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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts

in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

PAINTED - SHIBORI

by

SOON-HYE KIM

May 18, 1988
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Illustrations</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Historical Development of Shibori</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of the Artist’s Work:</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement I</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement II</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1:</td>
<td>Motif from &quot;Legends of Shigi-san Temple&quot;.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2:</td>
<td>Example of &quot;divided dyeing&quot; (somewake) dated 1309.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3:</td>
<td>&quot;Pine bark lozenge&quot; motif (matsukawabishi) of tsujigahana textiles.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing 1:</td>
<td>Crisscross binding.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph 1:</td>
<td>The combination of stitching and binding.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph 2:</td>
<td>Running stitch on a single thickness.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph 2a:</td>
<td>Maki-age shibori.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph 3:</td>
<td>Running stitch on a double thickness.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph 3a:</td>
<td>Ori-nui shibori.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph 4:</td>
<td>Overcast stitch on a double thickness.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph 4a:</td>
<td>Maki-nui shibori.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph 5:</td>
<td>Movement I (approximately 5’x 5’6”).</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph 5a:</td>
<td>Detail in Movement I.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph 6:</td>
<td>Movement II (approximately 10’x 11’).</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph 6a:</td>
<td>Detail in Movement II.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, people around the world have been producing resist designs in textiles by gathering a section of cloth and securing it in various ways before dyeing. Fabrics can be ingeniously shaped in this manner to create beautiful designs by plucking, pinching, stitching, folding, pleating and wrapping. When the dye enters the manipulated fabric, it creates a layered, rich, and almost magical coloring that is enhanced by combinations of stitching and binding techniques. The results are soft energetic and spontaneous designs that belong to the family of manipulative techniques called Shibori.

Shibori is a unique method of resist that originated in Japan. In the past, it included a wide range of conventional techniques that were used to produce fabric designs in high quality garments. Such uses of Shibori cloth are prevalent in Japanese chronicles, diaries, romances, paintings and photographs.

This unique technique plays an important role in the creation and appreciation of my work. Indeed, in order to fully understand Movement I and Movement II, they should be seem in light of the historical development of Shibori.
THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SHIBORI

Shibori dates back to the sixth century AD, to the Asuka (552AD-645AD) and Nara (645AD-794AD) periods. The textiles preserved in the Shoso-in show three types of resist-dyed fabrics. These are kokechi, rokechi and kyokechi. One might speculate that the word "kechi" originates from the Chinese word for "resist", however, the etymological evidence indicates that had this been a Chinese technique it probably would not have received and retained its Japanese name over the centuries (Wada, 1983:11-12). A verse from an old poem reads:

"When I was a child with hair down to my shoulders
I wore a sleeved robe of shibori cloth." (Ibid:14)

During the Heian period (789AD-1185AD), shibori resist dyeing became increasingly widespread. The elite developed shibori-patterned silk cloth (yuhata and narabi-sakume) using simple stitches. These were then fashioned into robes and worn by the ladies of the court, the participants of religious ceremonies, and the appointees to the emperor’s palace.

A visual record of Japanese shibori fabrics extends back to paintings of the late twelfth century. The textile pattern motif from the "Legends of Shigi-san Temple" resembles a web (Ibid:17). Later on, this motif became known as kumo ("spider web") shibori (see figure 1). The fan-shaped papers that contain Buddhist sutras provide further evidence of shibori. Several of these have been reproduced in full color together with scroll paintings, and include the "Legends of Shigi-san Temple" in volume eight of Emakimono. (Ibid:17)
By the end of the Heian period, different types of shibori-patterned cloth were being duplicated with stenciled patterns of silver and gold. This decorative cloth, once found in palace curtains, temple banners, canopies, and ship flags as well as among the garments of the different social classes, had become common place. It was no longer confined only to royalty and the elite.

