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East Timor's art, culture, back from the brink

Secretary of State for Culture and former director of the Provincial Museum in Dili from 1982 until independence, Virgilio Simith, will deliver the keynote address about the development of cultural policy including his personal accounts of the rescue and preservation of the country's art



The seminar, Back from the Brink; Heritage Culture and Art in Timor-Leste, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, May 16

By Vikki Riley

Darwin, May 14: The seminar held alongside the stunning Timor Leste exhibition of art, craft and artifacts on display at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin will feature noted academics and experts from Australia and Timor Leste.

The experts will discuss the past, present and future directions for heritage and cultural preservation almost ten years after Indonesian militias destroyed most of the country's

artifacts during the post-referendum looting of 1999.

The seminar will have a range of themes related to the building of a national identity via the repatriation of traditional material objects and non-material human memories of the Indonesian occupation.

A new museum is being built in Dili.



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The mapping of cultural sites such as recently discovered rock art in Bachau and Bagia on the east of the island will be presented by Professor Sue O'Connor, Head of Archeology at Canberra's Australian National University.

Her published work on rock art heritage sites in Southeast Asia is internationally applauded for its vigour and polemic.



Jill Joliffe, prolific journalist whose 2001 book *Cover Up: the inside story of the Balibo Five* led to a formal enquiry into the murder of Australian journalists by the Indonesian invading forces as well as a film soon to be released will present a paper and video about *The Living Memory* project she began in 2005.

The project deals with human rights violations such as torture and rape and so far Joliffe has collected 300 archival photos and documents which she exhibits with video testimonies of survivors who were former prisoners of the Indonesian military.

She will discuss the role of stories and memory in healing damaged lives and the lost history of those gone at the seminar this Saturday.



The backdrop for the seminar is a huge array of spectacular objects; tais weavings, ceremonial doors, carved statues, jewellery, intricate headdresses, lime boxes, masks, stone sculptures and paintings from the Arte Moris foundation in Dili.

An elaborate catalogue in Tetum, English and Portuguese has been printed to document the objects as well as to be used as an educational resource for the nation's schools.

The exhibition, *From the Hands of Our Ancestors*, art and craft from Timor Leste runs until July 2009.

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