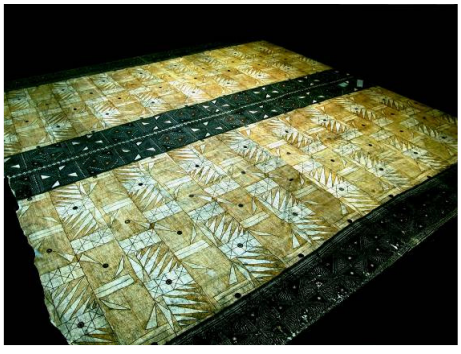
5. Fiji and *masi*

The Republic of Fiji consists of more than 800 islands of various sizes, 100 of which are inhabited. The archipelago lies between Melanesia and Polynesia, and ever since the first wave of settlement from Melanesia over 3,000 years ago, it has been a key site of migration and trade. The result was a varied culture in which Polynesian and Melanesian traditions mixed or continued to exist in parallel. When in the nineteenth century the islands were also settled by European settlers, an additional population was added: the European planters brought Indian workers to Fiji. Today, their descendants make up almost half of the Fiji population, 44 percent. The same diversity and various cultural influences can also be seen in Fijian tapa, called *masi*. There are more different techniques of tapa decoration in Fiji than on all the other islands of the Pacific.

5.1 Specific Forms of Masi

Historically, *masi* was the only 'fabric' available, and so its use was highly varied. In everyday life, *masi* were used for clothing, funeral shrouds, wall decoration, mosquito protection or room dividers. Today, many of these functions can be fulfilled by other materials as well. At the same time, *masi* also possess mythical religious dimensions: they are an essential part of funerals, weddings and other celebrations, and are used as presents, trade items or as tribute payment.

Masi thus possess a social significance that goes beyond their pure use. This is also evident in the strict rules for their use: once, women were largely banned from wearing *masi*, although they were the sole producers. In addition, the wearing of certain *masi* is reserved for people of special status or for special occasions.



5.1.1
Room divider or wall curtain
Fiji, 1892
Barkcloth, colour pigments, 827 x 750 cm
Köln: RJM (31329)

Almost 60 square metres in size, this *masi* is the largest item on view at the exhibition. It was purchased by the German-born collector and photographer J. W. Lindt in 1892, who travelled to Fiji as a guest of the British governor Thurston. On this trip, he visited Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi and his wife Adi Litiana Maopa, from whom he acquired the *masi*. It is unclear whether she herself was involved in its production, as Lindt reports, or if she only commissioned the work. Adi Litiana was a high-ranking figure (see information panel), so it would be unusual for her to have made the *masi* herself.

5.1.2
Smoked barkcloth *masi kuvui*
Fiji, 1952
Barkcloth, 347 x 98 cm
Wellington: Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Gift of the Welcome Collection, 1952 (FE004096)

A special dying technique is smoking. In this process, the *masi* is rubbed with coconut oil and then hung over an open fire. The smoke combines with the oil and creates a brownish colour; folds and wrinkles thus result in a batik-like pattern. *Masi kuvui* were and still are reserved for individuals of special status and are not used for everyday clothing. Today, the smoking of tapa has been largely replaced by the use of dyes to achieve the special colouring.

5.1.3
White/fine barkcloth *masi vulavula*
Fiji, before 1905

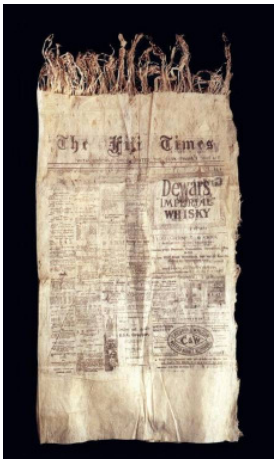
Barkcloth, 701 x 70 cm
Köln: RJM (15339)

White *masi* are rarely to be found in museum collections. This is primarily due to the preference of European collectors for strikingly patterned materials. Historically speaking, *masi* were often left in their natural state, though not always so fine and translucent. In this quality, they are primarily used as scarves, sashes, or turbans at ceremonies. Still today they remain essential for certain events. On closer inspection, tiny triangles can be detected in the material. Originally, they were intended to cover branch holes in the fabric, later becoming a style of ornamentation.

5.1.4
Barkcloth with stencil pattern *Masi kesa*
Fiji, before 1905
Barkcloth, colour pigments, 294 x 113 cm
Köln: RJM (15343)

5.1.5
Barkcloth with freehand painting *masi bola*
Probably Cakaudrove, Fiji, before 1904
Barkcloth, colour pigments, 940 x 237 cm
Köln: RJM (11586)

This *masi* shows a combination of freehand painting and stencil patterns. The large geometric patterns in black and white and the edges painted with fine reddish brown lines are typical for Cakaudrove, the archipelago east of Vanua Levu. To make these *masi*, the material was first folded and these folding lines were dyed to divide the surface. The patterns were then painted freely on the *masi* with only the assistance of a palm leaf that was used like a ruler and at the same time covered the parts that were to remain unpainted. The stars at the other end have been applied with stencils.



