

Catharine Ellis

Artist Statement

After many years of hand-weaving, exploring shibori on my loom, and working with chemical dyes, I now find myself using Jacquard design, industrial production, and natural plant dyes in my textiles.

The combination of Jacquard design and woven shibori has given me a freedom that would not be possible with my traditional dobbie loom, allowing large scale exploration of design, pattern, and resist. The actual weaving of the cloth is done on an industrial loom at The Oriole Mill in Hendersonville, North Carolina, yet my own hand is involved in the process from beginning to end. I design the fabrics using computer software, define each of the fabric specifications, gather the shibori threads by hand, and subsequently mordant and dye the cloth in my studio. It is a perfect combination of “machine” and “hand” and as in all hand work, there are many trials and errors before the final piece.

As I faced issues of a fragile water disposal system and a shallow hand dug well at my dye studio, I made the decision to return to the roots of my first dye experience and work with natural plant dyes. The challenge of using these dyes effectively on cotton fabrics has led me to travel and study with masters who have helped me to develop an effective process for mordanting, dyeing and discharging.

Some of the dye plants I use come from my own garden, bringing me closer to my landscape, which continues to be one of the greatest inspirations for my work. My wish for the viewer is to see the richness of the natural colors as they combine with the natural nuances of the shibori resist.