

24/02/2003

Endon's kebaya collection on show

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - A colourful exhibition of more than 100 kebaya Nyonya owned by Datuk Seri Endon Mahmood, wife of Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, was opened today.

The exhibition, "The Nyonya Kebaya: A Showcase", was launched by Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, wife of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, at the National Art Gallery.

The star attraction was a collection of Endon's antique Nyonya jewellery, including silver belts, pendeng (buckles), cucuk sanggul (hairpins) and gold and diamond kerongsang (clasppins) to adorn a kebaya.

Also on display are crockery, bed linen and tablecloths with Nyonya kebaya designs.

The exhibition follows the successful launch of Endon's book, *The Nyonya Kebaya: A Showcase of Nyonya Kebaya*, last November.

Today's event was planned by the gallery and Yayasan Budi Penyayang Malaysia, of which Endon is the chairperson.

Dr Siti Hasmah, in her speech, said Malaysia was renowned for its rich culture and valuable traditions.

"In this exhibition, we are given the opportunity to see a living art, art that is worn in the form of kebaya.

"You will be able to see the rare and intricate designs of old and new embroidery handed down from generation to generation," she said.

She said the Nyonya heritage had become a showpiece, and hoped the collection of kebaya and jewellery would attract the younger generation and help them appreciate their heritage.

"Many youngsters may think of history and culture as somewhat boring ... but they must be made to realise the importance of culture in our lives," she said.

In her speech, Endon said although some people might question whether the Nyonya kebaya belonged in an art gallery, anyone who had observed their creators at work would appreciate their artistry.

"There is no doubt that the Nyonyas certainly had great artistic traditions to draw from, whether Chinese, Malay or European," she said.

The Nyonya kebaya, she said, was also a symbol of how cultural, racial and social integration conceived beautiful results.

The Nyonya kebaya was a creation of the early Peranakans, a sub-group of the Chinese community whose culture and lifestyle is a fusion of predominantly Chinese and Malay influences.

In conjunction with the exhibition, a two-day symposium will be held on March 15-16 at the gallery.

Discussions will include how to value Nyonya kebaya.

A fashion-design competition based on the kebaya and open to students of fashion schools will also be held, with the grand finals scheduled for April 19.

The exhibition, which is open to the public daily (except public holidays) between 10am and 6pm, will end on April 27.

Admission is free.