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I am very pleased to greet you on behalf of AICA International in this preface to the Proceedings of AICA'S 52nd Annual Congress. Annual Congresses are very important in AICA's life. They project up-to-date questions in the field of art and society, both past and present. We can say they are milestones for AICA's worldwide membership, and the art establishment at large. This is a reason for AICA's commitment to holding these Congresses on an annual basis.

Every time we have a summit meeting of this nature, I consider it is important to recall a little of AICA's history, and the meaning of the congresses in this history, written over time in the last seventy years. AICA was born in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War in the framework of UNESCO. Its aim is to collaborate with UNESCO, in seeking to contribute to the reconstruction of ethical values. At an international level, it also aims to foster a rapprochement between different cultures, with full regard for the importance of cultural diversity. Art critics and art historians, as well as curators from museums of modern art, gathered at two meetings at UNESCO's Paris Headquarters in 1948 and 1949, to discuss the foundation of an International Association of Art Critics. They came from all over the world and included some of the most prestigious names of the time. Following those two international meetings at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, the International Association of Art Critics was founded in 1950 and admitted by UNESCO to the rank of an NGO in 1951.

Today, it may be said that AICA is a well-established forum for communication in the fields of art and culture, where many different voices can express themselves and be heard. It not only aims to promote art criticism, but also presents an open arena for debating the values of contemporary society. Its actions, decisions and debates can have important ethical repercussions, not only on culture, but also on society in general. AICA brings together people from all over the world, and is therefore, a locus for exchange and a breeding ground for ideas. There are around 5,000 associate members from 95 countries, organised in 56 National Sections, and an Open Section in which critics without an AICA section in their own country may participate.

From 2018 to 2020, AICA has been commemorating its Seventieth Anniversary. The 52nd Congress in Germany was an important milestone in this commemoration. AICA had not returned to Germany for an Annual Congress since the 1970s. Two important Congresses were held there in that decade: in Dresden and (East) Berlin in 1974, in the then German Democratic Republic (GDR), and in the city of Cologne, in the German Federal Republic (FRG), in 1977. This was, of course, at the height of the Cold War, following the division of the country into two distinctive parts, as a result of decisions taken by the Soviet Union and its three Western allies, in the years immediately following the end of the Second World War in 1945. That AICA, with its aim of political neutrality, was able to host these events and the accompanying debates on both sides of the ›Iron Curtain‹, was a matter of great significance and the cause of numerous national and international repercussions at the time.

In 2019 we came back to Germany with a theme proposed by the Association's German Section. Namely, AICA Germany considered it would be of the utmost importance to hear the views of art critics in an extended series of debates dedicated to ›Populism and Nationalism‹, thereby identifying art and criticism as expressions of society, with the potential to intervene in the tensions of everyday life. I can vouch for the fact that we were enriched by this exchange of knowledge and opinions and felt inspired to go further, in developing our own responses.

In this preface to the Proceedings of AICA's 52nd Congress, I would like to thank the German Federal Cultural Foundation (Kulturstiftung des Bundes) for the vital support they gave us with the cost of organising the Congress and funding the publication of the Proceedings. I want also to thank the German Commission for UNESCO for their patronage.

I also wish especially to thank Danièle Perrier, President of AICA Germany and her team, for their impeccable organisation of this event.

I should also like to mention my appreciation of the fact that the Congress organisers invited Jacques Leenhardt, International President of AICA at the time of German unification, to take part in a special conference, focusing on the relationship between the two German Sections of AICA at the momentous time of German reunification, on 3 October 1990. I am pleased to record that, as a consequence of his address at that conference, AICA Germany subsequently planned a Symposium on the subject of East-West relations. This was to have taken place at the end of this month, but has now had to be postponed until 2021, when it will take place at the Albertinum in Dresden.

I thank all the critics, art historians, researchers and members of the audience who took part during the eventful two days of the Congress in Berlin.