



Oceania:
Fiji, Papua New Guinea, & Samoa

Manitoba Crafts Museum and Library

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Dear Reader,

The document has been prepared to make all the works from the Oceania region in the Manitoba Crafts Museum and Library collection as accessible as possible to community, and contains information about the cultural objects currently in our care.

The information is accurate to the best of our knowledge as of May 2026.

We acknowledge that some information might be missing or incorrect. We welcome input and additional information from community members.

If you have any comments or questions, or if you would like to add information about any of these works, please contact me at:

204.615.3951 or mcml@c2centreforcrafft.ca

Best,

Andrea Reichert

Curator



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Wall Hanging (Siapo/Tapa Cloth)

Artist: Unknown

Accession number: 3381.00

Object name: Wall Hanging

Date: 1971

Period: Mid 20th Century

Description: This wall hanging, “Masi Kesa” in Fijian, also commonly referred to as Tapa cloth, shows symbolic cultural designs based on geometric principals. The border is made up of triangles in a cream tone on a brown background and the center section comprises elongated diamond shapes with particular motifs in the center, also in cream and brown tones. Colours were often made from plants, ochre and charcoal.

History of Use: In Fiji, as well as other islands that create Tapa, this art form has many uses. Traditionally, Masi Kesa would be used to create clothing, ceremonial attire, room dividers, wall hangings and mosquito nets.

Narrative: Due to the use of mainly brown dye to decorate the piece, as well as the specific geometric designs on the masi kesa, this piece was most likely made in Fiji. This was likely made to be used as a decoration. The creation and use of tapa is found all across the Fijian and Polynesian islands of the Central Pacific. Each region has its own respective style. Fijian masi kesa commonly uses more neutral colours to dye the fabric. They also incorporate more intricate geometric and floral designs on their pieces.

Material: Mulberry Tree Bark; Natural Dyes

Measurements: 88.5 CM x 36.7 CM

Culture: Fijian, Melanesia



Folder (Tapa Cloth)

Artist: Unknown

Accession number: 3382.00

Object name: Document Container

Date: 1971

Period: Mid 20th Century

Description: This folder made with Masi (Tapa cloth), which is ornamented with various geometric designs pertinent to Fijian culture. "Fiji Independence" is written on the back. Below this there is a symbol dyed in a reddish brown pigment. Below the symbol, "10th October 1970" is written. The folder closes with thread loops secured around one shell at the top and bottom. This object is stenciled or rubbed which is one of the 2 processes used in creating designs on tapa cloths. The other process is free hand. Colours traditionally made from charcoal and plant substances.

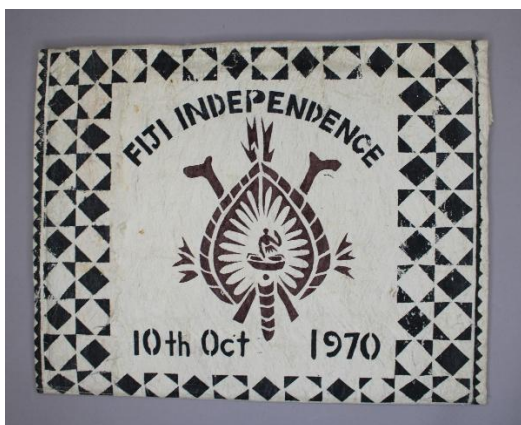


Narrative: Masi kesa (dyed bark cloth) is found all across the Fijian and Polynesian islands of the Central Pacific. Each region has their own respective Indigenous names for the bark cloth. It is most commonly referred to as tapa cloth. Masi kesa is customarily made of mulberry bark but sometimes breadfruit or fig bark may also be used. In order to make masi kesa, bark is harvested then soaked until it becomes pliable. Next, it is repeatedly pounded with a heavy wooden mallet until it becomes pliable and cloth like. This specific piece was likely made and sold to cater to tourists of Fiji, since it is not common to create folders with the masi kesa.

