



14AB Peters Rest
St. Croix USVI
walshmetal.com
773-8169

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Willard S. John

Tel: (340)277-9015

Email: jumbieproductions@msn.com

Local Artist Helps Preserve ‘The Art of Moko Jumbie’

St. Croix, USVI -- Tuesday, February 15th, 2005 -- Thirty year veteran Moko Jumbie performer, Willard S. John, is producing a multimedia Crucian art exhibit – "The Art of Moko Jumbie." The exhibition is opening at 5pm on Saturday, February 26th 2005, at the Walsh Metal Works Gallery in Peters Rest.

Featured will be both live performances and the artwork of over thirty Virgin Islands artists, who will explore the theme of Moko Jumbie traditions.

In "The Art of Moko Jumbie," Mr. John will be bringing together a diverse group of over thirty island artists who have each created one or more pieces about Moko Jumbies in various mediums including paintings, sculptures, photography, glasswork, mixed media and more. During the opening reception Mr. John will provide a brief history of the Moko Jumbie tradition accompanied by live performances by the Guardians of Culture Moko Jumbies.

A native Virgin Islander and longtime educator on St. Croix, Mr. John has been vigorously exploring and preserving the art of Moko Jumbie for over three decades. As a college student in the states surrounded by many students of African descent, he found himself hungry for knowledge of his own culture. A family member taught him to perform and he made his debut in the St. Thomas carnival parade of 1974. Mr. John became a self-taught scholar of the Moko Jumbie and has traced its roots back to African and Caribbean traditions and folklore.

Moko Jumbie stilt dancers originated as part of highly spiritual, sociologically significant rituals and celebrations of African culture. Originally, the Moko Jumbie represented God's power, a tall spirit that would protect the village from evil and also initiate young people across the threshold into adulthood. The true spiritual significance of Moko Jumbies had to be masked by enslaved Africans when they arrived in the West Indies, in order to preserve their culture and its traditions. Mr. John is giving residents, students, and visitors to the Caribbean the opportunity to understand the original intent and meaning behind these colorful characters that are such a familiar sight in island festivals and parades. "We want to remind people of their African roots!" he says. "In the African tradition, the Moko Jumbie is always masked so that no human features are visible on the dancers."

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Mr. John has produced an “informance” (information/performance) DVD entitled “Mockolution,” (the evolution of the Moko Jumbie) and is also developing a Moko Jumbie Handbook about the history and techniques of the authentic Moko Jumbie artist. “The handbook will explain the history as well as how to teach the techniques, with lesson plans, information on creating the costumes and performing,” he says. His research and techniques include the influences of Alvin “Ali” Paul, who in the 1960s modernized some of the Moko Jumbie traditions to include women performers, a change in costuming and performing in venues such as hotels, parties and cultural shows.

Mr. John currently works with two Moko Jumbie groups on St. Croix: the Ricardo Richards School troupe, and the Guardians of Culture Moko Jumbies, a professional group which can be booked for events and entertainment. Mr. John conducts Moko Jumbie classes every Saturday from 9:00 am to 12:00 Noon at the Ricardo Richards school. “This art form is not FROM me, it comes THROUGH me,” says Mr. John. “It’s my responsibility to pass it on, to appreciate and express my ancestry. After thirty years the excitement, the drive and the enthusiasm is still there. Fortunately I am still able to perform – and able to pass it on to young people.”

"The Art of Moko Jumbie" will be on exhibit from Saturday, February 26th through Saturday, March 12th, 2005 at the Walsh Metal Works Gallery. The opening reception for the show is Saturday, February 26th, from 5 to 9pm. Gallery hours are 10am – 4pm Monday through Saturday, or by appointment. For more information, call the gallery at (340)773-8169.

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Photos enclosed. Byline: Christina Frederick. Photo credit: Willard John. More photos available.

Mr. John available for interview.

SIDEBAR:

Who: Willard S. John and the Guardians of Culture Moko Jumbie group

What: Performing live along with the work of 30+ VI artists in "The Art of Moko Jumbie"

Where: At the Walsh Metal Works Gallery, 14AB Peters Rest (behind the Coca Cola plant)

When: Opening reception with live performance Saturday, February 26th, from 5 to 9 pm.

Art exhibition runs through Saturday, March 12th.

(Exhibition Hours: Reception Saturday 5 – 9pm, Regular Hours:

Monday through Saturday 10am – 4pm or by appointment at 773-8169)

Other: Free of charge, parking available

For more information and press: <http://walshmetal.com/gallery>

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a multimedia Crucian art exhibit

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Opening reception
Saturday, February 26, 2005
5pm – 9pm



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with live performance by
the Guardians of Culture
Moko Jumbies

exhibition hours:
February 28 – March 12, 2005
Mon – Sat 10am – 4pm

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