

**PRESIDENT'S DINNER - ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS**

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**SPEECH BY THE RT HON LORD JUSTICE ALAN MOSES,  
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AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS**

I am sorry to inject a note of complaint, even of protest on what ought to be a happy occasion. But it is a hard act to follow...I speak not of Mervyn Davies, gracious words surely should not be described as an act at all, but rather the unwelcome news, the bombshell that I was not the first to be asked to offer the toast. The startling news which I should share with you, that I was not the first choice, is that I stand-in for the stood down Jonathan Ross...I can only assume that the President is under the impression that Her Majesty's Court of Appeal peddles an even stronger line in banality and filth. It may be that the reason is the same as for Item 47 in the Byzantium Exhibition, like the Virgin and Child in the 6<sup>th</sup> C Ikon, it may be that Ross is historic and fragile, extremely vulnerable to movement which would expose him to long term damage and the curators have decided to exhibit myself, as a high quality photograph, in his place. There is further disappointment, I was told and my source is reliable, that there was to be table magic, legerdemain before your very eyes ....there is magic here as I shall explain but I suppose there was an inhibition on such fun tonight..... it might not have been thought wholly tactful to have Signor Gioci di Mani wandering from table to table making gold sovereigns or silver florins disappear under the noses of you, the Princes and Princesses of Commerce and Industry... you have probably seen enough of that for one life time.

I have a suspicion that you do not want me to talk about the recession or the regulation of the wholesale financial market or the syndication of debt. Well, I shall disappoint you I shall. I shall speak of recession, of leverage and of the hedge on the edge. This night I shall propose to you the advance from recession, the counterweight of leverage, the hedgerow and not the hedge. And may I suggest that the very reason each one of you is here tonight, is because you too understand that here is a place where you can celebrate and revel in the antidote.

I suggest, no, I assert, that the opposite of recession is creativity. And you are here, not only in a personal capacity but cloaked in the office of chairman and Chief Executive, President and Managing Director ,, you Arcadia and Accenture, GlaxoSmithKline and Goldman Sachs, because you and those with you do understand that here is the place to be to affirm the very contradiction of recession.

In this place, you celebrate, and by your presence you honour, an institution which defies the name of institution, a foundation with laws passed down from George III which defies all regulation, an establishment which defies the establishment. And it is, I suggest, its role in the process of creativity which marks the Royal Academy out from other institutions. Some of us, in days I hope now long past, tended to have an image of our favourite aunt, teetering past the statue of Reynolds, up the steps to the Summer Exhibition, before tea and a scone or pink fancy in the Friends Room. Not pausing to think of one of the leading fine art colleges, the Royal Academy Schools, this year 537 applicants for 17 places. And as she nibbles at her rock cake , beyond the door of the Casson room, ebb and flow the 30,000 people reached by the 900 programmes of the Education Department. Ignorant, perhaps of the Library holding

the Academy's vast collection of prints, engravings, rare books, objects, photographs and archives which, if only she knew how, she too could wonder at since the Academy is one of the first institutions to publish, after 7 years' work, its unique Collection on the web. Yes, there are other exhibitions in state museums, art galleries, art markets and art fairs, art colleges and institutions for research but here only here is an Academy, an assembly of working artists and sculptors and architects who lead and run the Royal Academy. It is above all that feature, that it is they who lead and rule the Royal Academy which distinguishes it from other museums and institutions. It is because the artists and architects of national and international stature, the Academicians, are engaged in the very process of creativity that the Royal Academy deserves its name. And if you doubt it, go and see Peter Freeth RA's pictures in the room next door.

How else could it boast the name Academy? Forget the hedge fund recall the hedge,.... that row of high cypress and ancient olive which surrounded a garden in northwest Athens. Here Plato opened his school of philosophy. The garden belonged to Academus and from his name derived the name of the garden where Plato taught, the Academia. Only those places sacred to learning and creativity are worthy of the name Academy, and I know you will share a profound sense of distaste that the Royal Academy seems to have forgotten, or worse yet, ignored the rule that academies were designed to exclude profanity and dissipation; in Plato's Academy it was even forbidden to laugh. Here then is one place that is more than a storehouse for art, more than a collection, more than an exhibition space though it is so eminent in all these attributes, it is a garden and as a former President taught, a garden is of more consequence than a granary. It combines so many attributes beyond the

presentation of collection and exhibition, because it is a creative institution for working artists.

