

ENGLISH

CARING FOR TAPA

Tulou atu dear Friend, Tulou

know this cloth is layers of care
 selfless, generous, consistent, humble. care
 it is softened fibres of inner plant flesh
 once and still the pathway of nourishing waters, to and from heaven turned hands of green.
 its creation offers wisdom for living. makes spaces of healing. embraces meditative lines of learning.
 the muscles of many given. beaten together again and again. again Tulou
 this cloth is layers of fragile, mysterious, ancient and unfinished stories
 warm, loving, life and death embracing. story
 transforming in the balance of cleansing waters, of joyful sun, of trust & truth, of time around
 and around. many songs sung. many lives touched. it is treasure to many and trauma for some
 laughter ripples out and tears flow in. an ocean of visual language.
 physically translated in many forms. temporary. poetically a lifelong dance with 'enough'
 this cloth
 an invitation to search, to exchange, to struggle, to serve, to celebrate
 and in honouring others, participate. shaping its fondly practiced patterns, its rhythms, its harmonies
 not ours to each hold away, to own alone, to claim for gain, or maintain... the same.
 separated, defined, controlled, lifeless, poisoned. Tulou.
 in fragments of tata to fullness of tapestry... our many cloths are an understanding,
 an intention, a valued burden of grace, a patient prayer
 marked with layers of memory, responding. forgiving. moving and changing
 declaring our dependence
 to nurture, to love
 Tulou atu. Tulou.
 unfold its care courageously.

By Ebonie Fifita-Laufilitoga Maka

Care expressed through cultural practice

Tapa is a barkcloth practice going by many names and regional variations across the Pacific including: siapo, ngatu, masi, hiapo, kapa, nemasitse, aute, and 'ahu. All these variations are cherished textiles that continue to be created, innovated, reused, and shared in cultural ceremonial exchange.

The opening poem by practitioner Ebonie Fifita-Laufilitoga Maka is a powerful expression of the multi-layered cultural significance of tapa cloth within Pacific communities.

The following words are an additional offering of insight into the care and display of tapa from a maker's perspective drawn from Ebonies experience and learning so far in working with the material, mentors, family and friends. These insights reflect values of community, relationship, and harmony between elements.

- Seek out and share cloths in your care with makers. Pieces hold unique lessons and reminders in them, and makers can help you decode and understand some of the possibilities. Cloths may be made with all natural materials that are great friends with each other and the earth or are a product of different circumstances and the use of or combination with synthetic, or store-bought shortcut options that are not so great for the environment.
- Allow cloths to breathe as often as possible. Bring them outside to admire in hot dry sun, find natural pigments to give them a touch up if needed, and use homemade tapioca-based starch paste to repair. This can be an enjoyable simple gathering with loved ones



MAKERS OF TAPA SPEND TIME DESIGNING TO TELL STORIES, HOLDING UNIQUE LESSONS AND REMINDERS IN THEM. CLOTHS ARE MADE FROM INNER BARK STRIPS OF SPECIFIC TREES.

to share memories about what occasions the cloth has served. Or take them to a dedicated maker and community to help you.

- Giving every cloth some rest time flat under a mat, carpet or mattress helps it hang again more calmly. If you have a few you can rotate them from being enjoyed to having some rest time.
- Fibres hang happiest when they are vertical. Try to have joins and overlaps in the cloth facing down so they don't collect dust. This also helps them stay together longer.
- Storage: Acknowledging folding and packing away processes and the why behind this.





Many families store stacks of koloa under the bed to exchange and gift. What I know about the folding of ngatu and masi is that for storage you want to try respect the same folds. This takes some practice. The image is folded inside. Ceremonial folding is a kind of pleating. People I've asked before have different experiences. What is important is the respect and care we give to each other in the doing.

Folding can sometimes simply be informed by the size of the mattress or mat that pieces will rest under or the storage bag, or traveling suitcase they need to go in, or the size of the cloth that will wrap them. For our ivi works I often decide with Peti how they are folded based on the size, the pattern and what its function is going to be. For works large and small there is a nice rhythm and movements one learns in folding together where the

outside of the foot helps to mark the creases given.

