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SPEECH BY MR A RAHIM ISHAK, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AT OPENING OF EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS
BY PROF SUNYEE AT THE CHINESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
AT 5.30 PM ON TUESDAY, 6 DECEMBER 1977

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Artists whether they be painters, sculptors or dancers, need patronage. This is a crucial element to their continued creativity and livelihood. Some enjoy the blessings of kings like Leonardo de Vinci who settled quite comfortably in his last days at the Chateau de Clou given to him by Francis the First of France. Others like Michelangelo was given stupendous commissions by the Pope. The Japanese colour-print painters of the Ukiyo-e School like Hokusai and Hiroshige appealed to both the aristocrats and lesser mortals.

In Singapore, patronage of the arts although lacking in some quarters come mainly from the rich. With growing affluence, there would be more among us who are in a better position to support our artists. If only Singaporeans could spend on works of art as much or even half of the money which they spend on consumer luxuries like expensive television and stereo sets, refrigerators and streamline European sports cars, life would be richer and more gracious. Much has been done to make Singapore green and beautiful. Let more of us take our own steps to match this aesthetic taste by making our own homes as gracious as possible. Art generally can help make our domestic lives that much more pleasant and agreeable. Some of us become embarrassed when we are called "ugly Singaporeans". Lack of appreciation of the arts is a contributory factor of this phenomenon.

I am not saying that artists and their works are completely not supported by our citizens but there is a case for more encouragement and appreciation. I understand that the recent Chinese Ceramics Exhibition was well attended and that many items were sold. Perhaps Chinese porcelain is a good investment! Many

of us do not buy pieces of art for art's sake but as a means of decorating the house. Surely we should be above this.

Another reason perhaps for this lack of patronage of the arts is that Singapore has no tradition of a national art form. What we have at the moment are streams of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Western arts. There have been efforts by our artists to blend these into a national form by combining style and subject matter from the various streams into an integrated whole. Their task in this respect may become easier with time because nationalist fervour and patriotism will have a powerful and sustaining influence. In the case of the Dutch, their 16th century artists glorified their ships on canvas because overseas trade was the mainstay of Holland's wealth. Other Dutch artists reserved a place for the tulip even though this flower originated from Turkey. Two subjects Singapore artists could consider are ships and orchids.

To conclude, there is a case for more patronage of the arts in Singapore and there is also a case for increased appreciation of our local artists and their works. One possible way of doing this is to hold courses in art appreciation in our schools and in Community Centres. This would be particularly useful for adults who had missed the opportunities to be imbibed with this aspect of education in their younger days at school.

In declaring this exhibition open, I would like to commend Prof Sunyee for her unrelentless and untiring efforts to make Singapore's art known overseas. She has combined to perfection local subject matter with her exquisite touch characteristic of Chinese paintings. Truly she must be regarded as one of our celebrated artists.

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