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A celebration of Asean masterworks

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THE exhibition entitled "Asean Masterworks" which will be shown at the Mines Resort Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, from December 14 to 16, has been set up as a special cultural event, in conjunction with the Asean Summit, due to begin in Kuala Lumpur on December 13, 1997.

The exhibition has been jointly-organised by the Asean Secretariat, Wisma Putra and Valentina Willie Fine Arts. The exhibition will be officially opened by Malaysian Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad, in the presence of all the Asean Heads of government.

After its brief 3-day private viewing at the Mines Resort Hotel, the show will again be set up at the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur from 15 to 31st January 1998, for the viewing of the general public. The art works have been insured for the sum of US\$5 millions (US\$1 = RM3.81).

As stated by the organising committee's press release, "these sixty art works will showcase the best of Asean art, highlighting the particular vision and achievement of the Asean artists. Six works each from a member state will be shown along with twelve works from the host country, Malaysia.

"This exhibition is intended to provide an unparalleled and unprecedented showcase of the region's greatest artistic geniuses, reflecting regional confidence, style and excellence."

The staging of this highly significant and prestigious art event at the Asean Summit only reiterates how far modern South-East Asian art have travelled since its earlier, more humble beginnings.

Its roots can be traced back to the 19th century when the Javanese nobleman Raden Saleh Bustaman left to study art in Holland in 1830 and the two Filipinos Juan Luna and Felix Ressurecion Hidalgo went to study art in Spain in the mid-1870s.

The pioneering efforts of these three legendary regional artists heralded a new interest and involvement with Western-type art in South-East Asia.

By the mid-20th century, modern art endeavours had already become deeply entrenched throughout the region but our region's modern artists had remained isolated from each other due to their different colonial backgrounds. Colonialism had fragmented and "partitioned" the different parts of the region over long periods of time.

It was with the formation of Asean in Bangkok in 1967 that attempts are made to "reunify" the region culturally again. In 1968, the first attempt to bring together the region's visual artists took place, with the organising of the First Asean Art Exhibition, in which Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines participated. This pioneering show was held in Manila.

In 1972, the Second Asean Art Exhibition was organised. This time artist from all the five founding countries (i.e. Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and Singapore) participated. This show was held in Singapore.

In 1974, the idea of an Asean Mobile Art Exhibition was introduced, travelling to each of the Asean capital cities. This historically - significant yearly travelling exhibition featured prominently throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. It was disbanded in the early 1990s.

In retrospect, so much has happened since the staging of the first modest exhibition of 1968. The region's artists have become exposed to each other, since the 1990s, with more members joining Asean, a more viable conception of a larger modern South-East Asian art tradition,

transcending the earlier parochial and nationalistic perceptions of the region's art contexts.

With the dynamic growth of Asean and its new geo-political significance, a new dynamic overview of this region's cultural achievements has also emerged in the creative arts.

In the case of the visual arts, two major exhibitons were held recently. In 1996, the Singapore Art Museum staged the "Modernity and Beyond: Themes in South-East Asian Art" exhibition.

In 1997, the Fukuoka Art Museum in Japan staged the historic show entitled "The Birth of Modern Art in South-East Asia - Artists and Movements". In each instance, a major art historical publication was produced defending the idea of modern South-East Asian art.

The present exhibition at the Mines Resort Hotel may be viewed as extending this new conception of a larger, more all-encompassing vision of the region's artisitic achievements. In the present exhibition, the works of major modern artists from the nine Asean member countries are projected and celebrated.

Artists from Myanmar and Laos are exhibiting within the Asean contexts for the first time ever in this show. The overall picture of modern South-East Asian art is still being filled in, with the passage oftime. There is still much to be done in art critical scholarship.

The present exhibition may be thus be viewed as a veritable "Who's Who" of the Asean art scene, bringing together some of the most significant historical figures in the story of modern Asean Art. Many of the ealier artists featured in this show have passed away already.

Herewith a listing of the artists who are featured in the "Asean Masterworks" exhibition, country by country. From Indonesia, Raden Saleh Bustaman, Affandi, S. Sudjojona, Hendra Gunawan, Srihardi Soedarsono and I Wayan Bendi.

From Thailand, Fua Haripitak, Pichai Nirand, Thawan Duchance, Montien Boonma, Vasan Sitthiket and Panya Vijinthanasarn.

From the Philippines, Fernando Amorsolo, Vincente Manansala, Anita Magsaysay-Ho, Arturo Luz, Ang Kiukok and Brenda Farjardo.

From Singapore, Chen Wen Hsi, Georgette Chen, Cheing Soo-pieng, Goh Beng Kwan, Tan Swee Hiand and Goh Ee Choo.

From Vietnam, Nguyen Fia Tri, Bui Xian Phai, Nguyen Tu Ngheim, Nguyen Sang, Dang Xuan Hoa and Hong Viet Dung.

From Brunei, Pengiran Dato Asmalee, Datin Maimuna Mohamad, Awang Sitai, Zakaria Abdul Hamid, Malek Metarsat and Pengiran Timbang Haji Tuah.

From Laos, Kham Tuan, Lam Phone Insixieng mai, Khamsuk Keominmuong, Kong Phat Luangrath, Kanha Sikounnavng and Anoulom Souvanduone.

From Myanmar, U Ba Nyan, U Ba Kyi, U Ngwee Gaing, Aung Myint, M.PP. Yei Myint, and Min Wae Aung.

The twelve Malaysian artists who are included are, Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal, Dato Mohd Hoessein Enas, Dato Ibrahim Hussein, Abdul Latiff Mohidin, Redza Piyadasa, Ismail Zain, Sulaiman Esa, Nirmala Shanmughalingam, Dzulkifli Buyong, Wong Hoy Cheong, Kung Yu-liew and Patrick Ng Kah Onn.

There are plans to reproduce all the sixty art works in a special Asean art publication, sometimes in June next year.

Do not miss this major Asean art exhibition when it is shown at the National Art Gallery in January 1998.

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