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Former finance minister advises artists to highlight current issues

BY EDWARD RAJENDRA



Visitors to the gallery looking at an acrylic painting by Mohamad Hassan titled 'Hadrah: Alunan Dari Bendang'. —Photos: ROHAIZAT MD DARUS/The Star

VISUAL artists must employ critical-thinking to their individual improvement and use creative expression to highlight socio-economic issues, political upheavals and daily struggles faced by the people.

Tun Daim Zainuddin, who served as Malaysia's Finance Minister from 1984 to 1991, said paintings were outlets for all visual artists to become social critics on the economic downturn, political upheavals and issues affecting people at large.

"Visual artists must use their brush and paints to tell on the current changes the nation is going through and even include the protests by the people as this will become historical records," he said after launching the Open Exhibition 2015 at the Shah Alam Gallery.

He said the nation had gone through the Asian and global financial crises and witnessed for the first time public dissent through the Yellow Shirt and Red Shirt street demonstrations, but visual artists have not been active in capturing these through their art and paintings.



Daim (left) at the launch of the Open Exhibition 2015 at the Shah Alam Gallery. With him are Prof Raja Zahabuddin (in red shirt) and Mohd Said (right).

Daim said “to me art is not just a mirror to reflect reality but it is also a hammer with which to shape it.

“In Indonesia during Sukarno and Suharto’s time, there were paintings that reflected on what was happening in Indonesia. Similarly, after the war, I visited galleries in Bosnia. The artists there painted about the wars, murders, rape and everything that was happening in the war.

“We had the big flood in Kelantan and the unexpected earthquake in Kota Kinabalu but so far, I have not seen any local artists who had these events on canvas. Visual artists must paint without fear or favour to make searing statements that will set the momentum for changes.

Daim, who was making his first visit to the Shah Alam Gallery, visited three galleries and viewed 87 artworks. He also presented the Incentive Award to seven artists.

The Open Exhibition 2015 showcases 70% of students' artworks from colleges while works by seasoned artists will continue to be featured until Dec 23.

It is open for viewing from 9am to 6pm.

Also present was Yayasan Seni Selangor trustee Prof Datuk Raja Zahabuddin Raja Yaacob and Gallery Shah Alam director Mohd Said Abu.