

FACT SHEET

Wednesday 23 February 2011

VARILAKU

PACIFIC ARTS FROM THE
SOLOMON ISLANDS

24 February – 29 May 2011

- The word '*varilaku*' describes the mixture of cool bravado and aggression found in the confidence of a Solomon Islands warrior, fully adorned and decorated, embarking on war-like or head-hunting expeditions.
- Warriors needed these personal qualities of *varilaku* in abundance, and the magic inherent in their adornments was used as an aid to boost their confidence and build the perception that they were striking, strong and capable warriors.
- There are just over sixty works in the exhibition, these include life sized sculptures of 'Urar' (a visualisation of a person's soul once it has arrived in an after-world of feasting and dancing) where the artist has utilised the forms of twisted mangrove tree roots. Other works include protective spirit figures from the front of head-hunting canoes which had a similar function to figureheads on European ships in the 16th to 19th centuries and over-modelled skulls of enemies acquired in war.
- A number of arts from islands now politically associated with Papua New Guinea as opposed to the Solomon Islands, such as Bougainville and Buka, have been included because of their geographic and cultural connection to the rest of the Solomon Islands.
- The last exhibition that displayed arts from the Solomon Islands was in 1974 at the British Museum.
- *Varilaku: Pacific arts from the Solomon Islands* explores a period of time when great changes occurred in the lives of Solomon Islanders. From the mid-19th century traders, recruiters, administrators and missionaries entered the islands in increasing numbers. They introduced new ideas and technologies, missionaries took to converting islanders to Christianity and administrators did their best to suppress the tradition, or *Kastom*, of head hunting and intertribal warfare.
- 'Kastom' is a word used today in the Solomon Islands and elsewhere in Melanesia such as Vanuatu that refers to activities, events and arts that are part of the traditional culture of particular communities. It can encompass everything from oral histories, myths and legends to material culture and particular ways of fishing or building a house.
- *Varilaku: Pacific arts from the Solomon Islands* is on show in the Orde Poynton Gallery only at the National Gallery of Australia. Entry into the exhibition is free.