

An evolving cultural practice

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Like many language groups in PNG, the Omie experienced significant events in the twentieth century. WW II struck their mountain hideaway rainforests in an abrupt and violent way, as they live not so far from Kokoda. Then, as they were recovering, their sacred mountain Mt Lamington - *Huvaemo* - erupted, devastating the land and killing many.

These cataclysmic events forced the Omie to rethink their cultural practices and engagement with the world beyond their homelands. Most significantly the male leaders decided to entrust their female counterparts with sacred knowledge, for the women to express this through the female artform of making, painting and appliquéing tapa cloth, in order to appease their ancestors.

In 2002, a third event led to further change. An Australian collector, David Baker, visited Omie territory and recognized the artistic value of *Nioge*. In 2006, he introduced Omie tapa to an international audience for the first time, through an exhibition at Sydney's Annandale Galleries. Many exhibitions have followed and, with them, an increase in Omie artists' design innovation and colour diversity.

Sihot'e Nioge curator Joan Winter arrived in Omie territory in 2017 and helped set up a community organization to give Omie artists more control over their art form. The next wave had begun and with it, the first inclusion of male artists sanctioned by the Omie community to enter this once exclusive female art form.