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SPEECH BY MR LEE KHOON CHOY, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE
(PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE) AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION
AT THE OPENING OF THE SINGAPORE YOUTH FESTIVAL ART AND CRAFTS
EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM ART GALLERY ON 31/7/81 AT 5.30 PM

I am glad that the focus of this year's Exhibition is on our traditions and cultures. Our ancestors were creators of great arts. They have passed on to us great monuments such as Borobodur and Prambanan, the Taj Mahal, the Dunhuang caves and many other architectures to remind us of our great potentials. The ideas that produced those great beauties are with us in our diversified languages and religions. They are capable of inspiring great art in the present and they did in the past, provided we develop the technical skills necessary to express them. What is needed for great art is clear thinking and technical skill. Our ancestors had both and so they produced art form equal to the best of the world. Borobodur is the greatest single monument in the whole of the southern hemisphere. The arts of China and India are of surpassing greatness. Our cultural heritage is enormous.

The problem is how do we tap our rich cultural heritage to enrich our technological society. In our developing industries, we need clear thinking and technical skills. Whatever Singapore produces should bear the stamp of excellence. They should be designed by our own designers. Good Singapore design should be the hallmark of all our products so that people throughout the world will be proud to possess something made in Singapore. Designing comes from art education, the ability to use your hands to shape things.

But there is a dearth of designers in Singapore. This is quite natural when there are only a handful of qualified teachers in arts and crafts. It is surprising that we have succeeded in

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holding this Exhibition and some of the exhibits are rather ingenious despite the fact that there are not enough qualified arts and crafts teachers. These young children who made use of their hands will soon be moving into the factories and the various industries. They need proper training by qualified teachers which are very scarce now. It is heartening to note the rethinking that is taking place in our art education. There was the attempt to develop the Baharuddin School into a Diploma-Awarding Institution and to enlarge the Nanyang Academy. The Faculty of Architecture decided to lay new stress on creative design. A decision has been arrived at to include higher art education in the new Commercial and Service Polytechnic. Finally, the Ministry of Education is currently planning to revise the whole of art education in the schools so as to bring the lower levels in line with the development in higher education.

Finally, I would like to say something about the Cambridge Syllabus for "O" and "A" levels which has dominated the art education. It is excellent in itself for a world-wide programme of art education. It was never intended to be an absolute rule. It has provided flexibility for an imaginative teacher. But it was often interpreted too narrowly and hence the more local methods and art forms tended to be neglected. Take Chinese brushing, painting and calligraphy for instance. In the context of our society, Chinese calligraphy is a means of expression and is also relevant to some industries which needed calligraphy. This is an area of neglect which I hope the schools will remedy.

This Exhibition could hardly have come at a better time. If our pupils are to be prepared for life in a technological society what better foundation can they have than a consciousness of the richness of our culture. I congratulate all our young artists on the beautiful work they have done and I wish them well in their design for a better future. It is my pleasure to declare this Exhibition open.

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