



**Buborero Jo'e ie – The Hornbill Sings
PNG Omie tapa (beaten bark cloth) in Australia**

The Omie Cultural Business Group PNG



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The Omie are an exceptional group of artists working on beaten bark cloth. Like so many communities in PNG there are pockets of peoples who produce interesting, transformative and innovative artwork as natural to them as anything else they do, while their neighbours might seem to produce little. Such is the case with the Omie tapa artists of remote, Oro Province, PNG.

Nioge the beaten bark cloth womens' skirts have a very special place in Omie culture. In one of the main origin clan stories a man and woman appeared on Mt Obo. Mina the first man directed Suja the first woman to go down to the river to select the right tree, to remove its bark, beat and soak it in mud - then wear it back to him, enabling them to become husband and wife in a newly civilized world. You see the bark removal and the first *nioge* opposite. These works are part of a series telling this story for the Sidoraje clan Museum, which opened on the 12th of June 2018. They are of a non-traditional style. The Omie welcome visitors to this astounding, sacred place.

Omie live in the mountains on the slopes of Mt Lamington *Huvaemo* and Mt Obo. They have a different diet than coastal peoples and lowlanders because of their altitude. They number approximately 2,200 people. Because of their remoteness few go to school, the nearest is too far away from several of their seven main villages, in hard rocky terrain. Very few can attend High School because they have to pay to board away from their families. This also limits their ability to go to any health centre and receive any of the very few government services. They are self reliant, self-sustaining, hardy, resourceful, smiling, mountain people.

This has in turn however enabled them to continue to reinvigorate certain cultural practices in semi isolation. Where once the carving of bamboo pipes and the elaborate tattooing *sor'e* of young men at initiation *ujawe*, were the major art forms this was changing by the 1960s when the men reconsidered their position and started to transfer secret, sacred knowledge to the women, the makers of *nioge* (in their language), *tapa* in English. (The word *tapa* now generic in English for beaten bark cloth derived from Capt. Cook's expeditions in the Pacific where the word *kappa* means to beat in Hawaiian and *tapa* in Tongan was a part of the larger design of beaten bark cloth.)



The cutting of the first Omie bark on Mt Obo.



The beating of the first Omie bark on Mt Obo.



The wearing of the first *nioge* – tapa on Mt Obo.



Lila Warrimou
Mahu vahoje – Pig Foot print



Jacklyn Daiva Rubuno
Niovade Ujosisu'e

With the cessation of the very complex, resource demanding, long term preparations for the *ujawe* for young men in a rapidly changing world, the unusual transference of knowledge to the women promoted them as the main material cultural producers and keepers of Omie heritage, thus altering gendered perspectives. Now however, a small and increasing number of men have started to produce tapa. Gender specific art forms are breaking down all over PNG because people have had to enter and maintain a presence in the cash economy – school fees, medicine, transport, marriages, funerals, clothing etc. despite the fact that approx. 80% of PNG's population still remain in and maintain their village and subsistence farming life styles. So in line with this development several male tapa artists are included for the first time, in this exhibition.

What we still have of the older *nioge*, several at the National Gallery of Australia, c 1950s; is in stark contrast to the new. While the Omie mainly refer to three colours red *birire*, yellow *are*, black *barige*, they produce an infinite range of colours through the natural dyes they make from roots, bark, leaves, seeds including that of the sandalwood tree, fruit, ash and water. They have more colours than any other peoples of the south-west Pacific and notably greens which are not found elsewhere. They use the inner bark or bast of certain fig species including banyan and the bast of the paper mulberry tree believed to have been brought from certain parts of China and Taiwan many, many millennium ago.

This exhibition is called *Buborero Jo'e ie The Hornbill Sings* because the Omie have a very observant and reverent eye for all the natural world around, below and above them, as most indigenous peoples do. They see it not only in micro detail which assumes the major design elements on tapa but in the macro world as well with the moon, the stars and *dahoruea'* mountain motifs and stories. The hornbill's beak is a constantly repeating motif in Omie *nioge* as you see on the front cover of this catalogue as the major element, and, or as a border design. There is clan importance not only for the hornbill but for the bird of paradise as well. The Omie see the minutia of nature so that the feathers, teeth and jaw of the hornbill are part of this vocabulary of intimacy along with lizard, grub and dwarf cassowary eggs, jaw bones, teeth, insects, beetles, spider webs shining through the light, fish skeletons, the tail feathers of the swift bird, pigs heads and hooves, bark designs, branch and tree dissections and many more motifs. Many elements in tapa design are at once physical representations of their environment and part of esoteric knowledge

known only to the Omie. Bamboo for example was used in the first creation story, in a biblical like tale, as an element of man making woman. It is also used in its physicality as a leaf motif and as a cross section repeating design of the bamboo stems. One of the most common former tattoo designs is also an unfurling fern motif and so on.

