

2003 NATIONAL ARTS EXHIBITION

4-8 November 2003

Opening Speech by Mr. Isoa Kaloumaira of the Fijian Trust Fund (FTF)

The Chairman of the Fiji Arts Council, Mr Michael Dennis, members of the council, Mr Joseph Roden and your team from Carlton Brewery, invited guests, ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to be invited to officially open this year' s Carlton Brewery National Art Exhibition.

I was hesitant at first when approached to do the honor tonight. Arts and craft certainly have not been my forte. As a person my artistry is very limited and I am acutely aware of it. This developed an inhibition that kept me away from arts in general.

What then brought me here tonight is the organisation I now represent, the Fijians Trust Fund. The Trust was established by government to foster the advancement of the indigenous Fijians and Rotumans and assist in their long terms economic, social, cultural, community and political development. Amongst the major objectives of the Trust are the study, preservation and promotion of the Fijian and Rotuman languages, culture and heritage.

The Fijians Trust Fund reports to the Great Council of Chiefs.

My role brought me into contact with the Culture and Heritage Unit of the Ministry of Fijian Affairs and other institutions that share similar objectives from the few discussions and meetings I have had with them I came to appreciate the importance of arts to our society.

I am no artist, but I believe the lack of oil and canvass did not inhibit our forefathers in their expressive arts from the early paintings of Fijian hairdo they proved artistry was very much part of our early society. The current braided hairlock would have passed off as rudimentary in that era.

Contemporary arts captures on canvass and on other media artists expression of society as they see and feel it. Preservation of their work will inform future generations something of our society and they will be ever grateful. Just as we are now ever grateful to artists of past generations for their work gave us a window to peep into what their societies had been like.

Another important aspect I learnt is the sense of purpose artist developed as they apply themselves to their passion.

My first visit to this venue, FIT's School of Arts, Culture and Design the sense of purpose on the faces of students was clearly visible. Some were drop outs from our school systems. A stigma all tried hard to escape but it is just their misfortune that providence would have it that some are academically more endowed than them. Arts brought back the sense of purpose to them.

As one drives into the school and walks through its corridors the mural, sculptures and paintings captivates the eyes and uplifts the spirit. The sound of music and singing add further character to the place (we did hear such beautiful singing tonight). The premises exudes youthful exuberance and vitality. I am sure without the FIT School of Arts, Culture and Design

some of these students would have stumbled through life without a sense of purpose that often led them to fall foul of the law and become dregs of society.

I am informed that arts is still very much encouraged by the Ministry of Education. Throughout the primary school years it is an integral part of the student's curriculum for forms 3 & 4, two periods a week is compulsory, forms 5 & 6 a student can choose art as one of his/her core subject. However, it will be of interest to know how many students at high school level seriously pursue arts in its many forms.

I am reminded of the artistry of secondary school students as they compete in the annual rock challenge. This year the competition took on a new name and was extended to primary schools too.

Also in conjunction with UNESCO the Ministry of Education runs the programme known as the "Associated Schools Project". The programme teaches students to look for venues of heritage significance within their locality, work on their restorations, preservation and care.

The ministry sees our achievements, as a country, in the academic field acceptable globally. Our students are accepted into many universities and tertiary institutions around the world so too are our graduates in the global employment market. But we lacked behind in our appreciation of arts in its many forms. In developed economies appreciation of arts is well ingrained and it is something we as a country aspire to.

However, resources, both financial and professionals are the major constraint faced by the Ministry. I urge the Department of Culture & Heritage, Fiji Arts Council, Fiji Museum and other concerned groups to continue raise the importance of arts in its many forms. Hopefully the appropriate authorities will sit up and see to the allocation of sufficient resources to this very important aspect of our life.

In addition, I believe we as a society need to place due importance to art and encourage our children that it is a noble profession. In gaining this recognition many who may not excel academically will proudly pursue art from school to tertiary levels and make it their profession. The impact FIT's School of Arts, Culture and Graphic Design have had an continue to have on its students is a clear testimony to this. So I appeal to parents and society at large that art in its many forms is rewarding and our children should be encourage to pursue these as their career.

I am told that the current role of the Fiji Arts Council is to co-ordinate national programs and activities to develop and promote visual, performing and fine arts as well as traditional and contemporary craft. This is a much broader role than that envisaged over 30 years ago when the council was first established. The role then was to be the body co-ordinating presentations by overseas artists.

Government realised the potential in our arts and culture, it led to the establishment of the Department of Culture and Heritage. The department's role is to co-ordinate the activities of existing government and non government organisations in particular the Fiji Museum, the National Trust

and the Fiji Arts Council. From this co-ordinated effort the Ministry for Fijian Affairs for the first time included in its overseas scholarship for 2004 Arts and Cultural Studies. This is a commendable achievement and I pray that many more such recognition come your way.

I therefore commend all the current efforts undertaken to promote creativity in all forms and at all levels of society. This is one of the policy objectives of the Fiji Arts Council. I was happy to note from the council's assessment that the number of youth and women individually and collectively participating in creative arts has increased. Exhibitions like the one tonight are welcomed encouragement to our artists and all the institutions working hard to promote such talents. As a nation we should all be proud the available talents easily justify an exhibition and this has been the case for the past years. Carlton Brewery has been sponsoring each exhibition since the first in 1976.

We must therefore say thank you to the Carlton Brewery for its continuing support making it possible to hold exhibition over the years. Carlton Brewery is a major sponsor for many sporting activities. It is worthwhile to note that its' continuing financial support for arts do send a clear message to our youths that arts in its various forms is just as noble and commercially rewarding as the many forms of sports we pursue.

Thank you Carlton Brewery.

The variety and quality of works on display tonight speaks volume of our artists. I hope that as wide coverage as possible is given to this exhibition to firstly show case these quality works. I am sure many of these can gracefully adorn many corporate boardrooms and corridors of power.

Secondly to give confidence to the artists who are here tonight and other artists out there that we as a national value their talents and will encourage them through our compliments and our wallets to continue strive for excellence.

With those words ladies and gentlemen it gives me great pleasure to declare this 2003 Carlton Brewery Arts Exhibition Officially Open.

VINAKA VAKALEVU