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CONTENTS

Features

- 6 Tivaevae, the quilts of the Cook Islands in NZ.
- 15 Wakatipu Autumn, a winning quilt.
- 16 AfroAmerican Quilts - after Roberta Horton.
- 17 10 Invited Quiltmakers - at Lopdell House.
- 24 Deborah J. Felix - a review by Malcolm Harrison.
- 26 New Zealand design, Kiwifruit.
- 29 Transition 1, a block design by Mary Metcalf.

Departments

- 4 Editorial.
- 5 Letters to the Editor.
- 12 Consumer Service Marge Hurst - Bits & Pieces.
- 14 Books.
- 20 Jean Wilson's column - I've Got It.
- 22 Sharing.
- 30 Calendar

Cover: Chrysanthemum tivaevae 2650 x 2820mm.

Casement cotton and embroidery thread. Handworked by the Kuki Airani Angaanga Tupuna Trust, Otara, Auckland.

Photo: Mark Adams "Real Pictures".



TIVAEVAE - QUILTS

Tivaevae on Atiu, Cook Islands.

The Fibre Arts Studio

Andrea Eimke



Atiu is the third largest of the fifteen Cook Islands. Nearly all of the 1000 inhabitants are Cook Islands Maori who live in five villages in the centre of the island. Nearly 50% of the island's population is under 18. Most of the adults belong to the grandparents' generation with the parents living and working in Rarotonga, the country's main island, or overseas.

Many Atiuans have no employment and live on old age or other pensions, a small income from farming, or depend on money sent from family members overseas. As in many other countries, unemployment is more common amongst women.

Atiu Fibre Arts Studio.

Atiu Fibre Arts Studio was founded in 1986 with the intention of conserving traditional art and crafts, introducing non-traditional knowledge and skills, and the creation of jobs, mainly for female school leavers. Production comprises handcrafted articles of local natural fibres, such as pandanus, bark cloth and bast, Tivaevae, cushions and quilted wall-hangings, going to shops in Rarotonga and private customers. The Fibre Arts Studio will also design and sew tivaevae on commission. Don't hesitate to visit the Studio Gallery if you are travelling to Atiu. Atiu Fibre Arts Studio Ltd, Areora.

Meaning of tivaevae.

The translation for the Cook Islands word "tivaevae" is patchwork, vaevae meaning to mend or to patch. Tivaevae are appliqued or pieced bedspreads. The sewing of tivaevae is a relatively new but important craft in the Cook Islands and has now replaced the traditional tapa cover. It is sewn for a son's haircutting, a daughter's or son's wedding, a gift to a family member, a close friend or an important visitor. Women sew special tivaevae to be wrapped around their husband's or family members' bodies when buried. Even though it is actually a bedspread,

tivaevae are hardly ever found as a bed cover. They are kept safe in boxes and decorate the bed only on special occasions such as a village competition, Christmas time or the arrival of guests. At family celebrations they often decorate the room in which the ceremony is held.

Some 60 years ago, Mrs Teakarua Moni who was half Atiuan, half Tahitian Chinese and had been raised on Atiu, introduced the cutting and sewing of tivaevae. She had learned it herself on a trip to her Tahitian family. **Tivaevae taorei.**

There are four different kinds of tivaevae techniques used on Atiu. The two which were introduced to Atiu first are "tivaevae manu" and "tivaevae taorei". Two more varieties, the "tivaevae fancy" and the "tivaevae pansy" were introduced later.

The most unique kind of tivaevae is the tivaevae taorei. The meaning of the name "taorei" (pronounce : tah-oray) is not quite known. It could either be handkerchief or the Maorified version of the English word dowry. A tivaevae taorei is the family's greatest treasure. The bedspread is pieced together from little pieces of fabric measuring no more than 2cm X 2cm forming the most intricate and colourful patterns. It used to be sewn in groups of eight women, each women sewing one triangular part of the pattern. The eight parts were then joined together and a backing sewn to the finished bedspread. It is very often a tivaevae taorei which accompanies a family member into the grave. It seems that tivaevae taorei are only made in the Society and Cook Islands, nowhere else in the world!

Tivaevae manu.

Tivaevae manu (pronounce : mah-nu) consists of two layers of differently

coloured fabric. The top layer is folded in four or eight. An intricate, mainly floral pattern, is drawn on to the folded material and then cut out carefully through all layers. The designing and cutting requires great skill, one has to make sure that the pattern does not fall apart when unfolded. It is therefore only done by few highly specialised ladies (taunga) who learned their skills in their young days directly from students of, or even from, Mama Teakarua herself. All taunga are now in their sixties and only a few young women on Atiu are interested in learning and thus conserving this skill. When cut out and unfolded the pattern is carefully placed on to the differently coloured background fabric, tacked and finally sewn on. This is done mainly by hand, using either invisible stitches and a matching sewing cotton or an embroidery cotton in a contrasting colour and zig-zag or chain stitch.

Tivaevae fancy and pansy.

The tivaevae fancy combines applique and embroidery. Floral designs are richly decorated with a wide variety of different stitches and then appliqued with invisible stitches on to the uni-coloured background. The patterns are nearly always symmetrical.

