

SMART ECONOMY GRANT TAKES COOK ISLANDS PEARLS AND ART TO THE WORLD

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM) is pleased to announce that the Government's SMART Economy Scheme has funded a new 'virtual marketplace' for Cook Islands black pearl and contemporary art. The launch of Bergman & Sons' Cook Islands Black Pearl and Contemporary Art Virtual Initiative was celebrated this week at the opening of Bergman Gallery's first fully online exhibition.

MFEM Financial Secretary Garth Henderson officially opened the 'In a Perfect World' exhibition by Cook Islands artist Mahiriki Tangaroa at Bergman Gallery on Tuesday evening. In his opening speech, Mr Henderson highlighted how the SMART Economy initiative will enable a more productive, diverse and dynamic economy. "Our Government has made two major structural changes to the telecommunications sector – the Manatua submarine cable and the freeing up of our telecommunications market to competition. The SMART Economy grants and tax credits will help our people leverage these changes to grow their businesses through technology innovation. "Bergman & Sons' Cook Islands Black Pearl and Contemporary Art Virtual Initiative will deliver a new, virtual quality e-market to a world-wide audience via twin

websites with e-commerce, operating in real time and with interactive capability. This venture encapsulates three of the key things we are seeking to achieve through this initiative - innovative digital technology, improved productivity and a more diverse economy." Ben Bergman, Director of Bergman & Sons and Bergman Gallery said: "Thanks to the SMART Economy grant, our new exhibition of Mahiriki Tangaroa's work is open for the world to enjoy. As the exhibition opened to our local audience here in Rarotonga, a virtual, on-line viewing room went live alongside a live stream of the opening via Facebook. I believe this may be a first for a Cook Islands gallery." While virtual marketplaces and exhibitions may be commonplace elsewhere in the world, the Bergman & Sons venture is breaking new ground for the Cook Islands. By bringing the world market to Raroton-

ga via the web, the Cook Islands Black Pearl and Contemporary Art Virtual Initiative helps provide a vital trade and cultural exchange connection in these times of restricted travel. As this venture removes the reliance on international visitors popping into the shop, it will help diversify our economy away from tourism and in doing so, promotes a more complex, diverse economy. The online exhibition can be viewed at: <https://bergman-gallery.co.ck/exhibitions/mahiriki-tangaroa-2020/>



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