

MASPAC aims to rejuvenate Maori and South Pacific arts

Maori and South Pacific people throughout New Zealand are being offered financial help to set up their own arts projects as part of this year's Maori and South Pacific Arts Council's programme.

The Council wants to help all groups preserve and promote their cultures and to encourage Maoris, living away from tribal areas, to rediscover their roots.

With this year's budget from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council increased to \$336,300 — though falling short of the \$485,000 requested following policy meetings last year — the Council will be concentrating on three main priorities.

These are the traditional Maori arts programmes to which it has allocated \$113,000; traditional Pacific Island arts which gets \$35,000 and contemporary Maori and Pacific Island arts which gets \$32,500.

Much of the money will be spent on a series of national hui including gatherings for weavers, carvers, traditional Maori performing arts tutors, composers and those involved in contemporary music. An extremely successful visual arts hui was held last year at Porirua's Takapuahia marae.

Council Chairman, Archdeacon Kingi Ihaka, says it is the first time any organisation has looked at the real needs of Maori and Pacific Island people and called together leaders and cultural experts from the various ethnic groups. "This is our aim over the next two or three years — we are achieving this slowly."

He said for years there had been pleas for retention of Maori culture and now, "at long last someone is putting some teeth into what people have been saying."

He said the programmes were of vital importance to all Maori and Pacific Island people because their cultural activities could not be separated from their life.

"To most people Maori culture is a few action songs, haka and poi — but culture embraces every aspect of Maori life. You can't divorce culture from people" he said.

The Council was interested in both contemporary and traditional arts he said. "We're not just talking about ancient waiata (songs) and traditional tattoos but about modern action songs and contemporary design. We're not static — we don't dwell on the dead."

Archdeacon Ihaka said the Council wanted to make contact with grass roots communities right across the country. It focussed its funding not on individuals, but on groups and their communities and on projects with com-

munal support.

Council member Cliff Whiting, a fisherman artist from Russell, said the Council's primary aim was to put people in a position where they felt secure and confident about making decisions for themselves and planning their own futures.

"We help them get set up, we assist in funding and call together people with similar interests, then we encourage groups to form their own programmes".

He said the Council wanted to help set up a national network of resources people in each craft. Through this, large numbers of people would be able to learn the skills, and those who had moved away from their tribal areas could use the network to discover their ancestry and heritage.

Mr Whiting said all the programmes were exciting but the Council was disappointed that lack of funds had forced postponement of some projects.

These include a joint programme with Regional Arts Councils aimed at promoting co-operation of Community Arts Councils and Maori and Pacific Island communities, and appointment of a research/resource officer with special skills for gathering data about other cultures.

Traditional Maori art programmes

Maori language is a top priority for the Council because without it the culture would die, according to Council Chairman Archdeacon Kingi Ihaka.

"I can't imagine someone speaking at a tangi and not using some Maori" he said.

Adviser and former senior lecturer in Maori Studies, Bill Parker agrees and says the Council should concentrate on promoting whaikorero (the art of oratory), leaving basic language teaching to the schools and other educational institutions.

He says whaikorero is a dying art and suggests two ways it could be revitalised:

— publication of material about whaikorero

— use of videos and other modern teaching aids showing the actions and stances of the speaker, as well as his words.

The Council has allocated \$17,000 of the \$113,000 set aside for traditional Maori art programmes to whaikorero (performed mainly by men) and karanga, the ceremonial calling by women.

No national hui is planned because an initial meeting of people involved in language arts decided a series of regional and tribal hui would be more appropriate.

The Council will also organise a policy meeting for women involved with the art of karanga.

Also in its traditional Maori arts programme, the Council is funding hui for weavers, carvers, and performing arts tutors.

The first of these is a national

Johnny Frisbie-Hebenstreit — Maspac council Kingi Ihaka

