

## **“New Guinea Structures”**

**By William Natera**

“I go back, but I leave my spirit here,” Waikua Nera says in his best English. Dressed in traditional bilas, Waikua, an elderly man from Abelam in the East Sepik Province, is speaking at the opening of the New Guinea Structures exhibit at the Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) in Brisbane.

He stands in front of a stunning structure – the front of a spirit house – which dominates the entrance of the Gallery, and tells the audience how pleased he is that the work behind him and in the central hall will remain in Australia.

Waikua is part of a group of artists from the East Sepik who travelled to Brisbane early this month to participate in The 7<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT7). The same band of gentlemen from Abelam and Kwoma were in the Queensland capital from last December to this January to create an incredible series of paintings and carvings for the event.

The artwork that was combined into large-scale structures based on the customary spirit houses form the Kramer Ausenco (PNG) Ltd sponsored New Guinea Structures exhibit. It is the highlight of the APT7, the only recurring exhibition to present the contemporary art of Asia, the Pacific and Australia.

The APT7 marks the twentieth anniversary of the APT, and the first time Papua New Guinea (PNG) has contributed to the series, and although a younger Waikua created work on commission abroad before, this project is close to his heart.

The team leader of the Abelam men on this tour of duty, Waikua is excited about the opportunity to represent PNG at the Triennial, and his passion for his culture is obvious and infectious.

The Kwoma team leader, Anton Waiawas, is just as enthusiastic about the works his men have put together, and though he has worked on other projects in other countries, for him too, this one is special.

Equally as thrilled with the exhibit is Kramer Ausenco’s Chief Executive Officer, Frank Kramer. He says that as PNG and the South Pacific’s leading engineering and project management firm, Kramer Ausenco has been delivering world-class results for clients.

“It was only natural that the company which provides a diverse range of services including architectural design, building and structural engineering, support the New Guinea Structures exhibit which is also first-rate,” he says.

Co-curated by architect Martin Fowler, the display reflects the idea of ephemeral structures, a central theme of APT7, and considers how the built environment influences people’s engagement with their surroundings and connection to place.

The Gallery are now the custodians of these works which form a significant part of its contemporary Pacific collection, and are a testament to the immense value of Papua New Guinea’s cultural heritage and its ongoing vibrancy.

The artists during the opening of the Spirit House. - Photo by Mark Sherwood, QAGOMA



The preview night of the APT7. Guests were hosted in the Gallery's central hall which was dominated by the PNG display. - Photo by Natasha Harth QAGOMA



The artists in front of the Spirit House entrance which greets visitors as they enter the Gallery's front doors.  
– Photo by Mark Sherwood, QAGOMA

