



MŌHALA HOU KE KAPA

KAPA BLOSSOMS ANEW

 Maui Arts & Cultural Center

January 21 - March 9, 2014
Schaefer International Gallery

Introduction

Mōhala Hou Ke Kapa: Kapa Blossoms Anew is the first statewide effort to present an exhibition that merges the function and form of Hawaiian *kapa* with visual layers of traditional design and contemporary departure. The exhibit reveals the process of *kapa*-making seen in the work of 21 *kapa* makers, augmented with a collection of historic artifacts from Maui Historical Society/Bailey House Museum and the Debereux 'Ohana.

Kapa-making draws from a vast knowledge of natural materials, tool-making and design skills, with enormous amounts of time and dedication. The work presented will bring a new appreciation to the *kapa* makers, practitioners and artists who are revitalizing a nearly lost art form with new energy and life.

This complimentary gallery guide, written by Lisa Schattenburg-Raymond and Maile Andrade, will provide you with a brief overview of Hawaiian *kapa*.

Enjoy the exhibition.

— Neida Bangerter, Director
Schaefer International Gallery

Mahalo to our sponsors:



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Kapa-making in old Hawai'i - courtesy of Bishop Museum

Hawaiian Kapa: The History and Process of Making

By the end of the 19th century virtually all *kapa*-making had ceased in Hawai'i, and much of the knowledge had been lost. The art of *kapa*-making over the last century had almost disappeared, except in Samoa, Tonga and Fiji, where the traditions are still carried on.

Uses for Kapa

The primary use of *kapa* was for clothing. Traditionally, women wore a *pā'ū* measuring approximately 3 feet wide by 12 feet long. It wrapped several times around the body, from under the breast and reaching to the knees. *Ali'i* women wore *pā'ū* with elaborate designs, and with as many as ten layers. Men wore a *malo* or loin cloth, which was generally 10 to 12 inches wide and 12 to 18 feet long. Both sexes wore *kīhei* – a kind of cape or wrap – when the occasion called for it. *Kīhei* were made of large sheets of *kapa*, six or more feet square.

A *kapa moe* was a blanket, 6 to 9 feet square. It could be a single sheet for an individual, or made of 5 sheets sewn together on one edge. The



topmost sheet, called a *kilohana*, was usually decorated. *Kapa* had its utilitarian use for clothing and blankets, but was also very important in religious and other rituals.

Mo'olelo (stories)

Hawaiian *mo'olelo* give three accounts that tie *kapa*-making to Maui.

The first tells of the goddess Hina, mother of Maui. In ancient times, the sun sped across the sky so fast that she was unable to dry her *kapa*. To help his mother, Maui fashioned a great rope from *niu* (coconut) trees collected from Paeloko, near Waihe'e. He ascended the great mountain Haleakalā (house of the sun) and waited for the first rays of the sun to appear over the mountain. With his great rope, he lassoed the legs of the sun and broke them off, thereby slowing the sun's ascent through the sky. Hina was finally able to dry her *kapa* properly.

Another story tells of Hina and her escape to the moon, where she still lives today. Hina lived with her family in Ka'uiki, near Hāna bay. Her husband and sons were very lazy and troublesome. After toiling hard for many years, she decided to escape to the sun. Hina ascended a rainbow, and began her journey. But as she got closer, the intense heat began to burn, so she slid down the rainbow and back through the cooling clouds and showers. As night fell, Hina began to recover, and when the moon rose, she decided to go there instead. She began to climb the rainbow again, carrying her prized *kapa*-making possessions in an *ipu* (gourd). She was almost away when her husband noticed she was leaving with her possessions. He grabbed her foot, and in the struggle broke her leg. However, she was still able to make it to the moon, and still lives there in peace, making *kapa*. When the moon is full you can see how bright her *kapa* is: when she shakes it out to dry, the flashing white light is lightning, and thunder is the sound of rolling stones that she uses to weigh down her *kapa*.

