

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AT  
THE OPENING OF THE FOURTH NATIONAL  
ART EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL ART  
GALLERY, KUALA LUMPUR ON 21ST DECEM-  
BER, 1961

Mr Chairman, Hon'ble Ministers, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are aware, my presence here on this rostrum is under false pretences, and I must therefore apologise that I am here when you had expected the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister in fact has had to leave for Bangkok earlier than he had anticipated. He has asked me to speak in his place and to convey to you his regrets for his absence.

I was extremely happy to accept his request as it gives me an opportunity to pay tribute to the artists of Malaya and to their achievements these past years, particularly since Merdeka. Artists as such, who exhibit their works regularly, have not perhaps had a long history in Malaya, but their record is certainly an honourable and a distinguished one.

In particular I am most gratified that Malayan artists have not been divorced from the main stream of the consciousness of this country. They have not attempted to set up a private club of their own, communicating in a private language available only to the initiated, exclusive, withdrawn and intolerant of the philistines down below. Certainly the longhaired, the associal or the pretentious are not to be numbered among them. They have instead belonged in a very real sense to the community, depicting our sorrows and fears, our doubts, hesitations and problems, our joys and our achievements.

Let me not, however, give any impression that they are parochial. They are, after all, Malayan artists, that is Malaysians who are artists. The dichotomy, in any case, is an unreal one. They are artists in their own right, concerned as all artists are, with the problems of their media, technical problems of perception and construction, concerned with extending their perspectives of the

world and of the human condition. But the source of their inspiration is rooted in the soil and sun and air of this country. Some of them indeed have spent many years training abroad. But neither the fog nor the bright lights of the various art capitals have diminished their original inspiration. For this I congratulate them.

As you see I hold the artists of Malaya in high esteem for their relevance to the conditions of this country and for their achievements as practitioners of their craft. They have contributed immeasurably to life in Malaya today and to the creation of a society where, not only, not merely, the entertainer but the artist is valued.

I salute them in declaring open the Fourth National Art Exhibition.