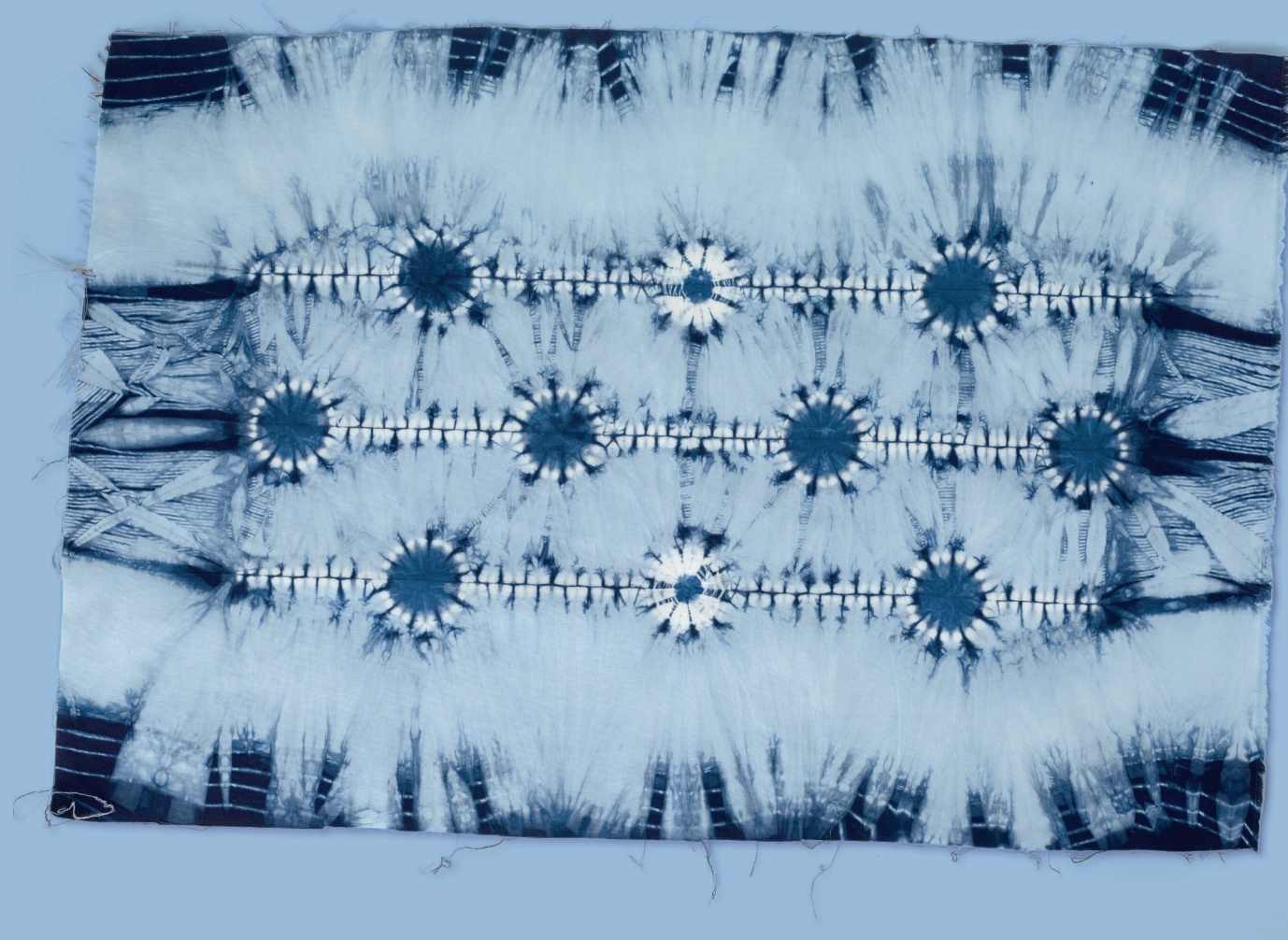


Shibori

Crisp, knife-edge folds in cotton, silks that float on the breath, the chameleon nature of manmade fibres; the unique characteristics of cloth are revealed through the manipulations of shibori. Artist, author and teacher Jane Callender shares her expertise in this traditional technique.



The Japanese term ‘shibori’ comes from the verb ‘shiboru’, meaning to wring, squeeze or press. It could be interpreted as compressed or pressurised – a clumsy description might be that fabric is compressed to block the dye. The most recognisable of its kind – both in name and effect – is tie-dye, but this term falls short and excludes many of the methods that the word ‘shibori’ now embraces.

At shibori’s heart lie pleats and folds. These distort the fabric and create forms that remain in place until processes are completed either to retain the three-dimensional shape or to create a resist. It is this manipulation of cloth and its passage through the third dimension that sets it apart from other resist dyeing techniques, such as batik.

