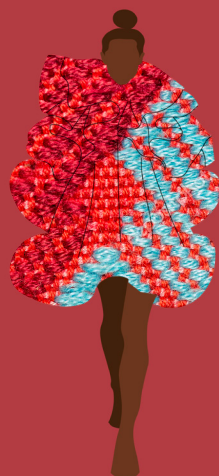
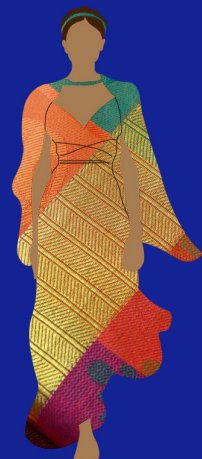
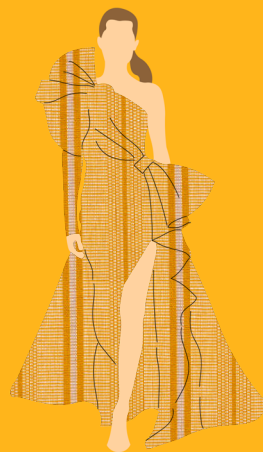




WEAVING DESIGNS

Is the Fashion Scene Keeping traditional weaving techniques alive?





WEAVING DESIGNS



WEAVING DESIGNS

Is the Fashion Scene Keeping traditional weaving techniques alive?

Design: Valeria Alvarado
Typeface: Abril Fatface
Freight sans



Table of Contents

- 2 Curatorial Statemet
- 14 **Navajo** Southwestern United States
- 32 **Huichol** Mexican Weaving
- 46 **Guatemala** Villages through
the modern day Guatemala
- 64 **Peruvian** Andes Mountain Region
- 82 **Kente** Ghanaian traditional technique
- 96 **Saree** India
- 108 **Silk Weaving** China

Curatorial Statement

This publication attempts to walk through antique weaving techniques worldwide and how these are translated into modern and contemporary fashion through designers who strive to keep them alive.

Weaving dates back to 1255-605 BCE when stone tools for preparing bark cloth were found in the Sagung Cave of southern Palawan and Arku Cave of Peñablanca, Cagayan. Humans have used this technique to create clothing, ceremonial garments, house objects, and bags to carry and transport goods, objects, and even babies.

Different communities have a unique perspective on this antique, thriving, and valuable procedure throughout the world. Although all of the takes on weaving start from the same general idea of interweaving threads, wool, yarn, or any other material, the patterns, texture, colors, and meaning are unique and speak to the communities heritage and characteristics.

Due to fast fashion, the automatization of fabric making, and the technology behind new weaving techniques, antique weaving techniques have taken a backseat. Commoners who keep their cultural weaving alive have stopped practicing it or translating their knowledge to younger generations. This break in the cultural thread creates enormous losses in the journey of preserving artistic traditions.

Nowadays, thousands of non-profit organizations support these weavers worldwide to help them get the platform they need to access the commercial

realm that appreciates handmade local creativity and cultural richness. The most successful scene to this is the modern and contemporary fashion around the world.

Designers proud to acknowledge their heritage and recognize the value of these antique techniques have introduced them into high fashion. Whole fabrics created by weaving communities, applications to enhance the garment, luxurious handmade materials uplift the modern designs by creating an exciting balance between the old and the new.

The different weaving procedures around the world make inspiring products that the same heritage designers are looking to. All around the world, designers are seeking inspiration for those intricate weaving pieces to inform their making.

This worldwide situation hits home for me as a designer as well. Since I'm an incredibly proud Peruvian, I choose to enhance my culture, traditions, and unique handmade local artistry through my own design journey. Peruvian vibrant color palette informs my design aesthetic, its form-making inform my creation, and now I'm mesmerized by its deeply rooted weaving communities and techniques. This directly informs my storytelling and my interviewing of concepts as they interweave threads and wool to create masterpieces.

Let's start the adventure to discover some ancient techniques through eight different countries and four different continents and how new generation designers are translating these techniques into a high fashion scene while helping the communities to maintain their cultural traditions alive.

Everybody can do their own small part to enhance any cultural tradition that is being left behind. For me, it's weaving right now, try and figure out what's it for your own life experience. Don't forget to do your part and buy locally, support handmade and help the cultural traditions stay alive.

NAVAJO
Southwestern United States





Navajo Weaving

A History

Many Americans have heard about and even own Navajo rugs. They were those quaint *objects that grandma and grandpa brought* home from the Southwest generations ago. *Usually, they were poorly regarded and* roughly used and never respected as anything but *rugs. Sure, everyone knew they* wore well – in fact some outwear more traditional floor *coverings. Almost everyone* with a horse had a saddle blanket, but they were just Navajo *rugs. Who cared? The* romance had been lost in the shuffle. People used them, stored them, *wore them out* or just discarded them. So what's the hoopla about now? Why was a Navajo *blanket sold* at auction by Sotheby in New York for more than \$100,000 in 1983?*

How come astute collectors flock to auctions and Indian shows to buy Navajo *weaving from the* last century? Why do so many Decorator magazines feature contemporary *Navajo weavings in* stylish homes and offices? The answer to all of this questions lies in the *realization that the products* of the Navajo loom are true Native American folk art. Indeed, what *is more American than a Navajo* weaving. It was born on the loom of the Pueblo Indians *of the southwest who wove cotton apparel* and later with wool of Spanish sheep acquired by *raiding Spanish ranches in the mid-seventeenth century.* Weaving appeared in the tra-

dition of Pueblo mantas or shoulder *blankets*. *The two-piece dress evolved in the late 18 century and by 1800 Navajo weaving had reached the peak of perfection. The famed Chief blankets and serapes were developed during the Nineteenth Century and became highly prized trade items. The beauty of these superbly woven blankets exceeded the weavings available in the American West. Very few pieces from the early era survive and those that do are housed mostly in museums and private collections.*

So how does this pertain to the weaving of today? Only in *the sense that the events* described above and the evolution of various styles of weaving such as *the Chief's blankets*, serapes and finally rugs set the stage for dramatic events that changed the *future of weaving*. One must bear in mind that the American west was not a civilized place when *the Spanish* arrived in the late Sixteenth Century.

It was only slightly more civilized when the Spanish lost control to Mexico in the *early 1820s*. Violence had been the keystone. Spanish armies captured Navajo and Apache *alike and* forced them into slavery. Navajo bands raided the Spanish ranches and inflicted *terror on the* people. The more sheep a man had the greater his wealth. This lowly *animal provided food*, fiber and riches. The marauding Navajo bands drove home the *sheep that provided the wool* for the talented weavers.

So how does this pertain to the weaving of today? *Only in the sense that the events* described above and the evolution of various styles *of weaving such as the Chief's blankets*, serapes and finally rugs set the stage for *dramatic events that changed the future of weaving*. One must bear in mind that *the American west was not a civilized place when the Spanish* arrived in the late *Sixteenth Century*. *It was only slightly more civilized when the Spanish* lost control *to Mexico in the early 1820s*. *Violence had been the keystone. Spanish armies captured Navajo and Apache alike and forced them into slavery. Navajo bands raided the Spanish ranches and inflicted terror on the people. The more sheep a man had the greater his wealth. This lowly animal provided food, fiber and riches. The marauding Navajo bands drove home the sheep that provided the wool for the talented weavers.*

When considering a Navajo *rug - the common terminology for all Navajo weaving - it* is important to realize that the product *is one hundred percent handmade. There are no* machine made Navajo rugs. There are imitations *which are occasionally mislabeled as genuine* Navajo rugs. A reputable dealer will advise you *how to determine if a rug is genuine*. Weaving is traditionally taught by mother to daughter. The *youngster is first taught to clean* the wool, then to spin and finally a small loom is assembled, and *the warp is strung*.

