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We are today beginning the 17th Extraordinary Congress and the 36th General Assembly organized by the International Association of Art Critics, sponsored by UNESCO, the Venezuelan Chapter and the National Cultural Institute (CONAC), under the aegis of the Presidency, and during the celebration of the bicentennial of the birth of the Father of our country and of a great part of the American Continent, The Liberator, Simón Bolívar.

This event, the second which takes place in Hispanic America acquires very special characteristics, as it has united visual art critics from more than 30 countries, who have joined us in the mentioned continental celebration.

One constant factor in time is communication; man has been described as an animal capable of communicating, that is, of producing a message and receiving an understandable reply, subject to interpretation.

The modern world has re-established the symbol as an instrument of knowledge; that is, as a vehicle through which men can communicate thanks to stimuli and reactions within the complex network of interpretations which link images and ideas, which from myths and theories, as creations of the psyche, fulfilling essential functions and satisfying the vital needs of mankind.

Those of us here today, intellectuals devoted to penetrate into the aesthetic meaning of images, have, as a daily task, to submerge in the multiple symbology in order to apprehend the ultimate reality of things. This is why the linguistic, auditive and visual symbols, as well as that of any other kind of artistic nature, always reveal the basic unity of various areas of reality. Therefore, the artist is basically the main interpreter of reality, and who makes sense of the objective universe, transforming it into a world capable of being understood. The critic interprets by exploring the essence and existence. We should therefore remember that symbolization is prereasonable, but not prerational; it becomes the point of departure for all intellection of form and all the different kinds of experience of an intellectual or vital nature correspond to diverse levels of symbolic meditation.

Taking into account the distinction between the discursive symbol, of a logical character, and the representative symbol as a synthesis or coincidence of the perceptive and non-perceptive, of the material or immaterial world, a coincidence between opposing factors but whose dialectic development can transform them into an identity: a chiaroscuro of the metaphysical presence of the being which emerges between reality and appearance (real-appearance and apparent reality), the task of the creative artist is that of giving birth to the world.

Today, in your presence, a meeting begins in Caracas which will serve to meditate on the cultural identity of the continent; therefore, you will be moving among symbols and with symbols you will interpret.

Culturally, we are defined as individuals but also as peoples. It is the cultural identity which determines the profile of a nation, from its way of life, habits, form of social and political integration, to the creative process in the most diverse fields of art: the conception of the value of what is beautiful; in sum, the system of ideas and beliefs which define a population as an autonomous body within a given reality. Therefore, culture is a synonym for the every-day things, but also for the unusual.

This meeting in Venezuela of critics in the visual arts means to analyze from the Precolombian culture, the Conquest and Colonization periods, up to the current period. This implies being in contact not only with aspects which determine the cultural identity of the Spanish-speaking continent, but also to submerge ourselves in the essence of what is national. Consequently, cultural identity leads us inevitably towards the reaffirmation of a specific personality and this is precisely the national identity. To try to define this concept is extremely difficult, as it is a dynamic process in which very diverse elements are entwined, some disappearing and others emerging, from one generation to the next. This is the so-called popular spirit or soul, as it is defined by some experts.

Simon Bolivar, the intellectual who with a clearness of mind about the integrating function practiced by the common cultural aspects in his Letter from Jamaica dated September 6, 1815, stated, the following after carrying out a concrete analysis of the relationship existing between the Provinces of Rio de la Plata, the Kingdom of Chile, Nueva Granada, Venezuela, Guatemala, Puerto Rico and Cuba with Spain, conscious of the fact that America is indivisible: "We are a small human species; we own a different world, surrounded by immense oceans, new in almost all the arts and sciences, although, in a certain sense, old in the use of civil societies, as we are not indians or europeans, but an intermediate species, located between the legitimate owners of the country and the Spanish usurpers", adding: "I, more than anyone else, wish to see the formation in America of the greatest nation on earth, due less to its dimension and riches than to its liberty and glory"

Simon Bolivar, the Liberator, is the creator of nations in the continent, universal father of one part of the world; he is the symbol of integration, liberty, and democracy, values which define the cultural profile of the Americas.

Because of these reasons, we feel very honored to welcome such distinguished group of critics, and hereby wish you a fruitful stay which will enable you to investigate the cultural topics of the continent, here, in this land of Bolivar.