Material: Mulberry Tree Bark; Natural Dyes; Shell

Measurements: 56.5 CM x 33 CM

Culture: Fijian, Melanesia





Wall Hanging (Tapa Cloth)

Artist: Unknown

Accession number: CR2023.10.1

Object name: Wall Hanging

Period: Late 20th Century

Description: Rectangular tapa cloth flattened by the repeated beating of sheets of bark and dyed using plants by large group of artisans working collectively.

History of Use: Made from tree bark that is beaten and flattened to form a thin cloth, tapa are used as fabric for garments and as bedspreads, or wall hangings/room dividers. Tapa are a common wedding gift. Designs are incorporated into tapa cloths with natural dyes, smoking, stamping or rubbing the bark.

Narrative: Purchased or gifted to donor's aunt who worked in Papua New Guinea from 1966 – 1996. This tapa cloth was likely produced in the Milne Bay province on the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea, made by local artisans and sold in markets.

Material: Tree Bark; Natural Dyes

Measurements: 142 CM x 76 CM

Culture: Papua New Guinean, Melanesia



Wall Hanging (Tapa Cloth)

Artist: Unknown

Accession number: CR2023.10.2

Object name: Wall Hanging

Date: 1960s – 1990s

Period: Late 20th Century

Description: Tapa cloth with naturally dyed, repeated (with some differences) geometric design. Design includes sun motifs. Designed flanked on right and left sides by undyed cloth.

History of Use: Tapa are creating by repeatedly beating sheets of bark until they become thin, flattened cloths. Tapa cloths are produced by large groups of people working collectively. Tapa are often dyed, using vegetables and other plants. Tapa were commonly used to construct garments, but now are typically worn for weddings. Tapa are also used as bedspreads, room dividers, and wall hangings.

Narrative: Purchased or gifted to donor's aunt who worked in Papua New Guinea from 1966 – 1996. Likely produced in the Milne Bay province on the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea, made by local artisans and sold in markets.

Material: Tree Bark; Natural Dyes

Measurements: 132 CM x 70 CM

Culture: Papua New Guinean, Melanesia



Wall Hanging (Tapa Cloth)

Artist: Unknown

Accession number: CR2023.10.3

Object name: Wall Hanging

Date: 1960s – 1990s

Period: Late 20th Century

Description: Tube shaped tapa cloth with naturally dyed geometric design covering bottom half of front of cloth in black and orange. Design primarily comprised of triangles surrounded by square border.

History of Use: Tapa cloths are made from sheets of tree bark that are beaten until they are thin. Tapa are typically dyed using natural materials such as vegetables and other plants with traditional geometric patterns. Tapa have been used to construct garments, notably for weddings. Tapa are more commonly used as bedspreads, room dividers, and wall hangings.

Narrative: Purchased or gifted to donor's aunt who worked in Papua New Guinea from 1966 – 1996. This tapa cloth was likely produced in the Milne Bay province on the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea, made by local artisans and sold in markets.

Material: Tree Bark; Natural Dyes

Measurements: 124 CM x 50 CM

Culture: Papua New Guinean, Melanesia



Wall Hanging (Tapa Cloth)

Artist: Unknown

Accession number: CR2023.10.4

Object name: Wall Hanging

Date: 1960s – 1990s

Period: Late 20th Century

Description: Piece of tapa cloth naturally dyed with repetitive geometric pattern in maroon and black. Undyed border along left edge of cloth. Design includes small sun motifs.

Cut in half by previous owner (donor's relative), who used it to cover a lamp.

History of Use: Tapa cloths are produced by large groups of people working collectively, beating sheets of tree bark until they are flattened. Tapa are commonly decorated with geometric patterns applied using natural dyes made with vegetables and other plants. Tapa can be used for garments, bed spreads, room dividers, or wall hangings. Tapa is a common wedding gift.

Narrative: Purchased or gifted to donor's aunt who worked in Papua New Guinea from 1966 – 1996. Likely produced in the Milne Bay province on the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea, made by local artisans and sold in markets.

