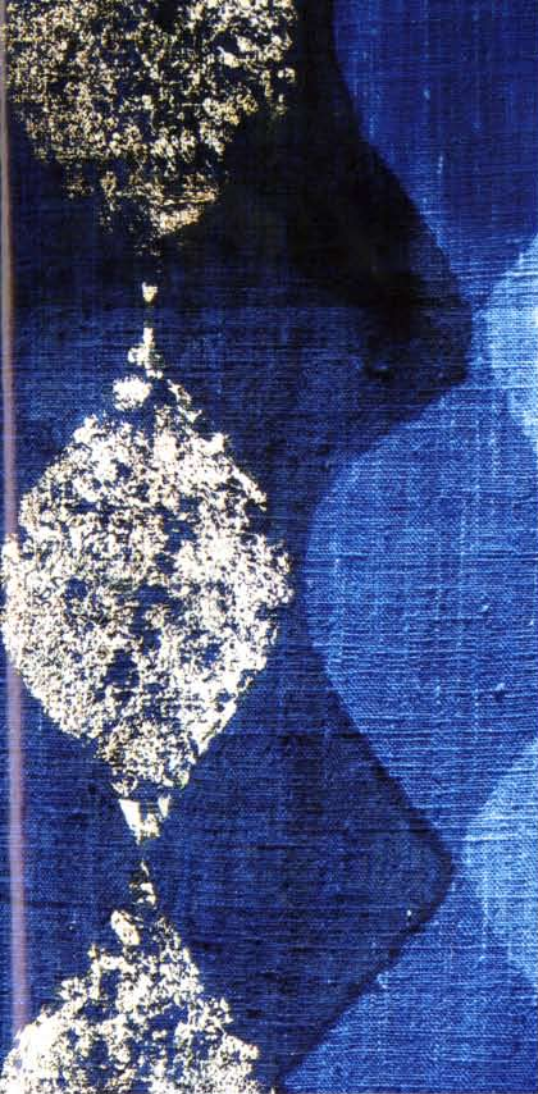


SIMON MARKS UNRAVELS THE MYSTERIES OF TEXTILES

TEXT & PHOTOS: MICHELE CEMPAKA





Left: Simon's feet are stained with the same indigo dye he used to create this beautiful textile entitled: 'A thousand Suns'

Above left: texture and color are harmoniously combined in this cloth which is from Tuban in Java. Above right: This piece called 'Gargoyles' has a primitive motif with warm earthy colors.

High up on a hill in Ubud lives Simon Marks: a part-time resident of Bali who originally hails from England. Artist isn't a label that Simon is fond of. In fact, he admits to hating that label because it has so many connotations that are associated with good and bad.

"I just make stuff," said Simon welcoming me into his charming home. Simon has lived quite an extraordinary life. He worked in theatre for many years making costumes and even did a stint at one of the most prestigious theatres in London, The Globe.

"I've always liked making stuff. I could never seem to get it together there in London, so I ran off and joined the Cirque Du Soleil. I found that it was quite contained in a way. It was a job, so you did this and that, or whatever was expected of you."

His time with the Cirque Du Soleil gave him

the opportunity to save a great deal of money, which funded his travels throughout Asia for a year-and-a-half. During this time he became interested in the techniques of textile making in India.

"I wanted to know how to get the natural colours that they were using. I liked the natural dyes because they have a sort of earthiness and they aren't so even and flat. They have a living color and dimensionality to them. For the past three years I've been making my own stuff."

He works with whatever materials inspire him, such as cotton or wool. When Simon first came to Indonesia he was inspired by the cloth from Tuban in Java, which is hand spun and hand woven and has a very rough texture.

"Something that is done by hand has energy and a life to it that you don't find when you use block prints."

While Simon experimented in India with

block designs which he drew and then had someone carve into blocks, he currently does all of his own dying by hand.

According to Simon, before textiles can be painted you must prime the textile like you would prime a canvas otherwise the paint will just flake off. This process is called 'mordant' which means to bite or adhere to the textile. After this mordant is applied the color can then be safely applied. For Simon, this process is like 'alchemy of transformation.'

"You use roots and herbs and transform them into a colour. So you're coaxing colour from roots, leaves, tree, bark and minerals – it's creating something harmonious and beautiful. To me, this style of work is almost a meditation."

Simon takes a bit of a Buddhist perspective on life and his work; he is concerned about where things come from and feels that's why it's



even more important to use natural dyes in a conscientious way. "There aren't that many natural dyes so you're depleting resources by using them."

Simon's first exhibition was held at Alila in September. He sold a few of his textiles and feels that now is the time to start marketing his work even though it's all very new to him. All the time he spent in both India and Thailand learning how to create textiles has served him well. While in India, he began with 'Kalamkari' which is a pen technique of drawing with bamboo on to cloth with mordant, followed by paint and colours. Cow dung is then used to strip away the excess colours. The result is a collage effect with different layers of paint.

In the future, Simon would like to exhibit around Asia. When asked what his vision is for creating his textiles and what he hopes to express by creating them Simon said, "It depends on what inspires me – it's all about inspiration. Without inspiration I don't think there can be expression. Something has to come from something. Nothing comes from out of nothing."

Simon's sources of inspiration are abundant: "Fabrics, things that are hand woven, esoteric texts, ripples on the waves, dreams, turban cloths in India, the clickety clack of the loom, the deep depths of Indigo, the time and love and attention that's used to make it something.

"you're coaxing colour from roots, leaves, tree, bark and minerals – creating something harmonious and beautiful."

That's what gives a creation a resonance – it has a focus and a repetition. Something that's been made by hand has been done a lot of times, and that repetition is like a mantra; if you say something more and more it creates more of an energy. That gives a thing its power. The process involved is transforming that through the alchemy of natural dyeing and the techniques. The process to me is very important as well. I don't know how it's going to turn out. I don't have a drawing. Sometimes I let things go along until I stop or until it's ruined, so making mistakes is also part of the process because that's how we learn."

Marks' work is all part of the energy of transformation. He feels that his textiles are for people who appreciate objects that have

been handmade.

"I would like to think that something I've made has some kind of affinity with them."

As I look at each piece, each with its own unique flavour, rich colours and movement, I feel this affinity that he is referring to. I want to take home several of his textiles and either drape them around me or hang them on my walls. Whether he wants to call himself an artist or not doesn't really matter, he has definitely got something special going on.

So what's next, Simon?

"The East is opening up for me – I have no desire to return to England," he says with a decisive smile. **FRV**

Left: 'Tree' was inspired by the abundant natural environment in Bali.

Top right: Madda Shibori on Silk.

Bottom right: Hand-carved Ottoman block which is used to make block prints on textiles.