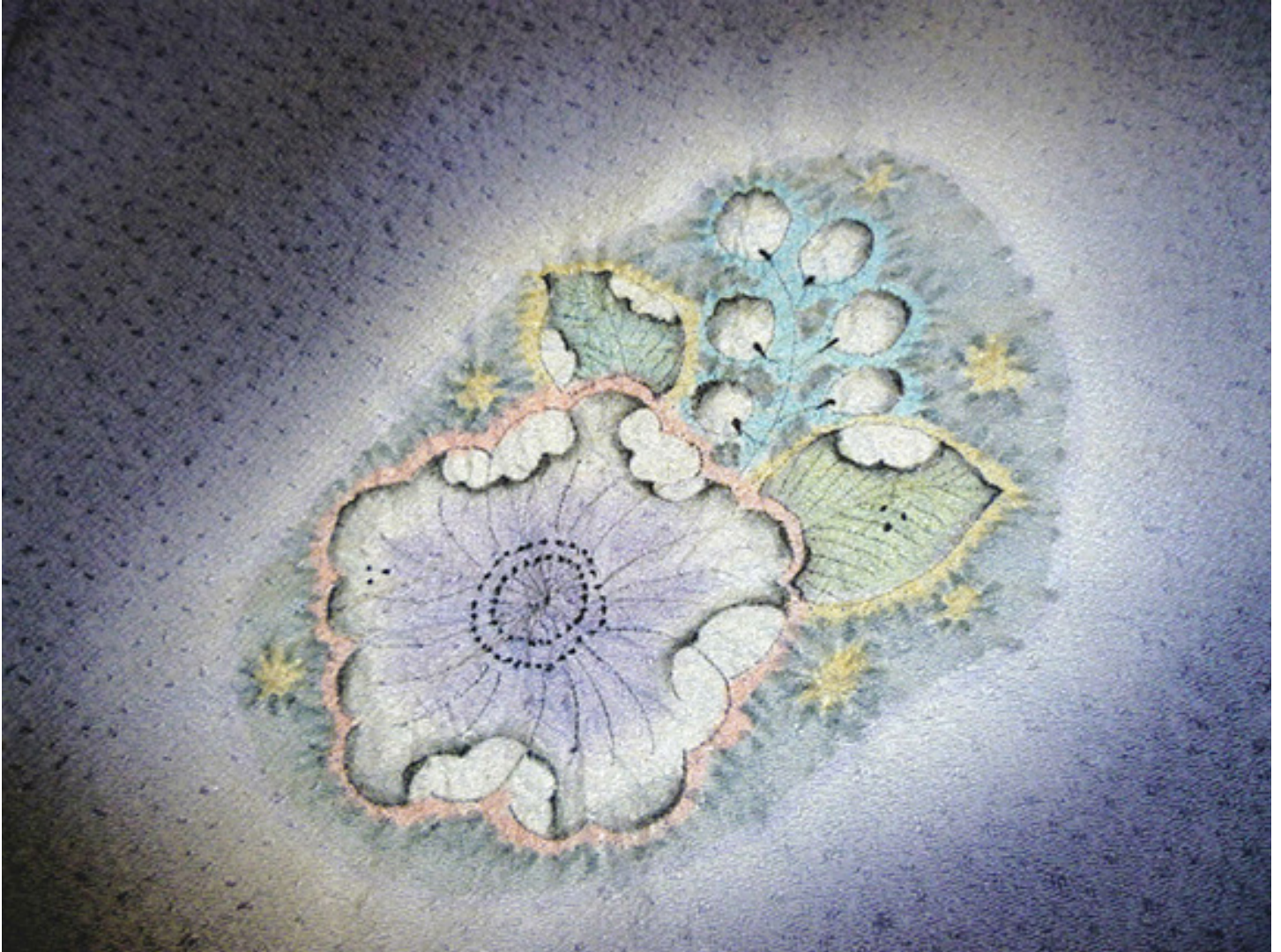


Tsujigahana – Real or Fake?

with John Marshall, copyright May 2017

Friends have come to me with treasures in hand—beautiful *tsujigahana* kimono they have purchased in the hopes it is *real*.

What is real?

