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# PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY DR SEET AI MEE, MINISTER OF STATE  
(COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT) AND (EDUCATION),  
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE EXHIBITION  
"CHOO KENG KWANG 1989" AT NATIONAL MUSEUM ART GALLERY  
ON WEDNESDAY, 12 APRIL 1989 AT 6.00 PM**

In 1985, the Ministry of Community Development introduced the "Outstanding Singapore Artists Exhibition" series. Since then under this series, the Ministry has, annually, singled out for honour an outstanding Singapore artist by holding a major exhibition of his or her works. The Ministry has selected Choo Keng Kwang this year.

Choo Keng Kwang came onto the Singapore art scene in the late 1950's after the emergence of a group of emigre artists with sophisticated artistic training and traditions. These pioneer Nanyang artists include such luminaries as Chen Wen Hsi, Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng, and Chen Chong Swee who together contributed to one of the most exciting artistic developments in post-war Singapore. They were so influential as teachers in the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts that they not only propelled the Academy to a position of subsequent historic significance on the development of a modern Singapore art but left an indelible mark on the styles and techniques of "the second generation of Nanyang artists", many of whom were the students of these great mentors, including Choo Keng Kwang.

In the early years, reflecting the interest of the time, Choo was involved in wood-cut and oil painting and chose as his subjects the life of workers as well as the beauty of the countryside. In the late 60s when batik painting caught on as a popular art form, Choo switched from

wood-cut and oil painting to batik painting. Many of his batik paintings were on Malay kampong life. With dedication and hard work, Choo soon emerged as one of the popular batik painting artists in Singapore during his time.

The rapid urban redevelopment of Singapore in the 70s meant that many old buildings had to be demolished. Government then encouraged local artists to capture on canvas our fast vanishing street scenes and old houses. It was at this time that Choo Keng Kwang began to paint his famous Chinatown scenes. Both for the historical value and their artistic merit, his paintings of vanishing old Singapore soon became collectors items, eagerly sought after by public institutions and private art collectors.

The '80s found visual arts in Singapore in a flourishing state. Choo himself has by now become firmly established as a highly acclaimed and successful artist. He has been commissioned not only to paint old buildings but also to paint many murals.

The historical development of Choo Keng Kwang, beginning with the struggling artist of the '60s to a popular one of the '70s, to the commissioned artist of the early '80s and to Singapore's outstanding artist in 1989, in many ways epitomises the gradual growth and development of the visual art scene in Singapore. His success serves as a beacon and example to the young artists of today. When one has the talent, opportunities do exist in Singapore and one can succeed as an artist.

The art exhibition held today brings together some 80 pieces of the works of Choo Keng Kwang. This exhibition offers a rare opportunity to view for the first time the full range of Choo's works and achievements. The works span 30 years and are in various media including wood-cut, batik, acrylic and aluminium.

The works of Choo Keng Kwang range in style from impressionistic paintings of scenes of old Singapore to the realistic portraiture of parrots, pigeons and fish. His paintings, which are of a consistently high standard, show Choo Keng Kwang's versatility, eye for detail, nuances of colours and also his feel for composition.

I congratulate Choo Keng Kwang on his artistic achievement and contribution to the development of the visual arts in Singapore. I also wish him greater success in his artistic career in the years to come.

On this note, I am pleased to declare the "Exhibition: Choo Keng Kwang 1989" open.

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