

ADDRESS BY
HIS HONOUR MR TOM PAULING QC
ADMINISTRATOR OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
ON THE OCCASION OF
MERREPEN ARTS FESTIVAL
Daly River
1 June 2008

As Administrator of the Northern Territory, it gives me great pleasure to officially open the Merrepen Arts Festival and the famous annual art sale and auction.

Mrs Pauling and I are delighted to attend the art sale and auction as our love of art and culture is well established.

On a visit to Daly River last month we purchased a wonderful painting by your president – Patricia Marrfurra McTaggart – called *Crocodile Skin*, which is hanging in Government House.

Now in its twenty-first year, the annual Merrepen Arts Festival has evolved to become one of the Top End's most anticipated and enjoyed arts and cultural attractions.

Its beginning was a humble one and is testament to the strength of Aboriginal women in the context of preserving and nurturing their spirituality and their culture.

Merrepen Arts was initially established in 1986 as a meeting place for the women of Daly River.

The art centre was a place where they could come together to share their stories, their troubles and practise their traditional crafts, such as making dilly bags for collecting bush tucker and plants used for medicinal purposes.

I understand *merrepen* is a mark of respect to the women elders as it refers to the fan palm from which their dilly bags, baskets and mats are woven.

Merrepen Arts has evolved into an arts centre and gallery that has also embraced contemporary art techniques, such as screen-printing and acrylic painting.

The festival epitomises the Territory's rich cultural history, its vibrancy and its uniqueness.

And this is the Territory that attracts a multitude of visitors to our patch of paradise each year, especially in the Top End's very comfortable dry season.

Festival-goers attending this year's event have enjoyed an abundance of entertainment: music, art, culture and sports.

I understand the opening concert by our own award-winning musician Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu was simply spectacular, and what could be a better setting for such a live performance than the banks of the Daly River.

I am sure our reptilian friends that were lurking nearby were placated by Geoffrey's melodious voice too!

I applaud the community of Daly River for tapping into their inherent talents as artists, and creating sustainable opportunities for economic growth.

The Merrepen Arts Festival is now firmly established on the Top End's dry season calendar, and will continue to flourish.

I thank Patricia for the kind invitation to attend the festival and on your behalf I declare the festival officially open.