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Honorable Dignitaries, Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues and Friends,

It is with the greatest pleasure that we convene the 34th annual Congress of the International Association of Art Critics at the new Tate Modern in London. It is appropriate that the first AICA congress of the 21st century takes place in a city that is a new and vibrant art center, and in an impressive new museum building that provides glorious evidence of this development. By happenstance perhaps more than by design, past AICA Congresses have often been in places that were in the process of undergoing major changes in consciousness. To give just two examples, in 1989 AICA's annual Congress took place in the Soviet Union, shortly before its dissolution, and in 1997 the Congress was in Northern Ireland, just as the peace talks there were starting.

This time the changes seem to have preceded us, and the ferment and renewal are above all cultural. We are pleased to be in the thick of this new energy.

Recent Congress themes have dealt with art and art criticism in relation to such issues as conflicted cities (1997/Ireland), new technologies (1998/Japan), and contradictory new notions of Europe (1999/Poland). In other words, the themes have considered the broader context of the world with its geopolitical and social issues as well as the esthetics of art and the vocation of art criticism.

Here in London, the theme chosen by our British hosts is "Visual Art, Visual Culture?" It may well be appropriate at this time and place to zero in on visual culture in this way; to reconsider visual culture itself in terms of issues of representation; and to discuss the roles of artists, critics, curators, museums, schools, and cities as vehicles for culture in

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a new century. We can eagerly await the symposium, anticipating a range of insights and diverse points of view.

It is thanks largely to the vision and foresight of Mark Gisbourne, an AICA Vice President and AICA-UK's current Acting President as well as co-organizer of this Congress, that we have come together here today. It was he who originally proposed that the British section of AICA should host the AICA Congress in this symbolic millennial year, and his persuasion prevailed over several other sections who also had hoped to host the Congress in the year 2000.

On behalf of the Executive Bureau, the Administrative Board, and the Congress delegates, I also wish to express appreciation in advance to Keith Patrick, Congress co-organizer and former AICA-UK President, and to the British host Section of AICA. Also to Congress coordinator Jill Sheriden, who has done much of the most thankless organizational work. We are also honored to be made welcome by our other hosts: Tate Modern, the British Council, the National Gallery, the Whitechapel, White Cube. We must also acknowledge the role of AICA-Britain's former President, Katy Deepwell, who presided during most of the time the Congress was being planned.

In closing, I wish to assure everyone that contrary to recent reports in London regarding restrictive changes in AICA's membership criteria, no such thing has taken place. While AICA welcomes the unaccustomed attention and controversy, you should be aware that the reports have been inaccurate. I'm sorry to disappoint those who have stirred this tempest in a teapot, but there have been no exclusionary changes in membership regulations. What there has been, regrettably, is a misunderstanding. Each of AICA's 72 national sections around the world has autonomy to admit members as it chooses. AICA strives to be as diverse and inclusive as possible. It is

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particularly gratifying that, according to the registration count, this is one of the largest AICA Congresses ever. We anticipate an exciting and informative week.

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