

**DELIVERED REMARKS BY MR EDWIN TONG, MINISTER FOR CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH & SECOND MINISTER FOR LAW AT THE WECARE ARTS EXHIBITION AND LAUNCH OF WECARE ARTS EXPERIENCES AT NATIONAL MUSEUM SINGAPORE ON 23 MARCH 2021, 2.30PM**

1. Good afternoon distinguished guests, my Parliamentary colleagues, the Mayors, thank you for the good job that you have been doing. I think the video just gives you a small snippet of the value of the arts, and I think that all of you will agree with me that we have brought arts to the community and made the arts more accessible. And I think just from what you can see in the video alone, arts has been used as a bridge and as a way for the community to bond. So thank you very much to the five Mayors.
2. It is my pleasure to join you here for the opening of the WeCare Arts Exhibition as well as the roll-out of the WeCare Arts Experiences.
3. This year's exhibition is extra special. It is also being held in conjunction with the People's Association's (PA) 60 years of community building, and I think the synergy between the two programmes and the fact that PA has been around for 60 years – building, strengthening, making our community more resilient – I think that's a great pairing we have here this afternoon.

**WeCare Arts Exhibition**

4. The WeCare Arts Exhibition showcases the artistic talents of seniors, of youths, and also of those with special needs. Indeed, it is truly inclusive.

a) Over the past six years, it has given a voice as well to the vulnerable through a mixture of the arts. And I think the real beauty of the arts is that it really knows no boundaries, and it does not distinguish. An artist is an artist, you express your form in whatever manner best known to you, and the art piece speaks for itself. It does not at the nature of the artist behind it; their socio-economic status; and whether they are able or disabled.

b) It is heartening to see our community coming together and celebrating the talent that we have in our midst through the arts.

5. Today's exhibition is the third instalment of this showcase:

a) It is a special edition that features art works created by 200 beneficiaries from 26 Social Service Agencies (SSAs) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

b) This year, we can enjoy, for the first time, art works by the beneficiaries of the Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC), MENDAKI and the Singapore Scout Association.

c) In addition to the physical galleries, audiences at home can visit the Virtual WeCare Arts Gallery @ CDC. My colleague, Mayor Low Yen Ling, will share more on this later on.

6. This year's exhibition is aptly themed "Resilience and Unity in the Time of COVID-19". It is a topic, a theme, a feeling that has been very much with us for most of last year, and still continues to be with us this year.

- a) Through the art works on display, we can really better understand how the beneficiaries have responded to this theme, how they saw it through their own lenses, and how they have chosen to express their own feelings and their own sentiments on what it means to them.
  
- b) You saw Ms Ng Xin Yi, a 12-year-old beneficiary of the CDAC. I was quite amazed at her artwork. It was very meaningful, and it tells you how she has seen the pandemic, the battle against the pandemic by the frontliners, through her own eyes. She has created a work inspired by the heroism of the frontline workers and has decided to do an artwork featuring three hands, symbolising the frontliners, adults and children working together hand in hand to keep Singapore safe.
  
- c) I am sure we can expect to see more of such creative interpretations in today's exhibition.

### **WeCare Arts Experiences**

- 7. At MCCY, we believe that it is important to bring the arts to as many Singaporeans as possible, to make it accessible and to bring it into the community. We don't treat art as just something that we do at an *atas* museum somewhere. It is something that is very much a part of us. It defines us and gives us solace and comfort, especially in these times.
  - a) Arts and culture bring with it innumerable benefits, and not just in well-being. They enable us to look at different viewpoints. We exchange ideas and we learn to see what another person sees –

through his lens, through the form of art that he has expressed.