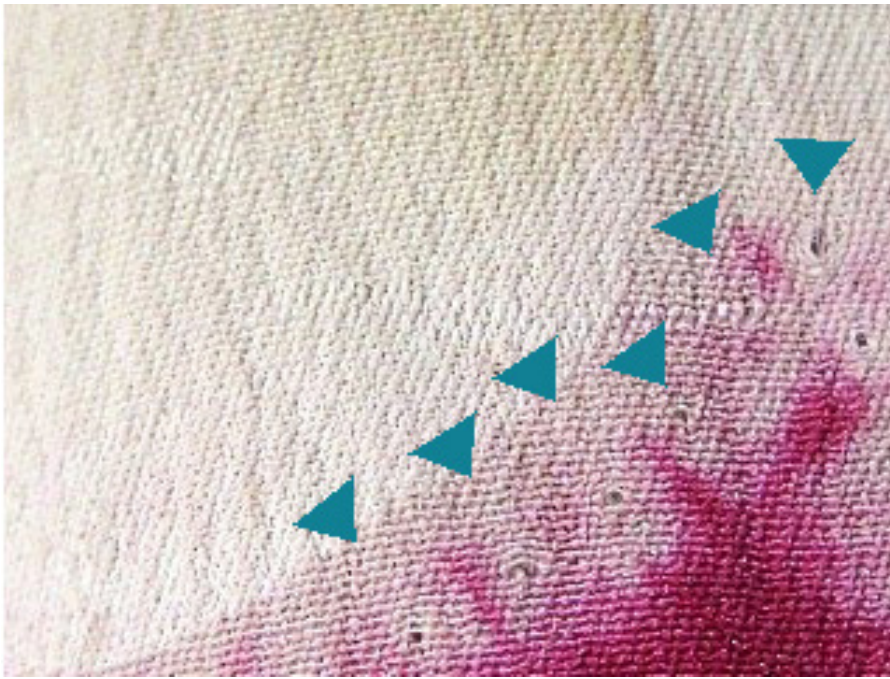


hand painted details, brushed background dyes (no *shibori*)

Their hope, of course, is that they have stumbled upon a piece created by someone as famous as Itchiku Kubota, or at least one that has been stitch-dyed by hand, with hand-drawn detailing. And I would hope that will be a dream come true for all of us – even if a bit unlikely.

However, unlikely does not mean impossible. So let's take a look at how to judge what you have.

We've covered what goes into hand-stitched, hand-painted *tsujigahana* elsewhere. Let's take a close-up look and see what we find.



notice the needle holes left behind in this hand-painted, nui-shibori piece – also notice how the holes correspond to the variations in the dye caused by pleating when the string is pulled tight (collection of the author)

There are many, many ways to create the same general look. Stitched *shibori* will leave behind telltale evidence of having been sewn in the form of tiny needle holes, see above. However, when the fabric is stitched and untied several times during the dye process these tiny holes may disappear through handling.



the holes are easy to spot in this example, but notice how they correspond to the wrinkled pleats we can see, but not to the dyed pleats (collection of the author)

Often in this case, once the entire piece has been dyed and the details painted in, the artist will go back and give one final stitching to the whole piece to add back in the holes and creases that have flattened out during the process and give it back that distinctive *shibori* look. In the case below, the holes left behind don't really correspond to the pleated variations of the actual dyework.



this sample exemplifies a piece that has been entirely printed and only during the very last stage of production had any shibori work done—notice how the center of the flower has been twisted, a bit like having one's nose tweaked (collection of the author)



With this look in mind, some artists skip using stitch-dye techniques altogether by printing, screening, or painting the design. If this is followed up with a final stitching and setting of the creases as mentioned above, the final look will be much the same at a glance as one entirely stitched, with a lot less effort expended.

In addition, the printed versions don't have the soft blurring of the edges seen in the stitch-dyed work. Often tiny dots are simply printed in to give the look of string-resisted areas.

printed flowers with rice-paste overlay to protect the main image as the background dye are painted—notice the lack of blurring around the edges of the flowers and the simple round dots of the stems (collection of the author)



notice how small dots have been printed to mimic the holes left by the needles employed in nui-shibori (collection of the author)

Next, let's look at the painted details.



hand-painted lines and shading—notice how the brush has skipped a bit along the surface of the weave (collection of the author)

Outlines painted by hand tend to have variations in thickness and darkness. They may appear a bit broken up or made up of small bits of what seem to be dots and dashes. Look closely and you will see that it is the brush skipping along the surface of the weave that causes this look. Shading done by hand should be true shading, not pixilated shading as you might see in an enlarged version of a photo from a newspaper, made up of spaced dots. Keep in mind, however, that true shading may be a bit uneven if it is affected by the bumpy surface of the weave.

