Unlike many of its neighbors, New Caledonia has a stable economy. Its long established nickel industry, combined with strong tourism and a territorial relationship with France, provides it one of the highest living standards in the Pacific. However, tensions continue to mount over the environmental impact of industry and the social disparity between indigenous Kanak and European populations. In 2006 New Caledonia joined the Pacific Islands Forum as an associate member, one step closer to autonomous rule. It is also a member of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), which has its headquarters in New Caledonia's capital, Nouméa.

The French government supports much of the art activity in the region and oversees the iconic Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre in Nouméa, which was designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano and references Kanak village structures. The Cultural Centre houses the Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture (ADKC), which aims to promote and preserve Kanak archaeological and linguistic heritage, encourage contemporary modes of expression within Kanak culture and promote cultural exchanges.

The center’s program of temporary exhibitions ranges from shows of woodcarving and anthropological photographs to contemporary art. Highlights in 2008 included a tribute to Kanak musician Jacques Kiki Kare, who died in late 2007, “S'y a pas toi, y'a pas moi” (March-June), with contributions by visual artists Paula Gony Boi and Denise Tlouvoune alongside choreographer Richard Digoue, and “Latitudes – Land of the World” (7/17-10/12), a touring exhibition of contemporary artists from around the globe, conceived by the City of Paris. The center also mounted “les autres/ the others” (10/28-08/2-9/09), a touring exhibition that originated at Brisbane alternative space Raw Space Galleries as a response to the Queensland Art Gallery’s Asia-Pacific Triennial, last held in 2006-07. Curated by indigenous Australian new-media artist Jenny Fraser, the show featured works by Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Melanesian, Polynesian, Maori and Asian artists based in Australia, including Gary Lee’s digital print portraits of scantily clad men.

There are two commercial art galleries in New Caledonia. Galerie Onze et Demi shows works by the owner, local artist Franck Chan San, who paints tropical still lifes. Lec Lec T, now two years old, is run by artist Hélène Janet and supports artists producing painting, video, sculpture and installation work.

The big event on the horizon is the transfer of the Tjibaou Culture Centre’s management from the French government to New Caledonia, scheduled to occur before 2011. Looking forward to 2009, two shows are scheduled in partnership with Tahiti and the Trans Pacific Art Express, a workshop program and exhibition curated by Thierry Fontaine from Reunion Island, which was featured in the “Latitudes” show and will conclude work by nine local artists. Overseas, Jean-Jacques Poiv, a Kanak woodcarver, will be exhibited at the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts in Taiwan.