

*Discours d'ouverture du Congrès de Tel. Aviv
du Président Sweeney*

Your Excellency Mr. Abba Eban; Your Excellency
Mr. Mordehai Namir; President Gamzu; Excellencies,
Colleagues of the A.I.C.A., ladies and gentlemen:

It seems hard to believe that fifteen years have passed since that June in Paris when many of us here today met, for the first time as a body which was to become the International Association of Art Critics. But when we look back over those fifteen years we realize how much in a subtly indirect way has grown out of that inaugural session - how much so many of us (and international relations in the art field) have derived from it. From a group of formerly isolated writers on art with parochial prejudice which tended to close our eyes to the qualities in the arts of other peoples and of other periods because of our lack of familiarity with them, we have become a group eager to seek and explore constantly fresh fields. This transmutation is the ideal objective we all seek in our art writing the awakening of new appetites, the encouragement of a liberal point of view towards an unfamiliar aesthetic expression in the visual arts, when that expression has found a response among those whose opinion we feel deserves respect: what St. Thomas Aquinas in the Summa offered as a standard of

quality - the judgment of the highest trained sensibility - in his case, with reference to honey testing.

We of the A.I.C.A. have had the privilege of being introduced to the art of three continents, to the arts of three millenia. We have been stratifications of culture illustrated by master works at each stage, one above the other. We have explored the Old world of Europe as well as the European new world of art, which is our more immediate concern. We have peeped into the Near East and strayed into the jungles of Yucotan. Athens, Manhattan, Paris, Oxford, Dublin, Rio de Janeiro, Amsterdam, Basel, Zurich, Naples are only a few of the centers we have had the privilege of viewing and coming to know - intensively to be sure, rather than extensively.

In spite of the fact that the A.I.C.A. was born in Paris in 1948, it is interesting to remember that in Mexico it received and warmly accepted its invitation to Israel. And in the same sense it is encouraging to note that in Israel the Committee of Admissions has formally noted the admission of three new sections, two from South America - Peru and Paraguay - and one representing Australia, bringing the total number of sections to forty two. At the same time we are happy to announce the admission of 52 new members.

I have often been asked after a Congress, or a General Assembly: "What has your meeting accomplished?"

What does the A.I.C.A. contribute?" It is simple: it makes for a better understanding - and should continue to make for a better understanding among confreres in the world of art criticism - a fuller understanding of one another's points of view. This has been the great value - and the essential value of A.I.C.A. - something that we of A.I.C.A. must not let ourselves lose sight in any minor interest.

Last September's visit to Mexico is still fresh in the minds of all of us who had the good fortune to be able to make that most rewarding trip. We have never forgotten, and will not forget the kindnesses shown us there by our colleague President Crespo de la Serva and his associates and the introduction for many of us to the great Maya civilizations of Yucatan, the folk art of the Mexican countryside, the art of Colonial Mexico and contemporary Mexican painting and sculpture.

Now for the next ten days, thanks to the industry and hospitality of our colleague, the President of your Israeli Section, Dr. Haim Gamzu we are to have the privilege of making the acquaintance of one of the oldest cultures so intimately bound up with the roots that of all Europe and the West, and at the same time with probably one of the most progressive new nations: Israel.

This is an opportunity we have been looking forward

to over the past three years. I recall the eagerness with which Dr. Gamsu's modest early enquiries, regarding the Associations interest, were met. We all recall our cable from Mexico last autumn when there was a suggestion that, in view of unavoidable structural delays, we might not care to carry out our projected visit. We also recall the sentiments with which Dr. Gamsu's reply welcoming our Congress here this summer was received.

Your Excellencies, Mr. Abba Eban, Mr. Mordechai Namir we are most appreciative of your presence. It is a great privilege and honor to be received by you in this way here in your country. As I have said this Congress opening here today in Tel Aviv suggests to us, in a sense, the remarriage of our past with the present. This from an art critic's viewpoint is the source and essence of health for and in a work of art. We look forward in these next ten days to the concrete and eloquent illustration of this remarriage which we know has taken place here in your country during the past fifteen years.

This is something we have looked forward to ever since President Gamsu first hinted that you might receive us. And this is something that all present will recall

as a milestone in our Associations history. Here in your country we will have the opportunity to touch the ground that has so many links with the great expressions of Western art of the past and at the same time look into the future side by side with you - in other words, with you, to enjoy a lesson in how to live fully and healthfully.

Your Excellencies and President Gamzu let me thank you in advance on behalf of all the members of the A.I.C.A. and their friends here present for the hospitality and enrichment which the program you have prepared for us promises for this visit of ours to Israel, so auspiciously begun today. Your Excellencies and President Gamzu 'Je vous remercie'.

James Johnson Sweeney.