Patterns and designs are rarely diagrammed and even the youngest *weaver is taught to* plan her designs and colors in her head – to visualize the complete product. *The Navajo loom* is upright as opposed to the horizontal type used in Mexican and Spanish weaving. *The exact* length and width of the textile must be planned because the ends or selvage is attached *before* any weaving is done. The wool is washed, carded and spun, and in some cases *dyed*. *Only* after this labored work is accomplished can the weaving begin.

Navajo weaving is constantly changing. In the latter part of the *19th century* the white traders influenced the patterns, designs and sizes of *Navajo rugs*. *Pri-*

or to this period most weaving was for wearing blankets and garments. The *demand for the fine old blankets* declined while the demand for rugs grew. *The traders suggested patterns and provided* a market for the finished product. Rugs were *often bought by the pound and sold by the bale to outlets* in the east. There they competed *with oriental rugs and factory made products. Quality didn't* matter, quantity did. The *quality of Navajo weaving sharply declined. It became obvious to some far* sighted traders that *this pound rug mentality would destroy the art. So traders such as* Lorenzo Hubbell at Ganado from 1883 until 1930, J.B. Moore at Crystal and several others took *a direct hand in influencing the course of Navajo weaving.*

Hubbell loved red and encouraged his weavers to use the new aniline dyes to weave exquisite red-dominated rugs. Hubbell also encouraged the weaver to recreate in *contemporary material the designs of the past. Today these products of the* “Hubbell revival” *are highly prized items. At the Crystal Trading Post from 1896* until 1911, J.B. Moore *emphasized the oriental or Persian influence so popular with* buyers in the east. A mail *order catalog showing the characteristic Crystal patterns* was printed and distributed by *Moore who disliked the idea of buying and selling* by the pound but bowed to the desires *of his customers. These old Crystal patterns have largely disappeared from contemporary weaving. Today the* Crystal area is famed for the vegetal dyed rugs designed with a *striped motif.*

Speaking of vegetal dyes it may be something of a surprise to learn that this was not an *old Navajo tradition*. In the late 1930s, Bill and Sally Lippincott bought the Wide Ruins Trading Post and encouraged the use of vegetal and native dyes. They upgraded the designs and *quality so that now, fifty years* later, the Wide Ruins area is the source of many pleasing and *exquisitely woven rugs. No article* on Navajo weaving would be complete without mentioning *the famous Two Grey Hills designs*. The neighboring trading posts of Two Grey Hills and Toadlena are the homes of these beautiful weavings. Early traders, Ed Davies at Two Grey Hills and George Bloomfield at Toadlena took over the posts about 1909. In his book,

Navajo Rugs – Past – Present and Future, Gilbert Maxwell describes how these two men spent “long patient hours on their knees, not praying, but going over each stitch of the *rug with the weaver.*” *Fine points were complimented, encouragement given to improve, always improve. Quality was rewarded by better prices and soon the rugs* became known *as the finest available.*

Today, the Two Grey Hills remains the premium creation of the Navajo loom. Expert *weavers, using the techniques of their ancestors, weave fine* tapestries with a thread count of *the weft exceeding one hundred threads per inch*. Still the amount of time that it takes to weave *a Two Grey Hills tapestry quality* - eighty warp threads or finer – is amazing. We purchased a *tapestry in 1982 from* a fine weaver, the daughter of a fine weaver. The piece was twenty inches *by thirty-two* inches. It was on the loom for fourteen months! Forty-five extra days were spent *in preparation* of the wool before weaving began. For this work she was paid almost \$9,000. *Recently she informed us* that it was too much work for the money and she planned to become a

computer operator in Gallup.

This brings us to an important point. For years we have been hearing that Navajo *weaving is doomed*. In some respects this is true. The majority of weavers are thirty-*five years of age or older*. Many weavers are active until they reach sixty or seventy *but the majority give up the hard work by the age of fifty-five*. Fewer and fewer young *women are learning the art. It is just too much work!* During the recent economic *hard times many weavers who had depended on off-reservation work returned to the loom. However, it always amazes me that the contemporary Navajo weaver has no great sense of history or a link with the wonderful weavers of the past. There is no compelling historic reason to weave simply because her mother is a weaver and grandmother may have been. If the money is good, weaving is continued. If it isn't, then the weavers will tend to quit altogether. For this reason there will always be Navajo weavers active at the loom. Poorer weavers will drop off along the line and the better ones will receive better and better prices. Relating to prices I am always amused when some- one says, "I bought a rug like that right after the war for \$40 and you want \$400." I wonder if they have bought a car lately. Navajo families are subject to the same pressures that we are. Sure the roads are better and the pickup has replaced the wagon but they still have living expenses in a primitive hogan or modern home. Our philosophy is not to pay as little as we can but to pay the weaver as much as we can. Most traders feel this way. Recognition is so important to weaver and ultimate owner alike. Names and photos are also important. Wouldn't it be wonderful to know who the weaver was of the fine old blankets? We never will, but we can document for the future. Recent trends in Navajo weaving point up an important fact about the attitude of the weaver. Frequently we see a swing away from the old "regional" design concept. Serious weavers are doing their own thing. They don't want to be bound by tradition and are creating new and marvelous designs. Vegetal weavers are working with colors. Pictorial weavers are creating new landscapes and whimsical settings.*

Storm patterns are emerging with imaginative variations. *Whole new "areas" are coming to the forefront. Serious weavers are showing innovation and boldness by the use of color and design. I refer specifically to a family whom we call the "Barber and Begay family" who live in a place not known for fine weaving. Spectacular designs in combination with vegetal dyes and natural wool colors give new hope for similar creativity in other locales. We were amazed when we were first presented with one of these weavings. "Two Grey Hills?" "No!" "Teec Nos Pos, probably!" "No - It is MY pattern. It is my rug. It is a Helen Begay rug." Interestingly, the entire family group shares this feeling. There is always some new and exciting development in weaving. The study of contemporary Navajo weaving is continually stimulating, always rewarding, never dull!*

There are many concerns *about the future of weaving. First is compensation. If the prices are not satisfactory and rewarding, the weavers will no longer weave. There is the concern of soaring birthrates and the consequent lack of grazing land for everyone in Navajoland. Wool, in many cases, must be purchased from outside sources as not every family has sheep. Family life in isolated compounds and remote camps is being changed by hous-*

ing projects, government jobs, welfare and off reservation employment. Weaving projects in certain areas are not successful because the compensation of the weaver is by the hour and quality is not stressed. However, there are many talented weavers. They are weaving away relatively unhindered by some of the above mentioned factors. The quality of weaving today is in most cases superior to anything in the past. Only in some of the great blankets of a century or more ago do we see equal skill manifested.