- Avoid moisture, food, shoes, animals, and cars unless you're feeling super generous and excited about honouring a momentous occasion. Perhaps the cloth is being called on to be wrapped around a tree[LST5], walked on, driven on etc by those being honoured. Keep in mind that cloths may or may not be repairable after these activities, and that they may be repurposed for other uses as a result.
- Whatever the monetary cost you might have paid for a tapa cloth, understand that the price is not the ultimate reflection of its true value. Generosity and sacrifices are made somewhere along the process by someone. Be aware that current commercial movements and increasing demand for cloth often don't sustain the well-being of growers and makers meaningfully at the grassroots.



FIND NATURAL PIGMENTS TO GIVE THE TAPA A TOUCH UP IF NEEDED, AND USE HOMEMADE TAPIOCA BASED STARCH PASTE TO REPAIR.

Care expressed through long term preservation

The following care guidelines come from a perspective of museum conservation practice with the specific intent of supporting long term preservation of tapa. They discuss key environmental factors that can cause your tapa to physically deteriorate and the actions you can take to prevent this. Also included are safe handling, storage, and display methods to aid in caring for your tapa at home.

Protecting and preserving your tapa

As a textile made from organic plant material, tapa cloth can be affected by many factors including light, humidity, handling, use and wear, pollutants and even acidic dyes and pigments.

Light

Light can cause damage to tapa cloth, particularly within the ultra-violet (UV) spectrum. The largest source of UV is the sun. Fluorescent and halogen light bulbs also produce damaging UV. Excessive light exposure may weaken the plant fibres, causing fading or darkening of fibres, dyes, and pigments in tapa.

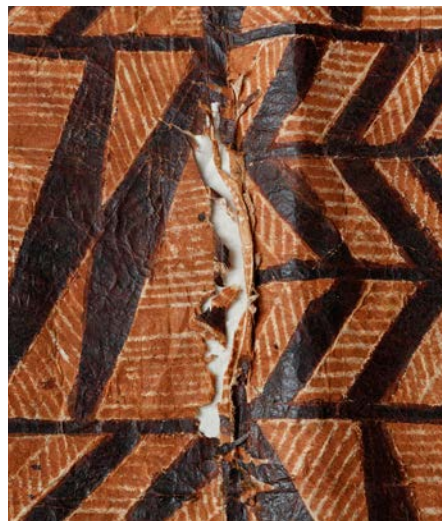
- Protect your tapa from strong light (sun or artificial) by storing out of direct light and/or adding wrapping materials to block out direct light.

Temperature and Humidity

Tapa absorbs and releases moisture from the air. The plant fibres that make up tapa expand and



TAPA CLOTH CAN BE AFFECTED BY CHANGES IN TEMPERATURE AND HUMIDITY WHICH MAY LEAD TO TEARS.



WHEN MOULD GROWS IT CAUSES WEAKENING OF THE FIBRES, STAINING, AND DISFIGURING OF THE TAPA.



REGULARLY AIR OUT TAPA, CHECKING FOR MOULD GROWTH AND TEARS.

contract in response to changes in temperature and humidity. Over time this may lead to tears and losses in the tapa.

New Zealand and tropical countries experience high humidity of over 70%. Humidity above 65% is when mould growth becomes problematic. Mould is harmful to our health and also deteriorates tapa cloth. When mould grows it digests organic materials causing weakening of the fibres, staining, and disfiguring of the tapa.

- Keeping tapa in an acid-free cardboard box will help to buffer the humidity. Moisture absorbers such as silica gel placed in storage containers and cupboards help keep humidity below 60%.

- Try to store your tapa in the driest room in winter and the coolest room in summer. Avoid damp and unventilated spaces like under the house, basements, bathrooms, kitchens, attics, and garages. Also avoid storing tapa in storage spaces that are set into the foundation or external walls. Regularly air out cupboards and storage boxes, checking for mould growth. In storage areas with low air circulation, using a fan or dehumidifier can increase air flow.

