

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR CULTURE, MR. S. RAJARATNAM,
AT OPENING OF PHOTOGRAPH WEEK ORGANISED BY THE SINGAPORE
POLYTECHNIC PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY FROM 17TH TO 23RD
JANUARY, 1964.

I am very glad to have been invited to open this exhibition organised by the Singapore Polytechnic Photographic Society. As was to be expected of an exhibition organised by Polytechnic students had laid stress not only on the aesthetic aspects of photography but also on its technological aspects. For in addition to the photographs, the exhibition includes display of photographic equipment such as enlargers, photo-copying machines, colour processing equipment and even T.V. equipment.

Photography is an art which, in many respects, reflects the characteristics of 20th century society.

First of all it is in every sense of the word a mass art medium. The ordinary man though deprived of the talent of being able to draw or paint can nevertheless express himself artistically through photography. It does not require much talent to manipulate a camera -- especially a modern camera where, as the advertisements say, all you have to do is to point and press the shutter.

However though anyone can learn to manipulate a camera only those with imagination and artistry can take a good picture. Photography, therefore, offers everyone of us avenues for finding such artistic expression as we are capable of.

Another feature of photography is that it is a combination of art and technology. A good photographer is not content with just pointing his camera and shooting. His dark room technique can transform an indifferent picture into something imaginative and arresting. To do this he has to have a complete understanding of the properties of the materials he works with. A good photograph is the imaginative control and arrangement of the interaction between light and chemicals -- the utilisation of the principles of chemistry and physics in the interests of art.

In some respects photography is an art very much down to earth. The artistic imagination is compelled by this medium to keep very close to life and reality. As a former newspaperman I am well aware of the potentialities of photography for making people aware of what is happening around them. A good photograph can make a greater impact on the people than can columns of arresting prose.

This being so, our photographers can, through this popular medium, do a great deal more than they have to communicate worth-while ideas effectively. Particularly so in a multi-lingual society like ours, photography, being a visual medium, can break through the language barriers.

I am happy to note that this exhibition is not just a display of photographs. In addition to general topics, emphasis has been given to the importance of industry in our fast developing state. Of the four prizes to be awarded, two are for photographs on general topics and two for photographs on industrial topics. I congratulate the members of the Singapore Polytechnic Photographic Society for using this exhibition as a means of making us aware of our potentialities as an industrial society.

Of course, I realise that Polytechnic students have a vested interest in the industrialisation of Singapore for more industrialisation means greater job-opportunities for them. But speedier industrialisation means also a more stable and more prosperous future for all of us.

I, therefore, commend the organisers of this exhibition for this judicious mixture of art and industry. I wish the organisers and helpers of this exhibition a successful week ahead and have great pleasure in declaring open this Singapore Polytechnic Photographic Week.

JANUARY 17, 1964.

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