5.1.6-5.1.7
***Fiji Times* on barkcloth**
Fiji, 1888 and 1915
Barkcloth, ink, 78 x 64 cm; 115 x 80.5 cm
Paris: Galerie Meyer Oceanic Art

The *Fiji Times* is an English-language newspaper published in Suva. It was founded in Levuka on 4 September 1869, making it Fiji's oldest still existing newspaper. The founder G. L. Griffiths printed individual copies on *masi* as a souvenir; after his death in 1918 his successor Sir Alport Barker continued this tradition. In 1958, the *Fiji Times* received a new printing press that automatically pulled the paper over rolls, instead of having to be fed manually, as before. This brought the tradition to an end.

5.2 *Masi kesa* – Stencilled Tapa in Fiji

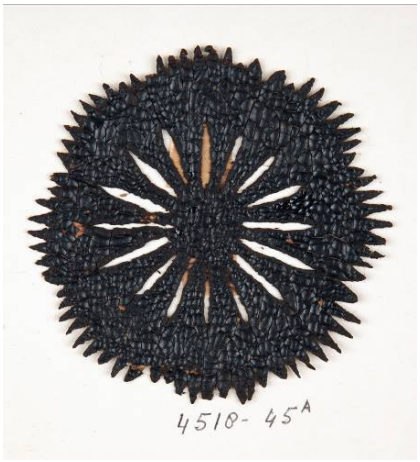
One of the most frequent forms of decoration in Fiji is the use of stencils. Fiji is the only region in Oceania where this technique is used. Originally, the stencils were made of pandanus or banana leaves, hence the term *draudrau*, which means leaves. But they could only be used once. For this reason, leaves were soon replaced with more durable materials: card or cardboard, rolls of film and finally X-rays. The latter can be reused almost endlessly. Most motifs are traditional, but there are also new creations.

5.2.1
Barkcloth with stencil pattern *masi kesa*
Fiji, 1971
Barkcloth, colour pigments, 296 x 174 cm
Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde)
(4257-1)

5.2.2
Barkcloth with stencil pattern *masi kesa*
Fiji, 1971
Barkcloth, colour pigments, 340 x 65 cm
Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde)
(4518-45)

5.2.3
Stencils made from pandanus leaves
Fiji, 1971
Pandanus leave, 15.5 x 7.5 cm
Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde)
(4518-45k)

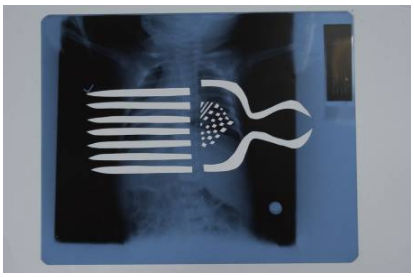
5.2.4
Stencils made from pandanus leaves
Fiji, 1971
Pandanus leave, 16.5 x 8 cm
Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde)
(4518-45j)



5.2.5
Stencils made from pandanus leaves
Fiji, 1971
Pandanus leave, Ø 9.5 cm
Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde)
(4518-45a)

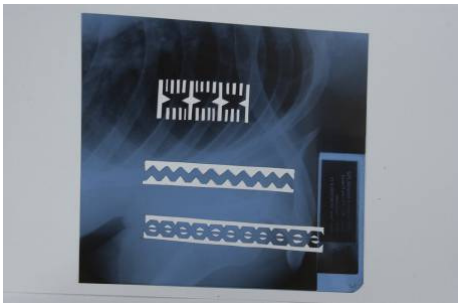
5.2.6
Stencils made from cellulose (film material)
Fiji, 1971
Cellulose, 13.9 x 12.7 cm
Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde)
(4257-4)

5.2.7
Stencils made from cellulose (film material)
Fiji, 1971
Cellulose, 18 x 14.8 cm
Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde)
(4257-3)



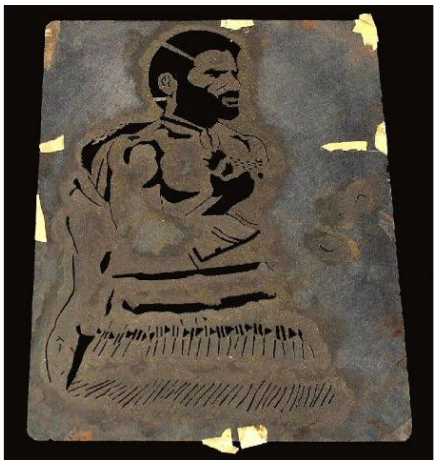
5.2.8
Stencils made from X-ray film
Vika, Korotolu, Fiji, 2003/04
X-ray film, 23.5 x 30 cm
Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde)
(6061-72)

5.2.9
Stencils made from X-ray film
Vika, Korotolu, Fiji, 2003/04
X-ray film, 18 x 18 cm
Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde)
(6061-39)



5.2.10
Stencils made from X-ray film
Vika, Korotolu, Fiji, 2003/04
X-ray film, 17.5 x 19 cm
Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde)
(6061-46)

5.2.11
T-Shirt made from cotton with stencil patterns
Tabu, Korotolu, Fiji, 2003/04
Cotton, 90.5 x 78 cm
Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde)
(6061-19)



5.2.12
Stencils made from X-ray film
Vika, Korotolu, Fiji, 2003/04
X-ray film, 35.5 x 28 cm
Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde)
(6061-85a)

5.2.13
Stencils made from X-ray film
Vika, Korotolu, Fiji, 2003/04
X-ray film, 28 x 35.2 cm
Leiden: National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde)
(6061-85b)