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NEW TORRES STRAIT MASKS EXHIBITION TO OPEN DURING ART AWARD

A new exhibition showcasing Torres Strait masks is set to open alongside the 2015 Gab Titui Indigenous Art Award on 18 June 2015.

Evolution: Torres Strait Masks is the Gab Titui Cultural Centre's latest cultural maintenance exhibition, documenting the evolution of masks in the Torres Strait and their influence on contemporary art forms.

The exhibition has been co-curated by high profile artist, Alick Tipoti, whose expertise in ceremonial masks led him to receive the *Wandjuk Marika 3D Memorial Award* in last year's Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award for his work, *Kaygasiw Usul*, inspired by a 19th century Torres Strait mask held by the British Museum.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu, said the exhibition supports the vision of the TSRA Culture, Art and Heritage Programme to research, conserve, interpret, exhibit and promote the culture and heritage of the Torres Strait people.

"Since 2008 we have seen some incredibly successful exhibitions produced by the programme," Mr Elu said.

"These include *Bipotaim (Stories from the Torres Strait)* – documenting communities' experiences of the 1967 referendum, *Zamiyakal (Torres Strait Dance Machines)*, which toured to Hawaii, and the 2011 Ephraim Bani commemorative exhibition, *Muruygawmal Muykupal Pathamukmik*."

The exhibition has been developed by the Gab Titui Cultural Centre as part of their annual cultural maintenance exhibition programme, presenting issues of importance to the culture and history of Torres Strait Islanders.

Mr Tipoti, who visited the British Museum's Torres Strait Islander collection in 2011, describes the significance of the mask in Torres Strait Islander culture as the closest way for him to connect with his ancestors.

"The masks hanging in museums, they aren't spiritually alive, but whenever there is a Torres Strait Islander presence the masks come to life simply because we are descendants of the original artists, and that's the whole purpose of this exhibition as well," Mr Tipoti said.

The exhibition will document the history and cultural significance of masks in the Torres Strait, featuring historical images from the British Museum and Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and commissioned works by seven artists throughout the Torres Strait.

“It (mask-making) is a dying art form,” Mr Tipoti said.

“That was one of the reasons I started making masks, because I wanted to revive that. Hopefully this exhibition will promote and encourage that side of things.”

The exhibition opening will be accompanied by performances by Aibai Sagulaw Buai Dance Team from Badu Island.

“When you wind the clock back, our ancestors never made something to be hung on a wall in a museum. The highest stage, still today, is the performance because it brings everything to life,” Mr Tipoti said.

“I see that as the highest form of storytelling, but obviously they – the dance and the exhibition – complement one another.”

Evolution: Torres Strait Masks will open in the Gab Titui Cultural Centre’s Ephraim Bani Gallery on Thursday evening, 18 June 2015. For more information contact the Gab Titui Cultural Centre on 07 4069 0888 or visit www.gabtitui.com.au.

Evolution: Torres Strait Masks is part of the Gab Titui Cultural Centre’s annual cultural maintenance exhibition programme. The Gab Titui Cultural Centre is an initiative of the Torres Strait Regional Authority’s Culture, Art and Heritage Programme.



Alick Tipoti with his masks, Baywaw Mawa (Maalu 1&2), 2011.



Alick Tipoti with Leitha Assan (Acting Operations and Exhibition Manager) and Aven Noah Jnr. (Gallery Officer)

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