I am afraid you must tell your aunt that long gone are the days when the Royal Academy thought of itself as a bastion against the avant-garde, and dim Presidents fought against Modern Art,.... dreary and arrogant jokes about Picasso or who drunkenly urged at the Annual Dinner...*if you paint a tree for God's sake try and make it look like a tree, and if you paint a sky try and make it look like a sky...What skies there were, he reminisced, in spite of all those men who have painted skies in the past, we should be painting skies still better.* Actually, I'm not sure we should altogether avoid those grim predecessors of Grimshaw. A Grimshaw speech, in his cups, describing to the successors of Tracey Emin RA what features they should paint and paint better I would not want to miss.

And how does this creative community rebuff recession? You cannot recede if you create, you can only advance. As they peer over what they perceive to be a decline, or worse, the edge of a cliff; your colleagues may see only fog and the obscurity of the unknown. After all, the most reliable forecast for limited visibility are those all too oft repeated words from the most eminent of spokesman...*lets be clear about this.* Those words always let you know that you are about to be engulfed in mist. But you are here because you know that in this place you will meet and appreciate the artists who lead the Academy, the painters sculptors and architects, who *do not view things in cloud and mist but apply the same standards of truth and disinterested spirit of enquiry that influence their daily practice to other subjects. They perceive form, they distinguish character...read men and books with an intuitive eye...the painter, says Hazlitt, is a critic as well as a connoisseur. The conclusions he draws are clear and convincing, because they are taken from the things themselves. He is not a fanatic, a dupe*

*or a slave; for the habit of seeing for himself also disposes him to judge for himself.*

Here, in this place, are the Academicians, the teachers, the students the librarians and archivists who will not acknowledge any decline, who will not join the herd, which confuses market forces with the urges of the Gadarene swine. Here they understand that *creation is the degree, to which, little by little, we have raised ourselves, that brings us level with certain heights. No one can leap from the foot of the mountain to its summit: it has to be climbed: yet the necessary muscles have to be trained and there must be the desire to achieve it.*(Ozenfant).

And as your colleagues shiver at what they perceive to be the new frost of market Regulation to emerge from BERR, you understand that *art is structure and every structure has its laws.* And you understand that the value of a work of art is not to be measured in coin, that art is so much more than an asset for investment; that when you judge a work it is so much more than a judgment of what it might fetch when sold, that the arid boast *we have sold the most expensive painting this year* will in future yield to expressions of true value.

And what of your vision, you who honour the Royal Academy? I speak not of the trite mission statement or the apology for some new piece of windy rhetoric, into which, just occasionally, government lapses. But the vision you share with all those who lead and run this place. Perhaps it is the vision of another academy, the academy, a type of drawing of a single nude figure in exemplary pose, skimpy drapery acting as a cache-sexe. ...although the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Council Minutes of the RA urged visiting Academicians to *dissuade students from bestowing unnecessary*

*attention on unimportant parts, especially when decency suggests their being passed over.* OR tomorrow, when you go to work and groan as colour gives way to civilisation, perhaps you will remember that vision of yourself, in Byzantium, standing looking, really looking and absorbing, not as some passive recipient of everyday pap, but full of excitement at the image of true leverage; the image of the Abbot Antonios, drawing the monks up, while their doubting brothers fall, dragged down by devils, up to the very top of the heavenly ladder of St John Klimakos ...

And in looking as you have done tonight, you acknowledge another aspect of reality, a true and for once explicable derivative : a thread derived from that very first sight of creativity, the silhouette of a hand spread out and set by a man, Paleolithic man, fifteen thousand years ago on the ochre floor of the cave at Cabrerets and leading unbroken, in the best of times and the worst of times, to the 21<sup>st</sup> century hands of Ackroyd and Ocean, LeBrun and Green, the thread spun and maintained by the Royal Academy. I give you the Royal Academy.