In the periods between 1185AD and 1513AD (the Kamakura and Muromachi) the fabrics were characterized by the appearance of divided dyeing (somewake, see figure 2) and refined stitch resists. When these were combined with multicolored dyebaths, they produced elaborate and detailed designs on a reserved ground.

The development in stitch shibori reached its height in the tsujigahana textiles of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries during the Momoyama period. Initially, between 1573AD and 1615AD, the lower classes wore indigo dyed cotton while the elite wore more colorful and sophisticated silk garments. In the later years of the Momoyama period, known in Japan as the "Golden Age of Shibori", all classes of people wore the colorful silk and cotton shibori-patterned cloth. Seiroku Noma, an authority on Japanese costume and textiles, states that "at no other time in Japan's long history were the streets so full of color" (Wada, 1983:24).

The tsujigahana style is typically a combination of shibori-dyed designs with decorative detail added in sumi ink. Here stitching provides a means to delineate dyed or reserved motifs, and a way of creating a textured design effect. By using extremely small stitches and taking up only two or three fine threads of the cloth with each stitch, the shibori artisans were able to
achieve sharp outlines instead of fuzzy-edged resist.

By the end of the Momoyama period, a new style of textile decoration had developed. This was typified by bold, contrasting diagonals that seem to be drawn from the "pine bark lozenge" motif (matsukawabishi) of the tsujigahana textiles (see figure 3)(Ibid:26). Stitched shibori, once so important in the tsujigahana textiles, was now limited to dividing a larger design area. As such, textiles at this time were dyed in different colors through the process of "divided dyeing" (somewake). (Ibid:26)

The Edo period of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries marked the beginning in the mass production of shibori cloth. In the village of Arimatsu an increase in sales, coupled with the demand for variety in shibori cloth and garments, led to a division of labor in production. With more cloth being produced came the need for quality control, and the beginnings of cloth guilds. Not surprisingly, this specialization in production led to a specialization in design. The combinations of stitching, binding, pleating and dyeing testify to the artisan's skills during the Edo period.

In the Meiji period (1868AD-1912AD), the methods of production changed even more due to the rising cost of silk. Consequently, more cotton was incorporated into the fabrics than ever before, and machinery began to replace the manual production of cloth. Although workers still stitched and bound the cloth in their homes, most of the folding and pleating were done by machine outside the home. At the same time chemical dyes began to displace the traditional, natural dyes. (Wada,1983)
In the years following World War I, shibori was incorporated into western style clothing and exported to Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Africa. Meanwhile, the social life in Japan was undergoing dramatic changes. Symbolized by the adoption of western dress, the younger generation no longer wanted to pursue the traditional crafts of their parents. This, combined with the competition from machine printed cloth, led to a sharp decline in the production of shibori textiles. (Wada, 1983)

Shibori is now but a precious part of tradition. However, thanks to the hobbyist a new demand for shibori is being created and a number of shibori objects reflecting different techniques are beginning to appear. As my own work exhibits, these contemporary shibori techniques are gradually being incorporated into modern designs and layouts.
DISCUSSION OF THE ARTIST'S WORK.

After World War I, the once common place Japanese textile of Shibori had become a fabric of the past. The remaining demand for this stitch and dye technique was due to artisans who transferred the various Shibori techniques onto such items as purses, neckties and formal kimonos. This is still true today, and as an artist I have a strong commitment to the continuity and development of Shibori - a dynamic craft in an equally dynamic world.

In creating Painted-Shibori (Movement I - photograph 5,5a. Movement II - photograph 6,6a), I experimented and adjusted technique to achieve a desired look. Often I used dyes experimentally much as an unconventional chef might create a new dish, but an essential aspect of my work remained the study of my craft and a return to the source (the fabrics) that have always been my teachers. As such, stitching was used as the means to delineate motifs that are dyed or reserved, and as a way of creating a textured effect in my work. It is the contrast of sharply drawn details with the soft edges of the resisted motifs and the tonal contrast of the dark dyes with the delicate blues, greens, yellows, and pinks that give my designs their unique quality.