A cross between the tivaevae fancy and the tivaevae manu is the tivaevae pansy. The pattern is cut out of differently coloured materials, eventually folded in a similar manner to the tivaevae manu, and then invisibly applied on to the one-coloured background.

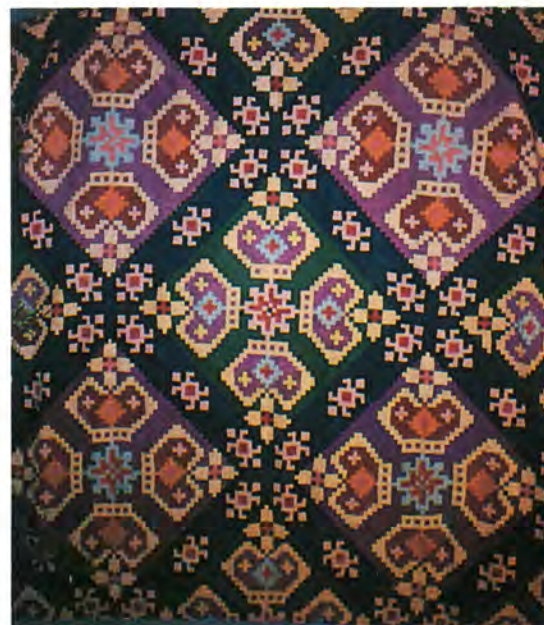
Quilting has never been introduced to the Cook Islands, one reason being the climate which makes warm covers such as quilts unnecessary except for a couple of "cold" winter days with around 18 degrees C. Another reason is that there is no wadding material available except for very fine kapok which soon becomes lumpy, or imported polyester wadding. The shipping costs make this unaffordable for the average Cook Island housewife.

OF THE COOK ISLANDS



"Rose" hexagon taorei by Tupou Mitchell is hand pieced. Taorei have backings often folded to the front to form a border. Bath House Exhibition, Rotorua. Photo Don Cole.

Tivaevae taorei "Crowns and Turtles" made in Rarotonga about 80 years ago. The crown was adapted from European culture, the turtle was prized as a feast food to honour a high chief. Pumphouse exhibition, Auckland.



Tivaevae taorei, Fisher Gallery, Auckland. One person decides on the design and will call to the members of the sewing group who will string together the combination of colours. The mosaic design is then pieced together by the individual. When sections are complete they are put together. Photo Anne Nicholas.

Lily pattern tivaevae manu by Tau Maniatu shows one form that this folded and cut applique style may take, and the use of contrast. Bath House exhibition, Rotorua. Photo Don Cole.





Rose pattern tatau by Ake Mitchell showing the use of heavy embroidery. Bath House. Photo Don Cole.



Close up showing heavy embroidery. Water lily tatau by Rei Ruaiti is typical - depicting flowers and their foliage in natural colours. Bath House exhibition, Rotorua. Photo Don Cole.



Pacific QUILTS June 1989



Mrs Numanga's masterpiece tatau employs four-way symmetry, colour contrast, and shading of colour by extensive use of embroidery. Note how the embroidery serves to unite colours difficult to use in combination. Bath House, Rotorua. Photo Don Cole.

Pansy tivaevae manu designed by Matarena George and worked on by women of the Kuki Airangi Angaanga Tupuna Trust. Fisher Gallery, Auckland. Photo Anne Nicholas.



Tivaevae Traditions Carry on in Rotorua Bath House Exhibition February 1989.



Shari Cole.

Over 25 tivaevae and smaller pieces were on show at the Bath House Art and History Museum in Rotorua, ranging from elaborate masterpieces by experts to first applique projects by young housewives enrolled in the Angaanga Vainetini programme, sponsored by Waiariki Polytechnic, and the focus for the exhibition.

Angaanga Vainetini (women's cultural craft course) provides enablement to isolated young women through skilled elders. In an atmosphere and spirit similar to women's groups in the islands, members meet in private homes, floors spread with tivaevae in progress, small children creeping about. Women work co-operatively on one another's projects, so that each has a completed tivaevae by course end. Official tutor Ake Mitchell claims no salary but uses the funding to buy materials.

This year the programme has expanded to a second group, composed mainly of senior women. Rei Ruaiti leads this group, most of whom are skilled at tivaevae but need social contact and opportunity to exchange ideas.

Cook Islanders regard tivaevae as a symbol of their culture. Strictly speaking, these bedcovers are not quilts, having neither filling material nor stitches to join layers. Nor does "bed-

cover" describe their real function.

In Polynesia, prestige of families and individuals still depends more on what they can give than on what they own. Presentation and exchange of gifts - particularly items produced by labour rather than money, are important in major social events - weddings, funerals, group visits, farewells, and welcomes.

In western Polynesia, (eg Samoa and Tonga) people give fine mats and tapa cloth. In the eastern islands, tivaevae take the place of these. Here women have adopted and adapted piecework and applique skills introduced by missionaries in the 19th century - a European invention subverted to Polynesian purposes.

