

[ca. October
12, 1989]

PRESIDENT FRANCESCO COSSIGA
ADDRESS AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
(Washington, 12 October 1989)

MR. BROWN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN;

I AM PARTICULARLY PLEASED THAT BY A FORTUNATE COINCIDENCE MY PROGRAM MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO BE WITH YOU TODAY, ON THE OCCASION OF THE SOLEMN PROCLAMATION OF THE CULTURAL EVENTS WHICH ARE BEING ORGANIZED JOINTLY BY ITALIAN MUSEUMS AND INSTITUTIONS AND THE WASHINGTON NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART. FOR THE FORTHCOMING CELEBRATIONS FOR THE FIFTH CENTENNIAL OF THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA.

I GREATLY APPRECIATED THE GESTURE OF EXTREME COURTESY WITH WHICH TWO OF THE GREATEST WORKS OF THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE PRESERVED IN THIS MUSEUM HAVE BEEN PLACED FOR THE OCCASION IN THIS SUPERB SETTING, WHICH IS THE HIGHEST EXAMPLE OF CONTEMPORARY INVENTIVENESS, IN A TRIBUTE, THROUGH ME, TO ITALY AND TO HER CONTRIBUTION IN THAT FRUITFUL SEASON TO UNIVERSAL CULTURE AND KNOWLEDGE.

IT IS INDEED A FITTING WAY TO EMPHASIZE THE CLOSE CONNECTION THAT HAS BEEN CONSCIOUSLY MADE BETWEEN COLUMBUS'S ACHIEVEMENT AND THE RICH CULTURAL BACKGROUND, WITH ITS WEALTH OF CREATIVITY. RUN THROUGH BY THE QUEST FOR NEW KNOWLEDGE. THAT GAVE RISE TO IT.

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WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THE MAN, CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, ONE CANNOT FAIL TO NOTICE THE WAY IN WHICH HIS HUMAN AND CULTURAL PROFILE IS SO CLOSELY BOUND UP WITH HIS ADVENTUROUS AND TRIUMPHANT DISCOVERY. AND THIS IS NO COINCIDENCE.

FOR COLUMBUS AND HIS WHOLE ENTERPRISE, IN THOSE FINAL YEARS OF THE 15TH CENTURY, EPITOMIZED A WHOLE AGE THAT WAS PERHAPS UNIQUE IN THE HISTORY OF MANKIND, IN WHICH THE FAR-SIGHTEDNESS OF THE POLITICIANS, THE CREATIVE ENTERPRISE OF THE MERCHANTS, THE INDIVIDUAL'S THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE AND THE DESIRE FOR FORMAL PERFECTION MERGED IN HUMANISM AND IN THE RENAISSANCE. COLUMBUS, LIKE LEONARDO, WAS THEREFORE A RENAISSANCE MAN, WHO REAFFIRMED THE RIGHT OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO PLAY AN ACTIVE PART IN THE UNIVERSE. AND LOUDLY PROCLAIMED HIS NEWLY-FOUND INDEPENDENCE AND DIGNITY, TOGETHER WITH HIS ASPIRATION TO BE THE SOLE AUTHENTIC CRAFTSMAN OF HIS OWN DESTINY. BY HIS ACHIEVEMENT, AND BY WRITING THAT CHAPTER OF HISTORY, HE MADE THE BOLD DREAM OF EXPLORATION, CREATION AND DOMINATION COME TRUE: THE DREAM THAT HAD COME INTO BEING IN ITALY, AND HAD BEEN SPREAD THROUGHOUT EUROPE BY THE GREAT MINDS OF MEN SUCH AS PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI AND PAOLO TOSCANELLI.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS'S ROOTS WERE BOTH PROFOUNDLY ITALIAN AND PROFOUNDLY EUROPEAN. DRAWING STRENGTH FROM HIS OUTREACH, WHICH WAS VIRTUALLY UNIVERSAL IN HIS DAY, HE PLANNED AND CARRIED

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THROUGH HIS ENTERPRISE AS A COLLECTIVE -- OR AS WE WOULD SAY TODAY, SUPRANATIONAL -- VENTURE. HE VIEWED IT, AND CARRIED IT OUT BY POOLING HUMAN ENERGIES FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS AND THE EXPERIENCE MATURED IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BY SEAFARERS AND MEN OF ACTION OF EVERY NATIONALITY. AND HIS ENTERPRISE SUCCEEDED PRECISELY BECAUSE COLUMBUS THE ITALIAN, COLUMBUS THE EUROPEAN, COLUMBUS THE UNIVERSAL ITALIAN, KNEW HOW TO REACH BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THE KNOWN WORLD, PROJECTING HIMSELF BEYOND THE LIMITATIONS OF NARROW NATIONAL BOUNDS.

IN A WORLD WHOSE HORIZONS AND PERSPECTIVES HAVE BEEN OPENED UP BY THAT VISION AND BY THAT ACHIEVEMENT, OUR PRIORITY TODAY MUST BE TO PURSUE AND STRENGTHEN THAT CULTURAL COOPERATION WHICH HAS SUCH ANCIENT AND FIRMLY-FOUNDED ORIGINS. IN THE INTERESTS OF INCREASINGLY DEEPER UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN OUR NATIONS, BOUND BY KINSHIP AND FRIENDSHIP.

WITH THESE SENTIMENTS IN MIND, MAY I ONCE AGAIN REITERATE TO YOU, SIR, AND ALL THOSE PRESENT TODAY, MY SINCERE THANKS FOR YOUR WORDS OF WELCOME AND FOR EVERYTHING YOU ARE DOING TO ENCOURAGE AND SPREAD KNOWLEDGE OF ITALY'S ART AND CULTURE THROUGHOUT THIS GREAT COUNTRY. AND WISH EVERY SUCCESS TO THE JOINT PROJECTS THAT ARE PLANNED TO TAKE PLACE BETWEEN NOW AND 1992.

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