

Shibori Cut Loose

Textile Center Joan Mondale Gallery

June 6–July 19, 2008

Opening reception, Friday, June 6, 6pm

Keynote address by Yoshiko Wada, Friday, June 6, 7pm

Shibori is the Japanese umbrella term for a host of techniques of shaped resist dyeing used throughout the world. Many of the decorative elements found in centuries-old Japanese folk textiles—for example, tying up seeds within tiny fingersful of cloth using strong thread, then dyeing the cloth and removing the bindings, resulting in web-like patterns that resist the dye—are also found in textiles made throughout Asia (for example, in India, Indonesia, and China) and across central Africa and Latin America. This *shaped resist dyeing*, as the World Shibori Network terms it, uses tying, stitching, clamping, pleating, folding, braiding, and binding to hold back, or resist, the dye that otherwise colors cloth when it is vat or immersion dyed. The earliest and most persistent use of these techniques has been in embellishing cloth for the poor, who could not afford—and were often prohibited from owning—the elaborately patterned textiles made for the wealthy from brocade weaving or knitting and silk and metallic embroidery.

With little more than sewing thread and other simple devices, traditional shibori artisans embellished people's garments, quilts, and pillows with patterns that over time developed deep histories and meanings. Whether traditional folk patterns traveled from one country to another or arose independently in many locations isn't clear. What is evident is people's continued fondness for these patterns. Even now, when the cost of labor to produce cloth patterned by elaborate hand techniques has become too high in most countries for everyone except collectors, roller-printed cloth patterned like traditional shibori is common as a substitute for the much-loved, handmade cloth.

Today, when knitted and woven fabrics are increasingly computer designed and produced, the recent explosion of interest in shibori may initially seem surprising, an aesthetic nostalgia. But this is not the case: many artists are deploying traditional shibori resist-dyeing techniques to very contemporary ends, producing sculpture, artwear, and fiber environments with them.

Stunning examples of this new shibori will be on view in *Shibori Cut Loose*, a juried exhibition in Textile Center Joan Monday Gallery, June 6–July 19, 2008. The twenty-one artists selected by shibori artist Ana Lisa Hedstrom work across a variety of traditions and genres. Most of them are from North America; two are from West Bengal, India.

Hedstrom, a well known artwear designer who has worked with shibori techniques for more than thirty years, has written of the emergent American aesthetic in shibori resist-dyeing, "My work departs from traditional Japanese techniques and . . . Japanese aesthetic . . . but I hope to retain some of the invention and skill found in Japanese indigo-dyed shibori. In the working dialogue of the studio, I incorporate Western fabrics, tools, and dye techniques with traditional shibori concepts. I have found parallels in forgotten Western techniques of smocking, shirring, and ruching. Most recently I have explored digital printing based on scanned scraps of my hand-dyed shibori."

The now well known and popular Western form of shibori called *iro-iro* (many-colored) *arashi* (storm) is a case in point: it is a fusion drawing upon Western textile artists' experience with tie-dyeing in the 1960s and 1970s and a Japanese technique invented in 1880. The bright, saturated hues of Kool-Aid and synthetic fiber-reactive dyes that have figured so prominently in American tie-dyeing now grace shibori-shaped scarves, capes, and other artwear, in vivid contrast to the subtle coloring of traditional Japanese shibori, prompting Japanese shibori artists to term the work *iro-iro*. Like other American translations of folk patterns, this contemporary shibori is often playful, speculative, and unconventional—as Margaret Koop, one of the artists in *Shibori Cut Loose* puts it, "Shibori offers some control, but I like the surprises."

Western shibori's jazzy improvisations now influence the traditional working methods of artists in countries with long traditions of shaped resist dyeing. In Japan, shibori is no longer limited to textile patterning: for example, Kaei Hayakawa has used hardened, shibori-shaped cloth as a basis for molds to produce patterned glass. Perhaps most strikingly, and certainly most frequently, shibori techniques are now being applied to synthetic textiles to create wholly unprecedented, otherworldly fabrics for fashion and decoration. Adapting shibori techniques to mass production, designers like Issey Miyake

have brought shaped resist into the age of electronic reproduction using polyester's peculiar property of radical shrinkage and stabilization at high temperatures. Exploiting this property creates fabric that offer textual effects similar to traditional shibori's dramatic peaks and valleys, "caps," and woodbark patterns on sheer synthetic chiffon, organza, and georgette. Japanese textile designer Yoshiko Iwamoto Wada and manufacturer K. Takeda & Company adapted one such technique—*miura* (looped binding) shibori—to create the pockeTee, a three-times oversized t-shirt, which is first tied and then steamed at above-boiling temperatures to set the *miuri* puckers in the polyester. The garment then shrinks to one-third its original size, and its expandable, heat-set puckers accommodate bodies of many sizes. The pockeTee has sold millions of units and has been widely imitated. Heat-setting has also been used to create other patterns similar to those made with traditional shibori techniques.

