



Tribute to the Solomons' Kuai Maueha

About 100 people attended the opening of an exhibition of the work of Solomon Islands artist Kuai Maueha in Honiara on May 15, the second anniversary of his death.

The exhibition was financed by the Australian South Pacific Cultures Fund, and was open to the public at the Australian High Commission building from May 15 to June 3.

Formally opening the exhibition, Solomon Islands Minister for Education, Training and Cultural Affairs Michael Evo thanked and congratulated Australian High Commissioner Trevor Sofield for his sponsoring of the exhibition, which had been set up by the writers of this report.

The attendance at the opening and the minister's words of admiration and support differed markedly from the poor response in 1974 when an exhibition of Kuai's outstanding work was mounted at the Solomon Islands National Museum by Anna Craven. It took nearly two years for this significant change in appreciation to develop, encouraged in particular by the interest of individuals connected with the University of the South Pacific, especially Dr John Chick and Professor Albert Wendt.

In addition to a core of work left by Kuai when he died — mostly carvings, but some drawings — a number of sculptures and items of copperwork were lent by individuals resident in Solomon Islands and overseas. Pieces were flown in for the exhibition by Air Pacific from Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. It was not possible to get back some of his best pieces now in California. But photos were sent instead.

Three of his largest works were found damaged and dumped in a small garden shed amidst tall grass at the Betikama Carving Centre at the Seventh-day Adventist headquarters, where Kuai worked for some time, and were carefully restored. It might have been possible to bring in



Artist and his work: Kuai Maueha poses with some of his sculptures. The photograph was taken in Honiara not long before his death.

many more sculptures and coppers had the Betikama Carving Centre kept a careful record of the purchasers of Kuai's works.

The generous and helpful response from people and institutions was a fitting tribute to Kuai who well deserves to be recognised and remembered as an artist of note in the South Pacific region.

All those who knew Kuai speak very highly and warmly of him, and he emerges not only as a very creative and talented artist but also as a unique personality.

Considering his late start as an artist, he was a prolific one, seemingly never short of ideas. He poured out what could almost be described as a stream of pure, untrammelled creativeness. A very few of his carvings give the impression that the subject or form might have been suggested by other people. But these appear rather stilted, and are easy to distinguish from his true flowing work, the definitive form of which often must have been inspired by the piece of timber itself.

It is perhaps difficult from this exhibition to see a particular trend or development in his work as there was no selection according to year or phase — all works available have been exhibited and the dates of most are not recorded. It can only be stated that Kuai was working with copper for a period from the end of 1977 to 1979.

It is easier to divide his carvings into the more, or less, successful. There were times when he added much shell inlay to his work (probably an earlier tendency), other times when he variously stained, burnt or polished the piece, or left his pieces, very successfully, entirely unpolished or unvarnished.

There were times when Kuai, like most Solomon Islands carvers, felt the urgent need to earn money and therefore to turn out something akin to "airport art" which more readily sold to everyday tourists. It is this need to earn a living that hampers the development of contemporary art in the Solomons, and handicaps many individuals who might otherwise explore their own talents and abilities, being as they are, not quite so single-minded or totally immersed in their craft as was Kuai, nor so suggestive to dreams and stories.

Kuai Maueha was about 48 when he died in hospital in Honiara on May 15, 1981, from heart failure following a fall from a tree.

He was born into the Tongaba sub-clan of the main Kaitu'u clan (*sa'a*) of Bellona (Mungiki), at a time when Christianity was being introduced. He was the first of two sons born to Maueha by his first wife Utiuka. At an early age he fell and severely damaged his spine, an injury which affected him for life. One of his biggest disappointments was his failure

to find a wife, and he would always help others whose marriages were encountering difficulties. He was a very religious Seventh-day Adventist and loved to preach to young people about his church, and often studied his Bible.

As an artist he was not truly recognised by his nation and it is sad to think that most of his better works, created at the peak of his career in the 1970s, are overseas. Although he tried wood-carving in 1962, he did not become serious about it until 1969 when in Western Solomons. He then moved to Honiara where he continued to produce carvings and in 1972 turned up at the Betikama Carving Centre, at the Seventh-day Adventist headquarters just outside the town.

During this period his carvings gradually became known, and a number of individuals recognised his talent. His first solo exhibition was held at the National Museum in October 1974. In 1976 he participated in a University of the South Pacific Centre workshop on art and dance in Honiara where he was introduced to line drawing and other techniques. This was followed by three months as artist-in-residence at the University of the South Pacific.



ic in Suva. Other Pacific Islanders were able to experience his creativity at this time and some of his major works now remain elsewhere in the Pacific. As a follow-up to this, he worked for some months during 1978 at the USP Centre in Honiara, and his work was on exhibition there.

Up to this time he had been working mostly as an employed carver at the Betikama Carving Centre. Betikama provided a secure communal environment for him, as well as an overseas outlet for his creations. He was introduced to working in copper there and explored that medium for some months. But he had a much more spontaneous sense for creating in timber, according to the shape and inspiration each piece gave him, and he soon returned to this medium.

Each individual form, every group of figures or heads, has a complex story associated with it, often based on biblical themes or traditional Polynesian stories from his native Bellona. It is extremely unfortunate that the mass of the pieces exhibited have lost their personal account.