Are Navajo rugs a good investment? The answer is a qualified "Yes." While I do not believe in buying any art as an investment, I suggest buying it for enjoyment now and in the future. If you choose wisely and carefully, select what you like and depend on a knowledgeable dealer to advise you, it can be an investment. If you expect a quick profit, forget it. Prices have risen dramatically as the quality of weaving improved and the numbers of weavers declined. This trend should continue. Above all, study, read and learn. Then enjoy owning a fine Navajo weaving. No, Navajo weaving is not dead. It is alive and well and totally acceptable in modern homes and offices. Reputable dealers are located throughout the United States. Weavers are busy at their looms weaving the rugs and tapestries and pictorials that will become heirlooms. Navajo weaving is an exciting art form - a truly American art form and a joy to own and collect. What is more American than a Navajo rug?





SUNNY FITZGERALD

Can Indigenous Knowledge Move the Fashion Industry Forward?

Some of the most influential Indigenous People in the industry weigh in...

To innovate, we often look ahead. But sometimes, the best way forward is found in *traditional knowledge. Here, we ask fashion, textile, and apparel industry professionals around the world how their cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge shape their work—and how it might help move the fashion industry in a more sustainable direction.*

Culture Is a Vital Resource

Louie Gong: Nooksack tribal member of mixed *heritage; artist and founder of Eighth Generation* in Seattle, Washington. In November of 2019, *Louie sold Eighth Generation to the Snoqualmie Tribe. He remains CEO under a multi-year agreement.*

Sustainability is not only about environmental *conservation*. *“I always talk about cultural art like a natural resource,” Native American (Nooksack) designer Louie Gong says. “We have to be stewards of that resource by nurturing it. If we keep taking without stewardship, eventually, we destroy it.”*

Gong believes that failure to respect and protect Native art is one of the reasons some **cultural arts are disappearing**. When companies sell “Native-inspired” products without **actually working with Native artists, it’s a loss for us** all. “Every fake piece of art has a fake story to go with it. And every fake product represents a missed opportunity for a cultural artist. Fewer people are practicing [cultural art], because it’s hard to make a living from it.”

Gong’s company, Eighth Generation, is on a **mission to change that—creating economic opportunities for Indigenous artists and offering authentic products to consumers**. “We’re committed to always working with an **Indigenous artist when we’re putting Indigenous art on products**,” Gong explains. “The artists **are paid, and if they need it, we provide them with business capacity building**.”

When cultural arts are celebrated rather than appropriated, everyone wins: Consumers receive authentic products, artists are fairly compensated, and the related businesses and communities also benefit. “Collaborating with an Indigenous artist [as Eighth Generation does] **doesn’t just pay off for the individual artist**,” Gong says. “If you choose a **community-engaged artist, they’ll take the skills that they’ve learned and amplify them**.”

Gong recognizes that the value extends well **beyond what bottom lines can account for**. “There are more currencies to pursue than just **money**. **Education and long-term opportunities for people like us are other currencies we pursue**.”

This holistic, conscientious, community-minded approach that’s rooted in his heritage is proving to be good business as well: Eighth **Generation is the fastest-growing privately owned Native business in North America**.

Being Mindful Is Always in Style

Jamie Okuma: Native American of Luiseño and Shoshone-Bannock descent; fashion designer and creator of Jamie Okuma on the La Jolla Indian reservation in California.

For Native American designer Jamie Okuma, sustainability is second nature. She was raised on the La Jolla Indian reservation and still lives there today with her husband and two sons. From the eco-friendly materials she uses to the imagery she creates, Okuma makes mindful choices guided by her heritage and upbringing.

“All of my work has tradition at its core,” she says. “**For example, [in our culture] every part of the deer or buffalo is used. So I try to utilize everything possible in my work—with my art, supplies, fabric—and not be wasteful. I even save the scraps and find uses for them.**”

Okuma also produces a limited number of pieces, **avoiding excessive overstock and offering customers something bold and unique yet timeless and high quality**. “**We all have those go-to pieces in our closet that we keep for years and literally wear out before we retire them,**” she says. “I’m here to make the go-tos, the keepers.”

Prior to the launch of her latest collection, she sent a note to her subscribers, reaffirming her commitment to sustainable fashion and urging people to consider that poor

working conditions and low-quality, unsustainable fabrics are often behind fast fashion and inexpensive clothing.

“**Slow fashion is ethical,**” she wrote. “**I didn’t want to make trendy pieces that are in one season and out the other. They are collectible staple pieces meant to be worn for years to come ... they are meant to make you feel good knowing this collection was created with everyone’s best interest at heart.**”

Jamie Okuma in collaboration with Jared
Yazzie of ODX



**Sometimes, the best
way forward is found in
traditional knowledge**

HUICHOL

MEXICAN WEAVING



CHERYL'S TRADING POST

Huichol Weaving

The Huichol (Wixarika in their own language) are a tribe of Native Indians that live in the **Sierra Madre** mountains of western Mexico. They have preserved much of their culture and **way of life into** the present by moving to an isolated area high in the mountains, and by **fighting against** and resisting colonization and assimilation. They continue to speak their language, **practice their** own religion, make and wear their traditional clothes, and gather and grow **their own foods**.

Weaving knowledge has been passed down from grandmother to granddaughter since **time immemorial**. **It's a spiritual practice that is fundamental** to Huichol female identity and culture. A woman will provide woven items **for her family** until she is no longer physically able. Then she will spin yarn for the younger **women to weave**. When she passes away her loom will be buried with her. Takutsi, the great **creator goddess** is a spinner and weaver, and also a helper to the weavers.

The steps taken in producing **a woven textile** are - preparing fibers, spinning yarn, laying the warp threads, stringing **the loom, and** weaving. Huichol women employ a backstrap loom. That is a flexible loom **composed of strings** of yarn and wooden parts. One end is tied around the woman's back, **and the other around a tree or post**. **Spindles and loom parts are** hand carved from various **trees that have spiritual power to help weavers communicate with** the gods. Traditional **fibers continue to be used in woven ceremonial** offerings, but have been largely replaced **by sheep's** wool in other weavings, although native cotton continues to be used widely. **Traditional** vegetable dyes have largely been replaced by commercial dyes. The Huichol like the **bright colors**. Women no longer weave blankets and clothes.

They embroider factory made **cloth, and** weave belts, straps, and bags. The time and work previously spent in weaving **larger textiles** is now invested in finer weaving, double weave, and elaborate designs on **smaller articles**.

Girls start learning to process fibers that will be made into yarn or thread at about six **year old**. **They remove seeds from cotton and** save them for planting. They wash wool with soap in the river, then hang it to dry in **the sun**. They separate strands of acrylic yarn to be re-spun into finer yarn. During these **times oral** history is passed down to them. Spinning lessons begin about the same time. Both **boys and** girls help with making loom tools. By age 3 or 4 children are able to use knives and **machetes**. By 9 they are able to make tools from softwoods. As young adults they carve the **harder** woods for loom bars, pickup sticks and battens. Girls begin learning to string up small **looms when very young**. **Huichol** girls learn to weave by watching and copying more experienced **family members, and are supervised** by their grandmothers. The first weaving project **is a plain weave bag strap with a geometric** design. By the time a girl reaches puberty she will have already learned to make **all her clothes**, embroider, and weave plain-weave fabrics. She now must learn to create double-**weave arti-**cles, beginning with belts which can be used around the waist, or as headbands, **and are** strong enough to be used as rope to secure animals. Then wide men's belts and bags.

