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The Singapore Art Society, moved by the historic importance of the International Year of Women, has organised this art exhibition for women artists. While these women have diverse origins, they are not divided by blood ties. The Oriental women use Western materials to produce rich and robust oil paintings while the Western women are deeply interested in the practice and study of classical and ancient Chinese ink paintings. All of them use artistic creation to communicate their thoughts and blend both cultures.

The content and styles of all the artworks allow us to experience a revelation of strong personalities. Some of the works depict elegant scenery while others portray the realities of life; some are delicate like embroidery while others are as unrestrained as a leaping rabbit. Some works embody a careful and precise classical objective while others display a lively modern awareness. In a word, variety is the great accomplishment of the women artists’ works which are exhibited here today.

We do not hope that such an exhibition will be held yearly after this one because it would mean that women are forever lagging, that they need to be encouraged and led by the hand. This is a loss of dignity and honour for them. If our perspective is not wrong, this art exhibition is not just a cosmetic gesture prompted by the occasion but a primary motivation for women to advance towards the great path of art.

In recent years, the women’s rights movement has created controversy. Nevertheless, the United Nations’ recent proclamation of 1975 as the International Year of Women is welcomed by many who believe it to be a timely and gracious move. Just as the renaissance in the 15th century was a turning point in the awakening of humankind, this day — this day in the 1970s — is a milestone for the emancipation of women. Today they can combine their strength with society’s compassion to cast off the shackles of inferiority and humiliation, and seek reasonable rights and benefits.

Sparkling jade stones are sometimes found in the grit of the riverbed; in the same way, heroines can emerge from the masses. Some good examples are the scientists Marie Curie and Dr Wu Chien-Shiung (吴健雄), and influential political figures like Mrs Golda Meir and Mrs Indira Gandhi. Some of them have made new discoveries and overturned old laws while others have fought victoriously for their country. This illustrates clearly that women are hardly the inferior class; they can contend with men in any role they assume.

In the arts, the success of women in the performing arts such as dance, theatre and music is well known. In modelling art like drawing, sculpting and building, however, women have not made comparable achievements. As one scours history, it is indeed difficult to find a woman who can be considered a great genius like Michelangelo or Rembrandt van Rijn. One cannot help but feel the great pity in this!

Some say that women are unable to focus on art because of their domestic and parenting responsibilities. While we understand this situation, we are also sure that with determination and perseverance, one can overcome obstacles and open up new opportunities. It would be most ideal if women could scale the heights and strive side by side with men to create excellent art. Otherwise, it would be equally commendable if they possess a certain level of artistic cultivation and add this to the pleasures of family life and the education of their children. This also boosts a society’s love for aesthetics and nurtures the noble character of its people.

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