8. At the recent Committee of Supply (CoS) debate, my colleagues and I spoke about how MCCY will provide additional stimulus and support to the sector, so that our arts practitioners – whether you are coming from an arts company or you are a Self-Employed Person – can continue to present their cultural offerings, their art presentations and expressions, to Singaporeans.

a) We will inject an additional \$20 million into the Arts and Culture Resilience Package (ACRP) to help the sector build capabilities and ensure that talent is not lost because what a lot of artists really want in this period is to be able to perform, to exhibit, and it is not something that they can do as quickly as they could pre-COVID. This additional \$20 million has brought our total support for the arts sector to \$75 million.

b) But it is not just about the financial benefits. It is not just about the grants, not just about the financial inputs or stimulus. It is really about the heartware as well, what we want to put into the arts sector and how we recognise our arts and cultural icons. So we will set up a Cultural Medallion Gallery in the Arts House by the end of this year. We hope that this will inspire Singaporeans to recognise our Cultural Medallion recipients, the talents among us in Singapore, and build greater awareness of our local arts and culture scene.

9. As part of our efforts to safeguard Singapore's tangible and intangible cultural heritage, Singaporeans can expect an exciting slate of activities and programmes this year. As I said just now, it is not just about giving financial assistance to the sector, but really about coming to take part in exhibitions, to be part of the audience at performances, and so on.

a) First, to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of preserving our National Monuments, we will hold a special commemorative exhibition right here, at the National Museum of Singapore, from June to September 2021.

b) Second, 2021 is also the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our Museum Roundtable, a collective established by NHB to spur a museum-going culture. To celebrate, NHB will launch a series of tours to lesser-known museums, including a roving exhibition on the Museum Roundtable.

c) Third, Singaporeans can also look forward to the re-opening of the Changi Chapel Museum and Reflections at Bukit Chandu later this year in 2021. I encourage all of you to go and visit if you have not been there. Over the next few years, we will continue to rejuvenate our museums to bring these offerings, make it more accessible and ensure that they remain relevant to Singaporeans, because what we produce in the arts and culture sector must always resonate and be relatable to Singaporeans.

10. In this spirit of inclusiveness, I am happy to roll out the WeCare Arts Experiences – an initiative which was first announced at CoS 2020 and set up by the five CDCs and the National Arts Council (NAC).
- a) The WeCare Arts Experiences is designed to facilitate greater access to the arts and culture for the less privileged. In particular, it enables them to experience quality arts productions and bond, through these experiences, with their family members, with their caregivers or with their befrienders – people who care the most for them – over a shared experience in the arts.
  - b) Social service agencies, community partners and other self-help groups can also tap on this initiative to bring their beneficiaries to ticketed performances as well as exhibitions at our cultural institutions.
  - c) The WeCare Arts Experiences covers the ticket, the transport and the refreshment costs for beneficiaries, caregivers and the volunteers who look after them.
  - d) In total, it is expected to benefit about 20,000 individuals.
  - e) I understand that some of our SSAs will be tapping on this initiative to bring their beneficiaries to the National Museum of Singapore for the 2021 WeCare Arts Exhibition. So you can see that there's really a lot of synergy between the various programmes that we have.

f) I hope that everyone will continue to play our part to enhance access to the arts, including and perhaps especially for those who are vulnerable in our society. May you continue by actively volunteering with the SSAs, introducing our beneficiaries to quality arts offerings or finding common ground in these shared experiences through the medium of art.

### **Conclusion**

11. Finally, let me close by once again congratulating the CDCs, the Mayors for your hard work in putting this together. We are using arts as a bridge and as a bond to really bring our community closer together. That kind of effort is invaluable.
  
12. I also want to thank PA and NAC on the successful opening of the 2021 WeCare Arts Exhibition.
  - a) My heartiest congratulations also go out to the beneficiaries and the SSAs who contributed richly to today's exhibition.
  
13. I look forward to looking at the art works, appreciating them, and seeing from their own perspectives what the pandemic is like to them. In doing that, I think we learn something as well.
  
14. I wish all of you a pleasant afternoon. Have a good day ahead and thank you very much.