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SPEECH BY DR TAY FNG SOON, MINISTER OF STATE (EDUCATION),  
AT THE PORTRAITS EXHIBITION BY MS MIN LEI-QI  
- "PORTRAITS OF SINGAPORE - PIONEERS, PERSONALITIES AND  
PEOPLE" AT THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY  
ON TUESDAY, 10 MAY 1988 AT 6.00 PM

I am very pleased to be present at today's exhibition. The exhibition is unusual for two reasons. First, it is a solo and a first exhibition by a talented young artist, Ms Min Lei-Qi. It is much easier and perhaps one is less vulnerable when one is taking part in an exhibition in which the works of other artists are also on show. There is a certain degree of safety and comfort in being with a crowd.

But when you exhibit on your own, you are on your own. Today's solo exhibition "Portraits of Singapore" therefore tells us much about the self-confidence and talent of Ms Min Lei-Qi.

Ms Min herself came to Singapore from Shanghai only three years ago when she married Dr Vincent Yip who is best known as the Executive Director of the Singapore Science Council. All the works that we will see today were painted by Ms Min in Singapore over the past 2-3 years. Not only has she had to adjust to living in a new country. She has also in a short time established herself as a portrait painter. I congratulate her for having done so well.

The second note-worthy point about today's exhibition is that it is exclusively one on portraiture - on the "Pioneers, Personalities and People of Singapore".

Painting inanimate objects or capturing scenery on canvas is difficult. The artist not only has to compete with the camera, he has to do more. He has to present nature through his eyes and from his point of view. Some of the portrayals of nature by Vincent Van Gogh or the Japanese woodcut artist Hokusai achieve greatness because of the unique power and ability of the artist to give us what is in effect a poem on canvas.

Portraiture of people - living, emotional, rambunctious, critical people - in my view is more difficult. Nature is forgiving if the artist distorts or even misrepresents her. But people are not. Yet a portrait must be more than a mere photograph. The artist must try to discern the character, the temperament of his subject. He must bring out the force of his personality. He must put into the portrait his interpretation and understanding of his subject. Being not an artist myself, I must confess that I cannot begin to understand what is involved, the powers of observation, the subtleties of posture, highlights and brushwork which must come together in the creation of a portrait.

This evening as we view the works of Ms Min Lei-Qi, we will be the judges of her skill and her talent. Some of her subjects are well-known public figures. This makes her task even more difficult and lays her open to many views and opinions. This reveals another quality that all artists must share - integrity and courage of their own convictions. But I am certain that we will enjoy Ms Min's portrayals of people and be influenced by her interpretation of them.

If Singapore society is to become more vibrant and culturally exciting, we need many more artists, musicians,

dramatists who are willing to experiment with new art forms as well as develop existing ones to high degrees of excellence. Ms Min's example in the difficult area of portraiture should encourage other young artists to try their hand in new fields.

May I conclude by congratulating Ms Min Lei-Qi on her accomplishments and wishing her continued progress and success as she develops her talent in the years ahead.

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