

## YOSHIKO WADA

*Selvedge talks to the world-renowned textile artist and Shibori expert*

**Yoshiko Wada** is president of the World Shibori Network and founder of Slow Fiber Studios. Yoshiko has led international tours for the Shibori Network and the coveted LongHouse Reserve's *Insiders Tours to Japan and India*. Each has been a unique experience; a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to engage with the people, history, and culture of the country visited. Her books include *Memory on Cloth: Shibori Now* and *Shibori: The Inventive Art of Japanese Shaped Resist Dyeing*.

**LG: Did you grow up in a creative house?**

**YW:** My paternal grandmother owned one of the first, if not the first dressmaking schools in Japan, while my maternal grandmother was from a family of traditional kimono makers. I grew up in Japan at a time when women still cared about kimono and spoke about it. I absorbed their knowledge and understood their passion.

**LG: After studying traditional dyeing and weaving you moved to America to study conceptual art. What prompted that?**

**YW:** When I was young I knew the story of my paternal grandmother who lived in Europe in the 1920s and 30s, so I was interested in going abroad to study. When I met my fiancé, he was about to go to the USA, so when I graduated from the Kyoto City University of Fine Arts, where I majored in textile arts, I joined him.

In the 1960s in the USA, craft was not yet considered as important as more established fields such as painting and sculpture. Therefore when I applied to the University of Colorado with

my BFA in Textile Art (which had focused on resist dyeing media such as katazome, paste resist stencil dyeing, or ro-ketsu, wax-resist dyeing, besides weaving) the fine arts school placed me in the print-making section. Eventually my focus turned to conceptual art when my art seminars introduced me to the cutting edge art scene of the 1960s. My interest in traditional textile processes such as ikat and shibori, which I approached as 'compression-resist media', was about highlighting the resist dyeing process, particularly mark-making, and memory on cloth, which comes from the interaction between the maker's hands and body and the pliable material. Researching and writing about Japanese kasuri and shibori made me aware of the precarious nature of those traditions. In my work today, it is natural for me to always think of the parallel between the traditional and contemporary, and comment on the similarities and differences. This comes from my conceptual art training.

**LG: How does contemporary shibori differ to traditional shibori?**

**YW:** Traditional shibori production focuses on the visual effects of design and colours, which are executed through fine craftsmanship to create items such as kimono and yukata. In contrast, contemporary shibori employs compression-resist/shibori techniques in art and western fashion items, as well as in architectural elements, by harnessing the two-dimensional to three-dimensional transformation of material. A good example would be Issey Miyake's multitude of creations that use a combination of polyester

and heat-setting to create shapes and texture by accessing modern technological development in the field of textiles.

**LG: How has India influenced your work?**

**YW:** My interest in India was sparked because India is where Buddhism began, which profoundly shaped Japanese culture. With Buddhism came the related arts and crafts, including textiles. Many of these textiles travelled through China, along the silk road. The Todaiji temple in Nara contains remarkable resist dyed textiles including shibori and ikat, some of which may have originated in India. So as well as the cultural connection, the two resist-media I am involved with in my work, also connect me to India.

**LG: You are an influential figure in the 'art-to-wear' movement, tell me more?**

**YW:** I have used 'kimono' as a framework for my artworks. In *Valentine Juban* (the under-layer of kimono) which was in red and white and executed by capped-resist shibori, the work commented on the way Japanese women kept bright and daring colours and pattern underneath. Red used to be dyed with safflower which faded easily and so represented the fleeting nature of passion. Another example is *Coca Cola Kimono* in the collection of the de Young Museum in San Francisco, which made use of popular images of daily life, capturing them on the cloth.

\*\*\*Laura Gray.

**Yoshiko will lead Selvedge's textiles of India tour in January 2020. For details [www.selvedge.org](http://www.selvedge.org)**

Marc Tailleur