Mould

Unfortunately, once mould is present on tapa it is very difficult to permanently remove.

- If possible, wrap the tapa in a clean cotton cloth and put it into a sealable plastic bag and store in the freezer for a minimum of two weeks. This deactivates the mould spores. Once the tapa has been frozen and has come back to room temperature, lay it out flat in a clean space. Using a soft dry natural bristle paint brush and vacuum, gently brush over the area of mould growth whilst holding the vacuum nozzle directly above taking care to not apply suction directly onto the surface of the tapa.

Staining from mould growth will remain on the tapa but removing the spores will limit further outbreaks. Air out the tapa following its cleaning and then store in an area drier than the area it was stored previously when the mould growth occurred. It's also a good idea to check on tapa that has had active mould. Examine it every 3-6 months and repeat the above steps if necessary.

Take care when cleaning mould! Work in a well-ventilated area and wear a dust mask, gloves, and safety goggles to limit mould spores from entering your respiratory system. Exposure can have serious and ongoing health risks.

Direct Liquid Spillage

Stains and tidelines occur easily on tapa due to its absorbent nature. Aside from visual marks, liquid spillage may also weaken areas of the tapa, causing areas to distort or separate. Liquids may also affect any soluble surface decorations. If left wet for a long time, these wet areas of the tapa will encourage mould growth. Avoid this whenever possible.

- Using clean, undyed absorbent materials (e.g. tea towels, paper towels, cotton sheets) apply even pressure across the wetted area of the tapa. Try not to rub these wet areas as this may damage the surface of the tapa. Swap out the absorbent material and repeat with until tapa feels dry to touch.
- Sandwich the area with new absorbent material and apply light weights until the tapa is dry. Monitor this and provide airflow



STAINING FROM MOULD GROWTH WILL REMAIN ON THE TAPA BUT REMOVING THE SPORES WILL LIMIT FURTHER OUTBREAKS.



LIQUID SPILLAGE MAY WEAKEN AREAS OF THE TAPA, CAUSING AREAS TO DISTORT OR SEPARATE.



INSECT DAMAGE WILL RESULT IN AREAS OF WEAKENED TAPA BECOMING MORE VULNERABLE OVER TIME.

via a fan or dehumidifier, if possible. Once completely dry the tapa can be repacked. Only pack the tapa when you are sure it is completely dry to avoid attracting mould.

Insects

Insects can eat fibres and the starch paste often used during the tapa making process. Insect damage will result in areas of weakened tapa becoming more vulnerable over time.

- Examine your tapa frequently, every 3-6 months, for holes and frass (pepper or sawdust-like droppings). If you see any sign of infestation, you can contact a Conservator for advice on treatment. Alternatively, if you have access to a freezer, you can also carry out the freezing treatment previously discussed. Once defrosted, carry out the same vacuuming process to remove any frozen insects and insect frass from the tapa.

Acidic materials

Some storage materials give off acids. Materials such as cardboard boxes and wood are not intended for long-term archival preservation

because they are low-quality, acidic, or deteriorate quickly. Investing in good quality storage materials will help preserve your tapa long-term.

- It is not necessary to only use archival grade materials; everyday household items such as cotton or polyester sheets and PVC down pipes can be prepared to safely use for long term storage of your tapa. See the 'Recommended storage materials' section for more information.

Additional note on dyes and pigments:

Some traditional dyes and pigments applied to the tapa are acidic and may weaken fibres over time. If you see holes or cracks only in the heavily pigmented areas, contact a Conservator for advice.

Storing your tapa safely

As tapa ages, it becomes more brittle. Wherever possible, store tapa flat. Traditionally, larger pieces of tapa are folded and there may be cultural practices around this. Keep in mind that opening tapa along brittle fold lines eventually causes breakages in the folds. Storing large tapa in a rolled format will prevent heavy creases from becoming stiff. This helps maintain the flexibility of the tapa for longer and may be easier to open out when needed.

