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**SPEECH BY MR WAN HUSSIN ZOOHRI, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY  
(HEALTH AND CULTURE), AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF  
THE CHEN CHONG SWEE RETROSPECTIVE, FOURTH IN THE SERIES  
OF "PIONEER ARTISTS OF SINGAPORE" EXHIBITION  
AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM ART GALLERY  
ON FRIDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 1984 AT 5.30 PM.**

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Today's exhibition is the fourth in the "Pioneer Artists Exhibition" series, jointly organised by the Ministry of Culture and the National Museum since 1981. The series aims to bestow tangible recognition to our pioneer artists for their significant contribution to the growth and development of the visual art in Singapore. It also serves as a means of providing strong inspiration and encouragement to our young artists as they go about their artistic endeavours.

The industrious efforts of our migrant pioneers and their descendants have been the building blocks of modern Singapore, a country with no natural resources. These migrants brought along with them their spirit of endurance and their baggage of traditions which have now formed the backbone of our cultural heritage. It is well that we preserve and develop this heritage or else run the danger of degenerating into a 'rootless' people. Hence, our emphasis on our traditional cultures as reflected in our gestures to acknowledge old guard artists like Chen Chong Swee as at this exhibition.

Coinciding with our celebration of 25 years of nation-building, it is extremely meaningful to feature "Chen Chong Swee Retrospective", highlighting the works of a prominent Singapore artist. Social progress is gauged not

only by economic life, but also the collective output of paintings, sculptures and literary and other creative works expressing the experiences of a nation. Therefore, those who have contributed to our cultural life like Chen Chong Swee merit pride of place.

Born in Swatow, China, in 1910, Chen Chong Swee was educated in the Hsin Hua Art Academy (Shanghai). Established in 1925, this Academy, for a brief period, operated as a catalyst in the propagation of avant-garde art in China. This movement included renovation to the acquired conventions of traditional Chinese paintings as well as interpretation of modern tendencies based on styles identifiable with the Schools of Paris.

Had Chen Chong Swee stayed put in his homeland, it would have been a different story. But by a quirk of history, he decided to migrate. Arriving in Singapore in 1931, he energetically "plugged" himself into the local art scene by teaching art in secondary schools. In 1951, he joined the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, retiring in 1972. With a handful of like-minded colleagues, he placed the Academy in a prominent position in the fifties and sixties. For such a contribution to art education, he was awarded the Public Service Star by the Singapore Government in 1965.

"Chen Chong Swee Retrospective" today features about 220 works in diverse media, reflecting a lifetime of consistent development in and passion for art, spanning the forties through the eighties. In his works, several outstanding city landmarks of Singapore in the fifties and sixties have come to life again. These include Raffles Place, Empress Place, the Wesley Methodist Church and Kallang River. The exhibition is therefore not only historically significant but can also arouse a sense of identity for the young and take the old down memory lane.

Chen Chong Swee's devotion to art education has been fruitful and is substantial. He has helped to nurture many young talents who now form the core group of our promising artists. Without the contribution of such pioneers, the art scene would not be what it is now. Thanks to them, our visual art is perhaps the most highly developed. Among the art forms in Singapore, it is the visual art that is most readily identifiable as Singaporean, in the midst of our cultural heritage.

Chen Chong Swee's favourite media have been the traditional Chinese media and water colour. One of his significant "breakthroughs" has been a successful marriage of these two different media, which is his hallmark and unique style. Chen Chong Swee's pictures are the very reflections of the spirit of contemporary times and abound in local colour. Michael Sullivan, the art historian, has said that "he is the only one who has attempted at all successfully to translate into the traditional medium the beauty of Malaya with its endless vistas of attap villages and palm trees bending over long white beaches.". Whether we agree with these views or not, we should exercise our heightened sight and consciousness in understanding the message underlying each painting when viewing this exhibition. All Chen Chong Swee's works have been created with this in mind. This is a standing invitation - to share and rejoice with the artist.

I now declare the "Chen Chong Swee Retrospective Exhibition" open.

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