Apprenticeship to become a master artist is a five year commitment. **Usually embroi-**dery, beading and weaving are learned together. **Vows are made that must be fulfilled to** complete the commitment. Single women must **abstain from sex, and married women** must abstain from extramarital sex for the entire **duration**. Guidance from the gods must be sought in dreams. A shaman must supervise the **apprenticeship**. He or she will give instructions concerning which gods, or helper spirits **to rely on**. Ceremonies and pilgrimages must be attended. The required offerings must **be made** - miniature looms and miniature weavings, as **well as prayer arrows, beeswax candles**, beaded gourd bowls, and the blood of sacrificed **animals are left when asking for help and** guidance. Plant allies such as peyote will be chosen as spirit guides. **Animal allies** (particularly reptiles) are also sought to help increase health, knowledge, ability **and personal** power. Finally the weaver must sponsor a ceremony that marks the completion **of her initiation**. If someone doesn't complete her apprenticeship, she may get sick, or her **family may suffer**. Spiritual experience and expression are not separate from acquiring and **expressing technical** competence.

There are different types **or classifications of designs**. **Some designs are** learned or copied from previous weavings **created by family members or ancestors, or seen** in ceremonies, photographs, collections, or libraries. Peyote visions (patterns, **colors, and** figures) are believed to have much spiritual significance and are reproduced in **artwork**. **Designs** dreamed at night, then woven the next day are believed to be gifts from the **spirit world**. 'Iyari' (heart memory) designs come from the weaver's inner self - her heart, **her thoughts, her ancestral memory**. **Huichol women consider these** weavings a part of themselves. "Designs are like **portals into the supernatural world**."

The Huichol make pilgrimages to holy **places in the** four corners of their land. They fast during these journeys, and bring sacred **water and other** spiritual medicines home. At

Lake Chapala in the south, where Xapawiyemeka, *the goddess of the lake dwells*, offerings are weighted with a stone, then thrown in the lake. At the *Pacific ocean*, they immerse themselves in the water, pray, and leave offerings for the goddess *Haramara*. *They travel to Utuawita*, the sacred cave to the north in Durango. They travel *to Wirikuta, the sacred land of peyote* in the high desert of San Luis Potosi to the east to communicate with the deities *and acquire* sacred knowledge from them.

The pilgrimage to Wirikuta to collect peyote is the central event in the *Huichol annual* ceremonial cycle. The participants in the pilgrimage, the holy places where *the pilgrims stop* to leave offerings, and the actions undertaken in the peyote hunt are represented *in the parts of* the loom. Ut+anaka, the earth goddess, learned weaving in order to find the *path to Wirikuta* and make the first journey there. *While the men are out hunting the deer, the women are* praying, are in spiritual *communication with the deer, calling on him to give himself to* feed their people, *creating a snare* with their loom. Also, “women trap the soul of the deer and bring it to life *in the form of woven* designs”. Deer and peyote are two aspects of the same spirit. Similarly, *every part of the loom* has a corresponding object or action in the cultivation of corn. Deer, *maize, and peyote*, along with water are the sources of life for the Huichol. “While weaving *on the loom, women* metaphorically hunt the deer, find the peyote, and plant the corn and *help it to grow.*”



Vintage Huichol Bag.



KRISTEN BATEMAN

Mexico Fashion Week

Showcasing the work of contemporary designers and traditional artisans

It's easy to see why contemporary *designers* seek to evoke traditional Mexican handcrafts and folk art through their *collections*. *Brightly-colored* embroidery and intricate beading reflect skills passed *down for generations, while the patterns* themselves carry meaning far beyond modern *print design*. *At the recent Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Mexico City*, designers *emphasized the collaborative nature of their relationship with* local artisans, *showing embroidered gowns and garments featuring historic emblems and motifs*.

These were clothes created with modern techniques, but infused with centuries-old tradition. *Designer Lydia Lavín, for example, worked with artisans* from the Huichol community, an *indigenous group from Mexico's Sierra Madre* Occidental mountain range, to create gowns adorned *with embroidery and beadwork*. The brand, which launched in 2004, has cultivated partnerships *with more than 3,000* artisans from 14 indigenous communities across Mexico.

"Being able to understand the way *of thinking* of the artists and all the rituals, the importance of preserving techniques and showing *the* world what they can do is the most important thing," Lavín said. Sandra Weil's *collection included* traditional methods from Oaxaca, a Mexican state well-known for *its textile traditions, hand* embroidery and woven materials

made on backstrap looms. **Embroidered pieces included depictions** of the bird of paradise, a flower native to Mexico.

Not only did she **seek inspiration from Mexico, but worked with** artisans with roots in Venezuela, **Columbia, Argentina and Peru**. **“I think we take a very contemporary view on the embroidery’s traditional heritage,” Weil said. Weil works with a team of about 16 people each season, including several local artisans. “It’s very fulfilling to give back to the economy and the local people that work with us,” she said.**

Last month, she **showed her collection in Pais for** the first time. “I think we have so many things to give to **the rest of the world** that have not yet been seen in the high-end world of fashion,” she said. **“I’m very honored to be one of the people sharing these beautiful techniques.”** “In Mexico, **indigenous** artisans have a long history of collaborating not only with fashion **designers but** with creators in general,” said Tanya Melendez-Escalante, the senior **curator of education** and public programs at the Fashion Institute of Technology’s **New York museum**.

According to **Melendez-Escalante, at the beginning** of the 20th century, after the Mexican Revolution, **the country’s government created public** projects to blend pop culture and fine arts. **“One good example is the work of the Mexican muralists, who portrayed indigenous Mexico in many of their works,” she said. “Fashion designers also participated in this impetus ... there were designers such as Ramón Valdiosera who worked with artisans and many designers were avid textile collectors.”**

Known as **the father of the color “Mexican pink,” Valdiosera was not** only a fashion designer but a **cartoonist, author and artist whose work reveled in** traditional Mexican art.

Fashion house Pineda **Covalin continued this sense of** celebration with their show at Fashion Week Mexico, which centered **on Mexican** emblems and designs. “The main objective has been to promote the Mexican richness **and** the Mexican culture, not only in Mexico, but around the world,” co-founder Ricardo **Covalin said**.

“It was 1996 when we created **the brand. In the global** situation of the world, Mexico just signed a free trade agreement **with North America. Mexicans** wanted everything from outside and they forgot about **our roots, our heritage. And so we started** our brand to be proud of who we are as **Mexicans.”** **The label’s spring 2020 collection incorporated** Aztec and Mayan prints, with **a recurring skull motif as a reference to Día de los Muertos** (Day of the Dead). The **show’s conclusion, meanwhile, drew on the Aztec ritual Fuego Nuevo** (New Fire **Ceremony**).

Audiences **were directed to light candles, while all the artisans and designers** who worked on the collection **walked the runway to take a bow. “It was important** for all of them to come out, and then **light the new fire,” Covalin said. “In the ancient** ritual, you burn the old things and then you **start a small fire, and you share it with all** the people.”

The fashion industry’s **incorporation of indigenous Mexican design** has sparked controversy in the past: Take, for instance, **Carolina Herrera’s Resort 2020** collection, which drew on embroidery from Hidalgo’s Tenango de **Doria** community as well as shawls associated with Saltillo in the state of Coahuila.

