

WESTERN ARTS & CRAFTS SOCIETY

Opening Night of Art 2002 Exhibition

September 20 , 2002

MINISTER FOR TOURISM

Hon. Pita Nacuva

SALUTATION

The Air Pacific Director of Marketing, Mr. Macarthy, members of the Western Arts and Crafts Society, Distinguished Guests, and Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am indeed honored as the new Minister for Tourism to have been invited here this evening for the grand opening of the Western Arts & Crafts Society Art 2002 Exhibition. My fellow colleague and predecessor, Hon. Konisi Yabaki, will now head the Fisheries and Forestry portfolio and I would also like to mention that the Culture & Heritage department is now officially under with the Ministry of Fijian Affairs.

However with these changes I am extremely looking forward to more prestigious events such as these as they not only showcase Fiji's artistic excellence and talents but will definitely contribute significantly to our tourism industry through artistic interior décor, paintings, literature etc.

Why I say this is because of my firm belief that Art is undoubtedly an important aspect of our culture. And I am

certain that tourists who come into Fiji would like to experience as much of Fiji's culture, arts and beautiful sunshine before leaving.

Art is also 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. It is a form of creativity and God given talent in the minds and hands of those who possess it and becomes visible through paintings, craft works, and sculptures to name a few.

To all the artists that are exhibiting at this event, I know that it is your love of art where you have developed your distinctive styles and creative diversity that has brought you and all of us here. I further encourage you to continue your passion for art as it is integral to this nation's cultural heritage and tourism industry. Your distinct styles, whether it is traditional or contemporary, has the power to bridge together diverse cultures through understanding and sharing in one another's creativity, as we shall soon see tonight.

I would also like to offer my personal congratulations. Although wining 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 Government of the day is aware of the vital importance of Fiji's culture and heritage, including visual arts, as a nation-building and income-generating 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 has established a Department of Culture and Heritage to oversight the developments in this sector at the national level.

I can assure you that even though the Department of Culture & Heritage is no longer with Tourism portfolio, it does not mean that we cannot work together anymore. I will ensure that tourists interested in Fiji's arts and heritage will leave our country more satisfied than ever. Let's all work together in turning Fiji into a mecca for those visitors interested in our cultural heritage. The potential is definitely there and we all must hold hands to achieve it and to reach far beyond the expectations of our visitors and local communities.

Specifically in the field of promoting Arts and Crafts, the Department of Culture & Heritage will spearhead the work

towards the establishment of an Authenticity Label for Fiji Made products. They will also consider establishing mechanisms for standard setting in order to monitor quality control of products.

And from what I hear, the Department will also develop and strengthen co-ordination between government and all cultural stakeholders through formulation of a National Cultural Policy Framework and Cultural Statistics. This I guarantee will take place in the not too distant future and that we will meet once again.

Just before I end, I would like to commend the efforts of the Western Arts and Crafts Society in putting together an awesome exhibition and for starting the process towards registration of artists through their Exhibition Catalogue. This promotional tool will definitely give our artists the recognition they aspire to and deserve. In the future our artists will gain the competitive edge to tap into regional and international markets and even become famous alongside Leonardo Da Vinci and Rembrandt. Therefore I urge you all to continue supporting this Art02 exhibition and Fiji's overall cultural development.

Thankyou very much to

- **Western Arts & Crafts Society** for being the driving force behind this exhibition, which aims to provide

Fiji's artists with opportunities for exposure and income-generation

- **Air Pacific , our national carrier** for their sponsorship;
- all our **talented artists** who have made tonight a memorable night; and
- the organizers, in particular, Maria and Ron Rova

With those few words, ladies and gentleman, I have the great pleasure of declaring the 2002 Annual Art Exhibition open.

VINAKA VAKALEVU