

**THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF 'MALAYSIAN ART - CONTEMPORARY PAINTING & TRADITIONAL ADORNMENT'**

KUALA LUMPUR, 25 SEPTEMBER 1996

I feel particularly pleased to be present here today to officiate at the opening of this Exhibition entitled, 'Malaysian Art - Contemporary Painting & Traditional Adornment', organised by the Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board with the active support of the National Art Gallery and the National Museum of Malaysia.

2. On exhibition today are 17 paintings in various media and styles and a number of sculptures representing the vibrant art scene in Malaysia. Accompanying these works, you will also see an exquisite collection of jewelry and adornments, many of them in gold, embedded with gem-stones, which reflect the filigree and fine work found in such traditional Malaysian crafts. The exhibition also presents a selection of traditional Malaysian textiles which reflect various indigenous motifs. To give you an idea of the intricacies involved in the creation of our famous gold-threaded "songket" or brocade textile, you will also be able to view, over the entire duration of this exhibition, a master weaver of this fabric at work, brought to New York for this occasion from the Malaysian State of Terengganu. Although presented on a small scale, this exhibition encapsulates the life, spirit, culture and heritage of Malaysia. I feel proud that today we are able to present an exhibition such as this to the American public for the first time here in New York City. I understand that a similar exhibition had previously been presented at Pasadena, California in 1988.

3. Malaysia, as you know, is a melting pot of different races, religions and cultures. These elements are reflected not only in the daily lives of the Malaysian people but also in the culture, arts and heritage of Malaysia. You would therefore see in the works on exhibition here traces of the rich and varied cultural background of our people.

4. In recent years, the rapid economic growth in Malaysia has triggered an upsurge in various forms of creative activity in the country. Economic prosperity has led to a growing appreciation and pride in the arts. Malaysians today are beginning to spend more time and money in acquiring and enjoying the intrinsic beauty and richness of Malaysia's own art and crafts.

5. There have been rather spectacular developments especially in the area of Malaysian art. With the higher prices that they are able to secure for their works, many artists have now decided to become full-time artists. Consequently, we now

witness an increase both in quantity and quality of artistic creations. Keeping pace with this development is the increase in the number of art exhibitions. Hardly a week passes without the opening of one or more exhibitions in Kuala Lumpur, the nation's capital, Penang or in the other major cities in the country. Even the different States seem to be racing to establish State art and cultural galleries and to acquire artistic works and cultural items for these galleries. Private galleries have also mushroomed. There is also increasing support for Malaysian art from private corporations. They have started acquiring art works for their own collections and are now more ready to sponsor art exhibitions since it gives them a "cultural image" which they want to project. In addition, Malaysian art has also hit the international arena. Over the last few years, international auction houses like "Christie's" and "Sotheby's" have also started auctioning Malaysian paintings. This has no doubt contributed to the growing acquisition of Malaysian art both for its aesthetic value and also as a form of investment. Having said this, I hope that you will enjoy the art works that are on display here since they represent some of the finest pieces by some of our best artists.

6. The Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board, the National Art Gallery and the National Museum of Malaysia all deserve our compliments for the efforts that they have made to organise this small but splendid exhibition. To those of the Permanent Mission of Malaysia, I must also add my thanks. Despite the busy work that the Mission is now engaged in, it has still found time to assist in making available this space and also in assisting to make this Exhibition a success. Malaysian Missions in other parts of the world should also emulate this and in their own small way help to promote Malaysian art and crafts and, most importantly, the warm Malaysian image.

7. I hope that this exhibition will create greater awareness and appreciation in New York City and in the United States of the charm and character inherent in Malaysian paintings and adornments. We would be happy if this exhibition stirs your curiosity and interest to visit Malaysia to explore for yourself not just our arts but also everything else that Malaysia has to offer. I am sure that you will be charmed by the welcome that will await you in Malaysia.

8. While we are embarking with solid determination to make Malaysia a developed nation by the year 2020, this goal should not be focussed just on materialistic advance. We must not lose sight of our culture and our heritage. Because, a nation without a culture or a heritage is like a man without a soul.

9. It is now my most pleasant task to officially declare open this Exhibition.