The Omie are keen to promote their distinctive art nationally and internationally for income and as a way of introducing themselves and their culture to the art world on their terms. The need for education and experience so they can become responsible and self-sustaining are necessities. Because of previous challenges they have formed the only functioning community group in Omie Territory the Omie Cultural Business Group, PNG Inc. But getting their art to an international audience is a complex undertaking for such remote people. The Omie welcome support through for example any advice about relevant legal matters such as copyright, possible venues for exhibitions in PNG, Australia and the broader international community and contacts with collectors and researchers who may be interested in filling in the many gaps in Omie history for all to be inspired by. If you feel you can help in any way please contact the Omie via details below.

The Omie also make the most unusual stringbags – *Sisira esoe* out of the tapa produced from the paper mulberry tree. These are also available.

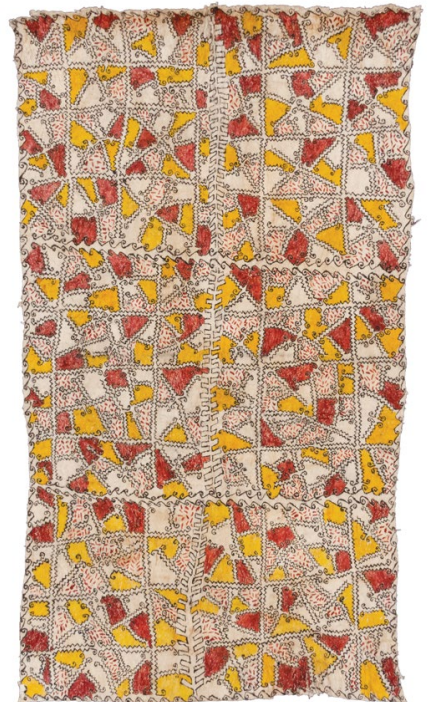
© The Omie Cultural Business Group Executive members: Julia Kimari, Chris Diovi, Biriso Sirevevo, and partner Joan Winter, April 2019.

A list of works for *Buborero Jo'e ie The The Hornbill Sings* at Woolloongabba Art Gallery is available separately. More works are available online at www.omietapaartpng.com and at Baboa Gallery, 5 Denning St. The Gap, Queensland 4061. Contact joangwinter@gmail.com 0475 848124.

The Omie send greetings and love and thank the Woolloongabba Art Gallery and you for visiting them through their *nioge*. You are all welcome to visit Omie Territory PNG. Please contact Joan G Winter and the Omie for more details.



Tospina Boujugo
Havinde, Jimujimude – moon and orchid



Nelly Haruto Keme
Uwaje sor'e – initiation tattoos



Joyce Uttamo
Sihae – sandalwood tree



Ilma Ugiobari
Butometare – lizard jaw bone



Vivian Minari Jivo
Jovore, Visue ane, Siahe – insect hovering over slow water, fish teeth



Jinda Rose Forema Sirimi
Odunaige Dahoruea – bush vine and mountains



Patricia Matomguo Warera
Sihote Vo'o Hore – spider's hole and tracks



Avami Ajiro
Visone – eel bone nose piece



Sandra Durami Inura
untitled



Elizabeth Ruvosemi Iema
Odunage – unfurling ferns



Tuka Jane Mabue
Avaege, Jije & Buboriane – snake, star and hornbill teeth



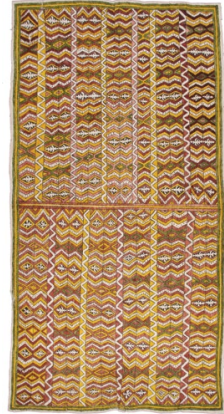
Sandra Durami Inura
Sabu'e, Dahoru'e Obohutaige – caterpillar, mountain and tree trunk



Jeanrose Ravohure Rojio
Obohutage – Omie use this tree bark



Lila Warimou
Gojav han'e – bird feather
head dress



Vivian Minari Jivo
Visue ane, Bubori ane, sabuahe, Guojaje Siahe – fish and hornbill
bird teeth



Bibra Hinana
Ujava'ajaha Oje – menstrual
house steps



Espet Mabue
Nionae – centipede



Linda Grace Savari
Ba'ibaje – fruit



Ilma Ugiobari
Gome – orchid



Josphina Rorei Tove
Visuija'ane – mountain fish
backbone



Bettrisha Boujugo
Ijeredime'e – sugar cane sections
backbone

New Emerging Men's Work 2018



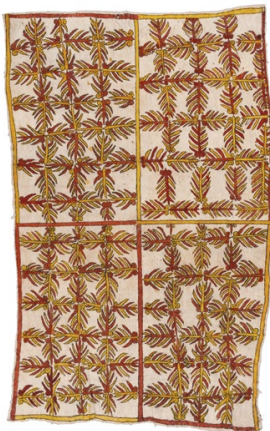
Clarence Maire Warina
Dahoru'e – mountain