Rolled Storage tips

- Select a tube a bit longer than the width of your tapa and at least 100 mm diameter.
- Prepare the tube by covering with a layer of clear polythene (PE) sheet plastic, tucking the excess into the tube's ends.
- Wrap the tube in a layer of washed cotton fabric, again tucking the excess into the tube's ends.
- Lay the tapa face down and cover it with acid-free tissue paper or cotton fabric.
- Proceed to roll it onto the tube, taking care not to crease it.
- Cover the rolled tapa with another layer of washed cotton fabric and tie it in several pieces with cotton ribbon.

Flat Storage tips

Small pieces can be laid in acid-free or archival-quality boxes. If there is more than one piece, separate them from each other with acid-free tissue or washed cotton fabric.



PREPARE THE TUBE BY COVERING WITH A LAYER OF CLEAR POLYTHENE (PE) SHEET PLASTIC, TUCKING THE EXCESS INTO THE TUBE'S ENDS.



ROLL THE TAPA ONTO THE TUBE, TAKING CARE NOT TO CREASE IT.



COVER THE ROLLED TAPA WITH ANOTHER LAYER OF WASHED COTTON FABRIC AND TIE IT IN SEVERAL PIECES WITH COTTON RIBBON.





Three-dimensional tapa objects such as dance costumes can also be packed flat in acid-free boxes. To prevent creases and folds, pack with acid-free tissue wadded up into balls inside the object to keep its shape.

Recommended storage materials

- Acid-free cardboard boxes – if only acidic brown cardboard boxes are available, first line the box with acid-free tissue or washed cotton fabric and make sure that the objects aren't in direct contact with the box. Wash or replace the cotton regularly or when discoloured to remove acids.
- Acid-free tissue paper – for layering between pieces of tapa cloth. Avoid regular tissue paper which becomes acidic much quicker.
- Acid-free cardboard tubes or PVC roofing downpipe – tubes that are 100-150 mm in diameter are ideal. Brown cardboard tubes sourced from carpet shops or PVC downpipes bought from a hardware store can be used when covered in a barrier layer of polythene sheet plastic or aluminium foil. This barrier will prevent acid transfer during storage.
- Undyed cotton fabric or calico – wash at least twice before use, once with detergent and a second time using hot water and no detergent. This removes residues from commercial detergents.



USE ACID-FREE TISSUE PAPER FOR LAYERING BETWEEN PIECES OF TAPA CLOTH IN THE BOX.



AVOID REGULAR TISSUE PAPER WHICH BECOMES ACIDIC MUCH QUICKER.



Displaying your tapa safely

Large pieces of tapa in good condition can safely be displayed when supported along the top edge. Here are a few ways to do this:

Draping method:

- Choose a pole or tube at least 60mm in diameter made from sealed wood, plastic pipe, or wrapped cardboard tube.
- Pad the pole with polyester batting and washed cotton textile.
- Drape the tapa over a padded pole or tube and hang from the wall with brackets.
- Change the drape position of the tapa every few months

Clamping Method:

- Using two slats of sealed wood, clamp together the upper edge of the tapa.
- Clamps can be bulldog clips, or bolts (taking care not to bolt through the tapa)
- Padding can be inserted between the clamps to protect the tapa
- One disadvantage of this method is that long-term display may cause weakening to the top edge. Inspect tapa regularly to ensure there are no tears, or signs of weakness near the clamped area.
- This method would not be suitable for tapa with fringing along the edge where the clamps would be attached.

Magnet method:

- 'Rare earth' magnets are very strong magnets capable of holding even large heavy weight pieces of tapa. They are available in different sizes and strengths. Museums and galleries often use this method.



PAD THE POLE WITH POLYESTER BATTING AND WASHED COTTON TEXTILE.



DRAPE THE TAPA OVER A PADDED POLE OR TUBE AND HANG FROM THE WALL WITH BRACKETS.



USING TWO SLATS OF SEALED WOOD, CLAMP TOGETHER THE UPPER EDGE OF THE TAPA.



