

Pacific Arts

Hiapo (tapa). Niue. c. 1850–1900 C.E. Tapa or bark cloth, freehand painting.



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On the island of Niue, *hiapo* is the term for bark cloth. The art form is made from the bark of the paper mulberry tree. Samoan missionaries are thought to have brought hiapo with them in 1830. Although the *hiapo* may have originated in Samoa, the quality of the tapa in Niue is different. Layers are felted into a single sheet like the way it’s done in the Cook Islands. Felting is the process of layering pieces of tapa cloth together. No one knows what it is made for, since the size seems to be too small for clothing or blankets.

The Niuens decorated their *hiapo* with freehand painting that is similar to the Samoan style. Rectangular or circular design compositions are drawn with fine black lines, in a grid formation. The subject matter is usually abstract forms and plant forms. People, stars, and fish are occasionally painted into the design.

Citations:

"Tapa in Niue." *Kapa Kulture*. 2 Oct. 2013. Web. 12 Apr. 2015. <https://kapakulture.wordpress.com/2013/10/02/tapa-in-niue/>

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