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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 FONG SIP CHEE, MINISTER OF STATE FOR CULTURE AT THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 11TH COLOUR PRINT BIENNIAL OF THE
FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'ART PHOTOGRAPHIQUE (FIAP) AT THE
NATIONAL ART GALLERY ON WEDNESDAY, 29 APR 82 AT 5.45 PM

The Photographic Society of Singapore is to be congratulated for hosting this 11th Federation Internationale De L'Art Photographique (FIAP) Colour Print Biennial Exhibition. It is a rare treat for Singaporeans. Although it is true that our photographers have, over the years, made their mark on the international scene in photography, the choice of Singapore as the venue for this exhibition, and the Photographic Society's ability to host it, must have been the result of our years of perseverance in the pursuit of excellence in this comparatively new art form.

There has been some controversy as to whether photography should earn its place and be recognised as a new art form. The purists, quite understandably, must feel appalled at such a proposition. The best answer is provided by the fine works of photography itself.

At the risk of being too simplistic, I should imagine that any medium which demands of one's creativity, a sense of beauty and aesthetics, an innate ability in grasping the essence and contrast of an object, and presenting the end result capable of communicating with the people, evoking feelings and appreciation in the process, must be accorded its rightful place in the world of art. In my view, photography has gone a long way from the days when having a picture taken was just an expensive excursion and a novel experience, accomplished through much fuss, bother and excitement.

Picture-taking no longer serves only its primary need of novelty; nor for posterity and nostalgia alone. Preference and bias, aesthetics

and simplicity, and artistry, have gone into the production of a picture. It is no longer snapping an object for what it is, or what it will appear most obvious to the viewer. It is the ability to capture the object and presenting it in a way which gives the viewer a feeling of what you want the object to represent or mean.

I am glad to note that the Ministry of Culture has not fallen prey to the temptation of having to play judge on whether photography ought to be recognised as an art form or otherwise. In fact, Mr David Tay, the Honorary Secretary of the Photographic Society of Singapore serves on the Art Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Culture. I do not dismiss other talents or artistic traits which Mr Tay must have, but I believe his service on the Committee was sought for his indulgence in photography.

For some time now, I have been considering if photography should also earn itself the distinction of having a separate Committee. The early reservation on such a move was due to the prevailing view then that on its own, photography may be too limited in scope or in depth. We have adjusted our focus since then, when more light has been thrown on the subject. The Committee can perhaps be titled: The Advisory Committee on Photographic Art. I shall ask my Director of Culture to work on it.

I hope this will add another feather to your cap. It is fair to say that your Exhibition has achieved more than what it has originally set out to prove. I wish you all success.

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