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Speech for Opening Ceremonies International Congress for Aesthetics Beijing, August, 2010

Curtis L. Carter

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I. Introduction

First, let me thank the Nomination Committee of our past presidents, Arnold Berleant, Aleš Erjavec and Heinz Paetzold, and the members of International Association of Aesthetics (IAA, hereafter) who have placed their confidence in me as the next president. It is with considerable respect for my distinguished predecessors that I accept this high honor.

Secondly, my greetings to the representatives of the Chinese government, Mr. Yuan Guiren, Minister of Education and Mr. Liu Lifen of the Beijing Municipal Education Commission. And of course special thanks to our hosts: The organizing Committee of Peking University and the Chinese Society for Aesthetics. They have provided us with a Congress with richness and variety intended to address important issues facing aesthetics, and with the warm hospitality that is characteristic of our host nation, the People’s Republic of China. I want especially to thank Professor Ye Lang of Peking University and Professor Ru Xin of the Chinese Aesthetics Society. A warm expression of appreciation, as well, to my friends and colleagues Professor Gao Jianping, Secretary General of IAA and Vice-president of the Chinese Society for Aesthetics, and Professor Peng Feng who have worked diligently with their colleagues in organizing the Congress.

As well, we express our thanks to our current President, Jos de Mul, who has been most helpful in preparing the transition in the office of president. In addition to attending to the leadership responsibilities of IAA over the past three years, Jos has offered his sage advice on many thoughts for the future of IAA and I cherish his friendship as well as his assistance as I assume the duties of president.

A special welcome to the new officers of IAA. Jale Erzen, of Turkey who will serve as First Vice President, Gao Jianping who will assume a second term as Secretary General, with Katya Mandoki as Second Vice President, and Albert van der Schoot as Assistant Secretary General. Jale is no stranger to IAA as we recall the excellent leadership she provided to the IAA Congress of 2007 in Ankara and the publications including her role as Editor of IAA Yearbook 2008 and the 2007 Congress publications.

Also among the newly elected Delegates at large is Professor Wolfgang Welsh of Germany.
Additional delegates at large are to be elected later in this meeting.

To all of these elected by the membership, congratulations and a sincere welcome to your new offices in the IAA Executive Committee. It will be a pleasure to work with you in the advancement of the aims of IAA.

II. The Beijing Congress, with some 700 registered attendees is perhaps the largest to date. This Congress is important because it confirms a growing expansion of a global perspective based on collaborative East/West leadership with support coming from a broader range of geographic and cultural perspectives. In effect the IAA serves as the United Nations of national societies to the extent that such exists in aesthetics.

It is especially appropriate that China serves as host of the current Congress. Having successfully launched the Beijing Olympics in 2008, with a flourish of amazing artistic achievement, China has demonstrated its ability to represent aesthetics internationally at the highest level. Through my working with Chinese contemporary artists, scholars and students, and cultural leaders in the arts over the past several years, I have learned to appreciate the richness and complexities of these developments and achievements. Chinese artists working today are at the forefront of global arts developments. At the same time, Chinese scholars are eagerly exploring how to connect their traditional aesthetics culture with contemporary ideas and practices worldwide. It has been very rewarding as I have come to know the scholars and students in aesthetics at Peiking University, the Academy of Social Sciences and other universities. Similarly a hundred or more studio visits as well as gallery and museum contacts, have heightened my understanding and appreciation for the exciting work that is taking place. We will undoubtedly see some of the results in the special arts events arranged for this Congress.

III. What then shall we say about the future for IAA? We look forward again to the next Congress in 2013 in Poland. For a program for the future I will leave those thoughts for the General Assembly or the Closing Ceremony.

But let me raise just a few issues for our reflection together in these coming days. (1) As IAA positions itself for the next three years, there is need for reflection on its role and purposes given the existence of strong national societies and emerging regional societies such as the European Association and the Mid East Congress. (2) What precisely is the role of IAA in a changing world of aesthetics and the increasing globalization of cultures? Its principal achievements recently have been organization of the Congresses and publication of a Yearbook of Aesthetics. Is the structure that was adapted 20 years ago in Nottingham still effective? What changes might improve the functions of IAA? Are there other things that IAA might do, within its resources? Should it for example seek NGO standing with UNESCO and the United Nations to gain a broader visibility for aesthetics? (3) What is IAAA’s role as the UN of National Societies? Can we improve our communications and collaboration with other organizations? (4) How do we understand the contribution of aesthetics? Is it simply a closed field for a special interest of scholars? How does it relate to the practice of the arts? To people outside academic circles? (5) How
can we build on the collaboration of East West that is continuing, with every future IAA Congress? There is not time here for exploring these questions, but we can think together during the Congress and beyond and try to form some concrete plans.

Close: I look forward to working with you all as the new president of IAA and thank you in advance for helping to make this a fruitful three year term. Let me close with these words utter by Robert Musil at the funeral of Rilke, “In the realm of aesthetics, even imperfection and lack of completion have their value. ”

Thank you and be sure to enjoy the many opportunities offered by our Congress these days in Beijing.