My work is essentially a blend of past and present: the combination of the Shibori history and my own contemporary design. Thus to the sixteenth century "pine bark lozenge" motif of Movement I, I added my own unique shape.
MOVEMENT I:

The first step in creating Movement I was to develop a line design or pattern as a stitching guide. In the Painted-Shibori the design motifs were inspired by water formations. These motifs evolved from a desire for movement and love of shapes common to an aquatic environment. Rising waves and their crests, swirling eddies and serpentine currents inspired the individual shapes and motion of the overall pattern. Both the large, undulating shapes and the small, clustered shapes were juxtaposed to create a dynamic, fluid composition.

The line design was transferred onto silk broadcloth which functioned as a white canvas. Before painting, the silk was washed to remove the dust from the natural fibers. Once dried it was stretched over a frame. The dyes in this piece were French Dyes used in combination with water or alcohol to achieve a desired effect. Water added to a dye lightened the color while alcohol, which encourages the fabric to absorb a dye, strengthened the color. Thus in order to achieve soft images and eliminate the dark edges made by a brushstroke, the fabric was dampened with water before painting.

In both my Shibori pieces, pastel underpainting is a prominent theme. This is an idea prompted by my childhood memories of the ocean. The light pinks, greens, yellows, oranges, corals, and blues are all colors common to the sea shore. The accent colors such as the bright pinks, yellows, and greens suggest a sunset splendor.

Once the painting was finished, the original line design was transferred to the silk with a water soluble ink pen. The fabric was stitched and bound
with straight stitching and crisscross binding (see drawing 1) which is a combination frequently found in Shibori, particularly in the noted Arimatsu village of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This technique is not only fast but allows for a wide range of design possibilities. Any motif regardless of size, may be resisted in this way. The crossed binding thread and the random folds of the cloth create a distinctive patterning within stitch-outlined motifs. (Wada, 1983)

This is the "maki-age shibori" (see photograph 2,2a) and predominates in Movement I. Once the design motif was outlined in running stitch with silk thread, the thread was drawn, bound with cotton thread, and secured by knotting (see photograph 1). The gathered silk was then immersed in water to inhibit dye penetration in the gathered area and then placed in the dye baths. Three different dye baths were used: a light, a medium and a dark brown. Before the silk was immersed in increasingly darker dye baths, it was twisted and tied in large, loose knots. Each different dye bath needed a different twist and knot. The latter were either removed or added to accommodate changes in the design.

With the dyeing process complete the fabric was left to dry naturally and the stitched and bound thread were removed. In order to emphasize the elastic texture of the surface, the fabric was partially pressed to retain its Sting Ray shape from the image of the "pine bark lozenge" and to maintain the desired texture akin to the moon's surface. The soft, puckered shapes fill part of the fabric and float against richly muted colors. These surrounding motifs were further accentuated by a chain stitch of silver metallic thread that casts an image of water catching the rays of the afternoon sun.
It is the combination of the positive and negative areas in Movement I that gives it its totality. In other words, the embroidery (the positive areas) and the dyes (the negative areas) combine to give the piece a full range of texture and color. These in turn give the piece a tactile and visual completion or "manjock", a Korean word meaning "satisfaction".
MOVEMENT II.

The initial stages in creating Movement II were much the same as in Movement I. The line design was drawn up as a stitching guide and, as with Movement I, this design evolved from a desire for movement specifically in an aquatic environment. The overall effect of this design is, in a sense, a shift in impression from a close up view of water rippling over pebbles to a distant view of an ocean wrapped in a floating mist. The latter is the product of the final dye bath. The rhythmic geometric designs of this piece need space. The spaces both within the design and in the manner in which this piece is exhibited (in three separate pieces) create a feeling of movement which is the essence of the design itself. In order to grasp this concept of the design, it is necessary to understand the origin and development of the design repeat.