Mexico’s Culture Ministry sent a letter **to** Herrera and creative director Wes Gordon, asking them to “publicly explain on what basis (**the brand**) decided to make use of these cultural elements, whose origins are documented, and **how this benefits** the communities.”

Gordon reportedly responded **that the collection** “pays tribute to the richness of Mexican culture.” Others say **it was a clear case of cultural appropriation** that was unnecessary given the historical **willingness of Mexican artisans to share** their expertise. Melendez-Escalante stressed **that designers who do collaborate with indigenous** artisans should respect their creative **input. “Their creativity is part of the collection and they** are remunerated as equal **players,” she said**.

But some **collaborations can be exploitative, Melendez-Escalante** said, with designers using artisans “as **labor to produce embroidery or other techniques** for their collection.” Not all indigenous artisans **are properly compensated, she** added. “Many artisans have to balance life in the fields with **producing their work**, so fair pay is of primary importance to them.”

In Melendez-Escalante’s **opinion, most** Mexican designers don’t seek to exploit the artisans they work with. “Traditional **crafts** are part of Mexico’s artistic and cultural heritage,” she said. “I think designers **are constantly looking** to honor our past and present, and these collaborations are **mostly about pride in who we are.**”

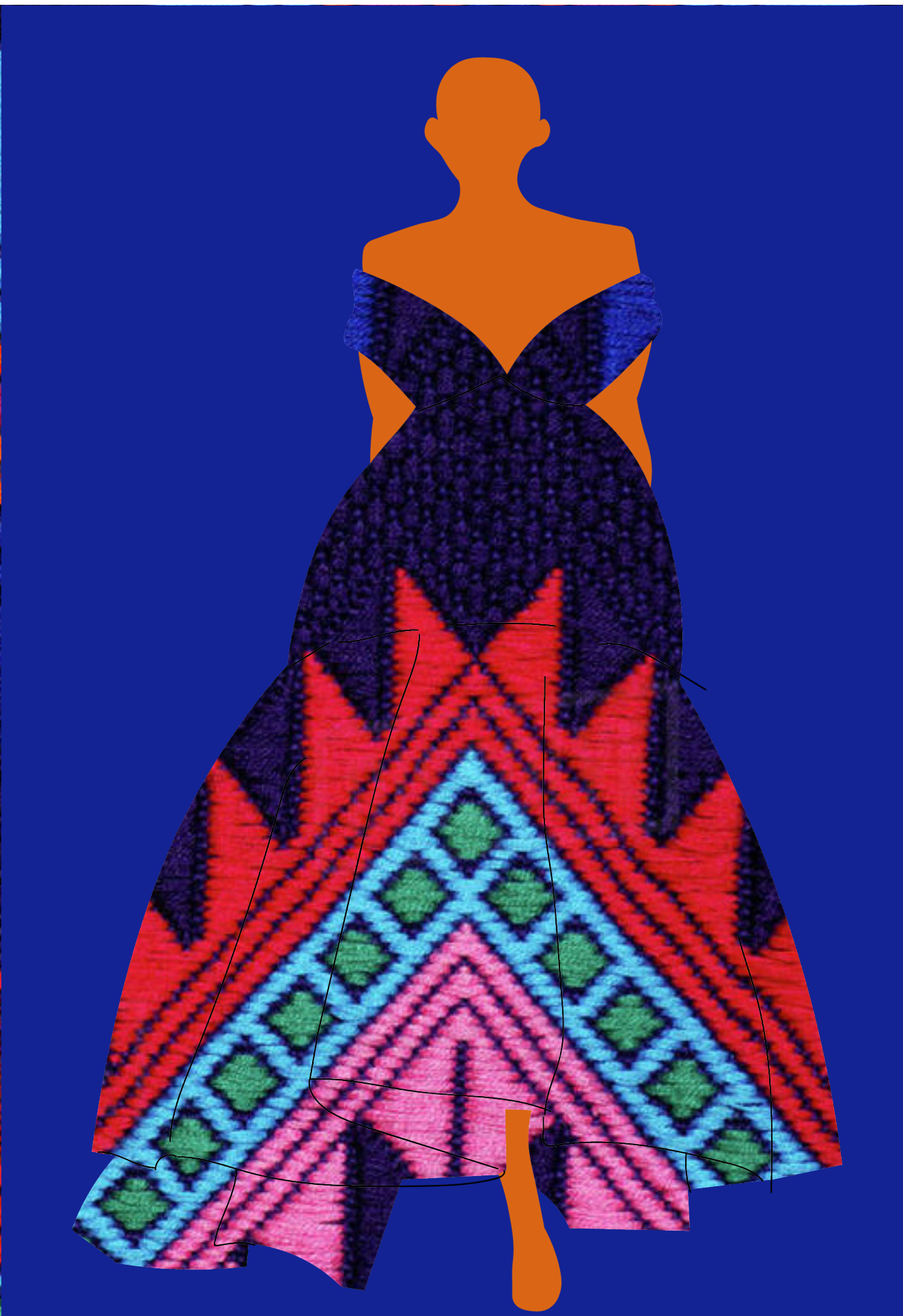
Mexico Fashion Week

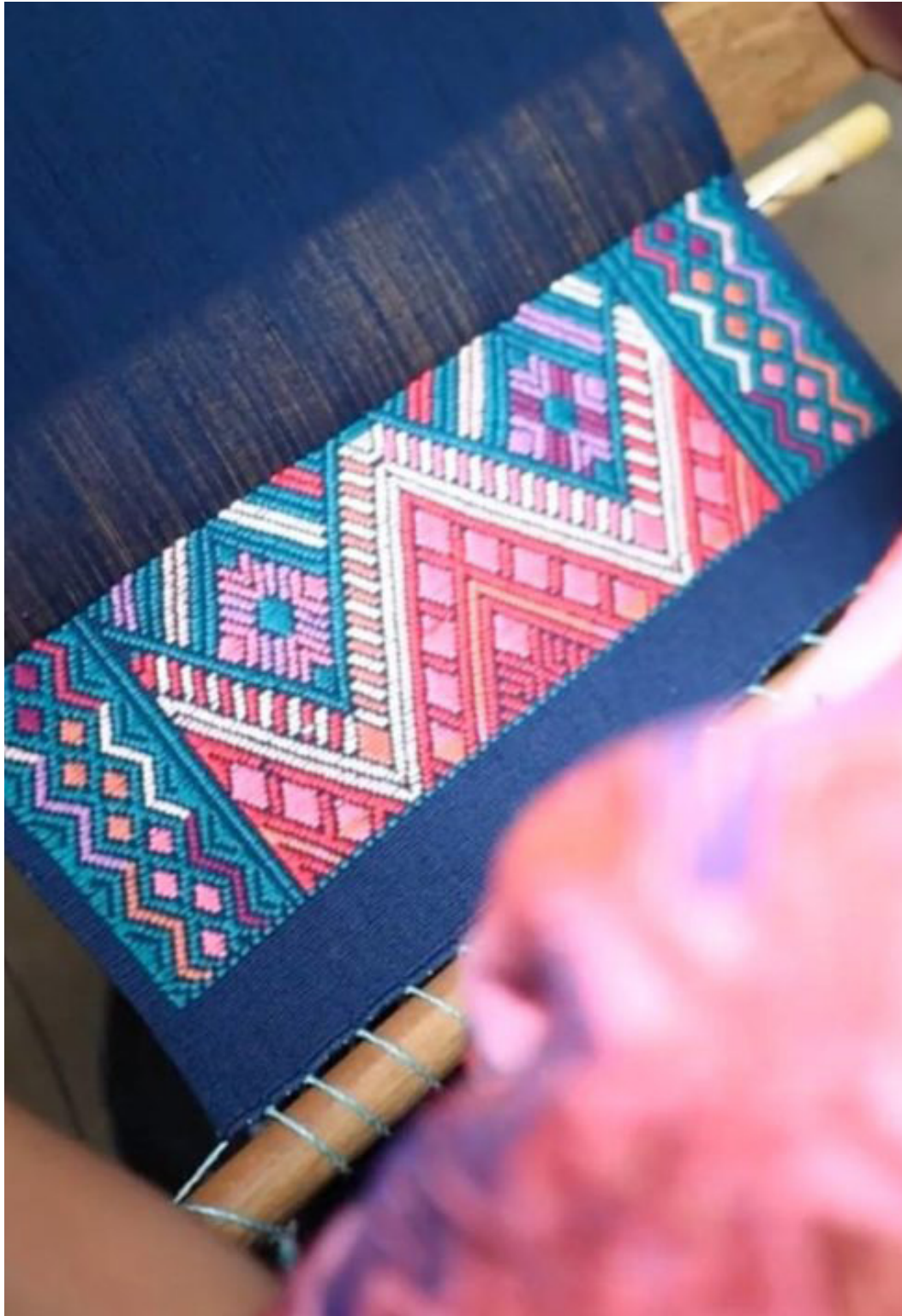


Lydia Lavín worked with Huichol artisans to create beaded and embroidered

GUATEMALA

Villages through the modern day Guatemala





SUZANNE LOVELL

The Story Behind Guatemalan Weavers

The country of Guatemala is steeped in tradition, and part of that tradition *is due to the country's strong* connection to the region's Mayan heritage. Luckily, the *country has always honored its rich past and their* customs that have been *celebrated for years*.

One of the most important customs is backstrap *weaving, a centuries-old art form that is still practiced among the local women weavers in many villages across modern-day Guatemala. Legend states that the* Mayans *first learned to weave 1,500 years ago by Ix Chel, the Mayan Goddess of the Moon, Love and Textiles.*

Mayan women learn to weave in order to provide fabric for *their homes and families. It has been* noted that the wealthier the woman, the higher quality *thread she uses and the more* elaborate the designs she masters. There is obvious practicality in weaving *clothing, towels, and* baby wraps. However, as time went on, close inspection of a woman's *hand-woven products would* determine her wealth and status.

For the weavers, this is as much part of their day's domestic chores *as caring for children and cleaning the house.* Interestingly, over the centuries, *each village would develop their own characteristic patterns* and colors which *portray their community's identity... much like a language's dialect. On an empty piece of fabric, the women would repeat geometric designs, stripes, animals, flowers, and birds using their practiced techniques!*

The materials remain important! Cotton is still the most commonly used material in traditional weaving. It is cultivated and some is imported to the United States and Nicaragua. With the arrival of sheep, the Spanish conquistadors introduced wool to Guatemala; this material was also used in weaving. Up until recently, weavers colored the fibers with natural dyes that came from the earth's organic materials. Today, many weavers purchase the yarn already prepared. This "shortcut" dramatically cuts down on the time-consuming process of carding, spinning, and dyeing the fabric. Chemical dyes and synthetic acrylic threads have gradually replaced the natural ones. It is quite rare to find weavers who still prepare their dyes and yarns in traditional ways.

