

Penyampai : DATO SERI DR. SITI HASMAH BT HJ MOHD ALI  
Tajuk : THE NYONYA KEBAYA LAUNCH EXHIBITION  
Lokasi : THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY  
Tarikh : 23-02-2003

It is a pleasure for me to be here today to launch this exhibition, The Nyonya Kebaya: A Showcase.

2. This exhibition is certainly timely as it will not only portray Malaysian's rich culture but also bring together people of different generations, racial groups and backgrounds. Culture is important as it depicts a society's way of life; its values, beliefs, customs and tradition, the arts, etc. In this context, Malaysia's have always been proud of its cultural heritage and it would be good if we are able to preserve those traditions that have enriched the lives of multi- cultural Malaysia.

3. Malaysia is reknown for its rich cultures and valuable traditions. In this exhibition we are given the opportunity to see living art, art that is worn in the form of kebayas. Just like the hand-woven songket and tenun, the embroidered kebaya is also a handwork at its best. You will be able to see the rare and intricate designs of old and new embroideries handed down from generation to generation. The painstaking handiwork of cut and embroidery lives on until today although in the form of longer kebayas and perhaps on less flimsy material. The Nyonya Kebaya has two forms - a long one, normally worn by elderly women and a shorter version worn traditionally by younger women.

This Nyonya heritage has over a period of time become just a showpiece. However, it is hoped that with this exhibition of beautiful Nyonya Kebaya and jewellery collection we will attract the younger generation to appreciate the heritage that we have.

4. Many youngsters might think of history and culture as somewhat boring. The younger generation must be made to realise the importance of culture in our lives.

One way to preserve our tradition and to ensure that culture is not lost, is to revive it by way of exhibitions, fashion shows and the like. The arts which incorporate theatre, music, painting, sculpture and handicraft can also be made more interesting and attractive to the younger generation by educating them.

The effort to showcase this Nyonya Kebaya exhibition is one way to revive this beautiful kebaya tradition that we have. Whilst the lure of new technologies and pop culture is much stronger now, given the rapid technological change in society, anything that brings culture to life and captures the imagination and encourages this new generation to participate and appreciate should be applauded. I have no doubt therefore that an exhibition such as this one will encourage the younger generations to think and appreciate more the rich heritage that we still have because this is not just about Nyonya Kebayas but also about our rich cultural past which should be inherited by generations to come and not forgotten. This is one way we can bring back to life the things of the old, to give new character to a fashion that is slowly dying out. The kebaya is certainly versatile and can be worn anywhere and at anytime, be it on special occasions or otherwise.

5. I have been told that this exhibition showcases over 100 Nyonya Kebayas with beautiful jewellery collection of Datin Seri Endon's to match, all with history and significance on its own. I congratulate Datin Seri Endon for her beautiful collection and also to the organisers of this exhibition for making it a success.

6. I am sure this exhibition will be a very interesting and informative one and hope that you will enjoy viewing the exhibits as much as I will. So with this hope, I have great pleasure of launching this exhibition, The Nyonya Kebaya: A Showcase!