The design was first drawn on a large piece of paper that was then used as a guide for the spontaneous application of water color onto another larger piece of paper. Energetic brushstrokes and numerous layers of color combined to produce an effect of swirling water. In order to create a design from the original painting, a small "window" was made from a piece of matt board and used to find exciting compositions and color combinations from within the original painting. This was eventually cut up into 5" by 5" squares. Using my original line drawing as a reference, these 5" by 5" squares were rearranged according to color and the direction of brushstrokes. The result was a unified composition.

Using silk broadcloth, three pieces were carefully sewn together to form a
large painting surface measuring 10' by 11'. This was then tacked onto a frame and because the latter was not large enough to allow painting the entire surface at once, it was painted in sections using the French Dyes and painting methods already described for Movement I. Once the painting was complete, the drawn design was then transferred onto the silk with a water soluble ink pen.

In accordance with the original line drawing, the silk was stitched with silk thread. This was done using a combination of running stitches on a single thickness (maki-age shibori, see photograph 2,2a), double thickness (ori-nui shibori, see photograph 3,3a), or an overcast stitch on a double thickness (maki-nui shibori, photograph 4,4a). By using three different kinds of stitches in a particular design, the traditional technique was consequently modified. After three weeks, the stitching was completed and the fabric was drawn up into tight gathers along the stitching lines, bound with connected cotton thread, and secured by knotting.

As with Movement I, the whole piece of gathered silk was immersed in water. It was then twisted and tied in large, loose knots and subjected to five different dye baths. Among these were deep greens, browns, and blues, all colors found in the ocean depths. Before the silk was immersed in the increasingly darker dye baths the knots were either added, removed or changed to accomodate design changes. The fabric was then dried naturally, the stitching completely removed and the silk was pressed.

The final part of Movement II is the edge of the fabric. Rather than hemming the silk and thereby loose or interrupt the natural image of the fabric
and the flow of the design, the unhemmed fringe continues the image of sparkling sand and marine colors - an integral part of both Movement I and Movement II.
CONCLUSION.

For years I have enjoyed working in water colors, however the emphasis in my formal educational studies has been on the textile arts. While I was studying in New York in 1984, I had a chance to see the exhibit "KOSODE 16TH - 19TH CENTURY TEXTILES FROM THE NOMURA COLLECTION" at the Japan House in New York City. What drew my attention in this exhibition was the way in which the materials and the processes responded to the artist's hand. The relationship between my hand and the resulting images created through Shibori enable me to have the kind of control I feel essential in creating a work with integrity.

Understanding and creating this technique from a technical and emotional base was initially unsuccessful. But, through trial and error I arrived at some unique technical solutions that would help fulfill my aspirations. Stitching, a tension exerted on the shape of a fabric, and the transformation of colors that occurred during dyeing and discharging, all contained infinite variation in color, pattern and texture. In experimenting with the fabric I was inspired to explore three-dimensionality in a slightly different manner. In contrast to the obvious three dimensionality of a sculpture, Painted-Shibori is concerned with a two dimensional form. But because of the crinkled surface, elastic shapes, and variations in color, the appearance of three dimensionality is created.

In the first section of this thesis I discussed the history of Shibori, later I presented my work as a continuation of this historical process. A consideration of my future work in Shibori is therefore a natural extension of
this discussion. There are, as there have always been, many possibilities for future work in Shibori:

1. To produce the Shibori technique as a painting as seen in Movement I and Movement II.
2. To create sculptured forms, all obviously three dimensional such as containers, baskets, and various garment forms.
3. To use the technique solely for fabric design whose function would be every day fashion wear. This is something common to various periods in Japanese textile history.
4. To apply Shibori to a different medium such as paper. The latter retains the shape into which it has been manipulated that would serve as both an added surface element and as a new form.