What remains unchanged is the backstrap loom... this looks identical to how it appeared in Mayan ceramics which date back to 600-800 A.D. The elementary machinery is made of rods that loop around the weaver's back as she sits on the ground in order to maintain the correct tension on the threads. The other end gets tied to a tree or a post

The 36-year Guatemalan Civil War was the cause of 200,000 lost lives; the vast majority of which (83%) were Mayan. For these communities, the peaceful and traditional way of life was completely devastated. The war was a conflict between the right-wing government and supporters of the socialist idea of peasants' rights to the land. Those who survived the guerrilla fights and mass ambushes were left with burned villages, no chance at education, and zero opportunity either presently or for the foreseeable future.

Via their grandmothers' techniques that had been passed down, the villages' women banded together and began weaving their identity back. Little by little, this manual labor occupied the survivors' minds and slowly diminished their vivid, horrible memories. Luckily, this art also led to a way for the women to feed their families.

Following the country's Civil War, women weavers joined together and formed cooperatives as a way to ensure that they earn a fair wage for their artistry. It is common to see three generations of women weaving together. Often times, only the youngest family members speak Spanish; the others usually speak one of the 21 native languages recognized in Guatemala.

Dylan O'Shea (and Caroline Lindsell) of the London-based "A Rum Fellow," a studio dedicated to artisan textiles, rugs, and statement interiors unique for their colors and intricate patterns said, "That social mission is very much at the core of what we're doing, but we also wanted to make sure that what we are offering is extremely beautiful and stands up in its own right. Then behind that product is a great story and a great mission."

**Up until recently,
weavers colored
the fibers with
natural dyes**

A Guatemalan weaver at work using a backstrap loom.



JILL SIERACKI

Meet the Artisans Reimagining Traditional Guatemalan Weaving with a Contemporary Aesthetic

A Rum Fellow's jaunty, handcrafted textiles, now available with Schumacher, also have an important social mission

To create their intricately beautiful array of fabrics, A **Rum** Fellow's cofounders, husband-and-wife Dylan O'Shea and Caroline Lindsell, draw **on centuries**-old techniques found in Guatemala. "It's a nation that lives and breathes **textiles**," says O'Shea.

There, family-run weavers produce the **London-based studio's** brightly colored brocades and fabrics, which made their debut **in the U.S. this summer with** Schumacher. "We are passionate about handwoven, **handmade products**. **We really wanted to work** with communities and cultures **that make in very traditional ways**."

Initially, the couple launched A Rum Fellow with fabrics made in Bolivia, followed

by Peru, before transitioning to Guatemala, which they first visited with their then-seven-month-old daughter in toe. Each of the destinations had a rich textile culture, but Guatemala drew **the couple in with their kaleidoscopic colors and** geometric patterns. During one trip, they **stumbled across a talented weaver on the side** of the road; she in turn introduced O'Shea and **Lindsell to others in her community and** now the small group helps produce pieces for A Rum Fellow.

Lindsell, who has a background **in fashion and textile** design, and O'Shea translate the brightly colored traditional Guatemalan **patterns for a** more contemporary audience. "Our color palette is bright but theirs is way, way **brighter**," he says of the brocade, stripe, and false-ria patterns that make up the bulk of the A Rum Fellow collection. (The company also offers an ikat design, but it has not yet launched in the **U.S.**) "When you're in Guatemala and its beautiful sunshine and people are walking **around in bright** colors, it make sense. But when you bring that to London, where we **are, it really jars**. **Some are** more colorful than others, like the Nica, and then there's **the Coyolates that are more tonal**."