Kuai Maueha died only partially recorded, his creativity and complex imagination represented only in three-dimensional symbols and not, regrettably, on paper as a story-teller. He was not just a carver — many people did not understand or appreciate his art. He was a unique artist of considerable abstract vision. More or less self-taught, his originality was totally uninfluenced by any school of art, and his work often displayed a strong sense of humor behind his religious faith. Although this fact is not widely acknowledged, his death was a great loss to Solomon Islands. — A. V. Stevenson and A. Craven.

Palmyra murder appeal rejected

A federal appeals court in San Francisco in May refused to dismiss murder charges against Buck Walker and Stephanie Stearns, who are charged with killing a San Diego woman on Palmyra atoll, in the northern Line Islands, almost nine years ago (PIM Sep '81 p23).



Exhibition pieces by Kuai Maueha: Above is one of his copper beatings, a form he used for only a brief period. The others are carvings in wood.

In an order filed in California on May 31, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals rejected defence arguments that the indictments should be dismissed because Walker and Stearns had already been convicted of felonies related to the murder, Walker's attorney Earle A. Partington said.

Partington said he received word of the appeals court decision — which he called a "disgrace" — in the mail.

He said he and attorneys for Stearns will ask the U.S. Supreme Court for a hearing on the matter.

Walker and Stearns, his former girlfriend, were arrested in Honolulu in 1974 after they showed up in a 10 m yacht owned by Malcolm Graham and his wife, Eleanor.

A subsequent search of Palmyra by Coast Guard and FBI officials turned up no trace of the Grahams that year. Walker and Stearns were convicted in federal court a year later of stealing the Grahams' yacht, *Sea Wind*.

Both defendants went to prison. Walker later escaped and was recaptured in Arizona.

Meanwhile, in 1981, skeletal remains — later identified as those of Eleanor Graham — were washed up on a beach in the Palmyra lagoon. Walker and



Stearns were then indicted for her murder. No trace of her husband has ever been found.

In arguments before the appeals court in April, Stearns' attorney, Leonard Wineglass, argued that prosecuting her on the murder charge constituted "double jeopardy" since she had already been convicted of theft.

Partington argued that even though Walker's theft conviction was later thrown out because he was denied a speedy trial, his client could not be tried for murder because the theft charge was a "lesser included offence" that is inherently part of the murder indictment.

Walker and Stearns have always maintained that the Grahams drowned while fishing in the atoll's lagoon. Walker remains in federal prison. Stearns now lives in California.

Raro's golfing hour of glory

The Rarotonga Golf Club has achieved fame (or notoriety?) because of the charms (or fiendish devilry?) of its well-kept nine-hole course set among the masts, stays and anchor pads of the wireless aerial farm at Black Rock.

The club in June realised a long-cherished ambition when it acted as the first host club in the 1983 Pro-Am Golf Tournament — Pacific Circuit.

A very full program was organised for the visiting professionals and amateurs and local players over the four days June 24-27.

A total of \$NZ10,000 in prize money was available in prizes for the professionals, and a wide range of prizes were there to be won by successful amateurs.

After competing at Rarotonga, visiting golfers had the choice of continuing to take part in the circuit by moving on to French Polynesia, American Samoa, Western Samoa, and Fiji.

Incidentally, course record holder at the time of the tournament was none other the Cook Islands Prime Minister Geoffrey Henry. His record figure was 64, for two rounds of nine holes. — Bill Coppell.

Democracy, or Dem a' crazy?

The deportation from Vanuatu earlier this year of Englishwoman Christine Coombe (PIM May p17, June p11), and the consequent closure of the small weekly paper known as *Voice of Vanuatu*, generated considerable heat.

While critics of the deportation have been given wide media coverage, the same cannot be said for those who strongly supported it.

One such person is Grace Mera Molisa whose verses on the

subject were printed in the last issue of *Voice of Vanuatu*. Ms Molisa has now requested PIM to reproduce them. Slightly shortened for legal reasons, they appear below.

Freedom of the Press
is a shining jewel
in the crown
of any Democracy.

What is Democracy?
is it something
to cherish?
Or is it Dem a' crazy?

So-called "Democracy"
is wielded
over our heads
like a guillotine
by a handful
of corrupt
and power-hungry,
dissident, misfit,
tools of multi-nationals
distorting truth
via stacking a biased paper.

Who is to say
that the Australian,
Fijian or any other brand
of Democracy is
any better
than our Democracy?

Our own system of Consensus
is more democratic
than the dictatorship

of the vote
against the minority.

What Freedom of Speech
is there
in Freedom of the Press
when my individual
and human rights
are denied
in the unbalanced
and twisted information
hawked by a one-sided Press?

The other side
of the coin
of Freedom
is Responsibility
and Dignity . . .
Our democracy
born of consensus
is the outcome
of personal
conversation
confronting
consulting
and consolidating
a political position
by means of
direct dialogue
ensuring a balanced
insight
derived from
equitably expressed views
conductive
to complete understanding
and harmonious existence
in a common community.

What right
has the dictatorship
of an outsider,
Australia, Fiji,
or World Press
to interfere
in the internal politics
of our sovereign state
by aiding and abetting
dissent and disorder
pre-empting
the decisions
we on our own accord
by Constitutional right
and sovereign duty
should freely make?

This paternalistic
and condescending
tenth-rate journalist
of capitalist media
is here purely
to tarnish and taint
our original
Thought
and Life-style
in the consumptive
and acquisitive
interests
of capitalist
economic expansion.

The hardest
slap in the face
for every Ni Vanuatu