

Treasured patches



Kia ora, my name is Pip.
I'm an educator at Te Manawa.

At home I have some old, tattered bits of material and clothing, which originally came from Japan.

Just rags you might say! But these are rather special rags. They're examples of boro, a Japanese word meaning "rags and tatters".



Boro is the name for textiles or fabrics that have been mended and patched together. The idea or reason behind doing this is the Japanese concept of **mottainai**, which means **treasuring things that are too precious to waste**.

A long time ago, women in the countryside of Japan mended and patched to repair their family's clothing and bedding. Over time they re-mended and re-patched, again and again. In the past this was done because they had no other choice.

People were poor, things were scarce, and many had to make do with what little they had. So, long before recycling became popular, there was boro!



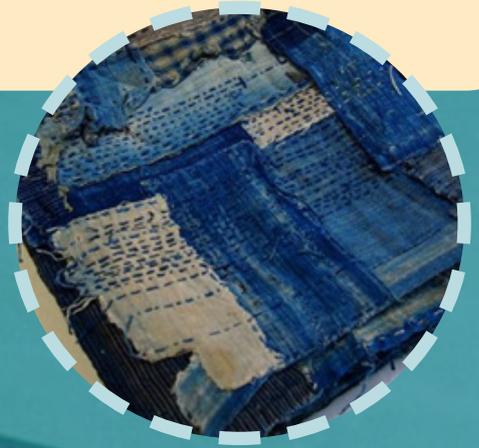
Boro farmer's gloves

Boro ぼろ

Women used pieces of old discarded cotton and hemp for patches of unplanned shape and size. They hand-stitched these random patches, layer on layer, over the holes and worn parts of their family's clothes and bed covers.

The running stitch they used to secure these patches is called sashiko. This means 'little stab'; the needle stabs through the fabric every time a stitch is made.

The stitches can run in straight or curved lines, for any distance, and are worked with cotton or hemp thread of different colours, thickness and twists.



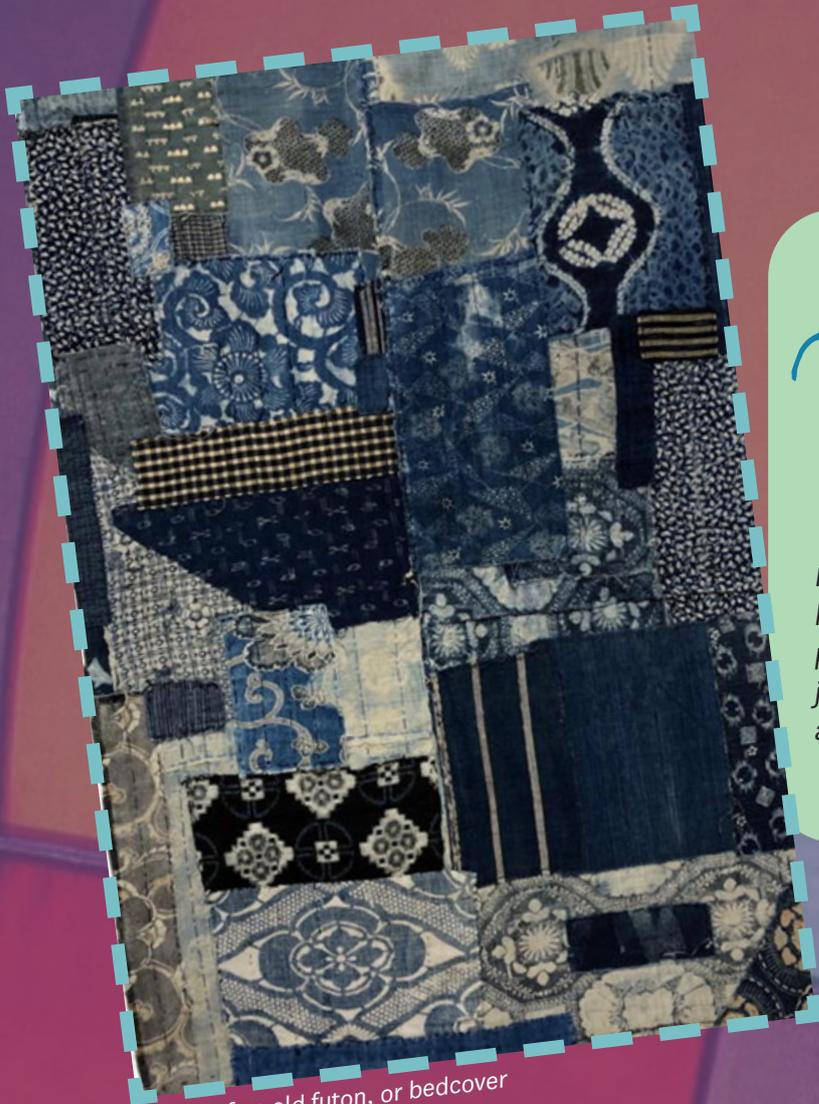
Extreme Boro!
A very old farmer's jacket