Tivaevae line the path of a queen's visit, drape the casket of a loved elder, decorate beds on island health inspection day, and wrap the bereaved and the departing in gestures of inclusion. Tokens of respect and love, they connect generations, strands in a total social fabric.

While many women participate in tivaevae making, the greatest honour goes to those who design and cut. A woman who says that she made a tivaevae often means "I sewed it". A common arrangement sees the owner requesting a pattern or colour, the designer cutting, the group embroidering separate pieces and tacking them to the background, and the owner completing the project. The designer

may cut in private to safeguard secrets of her personal patterns, and women respect one another's skill by not copying without permission.

Three types of tivaevae are associated with the Cook Islands - tiny pieced work, whole-cloth applique on a background, and applique combined with embroidery. The Rotorua exhibition included all styles, from the past several decades. Taorei (mosaic piecework of squares, diamonds and hexagons) believed to be the oldest type, were represented by three examples in four-crowns, fan, and hexagon rose themes.

As might be expected, tatau stole the show. Composed mainly on traditional floral themes, these massive designs in strongly contrasting colours acquired intricacy, even delicacy, through extensive detail embroidered in perle cotton. Colours and shapes were repeated with variations in formal four-way balance. Tutor Ake Mitchell in particular added dimension by edging some of the flowers with raised crochet.

Almost always, Cook Islands women cut out the flowers, then embroider them before appliqueing them to the background fabric. Some of the stitches are conventional western ones - blanket, French knot, long and short, chain, feather and flystitch.

Among the tivaevae manu, folded and cut whole-cloth applique of a contrasting ground fabric, plant themes like taro, rose, hibiscus, and tiare predominate. Skill in cutting these "snowflake" type designs, which may also be a central medallion and a surrounding ei (garland) marks the expert.



Tivaevae in Auckland, March - April 1989

Pacific Threads - Fisher Gallery Pakuranga : The Queen's Quilts - Pumphouse Takapuna

Sue Curnow

An exhibition hall filled with tivaevae is a wondrous sight. Hot, brilliant colours, huge floral and geometric patterns, luxuriant embroidery, grab your attention and leave no doubt as to their tropical origin.

Aucklanders have been treated to two such experiences this summer. At

the Fisher Gallery tivaevae created by women from the Kuki Airangi Angaanga Tupuna Trust, Otara, tutored by Mrs Matarena George were displayed. They were supplemented by historical American and European quilts and tivaevae, from the Auckland Institute and Museum, as well as contemporary work by Malcolm Harrison and Anna Bibby. The

exhibition was also assisted by the Council for Maori and South Pacific Arts. At the Pumphouse a show of contemporary tivaevae and some over 50 years old was organised by Mary Lou Herdson and Paula Lineen to raise funds for the restoration of "Para O Tane" Palace at Avarua, Rarotonga.

From the rather clumsy work of beginners in Otara to the refined and

highly skilled work of experienced Rarotongan women, and many fine examples of older work, we have the opportunity to examine, study and enjoy this evidence of a vital needlework and textile tradition existing right in our own backyard.

Cook Islands tivaevae have unique characteristics by which they differ from those of say, Tahiti in the Society Islands. But their chief distinctive feature is the embroidery, with which motifs (usually flowers and leaves) are delineated and filled in with details like pistils, stamens, veins, spots. This embroidery, often done in variegated floss, which gives a shimmering effect, is an important element of the design - try to imagine the "Pansy" or "Chrysanthemum" patterns (seen in both shows) without it. Two-piece applique (manu) is less common in the Cook Islands than in Tahiti and of course Hawaii where it has been lifted to glorious heights of achievement. (Interestingly, Hawaii is the only island group to have retained the quilting process - all the others make a patterned top only, adding a backing in the case of piecework).

The deeply saturated hues so necessary for the vivid colour contrasts are provided by casement cloth, a cotton whose slightly rough surface is light-absorbent, rather than reflective. So the Auckland-made poly-cotton sheeting applique tivaevae manu, while very handsome, lack the depth of



colour and rich surface of those made of the traditional material.

The flat, two-dimensional, effects of piecework (taorei - "handkerchief" - little squares) is achieved by careful choice of several highly contrasting hues, plus white; no tonal gradation is sought, so the result is a vibrant, frontal picture with no illusion of depth. Several older European piecework patterns are to be found as well as little squares: Log Cabin, Fence rail, pineapple, 8-point stars, hexagons.

Usually the colour arrangements are planned to suggest floral forms, seldom animals - except for the turtle carapace which is frequently featured in designs made of hexagons and diamonds.

Tivaevae have replaced fine barkcloth in the domestic and ceremonial life of the islands of Eastern Polynesia. They define and decorate spaces used for weddings, birthdays, haircutting ceremonies, receptions for high-ranking visitors: as gifts for honoured guests and departing friends; as burial wraps; and as bed-coverings. In this regard their role in society is similar to that of quilts in colonial America, and until recent times. Similarly too their creators, whether individuals or groups are respected artisans, producing items of fundamental importance to the community.

These glorious objects evolved - and are evolving still - from skills introduced 150 years ago are being made here in the Pacific, now. Let's hope we see more - soon!

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