

Kim Levin

## Introduction to the AICA Japan Congress

"Good morning, ladies and gentleman, colleagues and friends, it is with great pleasure that the International Association of Art Critics convenes in Japan on the occasion of the 32nd AICA Congress and General Assembly. It is a double pleasure, because 1998 is a landmark year for our organization, AICA celebrates fifty years of existence this year. The Congress here coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of this association of art critics, which was conceived in 1948 in Paris, during a meeting of art critics under the aegis of UNESCO."

"Last year the AICA Congress took place in Northern Ireland, a place that had suffered decades of religious and civil strife. The theme of that Congress had to do with centers of conflict and with melancholia, and our Congress there coincided with the start of the peace talks." ②

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"The theme of this Congress in Japan, "Transition: Changing Society and Art", takes on a different kind of relevance and a different kind of far reaching significance. We live today in a rapidly changing world, a world of amazing technological developments and scientific discoveries and at the same time a world increasingly beset by political chaos, economic volatility, societal anxieties, cross cultural confusions and improbable, unpredictable and sometimes alarming events. As we rapidly approach the cusp of a new Millennium and a new century, which it has sometimes been predicted will be the 'Asian Century', artists and critics alike around the world are dealing with similar questions of traditions and transitions. We come together this week from various parts of the planet. Everywhere the accelerating transformations of society and science have become crucial issues for art and for art criticism. In the closing years of the 20th century we deal with the rapidly receding past, the onrushing future and a present full of bewildering events. It is a time infused both with anxieties and with high hopes."

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"In the West the myth of the future has long been the driving force. For much of the 20th century, "The Modern Century", the future was envisioned in terms of progress as a new, improved, glorious Utopia. As we have become aware of the flaws in Utopian societies during our century and of the side effects of progress, an ambivalence has crept into these concepts of progress and modernization. We have also realized that the 20th century has been in many ways a cruel century; it has seen unprecedented genocides, destructive weapon developments, world wars and totalitarian regimes. It is no longer possible at this late day to view the future with unambiguous confidence. The 20th century is a very large question mark."

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"It is fitting that the papers and the discussions at this Congress will tackle crucial issues regarding art and society and technology at a moment of very rapid change. During the Congress, speakers will consider the impact of modernism and globalism, the problematics of identity and the dilemmas surrounding cultural issues in the late 20th century. These issues will be reconsidered from Asian perspectives. Among the themes to be discussed are<sup>x</sup> "Memories and Visions", including the sometimes difficult relationships between tradition and modernization, "Monuments and Icons", addressing the changing nature of public art, and "Technology and De-Materialisation", involving reality, virtuality and art in the age of the Internet."

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"We look forward to a fruitful dialogue among colleagues that will range from traditional concepts and contexts for art to the new virtual dimensions of time and space. On behalf of the International AICA Bureau, the Executive Council and the Congress delegates from many nations, I wish to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the organizers of this Congress and to everybody who helped them: to the President of AICA Japan, President Masayoshi Homma, to Congress Secretary, Fumio Nanjo, to the organizational staff and the members of the Japanese Section<sup>x</sup> of AICA, thank you for hosting the 1998 Congress. We look forward to many stimulating and thought provoking discussions together in the coming days. We anticipate a relevant and memorable Congress. Thank you."

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