Sixtus Kesi
Bisija – warriors' clubs



Honestmus Ugiobari
Hon'e Sopr'e – aerial view of cut bamboo design



Jacob Nekol Sume
Jukire – bush vine



Honestmus Ugiobari
Mododa'e Diburi'e Bioje'pho
– tail feathers of the swift bird



Jeremiah Siranumi
Hojihane jaje – drum making
tree and branches



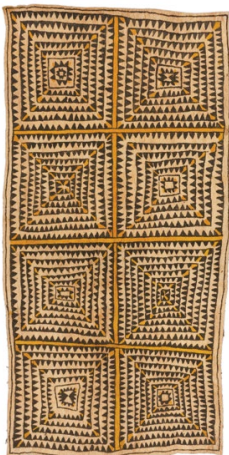
Peter Sihevo
Vinohue Hia'ie – grandfather's design



Ananas Oviro
Mijome – body tattoo and water vine



Didimus Boujugo
Aiha Roha'ie – traditional design of a leader's cloak



Bernard Kuriki Siravumi
Buboro ane – Hornbill beak with tracks



Columber Sorame
Viojoje – butterfly



Gillchris Sosa
Bubori'anoe & Dahoru'e – hornbill beaks and mountains



Senior *duvahe* Margaret Ho'ijo now almost blind has taught her daughter Josphina Rorei Tove her fish skeleton clan designs seen here at welcome in Asafa Vilage



Many people helped on the track to various villages, carrying tapa and food and protecting us all. Here we are on the way to Savodibehi village.



Everybody worked hard for the two day cataloguing workshops at Savodibehi.

From grand parents to grand children What the Omie must pass on

The production of *nioge* tapa cloth is now one of the most important material elements of Omie cultural practices and plays a critical role in defining and maintaining Omie unique cultural identity. This catalogue honours the first cohort of older women master tapa artist leaders *duvahe* (heads) who started exhibiting in 2006. Then things began to change. The first woman Awaro Haubari to pass her traditions to a male heir Albert Sirimi have both now passed away. Of the surviving ones Sarah Ugiobari has passed on her stories and clan motifs to her son Honestmus and daughter Ilma. Jean Margaret Ho'ijo now almost blind has taught her daughter Josphina Rorei Tove her fish back bone clan designs. Brenda Kesi now blind has passed hers onto to her son, Sixtus, daughter Patricia Matomguo Warera and daughter in law Anastasia Kesi. There are many artistic family lines. And all of these are represented by Omie Cultural Business Group, PNG.

The aim of the Omie Cultural Business Group established in 2018 is to enable Omie people to develop the whole of Omie territory, educate their children and become more self sufficient in this new century. Though Omie have exhibited for several years they have realised that they need to control and understand what happens to their tapa once it leaves them and gain a fair and equitable price for their international exposure and sales in a reciprocal relationship with the outside world. Because of this new association many new artists have emerged (approx. 60) and created their first *nioge*. So this is many artists first exhibition.

To achieve this training and experience are needed. Opposite are two pictures from the first workshops ever held in Omie territory at Savodibehi village. On the last two days hundreds of tapa arrived to be assessed, selected, registered, and catalogued ready to be freighted, first to Australia, then on to further international markets for sale. Those who could write well enough became the scribes for the artists who could not. Each of the seven main Omie villages has a committee structure to aid this process and to keep new records of the considerable artistic achievements of all the clan groups. Omie are eager to enter this new world on their own terms and ask you to assist in whatever way you can. Their remoteness creates many challenges that with support can be overcome.



MAJUNEVO

ABDA

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The new Sidoraje (Clan) Museum at Savodibehi village opened on 12 June 2018 after three days of workshops teaching Omie people about the international indigenous art market industry they had entered with little knowledge.

Front image: Rosemary Isodi Enebiriri *Buroriane, Burom Deje* – hornbill beaks and lizard backbone
Inner front & back cover image: The welcoming procession for the opening of the new *Sidoraje* (clan) Museum at Savodibehi village, Omie Territory, Oro Province, PNG 12 June 2018. This clan *sido* has the Bird of Paradise as it's clan emblem.

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Joan G Winter in Australia. Please contact Joan for use of any of this material.

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Queensland, Australia. The Omie people thank him for this support.



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For further information please refer to the website
www.omietapaartpng.com or contact international partner Joan G Winter
joangwinter@gmail.com +61 475 848 124

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