

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR CULTURE, MR. S. RAJARATNAM,
AT THE OPENING OF SHELL'S "MALAYSIA DAY PAINTINGS
EXHIBITION" AT SHELL HOUSE ON 27TH AUGUST 1964 AT
5.15 P.M.

I am happy to have been asked to open Shell's Malaysia Day Celebrations Paintings Exhibition. Some of you may ask what possible affinity there could be the Shell Group of Companies, which is essentially a business enterprise and art which deals with intangibles.

An exponent of economic materialism would say that the bond between Shell and the artist is that they both deal in oils, one for purposes of lubrication and internal combustion and the other for the more inspiring, if less profitable, business of decorating canvas. True your chairman, possibly anticipating such snide remarks as this, has exonerated his company by expressing regrets that the oils used in these paintings are not the sort that his company produces.

Be that as it may the Shell Group is to be commended for using some of its worldly wealth to commission Inche Hoessein bin Enas to do paintings for a book called "Malaysians". Some of the original paintings used for the book are, I understand, being exhibited here.

I hope that other affluent business enterprises in Malaysia will follow Shell by becoming patrons of local artists. In the old days great artists flourished because of patronage by churchmen, by monarchs and princes and by merchant princes. Just as churches and stately homes of princes were also art galleries, so too there is no reason why the offices of big business and industrial enterprises should not at the same time be temples of art where the worship of mammon could acquire class and refinement through worship of beauty as well.

And now I would like to congratulate the artist, Inche Hoessein whose works are being exhibited here today. I have already seen the paintings reproduced in the book for which they were originally commissioned. He has managed to convey, through paint and brush, the vitality, colour and diversity of that which we call Malaysia. He has quite rightly reduced the essentials of Malaysia to the activities of its peoples, how they work, how they play, how they worship, how they adorn themselves, how they seek beauty and, most important of all, how they pursue these universal and common ends in a variety of ways.

This after all is of the essence of Malaysia - diversity in unity. Unity there must be but a unity that denies diversity is tyranny and decay.

Similarly diversity without an underlying unity must mean anarchy.

It is all a question of finding a fruitful balance between diversity and unity. Malaysia is founded on the faith that such a balance can be found. Such a balance must be found if Malaysia is not to disintegrate.

Artists like Inche Hoessein bin Enas can help in our quest by visual presentation of the theme that a variety of races, cultures and traditions can be a source of strength.