In the story of the first *wauke* plant, we learn of Maikohā, who as a youth desecrated sacred places and destroyed sacred objects. His father did not know which of his ten children had done these things, so he tied boards to the front and back of their necks to test them. Maikohā was the only one who did not cry out, and so was judged guilty. He was sent away, and traveled to Kaupō on Maui.

Maikohā was said to have been very hairy all over his body, like the *wauke* plant. Before he died, Maikohā instructed his daughters to bury his body; from it grew the *wauke* plant. His daughters La‘ahana and Lauhuki, guided by his spirit, learned the art of making kapa *pā‘ū* and *malo*. Maikohā became the ‘aumakua (deified ancestor) of kapa makers. Lauhuki became ‘aumakua for those expert in beating kapa, and La‘ahana for those expert in designing or decorating it.

Kapa Plants

The *wauke* plant, also known as paper mulberry, is thought to have originated in China. Through human migration over many thousands of years, the plant made its way to New Guinea, and was then transported from island to island across the Pacific and finally to Hawai‘i.

In Hawai‘i, kapa was also made from ‘ulu (*Artocarpus altilis*, or breadfruit) as well as other plants, including *māmaki* (*Pipturus albidus*, a native nettle) and ‘ākia (*Wikstromia* sp.)

The *māmaki* was not cultivated, and had to be collected from the wild. It also did not have as much fiber as *wauke*, so it was much more difficult



The wauke plant

to produce. *Māmaki*'s sticky mucilage helps to bind fibers together, and can be mixed with older pieces of *wauke kapa* to repurpose them.

Cultivation of Wauke

Wauke was cultivated and maintained, requiring 18 months to 2 years to mature. It is an adaptable plant and can grow in various conditions from sea level up to more than 3,000 feet in elevation.

It was the work of both men and women to cultivate *wauke*. Men harvested it and fashioned the necessary implements used in its production. Men also collected the dye material and made the dyes. Women processed the fiber, made the *kapa*, and were responsible for the finish work. A woman who did not excel at *kapa* design was considered of little worth.

Kapa-Making Process

When the *wauke* stalks were mature, they were cut at the base, trimmed at the top, and brought to the women for preparation. A small slit at the base end of the stalk was made by a sharp shell or *niho 'oki* (shark's tooth knife). Then the bast (inner fiber) was peeled off the stalk, in one piece. The outer bark was then removed by scraping with a shell or by cutting with a knife, until only the white inner bark was left. The bark strips were then soaked in seawater for about a week to remove the excess sap, which contains tannins that could darken the *kapa*. Then it was ready for the next stage.



Kapa Beaters courtesy of Marie McDonald

The first beating was done with a round club-like beater called a *hohoa*. Some were smooth and others grooved. The bast was beaten on a *kua*

pōhaku or stone anvil. The purpose was to soften and separate the fibers to make them pliable enough to work on a wooden anvil.

At this stage, after the first beating, the fiber was called *mo'omo'o* and could be dried and stored indefinitely, or saved until enough bast was prepared to make a larger article like a *kapa moe*.

The second stage of beating was done with an *i'e kuku* or four-sided beater, on a *kua lā'au* or wooden anvil. The anvil measured three to six feet in

length and rested on two small stones that raised it above the floor. This gave the anvil a resonated note as it was beaten upon. The grooves were carved into the beater with various gradations from thick to very fine. As the *kapa* was beaten, finer and finer grooves were used, and it became thinner and thinner. One strip of bark would be spread four times its width, with its length maintained.

What makes Hawaiian *kapa* so unique is a second process that was perfected here. The dried *mo'omo'o* was soaked in fresh water, then bundled and wrapped in *tī* or banana leaves and left for several weeks. This treatment is often referred to as fermentation, but the proper term is "retting." The retting process allows bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms to break down the fibers into a soft pulpy mass. This process makes the fiber softer, however it can also make the *wauke* smell very bad. Fragrances were added later to counteract this.



Courtesy of Hawai'i Historical Society and Hamburg Museum of Ethnography

As the pulpy fiber was beaten, the texture became much finer and more paper-like, so that individual fibers are not visible. In the final beating, an intricate pattern was pounded in, called a watermark. The watermarks gave a lacey look to the piece; when a piece of this *kapa* is held up to the light, one can see the beaten-in designs.

