AKEKE KIKIRIA: A’ORO NU EVERA ARUKU

Akeke kikiria (design) or akeke vo’oa (bag) are made by women for people to hold personal items. Acquiring young fronds of pu (sago palm, Metroxylon sagu), women process the palm fibers and dye them. Gathering the fibers to be used, women make a knot, which they hold between their toes or knees as they plait the basket. Making an akeke can take between two days to one week. Plaiting is done in the morning or evening when it is cool so as to avoid breaking the fibres. Many of the designs shown here invoke opa (totemic ancestors) and link people to the environment and their ancestral histories. These baskets are a unique female art form of the Purari Delta and show women’s creativity and skill. Unfortunately, akeke kikiria are being replaced by bilums. By documenting these designs the hope is that this will stop, people will take new pride in these beautiful things, and a new generation of women will learn to make akeke kikiria. (Joshua A. Bell, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, bellja@si.edu)

Image Key: (1) Tapara shreds pu inamu ó (young sago palm leaves), (Mapaio 2001); (2) Shredded pu inamu ó bleaching in the sun; (3) Umu and Aea pressing sago fibres in the mud to make brown fibers (Mapaio 2002); (4) Puka holds daeko (Turmeric root, Curcuma australasica) used to obtain yellow dye (Mapaio 2003); (5) Branch of aee iri, the leaves of which are boiled to make red dye, Ne’a (2010) (see Koi Paku and Ropo); (6) Vaipa Kae plaits an eve upu design (Mapaio 2002); (7) Aea plait a diamond design (Ne’a 2010)

Top: Diamond pattern made by Aea Kevin (2010); Bottom: Vai’i Maiari pattern made by Vima Kauri (2010)

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