



A Contemplative Life in Art

The rice fields of Bali, pine forests of New Hampshire, snow fields of Iceland, quiet gardens of Kyoto, cloud forests of Costa Rica and white villages of Spain have all been views outside my studio window over 30 years. I was born in Lynn, a small city near Boston, where I grew up among my grandmother's flower gardens as well as on weekends in the forests of NH where my father labored on a family summer house. With cloth in my hands, childhood wax drawings that resisted black ink and a deep love of nature, I grew into adulthood attracted to work with the contemplative art of wax-resist (batik) on silk.

It was a dazzling resist-dyed kimono that captured my interest and brought me to Asia. In 1981, with a master's degree in art, I arrived in Kyoto to further my training. When I stepped into Tange Shin Inc., a contemporary kimono company, I knew I had much to absorb. For years I had been entranced by the glorious Indonesian batiks I

had seen in the MFA Boston collection, but it was the unknown Japanese rozome batik that



Applying Wax with a ro-fude brush.

would be my study. I was surprised to hear that this ancient wax-resist process of rozome actually pre-dates Indonesian batik. And while batik and Japanese rozome are similar, Indonesian batik is accomplished with *tjap* and *tjanting*, and the 'dip-dyeing' of waxed fabrics, but in Japan, the waxing and dyeing are both done with brushes.

In the studio I learned that rozome (roe-zo-may) required a meticulous use of dye and wax with little room for mistakes. My work was done in the Japanese style: seated on the floor, stretching my fabric with *haregi* (wooden bars) and *shinshi* (bamboo tenterhooks). Over the 18 years in Japan my color sense changed as I became aware of subtleties and nuances. Even today my work is often created with only three colors of dye. With this limitation I am challenged to create multiple blends and shades on a given kimono or wall hanging. In the process, minute color decisions and speed are necessary, as the correct dampness of the fabric is crucial to the



Teaching the techniques of rozome in Coupeville, WA.

would follow in the next 25 years.

In 1994, an opportunity to document this little known Japanese batik processes arrived when I was asked to write The World of Rozome: Wax Resist Textiles of Japan. In this book, I documented the history of wax-resist, from its arrival in Japan as *roke-chi* in 700 CE to its growth as a dynamic contemporary art process and included studio interviews with seventeen living masters of rozome. Many of these masters were later invited to exhibit and teach at the World Batik Conference-Boston 2005, organized at Massachusetts College of Art and Design.



Showing kimono in 1996

quality of the luminous shaded results. With training this all became second nature. Developing a strong focus, careful attention to detail, subtle awareness of the surrounding work space and deep concentration on this resist-dyeing -- all added to the meditation practice that I

In 1999, I turned my focus to the coming millennium and worked to create a global project that would consider cloth as a source of spiritual healing. The Kesa Project was inspired by the

nine-panel monastic robe that I researched. With help and support, I created spiritual cloths for each of the seven continents that were worn, on site around the world, while the millennium clock ticked on. Over the next eight years, the Kesa Project spoke to many people through several exhibitions and now has a permanent home in the collection of the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, MA.

As I returned to the USA in 2000, after living abroad for so many years, I had the clear opportunity to choose a life of intention. The path I have chosen, combining art, beauty, and spiritual direction, has come into fruition on many levels. My contemplative life was furthered with my ordination into the Triratna Buddhist Order in 2009, and at that time, Betsy became Kiranada (she who radiates the light of the Bodhi moon). My continued travels in Asia and Europe, with solitary retreats and studio time in Indonesia, keep me



Tonodan home and studio in Kyoto, Japan

awake to our interconnectedness and fresh to the impermanence of this world. I approach my art making as a spiritual process, an opportunity to go deep within, to loosen 'self', and to touch, however briefly, the ineffable moving toward a transcendence.

It is my deep wish that this art, and my life, might be of benefit to all beings; that my work might bring more awareness, kindness -- and a bit of joy into this world. May all be well.

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