Kapa was spread out in the sunshine to be dried and bleached. After drying, the *kapa* would be beaten again to soften it. One side of the *í'e kuku* was left flat and smooth, to be used like an iron to flatten the *kapa* and make it ready for dyeing and stamping.

Dyes

Captain Cook made the first collections of Hawaiian *kapa* on his third voyage in 1778-79. The color palette for those collected pre-contact pieces was red, yellow, brown, and black, which were similar to the colors found in other *tapa* of the Pacific Islands.

Yellows were derived from the root of the *noni* (*Morinda citrifolia*) and the *'ōlena* (*Curcuma longa*), a ginger relative we also know as the spice turmeric. Brown came from the bark of the *kukui* (*Aleurites moluccana*) and black from burnt *kukui* nut kernel soot. Reds came from *'alaea*, a red iron oxide earth, and *noni* root treated with burnt coral lime. These sources were from Polynesian-introduced plants, which were common throughout the Pacific Islands.



These were the dominant colors represented in the small sample of *kapa* that was collected at the time. It is also possible that there may also have been several other colors from endemic Hawaiian plants such as blue from *'uki'uki* berries (*Dianella* sp.) and a unique green from the endemic cotton plant, *ma'ō* (*Gossypium tomentosum*).

At the time of first contact, *kapa* designs were made with *kāpala*, or bamboo liners which were used like pens, some with a single point and others with multiple tines. With these simple tools, many intricate and interesting designs were made.

By the early 1800's we begin to see an explosion of design patterns, including watermark patterns beaten into the *kapa*. The color palette becomes much broader, and new intricate designs were made with *'ohe kāpala* (carved bamboo) and wooden stamping implements.



photograph: Lisa Schattenburg-Raymond

The introduction of imported cloth such as silks, calicos and wool greatly influenced the colors and designs of *kapa*. Many new plants were introduced to Hawai'i during this time, and many new materials were incorporated into *kapa*-making. Achiotte or annatto (*Bixa orellana*) made a bright orange dye which was very popular and is still used today. By the mid-1800s, the colors red and blue became prevalent. The coloring matter came from imported materials. Red *kapa*, known as *pa'i 'ula*, came from pulverizing or grinding "Turkey Red" cloth until it was very fine, and then beating it into the surface of the *kapa*. Blues came from imported laundry bluing, indigo powder, and synthetic ultramarine blue. During this time, the wearing of *kapa* clothing became less common, as Hawaiians adopted western dress — many under pressure to do so through missionary influence.

A variety of perfumes were used to remedy the strong odor of some *kapa*. *'Iliahi* or sandalwood (*Santalum sp.*) wood shavings, *maile* (*Alyxia oliviformis*) leaves and stems, *'awapuhi* (*Zingiber zerumbet*) shampoo ginger roots, and *mokihana* (*Melicope anisata*) berries were some of the most admired scents.

Kapa Vocabulary

Hohoa – round wooden mallet

Hulilau – soaking bowl, large gourd, or calabash

I Hue wai – water gourd

I'e kuku – square wooden beater

Kapa – bark cloth

Kāpala – bamboo liners

Kua lā'au – wooden anvil

Kua pōhaku – stone anvil

Māmaki – a native nettle species (*Pipturus albidus*); the bark is used to make a brown *kapa* that is coarser than *wauke kapa*

Mo'omo'o – strips of beaten *wauke* bark used to make larger pieces of *kapa*

Niho 'oki – shark tooth knife

'Ohe kāpala – bamboo stamps

Waiho'o lu'u – dye

Pōhaku ku'i – stone mortar for making ink

'Ulu – Breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*); the bark is used to make a type of inferior *kapa*

'Umeke wai – water bowl

Wa'u – shell scraper

Wauke – Paper mulberry plant (*Broussonetia papyrifera*); the bark is used to make clothing and bedclothes



Kapa-making implements - collection of Bailey House Museum



kapa cloth, various designs by Marie McDonald of Hawai'i Island



Mahalo

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