Material: Tree Bark; Natural Dyes

Measurements: 174 CM x 50 CM

Culture: Papua New Guinean, Melanesia



Wall Hanging (Tapa Cloth)

Artist: Unknown

Accession number: CR2023.10.5

Object name: Wall Hanging

Date: 1984; 1985; 1986

Period: Late 20th Century

Description: Tube shaped tapa cloth naturally dyed with geometric design in black and orange. At bottom of cloth, four diamond shapes arranged in square with borders, above triangular shapes with dots.

Marks/Label: Blue ink on back: "Sr. D Hall, Memorial Present from your student Isi Angane 1984-1986." In Papua New Guinea, registered nurses are referred to as "Sister" or "Sista", explaining why Hall is addressed in student's inscription with "Sr."

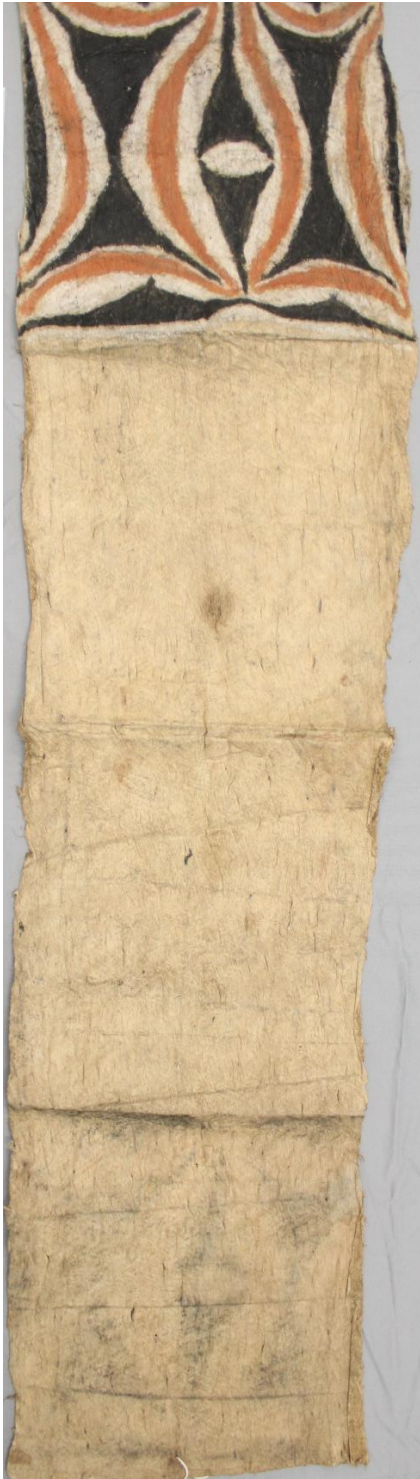
History of Use: Tapa cloth are produced by repeatedly beating sheets of tree bark until they have flattened, often done in large groups of people working collaboratively. Tapa are decorated with geometric patterns applied with natural dyes made of vegetables and other plants. Tapa are used for garments, wall hangings, bed spreads, and room dividers. Tapa are a common wedding gift.

Narrative: Gifted to donor's aunt by a nursing student that she taught in Karkar Hospital on Karkar Island in the Madang province of Papua New Guinea from 1984 to 1986. The tapa cloth came from the Wau area in the Morobe province where the student lived.

Material: Tree Bark; Natural Dyes; Ink

Measurements: 125 CM x 42.5 CM

Culture: Papua New Guinean, Melanesia



Wall Hanging (Tapa Cloth)

Artist: Unknown

Accession number: CR2023.10.6

Object name: Wall Hanging

Date: 1960s – 1990s

Period: Late 20th Century

Description: Rectangular tapa cloth with naturally dyed geometric design in white, black, and orange on top quarter of cloth. Design primarily comprised of triangular shapes.

