

## The National Gallery of Australia opens the first Solomon Islands art exhibition in Australia

# VARILAKU

PACIFIC ARTS FROM THE  
SOLOMON ISLANDS

The National Gallery of Australia exhibition, *Varilaku: Pacific arts from the Solomon Islands* opens tomorrow and is on show until 29 May 2011. The first Solomon Islands exhibition in Australia, *Varilaku* tells a story of both beauty and aggression, bringing together the finest traditional arts from the Solomon Islands. 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.

Ron Radford AM, Director of the National Gallery of Australia said "The National Gallery of Australia is delighted to present the first Solomon Islands exhibition in Australia which shows the finest examples of this art from museums and private collections throughout the country. Indeed not since 1974 at the British Museum, has there been such a comprehensive display of art from the Solomon Islands."

Covering the period from the 1860s to the 1940s, *Varilaku* represents a dynamic time in which the indigenous cultures came under the unstoppable influence of colonial administration and Christianity. The exhibition explores traditional beliefs in ancestral ghosts, the world of spirit beings, ocean-bound raiding expeditions and the indigenous aesthetics of the self, such as the use of adornments to express identity and status.

Featuring artefacts such as decorated wooden ear ornaments that young men and women would wear to enhance their appeal, life like sculptures, over-modelled skulls and 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.

"*Varilaku* represents a time capsule where cultures change from generation to generation and the twentieth century was full of scientific, social, economic and political change that influenced every community in the Solomon Islands", said Crispin Howarth curator, Pacific Arts, National Gallery of Australia and the curator of this exhibition.

*Varilaku* explores the diversity of the Islands at the time when the outside world viewed the people of the Solomon Islands as barbarous savages constantly engaged in head hunting. However, to those who spent time within the Solomon Islands, this way of life reflected a different image of a unique culture and identity shaped by elegance, vanity and passion.

*Varilaku: Pacific arts from the Solomon Islands* is complemented by a 128-page full colour catalogue by exhibition curator, Crispin Howarth and includes a guest foreword by Sir David Attenborough.

"Collectors and ethnographers have long known of the beautiful objects with which they [Solomon Islanders] enriched their lives. It is a delight indeed that this remarkable exhibition should reveal them to a wider audience", excerpt from foreword by Sir David Attenborough.



Featuring pieces that were produced by communities prior to the onset of World War II, *Varilaku: Pacific arts from the Solomon Islands* exhibits many works that will be displayed for the first time, despite many having been in Australian collections for over a century.

*Varilaku: Pacific arts from the Solomon Islands* is showing in the Orde Poynton Gallery at the National Gallery of Australia from 24 February to 29 May 2011. Entry into the exhibition is free.

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