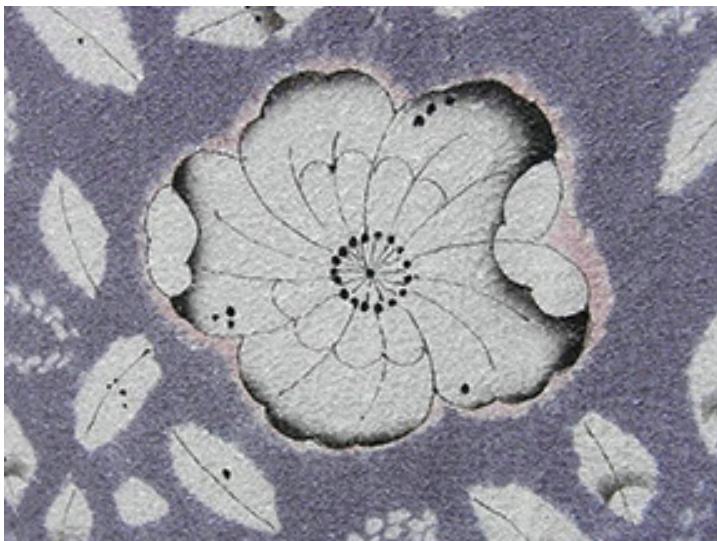
*lower-quality printed shadings can
have a pixilated look, which at a
casual glance can be deceiving
(collection of the author)*



Below are a few more examples of true brushwork.



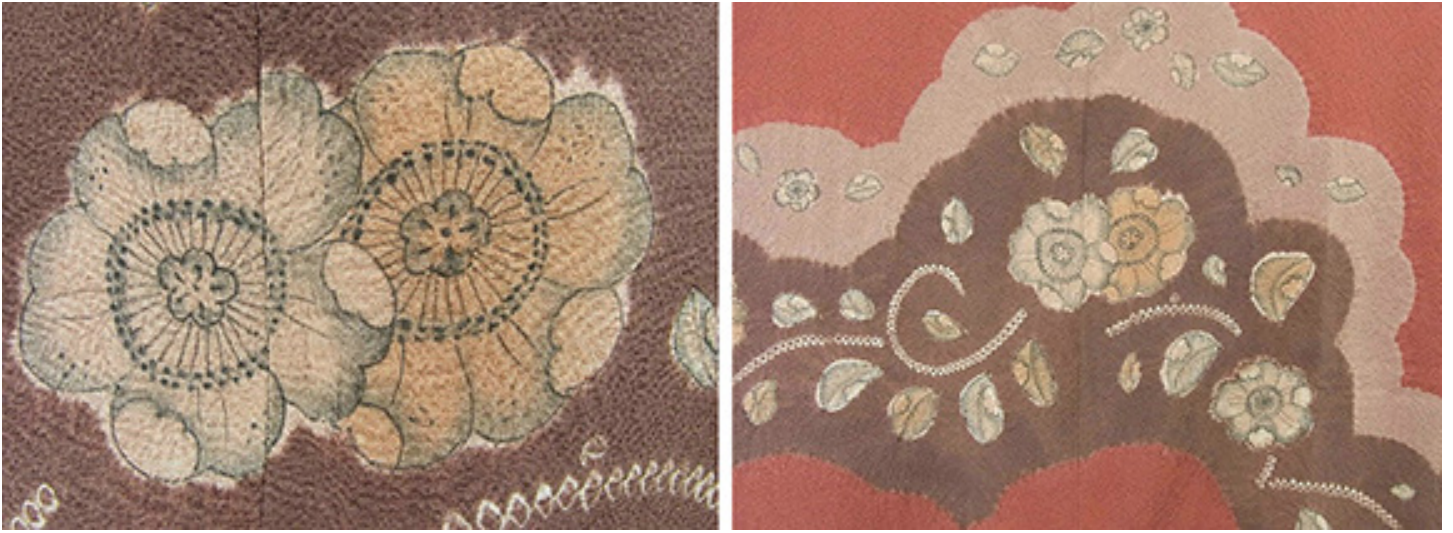
*very simple stitched outline, minimal hand drawing, brushed-in colors on flower
(collection of the author)*



hand-stitched and hand-painted details on figured silk chirimen (collection of the author)



*hand-stitched and hand-painted details, hand-painted color brightens the flowers
(collection of the author)*



hand-stitched, hand-painted details along with hand-painted tints to the petals (collection of the author)