History of Use: Tapa cloths are produced by beating a sheet of bark until it becomes thin and flattened, done by large groups of people working collectively. Often dyed using natural materials like vegetables and other plants. Tapa are used for garments, as bedspreads, room dividers, and wall hangings and are often made as wedding gifts.

Narrative: Purchased or gifted to donor's aunt who worked in Papua New Guinea from 1966 – 1996. Likely produced in the Milne Bay province on the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea, made by local artisans and sold in markets.

Material: Tree Bark; Natural Dyes

Measurements: 196 CM x 45 CM

Culture: Papua New Guinean, Melanesia





Carrying Bag

Artist: Unknown

Accession number: CR2023.10.7

Object name: Purse

Date: 1960s – 1990s

Period: Late 20th Century

Description: Red, white, and black handwoven bilium bag decorated with shells. Made with acrylic string; horizontal stripe pattern. Single strap. Shells attached with string, dangle down front of bag.

History of Use: Bilium translates to "womb." Bilium bags traditionally used as baby carriers and for transporting goods to market, as multi-purpose tote bag. Weaving is done primarily by women, all done by hand using a looping technique. Traditionally bilium bags were made using tree fibers, but artists have since switched to using commercially produced acrylic string.

Narrative: Purchased by donor's aunt while she was working in Papua New Guinea between 1966 and 1996.

Material: Acrylic; Shell

Measurements: 33 CM x 48 CM

Culture: Papua New Guinean, Melanesia



Wall Hanging (Siapo/Tapa Cloth)

Artist: Unknown

Accession number: 94.00

Object name: Wall Hanging

Period: Early 20th Century

Description: This siapo / tapa cloth is composed of geometric designs of diamonds and triangles in a uniform, grid-like layout. This piece is made up primarily of reddish-brown dye, cream and brown. The edges are rough, with white edges fraying the piece. Colours were often made from plants, ochre and charcoal.



History of Use: Tapa cloth is used to make decorations such as wall hangings and room dividers. It is also used to make clothing, ceremonial attire, paper, and if it is thin enough it can also be used as a mosquito net.

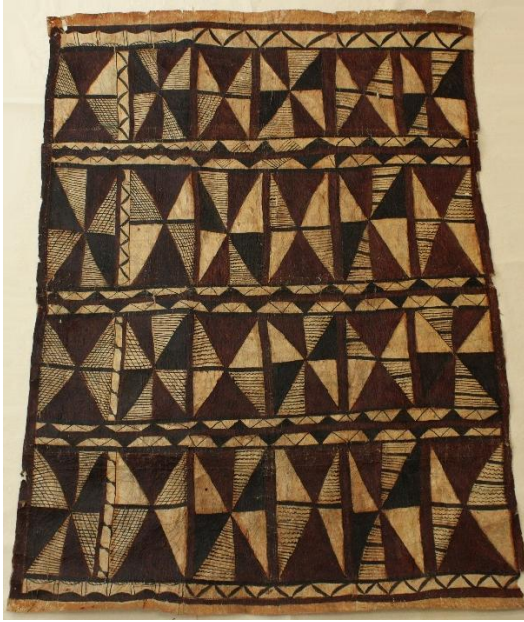
Narrative: Siapo is made throughout the islands of the Pacific from the bark of the Paper Mulberry tree, or other fibrous plants, which is then soaked in water until it becomes pliable, it is then pounded repeatedly until it becomes cloth like. Historically Siapo has been an essential art form in Samoa as well as surrounding islands. It is made from mulberry bark, or "aute" in Samoan. Siapo can also be made from other plants such as breadfruit and Mangrove. The dominating presence of the geometric designs and the lack of variety in pigments indicates that this piece was most likely made in Samoa or the designs were Samoan inspired.



