

NATIONAL TRAVELING ART EXHIBITION

Opening Nite – June 13th 2001

Minister for Women, Culture, Heritage, and Social Welfare

Hon. Ro Teimumu Kepa

SALUTATION

The ANZ General Manager, Mr. David Bell, fellow Ministers, members of the Fiji Arts Club Committee, Distinguished Guests, and Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am indeed honored as the Minister for Women, Culture & Heritage to have been invited here this evening for the opening and awards night for one of Fiji's most prestigious visual arts annual event, **the National Traveling Arts Exhibition**.

Art is an important aspect of our culture as it is a window to a country's soul communicating not only our legends, myths, and traditions, but also our present and future aspirations, values and needs.

For all the artists that are exhibiting tonight, I believe, it is their love of art, developing their distinctive style and from their unique perspective that has been a source of encouragement to them. Their distinct styles illustrate the great diversity that exists within our society. Art is also a powerful tool for bridging together diverse cultures through understanding and sharing in one another's creativity, as we shall soon see tonight.

As an, art lover and collector myself, I am indeed looking forward to viewing these displays myself. The inclusion of a new visual art presentation:

- The three-dimensional sculptures and carvings will be a novel and exciting experience for some of us, and
- The Junior category of artists will reflect the emerging new generation of artists.

To all the artists I offer my personal congratulations. Although winning is an added bonus I firmly believe that it is the experience and interaction gained through your participation here tonight that is of more importance.

The Interim Administration is aware of the vital importance of Fiji's culture and heritage, including visual arts, as a nation-building component and has therefore committed itself to its preservation, promotion, and development of relevant policies. For far too long this sector has continued to be marginalised driven only by the commitment and passion of the stakeholders. Cognisant of this the government, through my Ministry, has established a Department of Culture and Heritage to oversee the developments in this sector at the policy level. The Department in implementing its activities is working in close cooperation with other relevant ministries such as Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Fijian Affairs, and Department for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and all non-governmental organisations.

In particular, the **Fiji Arts Council**, established in 1964, is the organisation mandated and supported by Government, to promote and develop performing and visual arts for all Fiji citizens, regardless of ethnicity, gender, and level of expertise. Under its auspices the **National Art Exhibition** is an annual event organised each year attracting artists from all walks of life. Last year a new category, the **Indigenous Art Exhibition**, was incorporated as part of this national event.

I therefore take this opportunity to also urge and encourage artists, business houses and all art lovers who are here tonight to support this annual event. Now more than ever when resources are limited a true spirit of cooperation comes when national government and all important stakeholder organisations and peoples work together to build a better Fiji.

Through this sort of initiative, and encouraged by our collective efforts, Fiji's artists are rest assured that they will gain the competitive edge to tap into regional and international markets.

And now, on behalf of the Ministry of Women, Culture & Heritage and Social Welfare, I would like to thank the:

- **Art Section of the Fiji Arts Club** for being the driving force behind this exhibition, which aims to promote and develop artists and their works;
- the **ANZ Bank** for their sponsorship;
- all our **talented artists** who have made tonight a memorable night; and
- the organizers, in particular, Jeremy Droga and his assistant Marita Brodie

For without them an exhibition of this magnitude would not have been possible.

VINAKA VAKALEVU