Learn more about sashiko and how to do it here:

<https://sewguide.com/learn-sashiko-hand-embroidery/>

<https://upcyclestitches.com/sashiko/>



Section of an old futon, or bedcover

Why Boro?

Fabric was prized and as clothing and textiles had to last a lifetime and beyond, they had to patch and repair what they had. Boro meant that jackets, trousers, gloves and bedding would last a whole lot longer.



A child's kimono

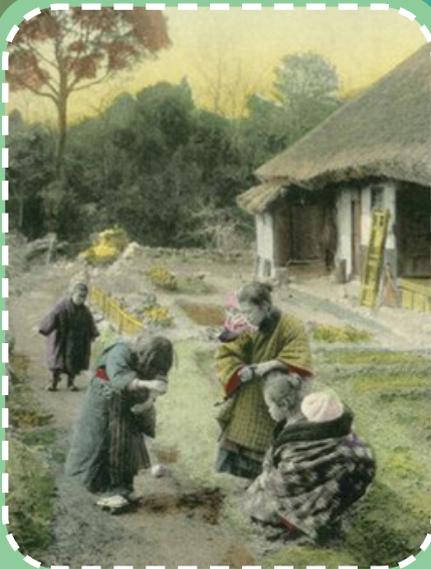


A child's jacket

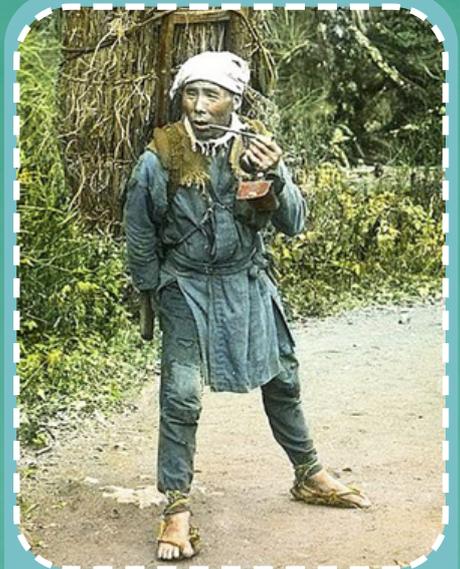
A long time ago:



Street Scene Old Japan
by Enami 1895-98



Women and children in a village. Source:
National Museum of Denmark



Charcoal carrier 1892-95
Photograph by Enami



Cargo Carrier in old Japan - source: The
Kimono Gallery



Japanese Children



What are some of the things you notice in these photos?

What would life have been like for children like you?

How different do you think it would have been compared
with life in Aotearoa New Zealand today?

Did you know?

Material made of cotton is much softer than material made of hemp, and much nicer to wear (think of your favourite cotton t-shirt). Cotton grew easily in the south of Japan, but in the poorer northern regions it was too cold for cotton; farmers in the old days could only grow hemp and had to make do with scratchy hemp clothes and bedding.

In the late 18th and 19th centuries, travelling southern salesmen decided to take lots of thrown-away worn cotton material (often used clothing) northward to sell to the people there. They used ships that looked like this:

Later this old material was used again to mend textiles, creating boro.

Fabrics were prepared for boro by soaking them in lye and rice-rinsing water, drying and then scrubbing them with rough fish skins to remove all the dirt.

This also loosened the existing threads from earlier sewing, which were then pulled out before the fabric was reused.

Boro declined in the 20th century as Japan became a wealthy country.