Material: Mulberry Tree Bark (Aute); Mangrove Pigment; Natural Dyes

Measurements: 118 CM x 128 CM

Culture: Samoan, Polynesia



Wall Hanging (Siapo/Tapa Cloth)

Artist: Unknown

Accession number: 95.00

Object name: Wall Hanging

Period: Early 20th Century

Description: Siapo/Tapa cloth. Is composed of geometric designs throughout the entire piece. Made up of a grid layout, with triangles inside each square and small triangular shapes around the border. Inside some of the triangles there is grid patterns and lines drawn throughout. The Siapo is dyed with a natural burgundy colour, black and cream. Colours were often made from plants, ochre and charcoal.

History of Use: Historically, Tapa cloth is used to make many things such as, wall hangings, room dividers, paper, traditional ceremonial attire, and mosquito nets.

Narrative: Bark Cloth or Tapa cloth (Siapo in Samoan) is made throughout the islands of the Pacific from the bark of the Paper Mulberry tree (aute in Samoan), which is soaked in water, then pounded until it becomes pliable and cloth-like. This cloth was most likely used as a wall hanging. Due to the style of the geometric designs and the use of neutral colours, this piece was most likely made in Samoa, or is a Samoan inspired design. The designs on Siapo cloth and tapa cloth are traditionally made with stamps carved on bamboo and wooden blocks, but it seems that the design on this piece was mostly done by hand.

Material: Mulberry Tree Bark (Aute); Mangrove Pigment; Natural Dyes

Measurements: 118 CM x 128 CM

Culture: Samoan, Polynesia





Wall Hanging (Siapo/Tapa Cloth)

Artist: Unknown

Accession number: 3533.00

Object name: Wall Hanging

Period: Early 20th Century

Description: Siapo/Tapa cloth with a geometric design. The design is painted in a reddish brown with a natural pigment made from Mangrove trees.



Traditional design elements are usually plant based and images from Samoan life. Designs may include “fa’a’ali’aoaaaa” (trochus shell), “fa’a’aveau” (starfish), and “fa’a’ masina” (rolled pandanus leaves). Grid designs are also popular, done in rectangles or oblongs. Designs are created by using either the freehand method or the rubbing method. Colours traditionally made from plants, ochre and charcoal.

Narrative: Traditionally, Siapo, more commonly known as Tapa/Kapa, is made by the women in Samoan communities. In Samoa, they use the bark from a mulberry tree (Aute) to create the Siapo. After harvesting the aute, the women will then soak it in water and beat it until it expands. The cloth of the paper mulberry tree is known as “u’a”. Traditionally, Siapo is dyed with natural pigments using a stamp made out of wood or bamboo. Upon closer inspection, it seems these two pieces were done mostly freehanded as opposed to using a stamp.

Material: Mulberry Tree Bark; Natural Dyes

Measurements: 131.2 CM x 115 CM

Culture: Samoan, Polynesia



Wall Hanging (Siapo/Tapa Cloth)

Artist: Unknown

Accession number: 3533.01

Object name: Wall Hanging

Period: Early 20th Century

Description: Siapo/Tapa cloth with a geometric design. The design is painted in a reddish brown with a natural pigment made from Mangrove trees.

Traditional design elements are usually plant based and images from Samoan life. Designs may include “fa’a’ali’aoaaaa” (trochus shell), “fa’a’aveau” (starfish – perhaps the design in this cloth), and “fa’a’ masina” (rolled pandanus leaves). Grid designs are also popular, done in rectangles or oblongs. Designs are created by using either the freehand method or the rubbing method. Colours traditionally made from plants, ochre and charcoal.

Narrative: Traditionally, Siapo, more commonly known as Tapa/Kapa is made by the women in Samoan communities. In Samoa, they use the bark from a mulberry tree (Aute) to create the Siapo. After harvesting the aute, the women will then soak it in water and beat it until it expands. The cloth of the paper mulberry tree is known as “u’a”. Traditionally, Siapo is dyed with natural pigments using a stamp made out of wood or bamboo. Upon closer inspection, it seems these two pieces were done mostly freehanded as opposed to using a stamp.

Material: Mulberry Tree Bark; Natural Dyes

Measurements: 131.2 CM x 115 CM

Culture: Samoan, Polynesia