As we have seen, Shibori is a dynamic technique in a changing world. I have taken advantage of this as is illustrated in the Painted-Shibori described throughout this essay. However, I do not see my involvement in Shibori in a finite or temporary state but rather on a continuum of change, a process that has been, and probably will be, repeated for generations.
Figure 1: Motif from "Legends of Shigi-san Temple".

Figure 2: Example of "divided dyeing" (somewake) dated 1309.

Figure 3: "Pine bark lozenge" motif (matsukawabishi) of tsujigahana textiles.
Drawing 1: Criscross binding.

Photograph 1: The combination of stitching and binding.
Photograph 2: Running stitch on a single thickness.

Photograph 2a: Maki-age shibori.
Photograph 3: Running stitch on a double thickness.

Photograph 3a: Ori-nui shibori.
Photograph 4: Overcast stitch on a double thickness.

Photograph 4a: Maki-nui shibori.
Photograph 5: Movement 1 (approximately 5’x 5’6”).
Photograph 5a: Detail in Movement I.
Photograph 6: Movement II (approximately 10' x 11').
Photograph 6a: Detail in Movement II.
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Kasuri.  This is the Japanese term for ikat, and involves the process of patterning cloth by binding yarns before weaving, so as to reserve areas from dye. It requires calculation of where the reserved areas of yarn will appear in the final woven piece.

Katazome.  This is paste-resist stencil dyeing. Rice paste is applied through a special paper stencil to resist selected areas from dye. The fabric is often dip-dyed, but sometimes dye is applied by brush or thickened and applied with a tube. Bingata is the bright, polychrome katazome developed in Okinawa.

Keicho kosode.  A style of kosode that was first popular during the Keicho era (1596AD-1614AD). Typically, interlocking or overlapping areas for contrasting colors and complex, disparate designs fill the entire ground. Somewake, shibori, and nuihaku were most often used.

Kimono.  The traditional garment of Japan that developed from the kosode during the early Edo period (1615AD-1868AD). It is a straight-cut, wrap-around robe worn with a sash (obi).

Kokechi.  An ancient term for tied or bound resist. Examples from the seventh and eighth centuries are in the Shoso-in repository.

Kyokechi.  An ancient Japanese resist process in which the cloth is folded and then clamped between carved wooden blocks. Several colors are applied through holes in the blocks that form reservoirs for the dye. Examples from the seventh and eighth centuries are in the Shoso-in collection.

Matsukawabishi.  "Pine bark lozenge", a geometric motif composed of three superimposed diamond forms (see figure 3) used as an all over repeating pattern as well as a single unit.

Nuihaku.  A combination of embroidery and applied gold or silver leaf (see surihaku).

Obi.  A sash worn with the kimono. A woman’s obi is wide and tied in a large knot or bow. A man’s obi is narrow and worn around the hips.

Overdyeing.  Dyeing one color over another to obtain a desired hue, i.e. yellow overdyed with indigo produces green.
Reserve or Resist.  A substance or technique used to protect an area of yarn or textile from dye.

Resist dyeing.  Patterning of yarn or fabric by protecting selected areas from dye. Patterns can be created by the application of substances such as wax, paste, and mud, and by physically manipulating the cloth. Typical of this process are ikat (kasuri), batik, paste and stencil dyeing (katazome), and shibori.

Rokechi.  An ancient term for wax-resist dyeing. The Shoso-in collection has examples of this from the seventh and eighth centuries.

Somewake.  Dyeing in which large areas of ground are dyed in different colors. This technique is typical of tsujigahana and Keicho kosode textiles.

Surihaku.  The stenciled application of gold or silver leaf using a special adhesive. Tsujigahana textiles and Keicho kosode provide examples of surihaku.

Tsujigahana.  The name given to a group of textiles that became fashionable during the latter part of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The literature and surviving examples show the fashionable clothing of this period to be made of silk. Stitched shibori of both large and small areas is used to achieve the typical effects of tsujigahana.