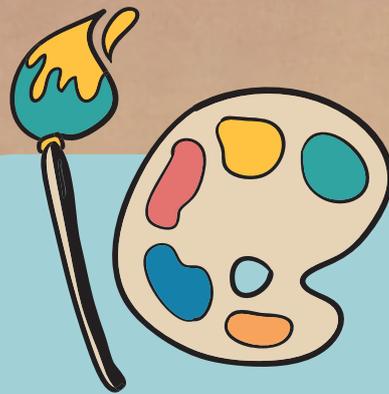
Boro was by then seen as a sign of being poor and often Japanese people were ashamed of it. Lots got thrown away, although some people figured out how special it was and started to collect boro.

Now it is celebrated as a symbol of resilience and making the very best of what you have.





Boro jacket and closeup
– courtesy of Sri threads



Have a careful look at the colours, the shapes and the textures on this boro jacket.

Some people think boro looks like Modern Art. What do you think?

Maybe you could do a painting, drawing or collage that looks just like this.

Boro today



Indigo boro teddy bear
from Kapital



Kansai Yamamoto

Over the centuries many people in different countries have given colours meanings. It works a bit like a code so when people see a colour, such as blue, everyone understands what that colour stands for - it's like a sign or symbol

In Japan, because blue is the colour of the life-giving oceans around the different islands that make up the country, it is thought to symbolize peace, stability and security.

Boro is often an indigo colour (ai or 藍) which comes from a natural dye. Indigo dyeing is known as ai-zome, which is written as: 藍染め. Indigo has long been the colour of Japanese workwear as all lower classes were made to wear blue tones during the Edo period (1603-1868). It was often found in the clothes of people living in the countryside.

Learn more about the meanings of different colours here:
<https://www.kids-world-travel-guide.com/flag-colors.html>

Indigo dyeing has a very special place in the world. You might even like to try it for yourself. Discover that it works almost like magic! Learn more about indigo dyeing online here:
<https://modernarchive.de/blogs/news/japanese-indigo-dye-falling-in-love-with-japanese-blue>

Boro is not always blue. It can be bright, dull, coloured or neutral.

Boro is even trendy and has been used by fashion designers in their collections!



Modern mending inspired by boro

Try your own mending. All you need is a needle, some thread, and maybe some material for a patch. You could mend a favourite piece of clothing or add a patch to something just for fun.

Have a look at this link here to help you get started with the stitching:
<https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/working-the-running-stitch-1177571>



from For Art's Sake

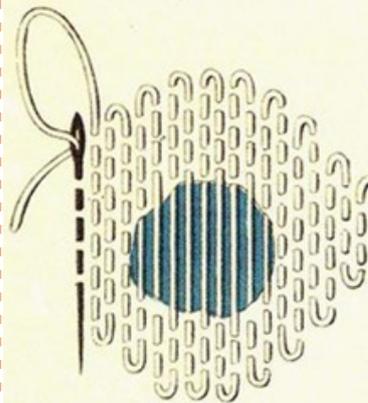


Upcycled Vera Wang Tunic Dress with boro by RebirthRecycling

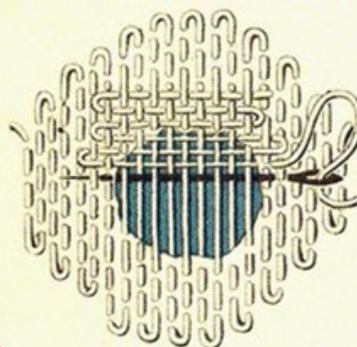
DARNING A HOLE

First clear the loops of fluff and broken ends of threads from knitted garments or clip away ragged edges from machine knit fabrics. Always use a darning ball under large holes.

1. Make the darn the shape of the hole.
2. Darn up and down the hole first; work on the wrong side.
3. Choose mending as fine as the material of the garment.
4. Begin a good distance away from the hole in order to reinforce the thin parts round the hole.
5. Space the rows of darning the width of a strand of mending apart.
6. Pick up the backs of the loops only unless the material is very fine.
7. Leave loops at the ends of each row and darn so that stitches alternate with spaces between stitches in the previous rows.
8. Pick up the edge of the hole in one row then go over the edge of the hole in the next row. If you have cleared the edges of the hole you will find this will be easy and will make a neater mend on the right side of the garment.
9. Continue the darn over the thin place beyond the hole.



Darning over the first rows of darning



1. Darn over the hole only and about two stitches of darning beyond.
2. Leave loops at the ends of each row, and only pick up on the needle the darning stitches.
3. Pick up the alternate strands of mending in first row.
4. In alternate rows, pick up the strands of mending you passed over in the previous row.



