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Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • tel: 3378191 ext. 352, 353, 354/3362207/3362271

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SPEECH BY MR S RAJARATNAM, SECOND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
(FOREIGN AFFAIRS), AT THE OPENING OF THE 7TH INTERNATIONAL
PHOTO-ART EXHIBITION AT THE ART GALLERY, NATIONAL MUSEUM,
ON SATURDAY, 5 JUNE 1982 AT 5 PM

First of all I would like to congratulate the organisers of this Photo-Art Exhibition for making it possible for Singaporeans to see some fine examples of photographic art from some 46 countries. What you see here is a selection from some 4,600 entries submitted by over 1,200 photographers.

If photographic standards are to be raised in Singapore we should measure ourselves not by Singapore standards but by world standards and this exhibition is no doubt intended to help Singapore photographers make a frank assessment of how they compare with the best.

We already have a number of Singapore photographers who are of world class but they are few and far between simply because though camera ownership has increased dramatically during the past two decades in Singapore, because of growing affluence, the potentials of photography as an artistic medium are not widely appreciated and understood.

For most people a camera is a marvellous mechanical toy. It enables anyone to make an exact image of anything he fancies without possessing the skill and disciplined training demanded of a painter. Today thanks to total automation - auto-exposure, auto-flash and auto-focus - even a child can produce a photograph by just pressing a button.

Because of this most people cannot think of photography as a serious art form demanding as much skill and intellectual discipline as any of the other arts.

But the fact that it is easy to operate a camera does not therefore mean it cannot be used as a tool for serious art. One

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might as well argue that since anyone can strike the keys of a piano and produce musical sounds, the piano cannot be thought of as a serious musical instrument.

Like the piano the camera is just a tool. In the hands of people with no imagination and an untrained eye you produce meaningless snapshots of friends, family and occasions. They are of interest only to a small circle of friends and family.

But in the hands of an artist the photograph he produces is not just mechanical reproduction of what the camera saw but what a thinking and sensitive human being saw. His photographs reproduce images and communicates, at the same time, feelings and comments about these images.

The snapshotter sees with two eyes - as a matter of fact, in most cases, with only one eye.

But the artistic photographer sees with a third eye. The third eye does not see just objects. It sees many other other things which escape the attention of the untrained eye. It sees undetected shapes, forms, contours, the subtle shades of colours and the relationship between them. The artist with his third eye will see colours as expressive of moods, time and place.

Therefore even if one cannot be a great photographer, the camera can train you to see in the world around you things you would otherwise miss.

The camera can freeze the fastest of movements. It can magnify things many times over. It can see colours that escape the naked eye. It has microscopic vision. It can give you telescopic and panoramic vision too.

All of these are beyond the reach of the human eye but available for use by a creative photographer.

Many of the photographs you see at this exhibition should make clear to you that they are not the mechanical products of a camera but of artists who know how to use it as an artistic tool.

All you have to do is try to reproduce yourself some of the pictures here which caught your attention and you will realise in no time that there is more to a photograph than just pressing a button.