

28 JUL 1982

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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

02-2/82/07/15

SPEECH BY MR LEE KHOON CHOY, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE) AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE EXHIBITION OF THE PAINTING OF THE YEAR COMPETITION ON 15TH JULY 1982

I am delighted to be here to give away prizes to the winners to the UOB Art Award at this Exhibition jointly organised by the Ministry of Culture and the United Overseas Bank Group.

I am glad to see the UOB group taking an interest in the promotion of art. This cooperation between a Government Ministry and a commercial firm marks the beginning of a healthy trend in our society in the promotion of cultural activities. In the past, the promotion of cultural activities were confined to the Ministry of Culture and other cultural organisations which were invariably handicapped by finance. Even the Ministry of Culture's activities were constrained by the limited supply of funds by the government. The commercial firms were shy to participate in the promotion of art and other cultural activities. They were only interested in making money and more money without realising that they also have a social role to play in the promotion of art.

Of late, commercial firms have widened up their horizon and began to take an interest in associating themselves with cultural activities. The UOB Group's generous sponsorship of this competition is an example of this trend. For instance, the multi-national companies have already taken the lead in showing interest in the promotion of arts and cultures. The Mobil Group have increased their contribution to the organisers of the Singapore Festival of Arts to \$500,000, the Esso sponsored the National Music Competition and the Shell the Drama Festival. The SIA too had contributed some \$100,000 worth of tickets to the Singapore Festival of Arts, and have also sponsored the Innovation of Arts in promoting sculptures and paintings.

Encouraged by the good response by these concerns, the Ministry of Culture had recently sent out 80 invitations to commercial establishments such as hotels, shopping centres, banks and new property developers to enter into joint ventures with the Ministry to organise art competition-cum-exhibitions and other cultural activities. The Ministry offers its expertise and technical support, and the commercial organisation its funds. I am afraid to say that till today, the response has not been too good. It may be due to the present economic slump, but I hope that the interest in the promotion of art will grow as they become better off.

It is good for a commercial company to be identified with certain pet project so that it will not always be said that the commercial firms are interested only in making money and nothing else. Japanese firms always identify themselves with certain cultural projects and they make it a point to set aside certain amount of profit to identify themselves with projects which has a bearing with the spiritual life of the people.

Life is not just bread and butter. We need to discover and develop our talents and our inner spiritual soul. There is joy in creation. An artist puts his heart and soul into a painting, forgetting himself and his surrounding, and when he has finished his paintings, he sees his own creation and derives a sense of satisfaction. This sense of satisfaction and fulfilment is not something money can buy. We hope commercial firms will plough in some money to help create more of such joy amongst our younger Singaporeans instead of allowing them to roam aimlessly in the streets and creating havoc, or let their energies passively sapped by the TVs and videotapes.

As we move into the computer age, there is an increasing need to educate our people in art of relaxation and the proper use of leisure. Time, like air, expands to fill a vacuum and it has a propensity to vanish without trace, unless it is compressed into something concrete for profitable ends. We must use our leisure hours to find ways of self-expression and to experience the sense of satisfaction and fulfilment in creating something, be it music, dancing, writing or art. Do not make videotape your only best friend when it is time for you to relax and rest.

I find among the exhibits, there are several paintings on the Singapore River. This river seems to have inspired many painters and I have seen a great number of paintings of it. Not that I am against painting the Singapore River, which is a good topic, I feel that Singapore painters seem to have lost the capacity for adventure in their imagination. It may be due to the fact that Singapore is urbanising so fast and in the process doing away with old buildings that there is little left for the artists to paint. For a tiny island like Singapore without mountains and huge rivers, the scope for scenic painting is really very limited. But we have a vast reservoir of human faces and human activities - the multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural composition of our society, provide an unlimited source of inspiration for the technically

equipped artists. Of course, painting human beings is a special skill not every painter can easily master, but it is a skill worth developing if one wishes to capture the feelings, expressions and spirit of our colourful society.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the UOB group for having sponsored so generously this year's competition. The UOB Group has already been known for their support of local artists and we are grateful to them for taking the initiative to launch this pioneer project, in response to the invitation of the Ministry of Culture. With greater encouragement and patronage from more commercial firms, we can expect a fine flowering of both creativity and art appreciation among our younger generation.

I have great pleasure in declaring this Exhibition open.