in 1956 to the Atlanta Games in 1996, as either coach or consultant. Rosandich witnessed the unprepared athletes and dismal performances of the 1972 Munich Games and recognized a need for a national school of sports.

He was also well aware of Olympic history and the artistic and cultural heritage of the Games. In 1984, with a decade of operations under the Academy's belt, Rosandich opened ASAMA. There, sports history, art, and literature are preserved and the cultural connectivity of athletic competition and artistic expression is highlighted. ASAMA's collection includes works by artists from five continents; its development has made the Academy a presence in culture and education internationally.

In another pleasing coincidence, the Beijing Games' opening ceremony occurred on the 10-year anniversary of the museum's official dedication by the State of Alabama and Governor Fob James (8 August 1998).

One of the functions ASAMA performs is the designation each year of a Sport Artist of the Year. The honor is part of the quarter-century-old Academy's Awards of Sport program that pays tribute to the artist and the athlete. Past sport artists of the year include Ernie Barnes, Charles Billich, Hans Erni, LeRoy Neiman, and Cristóbal Gabarrón. These individuals comprise a circle of champions with unique power to promote art and culture around the world.

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Pictured at the opening of Mina Papatheodorou-Valyraki's (center) exhibit in Beijing is His Excellency Karolos Papoulias (left), President of the Hellenic Republic and Xikun Yuan (right), Sport Artist of the Year 2008.



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## Sport Artists of the Year 2008

During 2008, in light of a landmark Olympiad set in China, the Academy chose to honor two very special Sport Artists of the Year. Chinese artist Xikun Yuan and master calligrapher Gu Gan won in the sculpture and graphics categories, respectively.

Gu Gan's award paid tribute, in part, to his series of 33 calligraphy paintings exploring sport. One of the works commemorates the 2008 Beijing Games in a study of the five Olympic rings.

Known as a "portrait diplomat," Xikun has depicted more than 200 heads of international organizations, including face-to-face renderings of political celebrities such as former U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, former South African President Nelson Mandela, and IOC Honorary President Juan Antonio Samaranch.

## Culture and the IOC

The vision behind one of the world's most innovative academic institutions linking sports and art belonged to Rosandich—something not lost on the International Olympic Committee (IOC). In 1999, the IOC appointed him to its Commission for Culture and Olympic Education; through

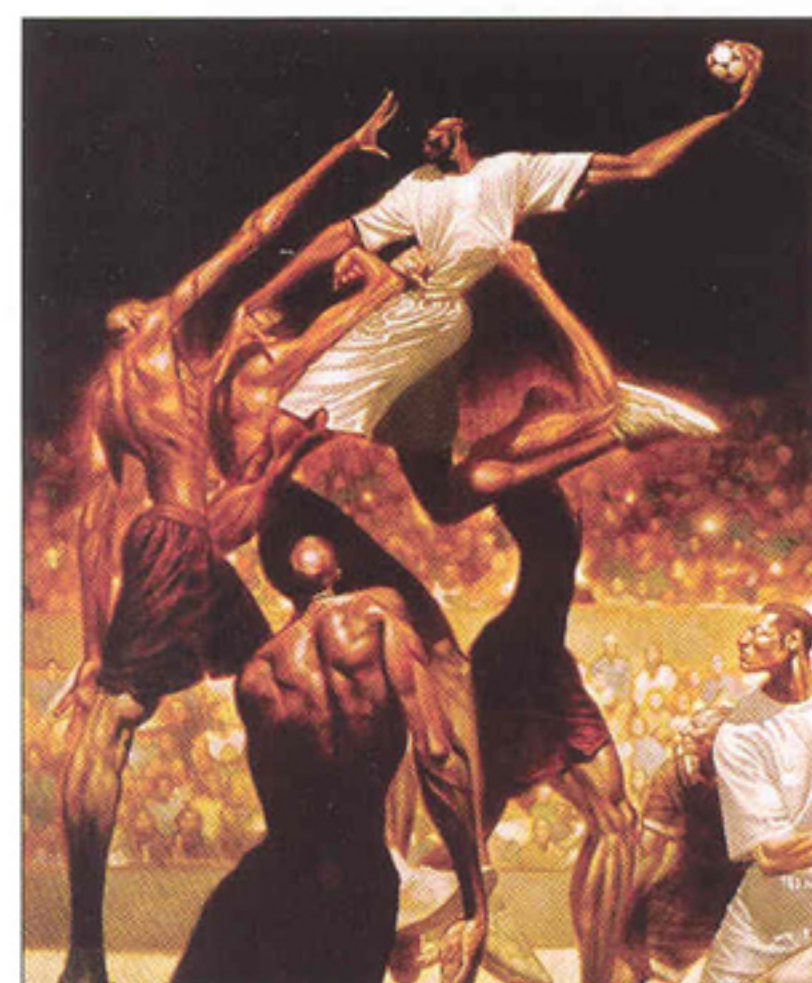
Beijing Games through their works. The Academy and the United States Olympic Committee conducted the American national qualifying round in the art contest (in graphic and sculpture categories), as well as national qualifying for the sport and singing contest.