The twenty-one artists selected for *Shibori Cut Loose* reflect these two approaches to resist dyeing: some work in traditional ways, clamping, stitching, and otherwise creating surface resists on natural fabrics and dyeing them with ancient dyes like indigo, purple root, and madder, creating everything from quilts (Carol Ann Grotrian's *Time Is as Weak as Water*) to artwear (Margaret Koop's *Cityscape Shawl*, which combines *arashi* shibori with another of Koop's interests, lace-knit wire) to art cloth (Marilyn Gillis's *Sedona III*). Barbara Setsu Pickett, an Oregon artist with over forty years of experience as a dyer, combines natural materials (silk organza, marbles) with traditional and experimental shibori techniques to create otherworldly textiles. Her description of *Falling Water* (2006) suggests something of the complexity of histories, meanings, techniques, and pedagogical relationships found in contemporary shibori:

Falling Water began as 17 yards of silk organza. It was bigger than my house. Silk has memory, the ability to retain shape when compressed and set with steam. It holds its form until moisture relaxes it again. In *Falling Water*, this attribute of silk becomes a metaphor for fragility of human memory and longing.

I hand-painted acid dyes to achieve the hues nuances, used marbles to create the frothy foam and rope-core resist to make the rippling cascade. It took more than a thousand marbles to get the depth of froth I wanted. As I was placing and securing each marble, I had the time and focus to think about my mother's long life. She died at the age of 91 at the end of March this year, after many years of decline.

Falling Water is a tribute to her and her courage and love. She grew up in the Great Depression, spent WWII in a detention camp for Japanese Americans in Idaho, and managed to rear four children.

I have been doing shibori since the 60s and made tie-dyed scarves to help pay for my college education. In 1975 I was hired to head the Fibers Area in the Department of Art at the University of Oregon and have taught there since then. I learned to do more sophisticated shibori from Yoshiko Wada, and with the support of an University of Oregon research award in 1989 was able to research in Japan, especially in Arimatsu, Hirose, Kyoto, and Izumo.

Other artists in *Shibori Cut Loose* have created fusions between traditional shaping techniques and new fabrics, dyes, and forms—for example, Jacy Diggins's *Tidal Vessel* and Monika Savla's *River*, which apply shibori patterning to a nonrepresentational paper vessel and a two-dimensional weaving. There's no hard and fast division between traditional and contemporary approaches among these artists: Procion and indigo dyes mingle with hand-woven cottons and heat-set polyesters.

Yoshiko Wada, designer of the pockeTee and author of the definitive study of traditional Japanese shibori, *Shibori: The Inventive Art of Japanese Shaped Resist Dyeing* (Kodansha, 1983, 1999), played a pivotal role in igniting the contemporary shibori revival. She will discuss the fascinating history and resurgence of shibori in her June 6, 2008, keynote address, "Shibori: 400 Years of Artisan Design," at the opening of *Shibori Cut Loose*. Wada will survey the material and cultural history of resist dyeing in Japan and describe how Western artists' use of shibori has affected traditional shibori practitioners in Japan. During the Shibori Symposium held in conjunction with *Shibori Cut Loose*, Bengali artist Monoleena Banerjee will present a two-hour seminar on the fusion of Indian, Japanese, and North American resist-dyeing techniques that characterizes Indian practice today (June 8, 9am). In another two-hour seminar on June 7 at 1.30pm, Yoshiko Wada will describe Japanese applications of shibori techniques to high-tech fabrics. Other artists will offer seminars exploring shibori's use in contemporary weaving, knitting, and other textile practices.

What were once local or regional textile traditions of resist dyeing have now moved onto a global stage. Please join us for a stimulating exhibition and symposium on the movement of folk shaped resist dyeing into the international limelight.

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