Best ideas emerge when technology intersects with the arts, says Heng Swee Keat

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said arts and culture are an integral part of the national fabric as they uplift the human spirit and shape the community. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG
SINGAPORE - Arts and the humanities are growing in importance even as hard sciences such as engineering, technology and mathematics have underpinned Singapore’s development over the past 53 years, said Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat on Saturday (Oct 20).

"The best ideas emerge from the intersection of technology with the arts, when people from different disciplines collaborate to learn from each other," Mr Heng said.

Speaking at the launch of an exhibition titled All Possible Paths: Richard Feynman’s Curious Life at the ArtScience Museum, Mr Heng said arts and culture are an integral part of the national fabric as they uplift the human spirit and shape the community.

"Increasingly, the importance of the arts, social sciences and humanities is being recognised. Educators now speak of the Stem subjects, with the addition of the arts to the traditional Stem (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects," said Mr Heng, previously the Minister for Education.

He pointed to Nobel laureate Richard Feynman's work in quantum mechanics as an example of how difficult scientific concepts can be conveyed through simple illustrations.

"He, unlike other theoretical physicists, had a visual approach to the problems he was trying to solve," Mr Heng, who is also chairman of the National Research Foundation, said of Professor Feynman.

Prof Feynman’s achievements later contributed to the development of lasers and global positioning systems.

The exhibition is held to commemorate his birth centenary.

During the launch, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) president Subra Suresh said in his welcome address that Prof Feynman embraced arts and the hard sciences and applied both fields in his research.

He drew pictorial representations of mathematical expressions to describe the interaction of subatomic particles, known today as the Feynman Diagrams, said Prof Suresh, adding that the late professor's achievements are "truly inspiring as they teach us the importance of curiosity, going beyond science and embracing other disciplines, a term now known as multidisciplinary learning”.

The ticketed exhibition will run to March 3 next year. Highlights include mixed media installations portraying lasers and moving lights.

The exhibition is curated and produced by the ArtScience Museum, together with NTU and the Nobel Museum in Sweden. It is supported by the Centre for Quantum Technologies at the National University of Singapore.

Tickets, costing from $8 to $15, are available at the museum, all Marina Bay Sands box offices and on its website.