

Exhibit from the Academy's Archives



Every newly elected member of the Academy is asked to write a letter of acceptance. The thousands of such letters received over the past 225 years are one of the Academy's most important collections of documents. Now, visitors to the Academy's House in Cambridge can view a selection of these letters in a new exhibit in the atrium. Among the seventy-

five documents on display are the acceptance letters of Charles Darwin, Washington Irving, Mary Leakey, Martin Luther King, Jr., Marion Anderson, Willa Cather, John F. Kennedy, Abba Eban, John Cage, and Igor Stravinsky. The letters show the progress of technology, from handwritten notes to email, with telegrams, typewriters, and word

processors in between. Despite the changes in forms of communication, they are remarkably consistent in revealing how honored the new members feel and how committed they are to advancing the Academy's goals. From George Washington's acceptance, dated March 22, 1781, to the responses of recent inductees, members express their enthusiasm for the Academy's role in the life of the nation and the importance of its work to the world.

Written from a field camp during the Revolutionary War, Washington's letter states: "The Arts & Sciences essential to the prosperity of the State & to the ornament & happiness of human life have a primary claim to the encouragement of

every lover of his Country & mankind." Fifty years later, British mathematician Charles Babbage's August 1832 letter has a similar theme: "I beg you will assure the Academy how much I feel gratified at being thus connected with an institution which having for its object the discovery of truth, must have for its supporters all those who wish well to the interests of mankind." Nearly 200 years later, writing from California using a technology made possible by Babbage's work on computing machines, Quincy Jones echoes his predecessors: "The significant accomplishments and innovative approaches of the Academy are compatible with my own visions of global peace and prosperity." Silvio Micali pulls all of these sentiments together in his rousing 2003 response: "Long Live Art and Science!" ■

Induction

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lectual community and society. If the original Fellows studied subjects ranging from 'the various soils of the country' to the commerce of America, the Academy now provides analyses of security on the Internet, corporate responsibility, and the place of the humanities in the university and beyond. The goal is to advance scholarship and inform public debate." (The orientation remarks appear on pages 15 – 22.)

During the orientation, attendees also had the opportunity to view a new exhibit featuring a selection from the thousands of letters of acceptance written by Fellows and Foreign Honorary Members over the years.

At the afternoon Induction Ceremony, held at Harvard's Sanders Theatre, the Academy

acknowledged the individual accomplishments of the newly elected members. Representatives of various disciplines spoke about the challenges of contemporary society and reflected on important issues facing American science and scholarship. The natural disasters of the past year were much on the minds of those who spoke. In a series of readings, poet Susan Stewart of Princeton University reminded the audience that "in this time of extreme weather we are closer than ever to the universal claims that water and wind and fire inevitably make on our fragile human worlds." The speakers included physicist and Nobel Laureate Eric Cornell (Class I), genetics researcher Nancy Wexler (Class II), Harvard Law School Dean Elena Kagan (Class III), historian and University of Chicago Provost Richard Saller (Class



John Anderson (Case Western Reserve University) and Nicholas Donofrio (International Business Machines)

IV), and television journalist Tom Brokaw (Class V). (The full text of the speakers' presentations is printed on pages 7 – 14.)

Concluding the ceremony, President Spacks observed: "Throughout its 225-year history, members of the Academy

have worked together to advance intellectual thought and constructive action. We are confident that our newest group of members will help us fulfill that mission in new and significant ways." Given the success of the day's events, they are off to a good start. ■

Letter of Acceptance from Thomas Jefferson

Sir

Philadelphia Dec. 22. 1791.

I am to acknowledge the receipt of your favor of July 4th. covering a copy of Judge Lowell's eulogy on the late worthy President of The Academy of Arts & Sciences. I sincerely wish that my situation in life permitted me to contribute my mite to the labours of the society for the advancement of science, and to justify the honor they did me in placing my name on their roll. but however wedded by affection to the objects of their pursuit, I am obliged ~~to~~ to unremitting attentions to others less acceptable to my mind, & much less attaching. I read with pleasure whatever comes from the society, and am happy in the occasion given me of assuring them of my respect & attachment & yourself of the sentiments of esteem with which I have the honor to be Sir

Your most obedient humble servt



Mr. Pearson

Philadelphia Dec. 22, 1791

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Th. Jefferson

Mr. Pearson