Try mending your jeans,
or making a pair of
socks more fun!



Darned socks - Source: Instagram Woolfolk yarn

Boro Japanese paper doll

- On the next page is a picture that you can trace or print, and use coloured pencils or pens to draw in some boro patches on these Japanese paper dolls. You could also glue on some small fabric patches.
- Then fold along the dotted line, cut around the outside solid lines.
- Put some glue on the back of your dolls and stick the two sides together.



Mirjam's deas for making your paper Boro dolls:

I used a yellow felt pen and sandwich paper to trace the shape of a doll from my computer screen.

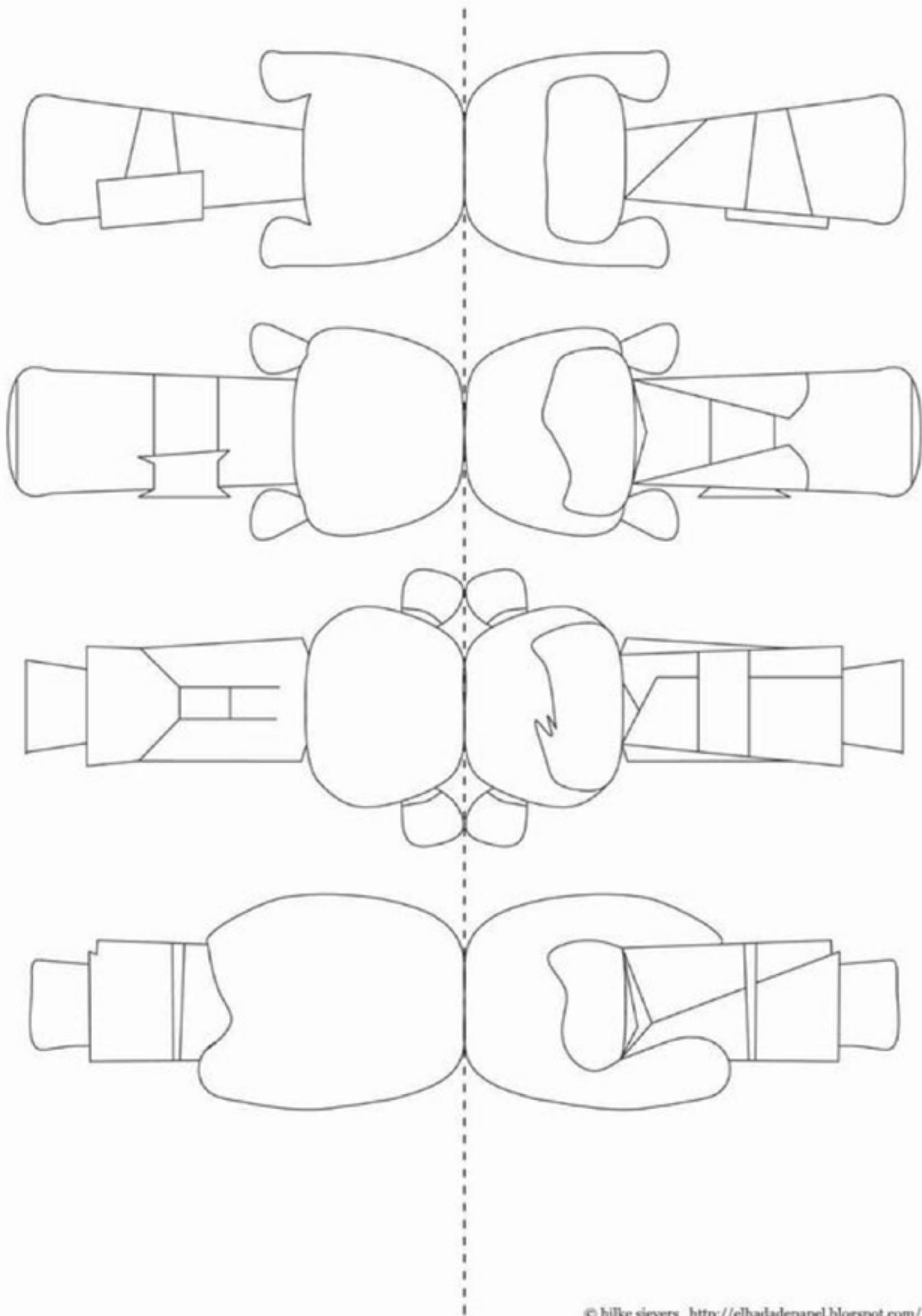
I went on a hunt for different textured surfaces around the house and garden. I used my crayons for these rubbings, with different textures and colours for the different parts of my paper doll.