These pleats and folds can be put in place randomly for chance effects such as scrunching, twisting, or plucking, or they may be arranged in a controlled way. Once the folds are worked, compression is exerted and the means by which it is applied – binding, wrapping or squashing – not only prevents the flow of dye but generates distinctive marks, some delicate, others bold. Stitched shibori involves pulling the threads of handsewn rows to create tiny folds. As a row of stitching can follow a drawn line, specific shapes, motifs, patterns and designs can be composed.

The moment in time at which the fabric changes from undyed to dyed is totally obscured from view, as shibori denies us these advantages. Although samples are created, notes taken, plans made and recipes followed, control is taken away the moment the prepared cloth is immersed in the dye. A sense of mystery and expectation prevails, no matter how many times this process has been undertaken, and in particular when using indigo. Only when the compression is released – the stitching threads cut, for instance – can the maker’s vision be seen.

You might well think that one row of stitching could only be capable of producing one type of resist effect. The results, however, show just how different and varied a stitched line can be and in combination with the arrangement of the cloth, many different variations can be achieved to build up motifs, patterns and one-off designs. Add to this

the choice of fabrics and dyes, and a myriad of options present themselves. So much can be learnt from working traditional patterns. Although it can often appear as though complex stitching has been used, analysis reveals that in many cases it is the underlying geometry or the folding that provides the complexity, not the stitching. In a technique known as itajime, we encounter a type of three-dimensional geometry, which results in bolder and larger patterns. When we look to bomaki shibori, and in particular arashi, techniques in which fabric is wrapped around a central solid core, we find delicate linear markings. The artisan’s dexterity, touch and understanding of how the cloth may be moved to influence the flow of the dye creates many varied patterns.

We could assume that where evidence of textile dyeing activities have been discovered through archaeological finds that resist-dyed techniques of some sort began to develop. How was the technique discovered? Perhaps a beverage, juice or dye was spilled on some scrunched-up or folded cloth, which, when moved, showed an interesting arrangement of shades and marks, prompting a creative mind to think and plan. The simplest of motifs, circular or square in fashion, would have been created by binding around a pinched section of cloth. From this starting point, it would not have been too great a leap to begin to use a needle and thread to create a ‘joined up line’ using stitches. Peru, China, the Malay world, India, Japan and Africa each developed their own distinctive styles of compressed resists. Over millennia, the knowledge of these techniques has spread across the world and continues to guide and influence contemporary shibori practice.

I was born in Penang, Malaysia. The family lived for some time ‘up country’ beyond Kuala Krai, not far from the border with Thailand. Home was an old bungalow some distance from Kampung Pahi on the jungle-clad banks of the Kelantan River, the only route to Kuala Krai. There were no roads. It sat on stilts to clear the monsoon floods, had a leaky roof and holds my earliest memories of stitching; winding the handle on the Singer sewing machine ever faster, I would force my mother to proceed at breakneck speed.



The family returned to the UK in the early 1960s. My art studies began at Eastbourne, where textile fashion students were required to make a garment for their final foundation year show. I knew of tie-dye, but chose to stitch, in order to achieve a linear resist. My study continued at the West Surrey Institute, Farnham. Here, a table laden with indigo textiles from all over the world inspired a three-week practical study of resist-dyed textiles, in which I investigated stitch resist. I responded immediately to 'that' blue and my interest in batik, paste and stitch resist intensified. The results of my stitched samples, the clarity of the markings and the intensity of the indigo blue, just held me and has held me ever since. After a gap year, I bought fabric, indigo and a dustbin and converted part of the coal shed, appropriately, into a small dye house. With a design in my head and no real skills to get it committed to cloth, my father and I sat on the sitting room carpet and with a protractor and a long ruler to hand we plotted out the design together on the fabric. Simple geometry became my best friend. The potential for pattern making, with a technique that I felt I could express myself with, reaffirmed my commitment to textiles. I continued my studies at Farnham and graduated in 1977 with a BA (hons) degree in Printed Textiles.

My stitch resist life has had to be put on hold now and then over the years. At one point, I was forced to disconnect from the rush of daily life for some time, due to major spinal surgery. During that time, I set out to refine my technique, develop stitch patterns and create some new pieces as the construction and movement of pattern held my focus once again. A London Arts Board Individual Craftsperson award followed. I set up courses for adult education, put on small displays, took a part-time job and began to receive bookings for workshops in the UK. Since settling in Norfolk in 1999, I have produced many teaching and 'callishibori' samples alongside work for exhibitions, further explorations into other natural dyes and writing two books: one on pattern, the other on shibori. Teaching has taken me to Australia and New Zealand, Canada, America, Kuwait, Europe, China and Japan. Last year's lockdown initiated a new teaching experience, and I now welcome kindred spirits on my computer screen and continue to share my passion for pattern, for this extraordinary technique and the

magnificence of indigo. The nurture of hand-crafted textiles, the pure excitement of the genre as it embraces tradition and innovation in pattern and design, are the threads that draw us together.

Thanks go to Search Press for allowing the use of extracts and images from Jane's book: *Stitched Shibori*.

This, and more details on her virtual classes in shibori, can be found at:

janecallender.com