## Art, Singing Contest Results

In the U.S. art competition, San Diego artist Kadir Nelson won in the graphics category, while Pacific Grove, Calif., native Edward Eyth won in the sculpture category. From the national competition, the entries proceeded to international judging in Switzerland last 15 May, joining some 60 other submissions.

The international winner in graphics was Ivan Patuc of Slovakia. His painting featured the sport of wrestling and earned a \$30,000 prize. In sculpture, the \$30,000 first prize went to Joe Datuin of the Philippines, who entered a work titled "Dancing Rings." Nelson's third-place finish earned the artist a \$10,000 prize; Eyth's work earned an honorable mention.

In the IOC's sport and singing contest, victory in U.S. competition went to "I Stand Amazed," a song performed by Legacy 12, a group of 8- to 12-year-olds from Lake Highland Prep School in Orlando, Fla. In



*"Anatomy of Team Handball"  
by Kadir Nelson*

to the public during the Olympics in Beijing and will become part of exhibits at the Olympic Museum in Switzerland, as well.

## Sport Artist Network

ASAMA and the Academy generate a wide network through which artists and others with a stake in art and sports are brought together to further their aims. This network was in full swing in the lead-up to the Beijing Olympics. In addition to working with Gu Gan and Xikun Yuan, the Academy assisted a number of its sport artists of the year in launching exhibits and partnerships spanning the globe. The stories featured next only begin to demonstrate the role the Academy fulfills in global art and culture.

## Valyraki Opens Beijing Exhibit

Mina Papatheodorou-Valyraki presented an exhibit titled "The Mind and the Body" at the Jin Tai Museum in Beijing, coinciding with the Games of the XXIX Olympiad. On hand for the opening of the show were Michael Cambanis, the Hellenic Republic's ambassador to China; Karolos Papoulias, president of the Hellenic Republic; and Xikun Yuan, director of the Jin Tai Museum and the Academy's Sport Artist of the Year 2008 (sculpture category).

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*Pictured above are the members of the judging panel that decided the IOC Sport and Art contest winners, in graphics and sculpture categories. From left to right are Tomas Sithole of the IOC; Abiola Akintola; Letila Mitchell; Chairman Zhenliang He; Dr. Ching-Kuo Wu; Dr. Thomas P. Rosandich; Edward Kensington; and Cris Gabarrón.*

a series of reappointments, he continues serving today. In the 2008 Olympic year, the IOC Commission for Culture and Olympic Education sponsored contests for artists and musicians interested in celebrating the

subsequent international competition, Legacy 12 received an honorable mention and the top prize, \$15,000, was awarded to the a cappella group Voiture, from the Republic of Korea.

The winning art and music were available



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