Within the **collection, stripe and false-ria are sold by the yard**, but due to the traditional looms **still used to produce the fabrics, they come in a width** that is narrower than the **standard size of textiles**. **Brocades are sold in panels because of the** unique back-strap looms used to handcraft each piece. **And each of the designs are so intricate that** individual **artisans can recognize their own handiwork in their applications, such** as the jaunty panels **on headboards at Kit Kemp's Firmdale Hotels**.

The designs **can be found across the globe, from pillows for the** popular Peruvian restaurant Casita Andina **in London's SoHo neighborhood or to trim** curtains or enliven the back of bar chairs. "The **artisans can recognize their own** textile because they can just see their incrementally tiny differences," says O'Shea, **of showing the local weavers the creative ways designers have implemented their fabrics** around the globe. "Their faces light up and they love to see it. It's always a little **magical** moment that gets us in the feels because they're so excited by it."

Additionally, O'Shea and **Lindsell work closely** with a number of social organizations in the country, while also **creating their own collectives of** family-run weavers to ensure fair wages and provide **social programs for its Maya collaborators**. "That social mission is very much at the **core of what we're doing, but we also wanted to make** sure that what we are offering **is extremely beautiful and stands up in its own right**," says O'Shea. "Then behind **that product is a great story and a great mission**."

Collectives of family-run weavers



Rum Fellow's cofounders, husband-and-wife Dylan O'Shea and Caroline Lindell

FASHION REVOLUTION

Guatemala's Natural Dye Ambassador

Olga Reiche

To separate her passion for natural dyeing from hand weaving, or designing from teaching, *isn't* possible for Olga Reiche. All she touches is intricately woven together within her home *country of* Guatemala and shared far beyond. This spirited woman with a quick smile has *been working* with indigenous artisans on product development and marketing for over thirty *years, producing* her own line of naturally-dyed and recycled products, and teaching locally *and internationally*. Her concern for environmental and artisanal sustainability is a driving *force*.

Artisan to Artisan

After the devastating earthquake in 1976, Olga worked with Oxfam, an international *confederation of countries working together* in partnership to alleviate poverty. Olga *traveled throughout the country, interviewing* artisans and making recommendations for *their sustainability*. *A decade later, she began working* with women weavers in the remote *Ixil Triangle, the women widowed during the violent 1980-1996* civil war. She

60

Guatemala's Natural Dye Ambassador: Olga Reiche

opened a shop in Antigua (now closed), to sell their woven goods and helped the weavers *with product development, but also discovered local and international* markets to sell *their wares*.

One of the primary groups Olga now works closely with is the weaving cooperative of *Ixbalem Ke, based in Samac de Cobán in Alta Verapaz, a* remote area in the cloud forest. *The women weave a type of intricate brocaded gauze* weave, in both white on white *pattern as well as natural brown cotton, and* naturally dyed threads too. This Mayan weaving *style was rapidly disappearing and,* with Olga's assistance, the women weavers are *dedicated to preserving this* traditional textile.

Learning, Teaching and Sharing

In the late 1980s, Olga met Ana Roquero who had been studying the natural dyes of Latin *America and* their preservation. It didn't take long before Olga too was focused on this and *over* the years she researched and collected data from all over Guatemala culminating in her *recent book,* Dyeing Plants of Guatemala, (Spanish only), a solid resource on the use of dyes *and pigments*.

Olga worked with cooperatives in the Lake Atitlán area, mentoring the weavers, *developing new designs and* products, teaching them how to manage a business, and how to *competitively market products in* the international arena. In 1995, she started to teach natural *dyeing techniques to artisans in this* area. She returns here often, especially in the village of *San Juan La Laguna where they grow and* dye with local plants.

In 2008, she co-founded Artes Textiles y Populares in Antigua, an educational center *which hosted programs in the textile arts for national* and international groups. After the *center closed, Olga ended up with some of the equipment,* especially looms, so she set up *a home studio. She started backstrap weaving classes complete* with a manual so when *you're back home with these warped sticks and threads, you can have* the continued *guidance of Olga*.

She also teaches natural dyeing on a small scale in her studio, growing indigo plants *outside her door and working with many regionally sustainable plants. She has* recently *made pigments for painting by drying the plants and converting them into* powder. *She calls them The Natural Palette and offers classes on this as well. The* next time *you're in Antigua, sign up for a class or bring your group to her studio—she'll be* more *than pleased to host you*.

The Upside to Recycling

Olga's work in the field of recycling is inspiring. When Olga first started thinking about *recycling, she asked herself two things: What would have* a positive impact on the *environment, and what would provide work for the* weavers? Recycling of things that were *already plentiful, too plentiful, met one of* her goals. Her design aesthetic is beyond the *or-*

Fashion Revolution

61

dinary—she’s really upcycling. Using discarded corn husks, plastic bags, cassette tapes, and jeans, she designed products that have traction in the market plus they added another line *to her own organic* cotton and naturally-dyed handwovens, sold under the label Indigo. Who *else can mimic* ikat weaving using plastic bags? And when an experienced weaver grabbed *one of her* jeans rag rugs at a recent ClothRoads event and bought it without hesitation, it was *a thumbs-up* for quality and design.

The net result has provided income to women who are the sole support of the family, *allowing them to stay* in their village and work. Plus the products provide work to seamstresses *and leather workers. It’s* a good thing.



Michel Vial

PERUVIAN

Andes Mountain Region





THE REAL WORLD TRAFALGAR

The Peruvian Women Keeping Ancient Textile Traditions Alive

You can't go far in Peru without seeing the technicoloured textiles that have become **synonymous with** this area of Latin America. But these Andean woven crafts are an **ancient tradition; the 10,000** year-old methods for spinning, dyeing and weaving these **rainbow textiles** are kept alive today by the local indigenous women of Peru.

Discover how these local Peruvian women are preserving their **country's heritage** by making beautiful handicrafts, supported by Join Trafalgar and **the TreadRight Foundation**.

The craft of Peruvian weaving

In the Andes of Peru, the traditional textiles that the **indigenous people wear** are not only made and worn for practical reasons, but they also form a crucial part of their cultural identity

Traditionally, the fabric used for these **textiles** is delicate alpaca, llama and vicuña wool, which is native to the Andean area. This **wool is warm and versatile**, with the weavers using bright coloured dyes to put their own stamp **on their creations**.

Located in the Andean mountains, near the Sacred Valley, **the living museum of Awana Kancha** offers a first-hand look into how the local indigenous Quechua **women use the age-**

old methods to produce traditional textiles and preserve this area's unique artisanal *heritage*.

During a visit in Awana Kancha, the women will demonstrate the centuries-old *methods used for spinning*, dyeing and weaving Andean traditional textiles.

The preservation of ancient Andean heritage

Unfortunately this long standing Peruvian tradition of weaving is at risk of *extinction, in the face of changing times*.

As one of the recipients of a TreadRight Foundation grant, *the Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco (CTTC) in Peru* is a non-profit *organisation established by Andean weavers to aid the survival of Cusqueñan textile traditions and provide support to the indigenous people who keep them alive. Officially established in 1996, the organisation employs more than 500 individuals* from the *Cusco region*.

