

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
COLOMBIA, MR. ANDRES PASTRANA, DURING THE ART
EXHIBITION OF MAESTRO MANUEL HERNANDEZ AT THE
NATIONAL ART GALLERY IN KUALA LUMPUR**

Kuala Lumpur, March 2nd, 2001

In spite of distance, something now brings Colombia and Malaysia closer together: the fact that both countries now hold the works of Maestro Manuel Hernandez, this honor ratifies the painter's ideas on the need to internationalize our art and evidences that great esthetic productions surpass all borders without loosing their local flavor.

Maestro Hernandez has created a universal art that has not lost its Colombian essence. Even though he has followed the same road of Carlos Rojas and Eduardo Ramirez Villamizar, who absorbed language of the abstract in the United States and in Europe, he has not lost the echo of our people and our light because of that.

Maestro Hernandez has said that what amazed him most of his childhood travels to the warm town of La Vega was the steamy atmosphere of the climate, the manner in which it dissolved the outline of things, until they became blurred, hazy, and soft.

That experience is reflected in all his paintings and now forms part of the heritage of universal painting.

Today everyone visiting this art exhibition in Kuala Lumpur can perceive the sensitivity of the shy child who grew up along side a magnificent father who would abandon his engineering work on Sundays to go and paint the landscapes of the Savannah, and in so doing turning his local world into a universal asset. He has never resorted to national issues for inspiration because he is convinced that painting has nothing to describe nor tell, on the contrary, painting only reflects one's own universe of shapes and colors, and he has given a Colombian and Latin American touch to his creations.

This tone manifests itself in his painting style and in the way in which he understands his identity: Maestro Hernandez has insisted on defining the essence of what is Latin American based on a feeling of introspection; he sees it as a trend towards spiritual absorption and restlessness. In his work, painting is viewed as a form of meditation that goes against all those in the region who believe art finds its starting point in

exuberance. Such sentiment has acquired a diaphanous and overwhelming expression.

In the 35 works exhibited here, in his 35 visions of enigmatic symbols, there is no grandiloquence or the flashy desire to impact. With very few colors, with a very limited alphabet of forms, he obtains maximum result with minimum resources. This artist has created works of art that lead us to question ourselves and also leads us to silence. Works of very light and floating figures, filled with spirituality, revealing the presence of the mysteries of life, lead us to a moment of revelation.

Nothing could be more in line with the East than a painting where spiritual quest and the praise of serenity and quiet are his deepest intentions. It is not by chance that during this one year voyage across Indonesia, Korea, India, Hong Kong, Macao, Philippines, Australia, and now Malaysia, Maestro Hernandez's work has been welcomed by the public and critics. In this warm embrace of cultures, Colombia and the Asian continent have found that their most intimate concerns are in perfect tune.

I believe this bond, created by one of our most important national artists, by a fellow countryman that teaches us that sensitivity and creativity can survive amidst all our problems, should applies to the ties between the peoples of Malaysia and Colombia.

Let this be an occasion to celebrate, with art and culture, those ties that bond our two countries, and that will continue growing and increasing with the same greatness and transparency we find in the works of Maestro Manuel Hernandez!

Thank you very much and I hope you enjoy this exhibit called "Paper and Symbols".