Honorary Doctor of Engineering
Dr John MAEDA

Public Orator Professor Christian WAGNER

Mr Pro-Chancellor:

Dr John Maeda's life and career is a tapestry of many threads, defined by humble beginnings, the highest academic achievements, innovative endeavours in art, science, venture capital, design and education, and by this current position as Vice-President of Design and AI at Microsoft.

In his early career, Dr Maeda taught media arts and sciences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and served as Associate Director of Research at the MIT Media Lab. Later, he became President of the Rhode Island School of Design before turning to the world of business where he served on the board of directors at Sonos Inc. and Wieden+Kennedy and was appointed Design Partner at Kleiner Perkins Caufield and Byers, Global Head of Computational Design and Inclusion at Automattic, Executive Vice-President and Chief Experience Officer at Publicis Sapient, and most recently as Chief Technology Officer at Everbridge as an expert in critical event management.

It is perhaps appropriate to see him as someone who builds bridges that bring people together and connects fields of knowledge. Educated in computer science at MIT, he was inspired by what he called "humanist technologists" who, having witnessed the destruction of World War II, advocated the use of the arts as a counterbalance to science. Dr Maeda shares their vision that while science has brought about opportunities for human advancement, it has also created danger and crises. On the other hand, the arts keep humanity alive like a shining light in the dark and give science its rationale and purpose. The two are meant to work together but modern education has unfortunately tended to keep them apart.

Dr Maeda then became a strong proponent of STEAM, successfully persuading the US Congress to insert Art into a curriculum largely comprising Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, thus turning STEM into STEAM. At MIT, he formed the Aesthetics + Computation Group, bringing together computer-knowledgeable designers who could code and artistically minded engineers who could design. Thus he began his enduring effort to reconceptualise the relationship between the two disparate fields of technology and design.

Dr Maeda grew up in an immigrant family in Seattle, US, where his father ran a tofu factory. While he acknowledges the power of education in effecting social mobility, he is sensitive to the daily difficulties that minorities must grapple with. He observes that in American society, Asian males are often accorded a kind of invisibility, which ironically gives them the freedom to manoeuvre across racial and gender lines. This works to his advantage in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion. At MIT, he headed the Race and Culture Relations Committee. In leadership workshops, he urges corporations to be mindful of unconscious biases that are built into the system. As people of various ages, cultural backgrounds and gender approach the world in diverse ways with different ideas, inclusivity becomes both a moral imperative and a practical necessity.

As a globally celebrated technologist, designer and author, Dr Maeda is recognised by *Esquire* as one of its 75 Most Influential People. Many of his books are favourably received, including *How to Speak Machine* and *The Laws of Simplicity* and his artworks are included in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Cartier Foundation in Paris.

These accomplishments have won him awards and accolades, including the White House's National Design Award, the Tribeca Film Festival's Clayton Christensen Disruptive Innovation Award for STEM to STEAM, the Blouin Foundation's Creative Leadership Award, the AIGA Medal, the Raymond Loewy Foundation Prize, the Mainichi Design Prize, the Tokyo Type Directors Club Prize, and his induction into the Art Director's Club Hall of Fame.

Recalling Nelson Mandela's famous line "Do not judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again", Dr Maeda stresses the importance of resilience in managing the challenges of our uncertain century, individually, organisationally and governmentally. His thinking is deeply shaped by formative experiences, such as leading the Rhode Island School of Design through the most difficult economic times. To him, success means that having survived one challenge, one moves on to the next with energy and resolve, knowing full well that all crises are short-lived.

Mr Pro-Chancellor, with visionary zeal, a wealth of practical experience and a deep resource of knowledge, Dr John Maeda has projected a world of possibilities where age-old lines of division are being negotiated and redrawn. His work in education, technology, design, and crisis event management is premised on a wish to connect, making the world a better place for all of us. Mr Pro-Chancellor, may I present to you Dr John Maeda for the conferment of Doctor of Engineering, *honoris causa*.