

Good Morning.

My name is Hossein and I'm partially responsible for you'all being here this morning.

Wow!

If I'd known there would be such an impressive turnout today, I would have invited my in-laws, the Alter Egos.

Thank you Dr. Burnett for filling in for Neil MacGregor, whose spirit is with us today, as are several Pharaohs, assorted Assyrian and Mesopotamian nobility turned to dust, and Persian Oligarchs with their home-improvement knick-knacks on loan from history. I myself am particularly fond of the Cyrus Cylinder, which the Museum has promised to loan me as a doorstop to allow some philosophical airings here today, by keeping open the portals of historicism.

A little over a year ago I stood before some of you at the launch of the Art & Patronage Middle East book at Sotheby's to declare myself a troublemaker. A candidate for the role of creative alchemist; a sorcerer of ideas, a wizard out to magic away the cobwebs of history and allow the light of honesty to touch our creative vision in the regions of the greater Middle East and North Africa.

We're here today to attempt such wizardry through the Art & Patronage Summit.

For WE ARE indeed in need of honest appraisal to seek out some of the causes for the creative backwardness of the regions under the spotlight today. We are in need of fearless investigation, theoretical reappraisal and practical solution seeking, if for no other reason than to leave this auditorium at the end of the day with a few creative prayers at the altar of history.

Look all around you at this grand Museum's magic rooms containing some of the glories of the region's past civilizations.

Visit some of its rooms and see the creative majesty of our past. Let us, then, as their descendants wonder out loud as to why it is we are where we are today?

Now, I know some of you will wince at my blanket use of the word *backward*. 'Look at the pockets of creativity bubbling up in Iran and Turkey, in some other parts of the Arab world?' You will ask. And you would be right. There are these pockets, but they're merely that. Doesn't take much to make comparisons against size, population and natural and human resources of the Middle East against mere pocket battleships of creative endeavour.

I know a little about these pocket-creative's myself. I've been hunting them down book by book over the past several years, platforming to best effect what there is and allowing world audiences (ourselves included) to go: Wow! We thought the Middle East only produced oil, and some other nasty stuff!

I know, I know.....generalisations are the preserve of cultural scoundrels, imperial overlords, colonial undertakers and national fundamentalists. I can claim membership of some of these clubs. But then so can many others, those who would hide behind the comfort blanket of history, flirting with the fruits of modernity and progress only in selective measure. Nobody is fooled by the gloss and glamour of faux cosmopolitanism dotting Mideast landscapes, places where women can ride an elevator but not drive a car. The Summit has even commissioned an artwork on the subject entitled the *Cloud, the Fisherman and the Mutating Cities*, which we plan to auction off in support of our Project Mart's winning recipients. So do please remember your checkbooks and pledge cards.

We have become guardians of non-change without knowing it. Gate keepers, thinking we can select our way to the Holy Grail, cherry-picking models, but not seeding the ideas behind them. For it is ideas, not bought models, which change society. Its all very well buying wholesale modern technologies, highways jammed with supercars and museums with crystal roofs. What we really need is a crystal ball with which to look at the heart of our problems, without a chip on our shoulders and the prejudices of nationalist or fundamentalist recoil.

We had it all. After all, we invented history. Religion too. Creativity that led to some degree in informing the European enlightenment, and then we stopped dead in our tracks somewhere in the Middle Ages as the world passed us by.

Now, I don't want to bore you with history lessons, but in order to understand the purpose behind this Summit, one has to look at cause and effect in order to overcome the effects of today's creative torpor. I've been doing that for the past five years and it's been an eye-opening experience, believe me.

Out with taboos. We need some straight talking here today. As I've written in the introduction to the A&P Programme you hold in your hands, 'Tis the season to call things by their proper names. Enough of platitudes bought with greasy money or art engendered for national publicity. We're gathered here today to bury the albatross of mediocrity and ineptitude, to embrace creative change, to imbue the system with new ideas and enthuse the younger generation with the power of art.'

And do we have a show lined up for you today, ladies and gentlemen.

A unique gathering of minds, thinkers and doers here to share their experiences, expertise and wisdom around the important subjects of institution building, collecting, funding art, and creative education. Each topic worthy of a whole conference by itself. Our gratitude is unbounded to all of you who've made the effort to come to London in the dead of winter. Some from warmer climes, others in the midst of climactic political changes unfolding across the region, change with uncertain futures.

But then uncertainty is what change is all about.

The courage and willingness to let go traditional lifelines, to seek undefined change, to explore unchartered social ideas and be willing to discard old models. Tired and defunct ideas newly dressed-up in religious garb, xenophobia and implacable ideologies which simply DO NOT cut it anymore. For anyone out to historical lunch, these retreats haven't been able to affect progress for the past five hundred years!

We're moving at the speed of light, even questioning the very speed of light itself in this universe of zettabytes and cloud creativity raining down new ideas by the minute, ONLY harvested in places where creative thinking replaces sclerotic emotions.

Let's get back to fundamentals as I try to reign in my ambitions for the Summit. Let's see what we, together, can achieve as individuals and not wait on others to light our way or fund our means. This Summit is a case example of what a group of dedicated people can achieve in a short spurt given purpose and direction. We can all make change happen.

Let us be the difference today.

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