START TO FINISH KATAZOME Garment Design

BY JOHN MARSHALL

I fell in love with Japanese culture at a very early age and followed through with this interest through apprenticeships in Japan starting at the age of seventeen. I found that being immersed in the culture was as important to me as learning the technical skills. I was able to achieve my goals through the kindness of many people around me.

I've been asked to share with you some of the steps involved in *Katazome*, a traditional Japanese dyeing technique in which a rice paste is used as a resist to create the patterning over which dyes, in my case natural dyes, are applied. Toward this end, I thought it might be easier to walk you through the steps as I dye a garment.

I start out with simple sketches of what I have in mind and then either carve stencils to outline the images or I pull from my vast library of stencils to mix and match.

I carve the stencils using traditional hand-made paper, which has been lacquered with persimmon tannin and smoked, called shibugami. The stencil is used to apply a resist, made up of rice, bran, and a few other ingredients for taste, to my silk yardage.

Japan developed a very unique method of painting on silk. The fabric is clamped at either end and pulled tight between two posts or trees – much like hanging a hammock. A series of bamboo skewer-like rods, with needles in the ends, are poked into the selvage edges causing them to bow.

The bamboo, called shinshi, in attempting to straighten out, remove the slump from the hammock leaving the dyer with a

wonderfully taught surface, suspended mid-air. Dressed out in this manner, the yardage is easily tilted to work upon, much like a painter's canvas, exposing both sides while allowing dyes to dry quickly and evenly.

Most of the dyes I use I make from scratch. These may take the form of plant-derived extracts, such as onion skins, combined with a mordant, of which alum is just one example – or they may take the form of pigments. Pigments may be extracted from plant sources, such as onion skins, or they may be processed from local minerals, that is to say, dirt. In either case, minerals require a binder and I use soymilk.

The two types of dyes are applied using various sizes of brushes (refer to Susan Moyer's *Silkworm* article from Summer 2020, Volume 27, Issue 2). Surikomi brushes are used for detail work, jizome brushes are used for large swaths of color, and fude are used for finely detailed lines. These colors are built up layer upon layer, overlapping in some cases, and meandering off on their own in others.

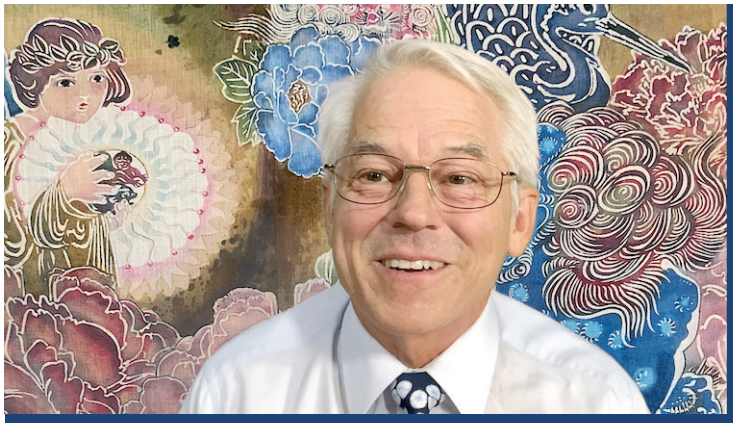
The juicy dyes allow for very translucent color and the pigments tend to be matte. One unique quality associated with natural

pigments is that the particle sizes are very uneven. This allows for a greater variety of light reflection, awarding us with much more complex colors. Beyond this, the particles never actually blend – green remains yellow particles next to blue particles, no matter how many layers you apply. It's the different between our visual experience of concrete painted green to look like a lawn, and a meadow that may appear simply green at first glance until we stop to appreciate the full range of multi-colored grasses and flowers that seduce us into tranquility.

Eventually, the paste is washed away with tap water exposing our full range of nuanced color, reinforced by the contrast of the sharply defined lines the paste resist has left behind.

And there you have it!

I've been immersed in this process for almost fifty years and have never grown tired of the joy I find in working in this medium.



This has been a thumbnail description of the process – a bit like painted concrete. For the meadow version, please visit the short video I have prepared for *SPIN*.

vimeo.com/582013900

If you'd like to find out more about what I offer, please visit my website at **johnmarshall.to** or contact me at **John@johnmarshall.to**.