



**Australian Government**

**Torres Strait Regional Authority**



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## **GAB TITUI ART AWARDS CREATE OPPORTUNITY FOR TORRES STRAIT ARTISTS**

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Successful careers for emerging Torres Strait artists have started with a Gab Titui Art Award and the Torres Strait Regional Authority is hoping this exciting trend will continue as Torres Strait artists are invited to enter the 2010 Gab Titui Indigenous Art Awards.

The 2010 entries will be judged by guest curator Stephen Gilchrist, Indigenous Curator at the National Gallery of Victoria.

“The Gab Titui Indigenous Art Awards has become an important event in the cultural and social calendar for the Torres Strait region,” said Torres Strait Regional Authority Chairperson Mr Toshie Kris.

“It provides local artists with the opportunity to gain professional experience in exhibition protocol, as well as promoting the distinct style and production of contemporary and traditional art that is unique to the Torres Strait. The career opportunity this award presents to artists is evident in the recent successes of dhoeri maker, Mr George Nona,” said Mr Kris.

Winner of the 2009 Gab Titui Indigenous Art Award Mr George Nona said he had no idea of the impact this award would have on his future as an emerging artist.

When Mr Nona entered his dhoeri *Torres Strait Spiritual Headdress* in the 2009 Art Award and won first prize, it created the opportunity for him to transcend his interpretation of the Torres Strait’s unique culture by creating carefully crafted traditional western island dhoeris. These dhoeris now adorn the walls of galleries and museums across Australia, promoting the richness of his cultural heritage and affirming him as a master craftsman.

“I’m creating much more dhoeri and always coming up with new ideas. I learnt how to work towards a deadline - like an exhibition opening. This helps me for when I have exhibitions down south. My work is much more recognised now,” Mr Nona said.

It was while visiting the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra in 2000 that Mr Nona came across an old black and white photograph taken in 1927 of a troupe of 32 Badu Island men wearing traditional western Torres Strait Dhoeris. The photo titled *Badu Island Warriors* inspired him to research archival photographs and records extensively in search of various western island dhoeri designs.

To his surprise, Nona discovered that some of the unique designs captured in the archived images had not been seen or created by Torres Strait Islanders in almost a century. It was at that moment he knew he had found his purpose – to revive and maintain the lost techniques of making traditional western island Torres Strait dhoeri.

Since then, Mr Nona has produced over 140 dhoeris; had his own solo exhibition; participated in several group exhibitions; been published in numerous catalogues; featured in major art magazines and national newspapers; and had his work collected by Australian gallery and museum institutions. His most recent achievement is an exhibition titled *Muiyiw Minaral (Spiritual Markings)*, which was on display at Sydney’s Hogarth Galleries in February 2010.

“Making dhoeris has always been inside me,” he reflects. “When you look at it, our ancestors were artists. They had to be - it was part of their lives, the way they lived, part of their spirituality. We have it inside us too.”

What began as an interest, eventually evolved into a fixation that has consumed Mr Nona's life. Endless hours are poured into studying historic photographs, consulting with community elders, practicing techniques and finally creating the dhoeri. Every headdress is made with precision, the utmost care and respect for his community, ancestors and the sacred stories and meanings behind the symbols incorporated into each unique piece.

"My bloodline runs from the Eastern to Western Islands and I was grown up by Top Western family. When I make dhoeri I am respectful of where the techniques and designs come from. I research all the meanings behind the dhoeri and I talk to the elders before I start making," he says.

"The dhoeri hold a deep spiritual meaning. I get permission to make the dhoeri, but I never tell the full spiritual meaning behind these things to people who aren't allowed to have this knowledge. The meanings and uses are sacred and only passed onto the clans, makers or wearers."

To other artists who might be interested in entering the Gab Titui Indigenous Art Awards, Mr Nona's advice is simple:

"Our culture comes through our art. Make something that shows where you are from, your family, your spirituality or your beliefs. It doesn't have to be just paintings or linocuts, it can be a cultural artefact or something you are good at making. If you're a serious artist, the Award can take you a long way."

The Gab Titui Indigenous Art Award is open to Australian Indigenous artists residing in the Torres Strait and NPA. Entries Close on Tuesday 15 June 2010. For an entry form or more information about the Award, contact George Dann at Gab Titui Cultural Centre on (07) 4090 2130.

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