Next I used water-based paint on top of that. To me it looks like the patterned patches you can see on the pictures in this pack.

To make her dress really look like the beautiful sashiko stitch, I used my fine liner to create some stitched patches. To help the doll to stand up I used a toilet paper roll as a base.

Have fun on your texture hunt!





Make old new again!

The instructions are here:

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/make-your-own-japanese-boro-bag>

We might think of recycling as a recent idea, but it was actually carried out in the Japanese countryside as a way of life for hundreds of years through boro.

It has close links to today's thinking about protecting the earth and the things we do to help the world's resources last longer.



Did you know that this symbol was designed in 1970 by an American, Gary Anderson. It represents the cycle of life. The three green arrows look like paper folded over.

These words sound quite alike. What do they really mean?

REDUCE – to use fewer materials and save the world's resources.

REUSE – to use something again, either in the same way or in a different way.

RECYCLE – to turn something into its raw materials, which can be used again.

When we are trying to use fewer of the world's resources there are two more important words, which sound similar:



REPURPOSE – to use something again, often creatively, in a different way or for a different use.



UPCYCLE – to reuse discarded objects or material in such a way as to create something of higher value or quality than the original.



Find out all about the impact of the textiles we buy, the fashion industry and the need for us all to recycle clothes online here:

<https://www.oneplanet.org.nz/recycle/household-recycling/textiles>

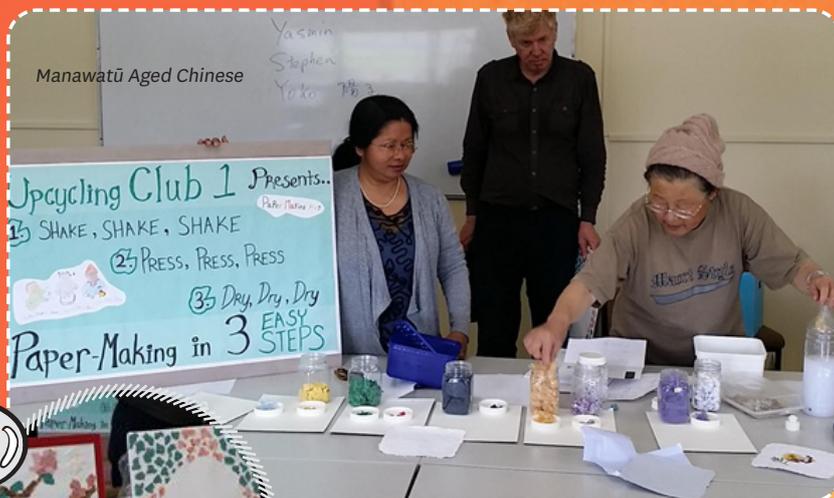


Make old new again!

Palmerston North has an Upcycling Club run by Yoko who has great ideas for arts and crafts using things that would otherwise be thrown away. Every month there are different activities to try out* - flax weaving, card making, sewing, sand gardens...bring your ideas and use what you have! Nothing goes to waste.... If you don't live in Manawatū, maybe there is something similar in your area?



*Palmerston North Upcycling Club, usually meets every third Saturday of the month at Te Manawa. Please be aware session times may vary during the Covid-19 Pandemic. For more information visit <http://www.temanawa.co.nz>



Learn more about recycling at:

<https://www.oneplanet.org.nz>

Local artist Ron Te Kawa (Ngāti Porou) is a fabulous quilter and clothes maker who uses scraps of fabric to tell stories under the label "My Beautiful Life".

Ron says the clothes he makes are an extension of the ones his mother, grandmother and tipuna made.

"They recycled the materials around them: flour bags, tablecloths and precious rare fabrics got turned into anything from school clothes to party dresses."

Trained as a costume designer, Ron adorns his creations with contemporary Māori themes. "I am a gatherer in the traditional sense, but with a modern twist. All my materials can be found in abundance locally, if you know where to look."

Life, he says, should be a celebration — a riot of colour, a grab-bag of good times.



Discovery Time