

Singapore Government 12 JUL 1982

PRESS RELEASE

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

04-2/82/07/01

SPEECH BY MR FONG SIP CHEE, MINISTER OF STATE FOR CULTURE, AT THE
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE NAIVE PAINTING EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL
MUSEUM ART GALLERY ON THURSDAY, 1 JULY 1982 AT 5.30 PM

It is perhaps my distinct honour for having the privilege to declare open two exhibitions of works of art by German artists of, interestingly enough, 'opposing' styles.

In September 1971, at the opening ceremony of an exhibition of reproductions of the works by Albrecht Durer, brought to Singapore by the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, I made the remark that Durer was the first German artist "to observe art scientifically, according to geometrical laws, perspective and human proportions." Durer, born in 1471, stood tall as an artist in his era. His consummate skill and his versatility had won over the artists who came after him.

My admiration for Durer, most certainly, does not detract from my appreciation of the Naive painters and their works. On the contrary, on reviewing the literature given to me by Dr Uwe Nitschke, Director of the Goethe Institute, and on going through the descriptions of the 89 original paintings done by 31 of the German Naive painters featured in this exhibition, I have come to wonder whether a statement I had made on the occasion of the Durer Exhibition had not been too limiting. I had said then: "The works of Durer have stood the test of time. He had, in his works, given an insight into life which has enriched the human society."

Indeed, what I had said of Durer could apply, even more aptly, to the Naive painters whose works, by their freshness of vision and an absence of preconceptions, have drawn the attention of the public, and the less conservative and less biased painters who have had their training in conventional art schools, to the very desirable attributes found in

the romance with nature and with life which the Naive painters have found to be the reality they encounter.

Thus, if not for anything else, the style of the Naive painter goes way back, in terms of describing the human condition, beyond the time of Durer. It ranks in value with the 'primitive' style or 'art primitif', as the French would describe it, having back in their minds the efforts of Henri Rousseau or Paul Guaguin in seeking closer communion with mother nature, in offering us an insight into what humankind would perceive to be its 'pure' and bold manifestations.

The less initiated could laugh or scoff at what to them would be ludicrous way for an adult and a trained artist to express his feelings in child-like forms. Such critics could very well have forgotten the virtues or purity and bliss in innocence which they perceive and cherish so much in our children. Indeed, looking back in nostalgia the period of our youths is an experience all of us share at one time or another, in our quieter moments of reflection.

Youth is the springtime of life, as much as Naive art recaptures the pristine visions of a humanity which we discard at our peril. At one moment or another, we shall all come to recognise this fact.

At the risk of being presumptuous, I may venture a guess that Singapore is perhaps the more active among the developing countries in the promotion of children's art. The innate ability of many a child can be detected through his expressions in art or in what he perceives in the shapes, colours and in the contrasts of things he sees, although not necessarily in the form of a bias or inclination for a formal education in art. It is for this reason that we have been very active in organising many children's art competitions by way of the good work done by the People's Association. It is unfortunate that many people do not quite appreciate the developmental aspect in the upbringing of our young and dismiss these children's art promotions as mere meaningless activities just to fill the programme of activities of the community centres.

I have asked for some statistics from the People's Association on this aspect of their activities. The figures show that in the last two years alone, 11,876 children took part in various types of art

competitions, including on-the-spot drawing contests, organised by 117 community centres (6,089 in 1980 and 5,787 in 1981). From January to April this year, 799 children participated in similar contests. Almost every child at these mini drawing 'jamborees' was accompanied by at least one of his or her parents. The joy, the expectations and the satisfaction of the parents shown so explicitly on their faces, are a sight of warmth and the love of parents for their children, and of the everlasting hope lodged in the breast of every human being for a better life for their wards.

I am grateful to the Goethe Institute for making it possible this Exhibition of Naive paintings by accomplished German artists. Not only are their works a feast to the eyes and the mind and an artistic delight, but also the works have opened up and pointed to a new direction for our artists to deliberate on, to follow and to develop.