- The magnet will need a metal counter piece, either a strip of steel or steel screws fixed in the wall. Depending on the size of the tapa, you will need a magnet every 20-25cm along the top edge. The bigger the tapa, the more magnets are required.
- Adhere a barrier layer of acid-free paper, textile, or spare tapa cloth to both the magnet and the wall fixing. This provides friction to hold the tapa in place and ensures protection from rust and indents over time.
- For presentation you can make the magnets less visible by covering them with small pieces of tapa or paper. You can match the colour using watercolours.

Mounting methods to avoid:

- Avoid using pins, nails, or staples to fasten tapa to walls as they create tiny holes that eventually widen or tear under the weight of the tapa. Metal fasteners may also start to rust which causes weakening of fibres.
- Blu-Tack®, double-sided sticky tapes or other adhesives will fail and tear the tapa otherwise causing unsightly stains as they age.
- Sewing Velcro® or other cloth backing is not recommended because the needle holes will cause tears in the tapa over time
- Sandwiching between glass or acrylic can create deep creases and increase risk of mould growth as moisture gets trapped between the glass. Ensure there is a space that separates the tapa from the glass to allow airflow.

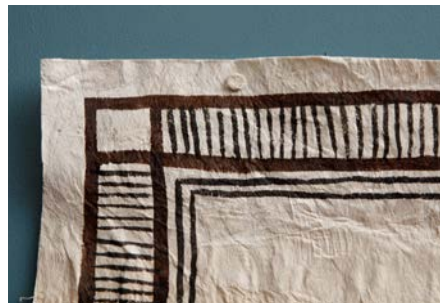
Framing your tapa

Smaller pieces of tapa are easily framed. The advantages of framing include protection from dust, insects, and light.

If professional picture framing is an option, ask the framer to use conservation-grade materials. They cost a little more, but they will not damage your tapa. Always ask the framer how they plan to mount your items. Avoid using sticky tapes or dry-mounting to the backing board – it can permanently damage your tapa as it



THE MAGNET WILL NEED A METAL COUNTER PIECE, EITHER A STRIP OF STEEL OR STEEL SCREWS FIXED IN THE WALL.



FOR PRESENTATION YOU CAN MAKE THE MAGNETS LESS VISIBLE BY COVERING THEM WITH SMALL PIECES OF TAPA OR PAPER.

ages. Instead, ask the framer to use a reversible adhesive and paper hinges to mount the tapa.

If you choose to do it yourself with a ready-made frame, contact a paper or textile conservator who can provide a methodology and advice on making conservation hinges.

Maintenance on display

Tapa on open display will need occasional dusting. The safest way clean is to lay the piece on a clean flat surface. Use a vacuum cleaner on low-powered suction and vacuum through a nylon mesh. This method will prevent accidental damage to the tapa.



Sourcing quality storage materials

Several of the materials mentioned can be purchased online, or at hardware and fabric stores. Long tubes may also be available from carpet or fabric stores for free. In NZ, these companies supply conservation-grade materials:

Magnets NZ

Website — www.magnets.co.nz

Email — info@magnets.co.nz

Phone — 09 414 5606

Conservation supplies Ltd

Website — www.conservationsupplies.co.nz

Email — info@conservationsupplies.co.nz

Phone — 06 211 3991

Port Nicholson Packaging Ltd

Website — www.pnp.co.nz

Email — sales@pnp.co.nz

Phone — 04 568 5018

Triptych Conservation

Website — www.triptych.co.nz

Email — info@triptych.co.nz

Phone — 06 378 6616

Finding professional help

For more advice on preserving tapa and other collections, contact Auckland Museum or the National Services Te Paerangi, Te Papa.

If your collections show signs of damage, don't attempt to repair or restore them yourself. Professional conservation treatment can often extend the life of fragile objects. To find a Conservator near you, visit the New Zealand Conservators of Cultural Materials Pu Manaaki Kahurangi website www.nzccm.org.nz

This resource was kindly supported by the Tennyson Charitable Trust and the Centre for Pacific Languages. We would like to thank Ebonie Fifita-Laufilitoga Maka, Cora-Allan Wickliffe, Emily Parr, and Doron Semu for their invaluable contributions.

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For a full list of online resources, visit Auckland Museum's website: aucklandmuseum.com/collectioncare