With Trafalgar's help, the grant was used to finish *the construction of a traditional weaver's home at the Chinchero Weaver's Centre*, which *welcomes locals and visitors alike, in order to provide* education about the traditional weaving *techniques and promote the sale of the textiles*.

Empowering local Peruvian women through responsible travel

Responsible tourism in this area of Peru will help to support the local women *in providing an* income for their families, as well as preserving and promoting the ancient traditions *of this Andean* community for years to come.

Crucial part of their
cultural identity

CAYETANO GARCÍA

Saya

La Humanidad Detrás de las Texturas y Textiles de Sitka Semsch

SAYA, palabra en quechua que significa “mujer fuerte, guerrera, que se queda de pie”. **La mujer** en nuestro país es la fuerza que motiva y trasciende de generación en **generación**. **Entonces**, tener a la mujer peruana como musa, es y seguirá siendo **siempre, un recurso hermoso e inspirador**. Sitka Semsch, diseñadora de modas **peruana**, **abrió hace un mes la tienda Saya** by Sitka. Abrazando la historia milenaria **del textil peruano y añadiendo la estética propia** de su larga carrera como diseñadora, **Sitka nos permitió conocer la historia detrás de su nueva marca**.

Después de mucho tiempo de **realizar vestidos de novia y de fiesta**, **Sitka Semsch**, quien estudió en el Rhode **Island School of Design**, **se planteó la idea de crear una línea de ropa más accesible**. **Para ella**, **“la accesibilidad no sólo traducida económicamente, sino de lo utilizable y reusable”**. **Al trabajar previamente con inmensas empresas de retailing** como colaboradora y al asociarse **con conocedoras del negocio del retail**, **decide crear una marca con contenido**.

Me llamó la atención el peso que le dio a esta palabra; ¿contenido a nivel de cantidad de piezas? ¿significados atribuidos a cada una de las piezas? Sitka entiende por contenido de su marca a un conjunto de valores que trascienden en toda la línea de trabajo. **“Con-**

tenido referido a la calidad de la materias primas, a la mano de obra, al trabajo realizado y **la responsabilidad social** de por medio, y, que finalmente, sea una marca que te sientas bien **usándola**. Eso es contenido”, me explicó, **“Va más allá del gusto. Eso es subjetivo. El contenido de Saya es lo objetivo, lo correcto.”**

Cuando era chiquita, Sitka admiraba el gusto de su madre. Aquella representó un aspecto **importante en la estética** que presenta hoy en día en cada una de sus piezas. **“Me enseñó a consumir poco, a usar una prenda** varias veces y a ser ingeniosa.” Cuando uno ve sus **piezas, resaltan los colores neutros, las fibras naturales**, un estilo sin estampados pero **con detalles sutiles**. **En estas características radica una parte** de la sostenibilidad de sus **diseños modernos y contemporáneos, en los que la durabilidad del uso de las prendas equivale a la sostenibilidad de consumo**.

Sin embargo, al crear SAYA, entendía de que no era lo único que tenía que realizar **en cuanto a sostenibilidad ambiental y social**. **Hoy en día, los movimientos sociales como el feminismo y el, cada vez más creciente, movimiento por el cuidado del planeta, influyen en los trabajos de diversos artistas**. **“El arte es la expresión de quiénes somos a través de diversas disciplinas”, señala Sitka, quien comenta que todas las personas que proveen materia prima y trabajo son mujeres, con quienes tiene una relación muy personal**.

Antes de comenzar la marca, consideró importante dar oportunidad a diversas **mujeres de bajos recursos, por lo que encontró la ONG “Sembrando Juntos”**. Esta **organización ubicada en Pachacutec, acerca educación** de calidad a niños pequeños, por lo **que Sitka decidió capacitar a las madres de** estos niños en diversas técnicas textiles. **Al capacitarlas en macramé, confección** de accesorios o cobertores de almohadas, la **diseñadora considera que se desarrolla** una madre **“contenta, independiente y acompañada. Una mamá así va a tener una** mejor relación con sus hijos e hijas, y, por ende, la familia estará **mejor. La idea es** que se vuelvan expertas proveedoras y que salgan adelante. Es un **good to good”**. **Al ser un país con habilidades textiles con un bagaje cultural e histórico increíble, crear oportunidades de educación y de solvencia económica mediante lo textil, permite la existencia de estas prácticas. Por otro lado, Semsch considera que en la línea de trabajo de cada prenda, existan los mismo valores. Desde** el área de diseño, la producción el control de **calidad y la distribución. Otras proveedores de** telares con los que trabaja, tienen, a la vez, **albergues para dar desayuno a niños y niñas con bajos recursos económicos**.

La nueva tienda, diseñada por la arquitecta Beata Woznica, es una casa rodeada **por un parque sanisidrino y con características auténticas. Fue, por ello,** principal **inspiración para la editorial que acompaña esta entrevista. La tienda contrasta con las prendas más neutras, “me gusta el balance: si bien la tela dura no me gusta, los materiales metálicos sí. Quiero que en la tienda y en mis prendas haya una sensación de que existe un ser humano detrás de cada detalle. Que veas la** humanidad en cada **producto.”**

Quiero que en la tienda y en mis prendas haya una sensación de que existe un ser **humano detrás de cada detalle. Que veas la** humanidad en cada producto.” Suelo **preguntarle a diversos diseñadores y artistas** acerca de cómo el arte va entrando inevitablemente

a nuestras vidas. En el caso de la tienda de Sitka, apuesta por una zona home y decoración *de interiores.* “*Convivimos* con arte, con plantas, con moda y con decoración. Así sentimos *bienestar.* *Es una* decisión en tu vida la de decorar con sostenibilidad.” Los artículos de *decoración,* representan elementos del Perú, como en los colores orgánicos y los algodones de *alta* calidad. “Es una conversación entre el concepto y el material”, comenta Sitka.

“Me preguntan siempre si es que volveré a usar colores neutros en mis diseños. Sí. Yo *apuesto* por estos colores, significa ser auténtico. Encontrar mi propio ser y qué trato ser. Es *importante* definirse para trasladar tu propia estética a otras ramas”

Al recorrer con ella la tienda, me señaló la importancia de la autenticidad en un artista y *diseñador.* “*Me preguntan* siempre si es que volveré a usar colores neutros en mis diseños. *Sí. Yo apuesto por estos colores,* significa ser auténtico. Encontrar mi propio ser y qué trato *ser. Es importante definirse para trasladar* tu propia estética a otras ramas”. Finalmente, *cuando di por terminada la conversación, Sitka me* volvió a sorprender con una lección *que siempre recordaré.* “*Yo creo que para tener éxito hay que* usar las 4Ps. Estas son *pasión, perseverancia, paciencia y propósito.* *La pasión para crear algo* propio y que *tenga el propósito de crear un mundo mejor, dándole oportunidades a personas que* quizás no la tienen, *y durante este proceso, paciencia y perseverancia para* ver un *resultado con calidad y contenido de verdad.*”



Fotografía Sebastián Corzo
Modelo Abby Carter
Diseño Sitka Semsch



DOMINIC LUTYENS

The fashion created in the clouds

Known traditionally for their folksy appeal, Peruvian textiles created high in the Andes mountains are being re-invented for the 21st Century

With their strong, saturated colours and *dazzlingly* vibrant patterns, traditional Peruvian textiles at first glance appear to have *funky, folksy, homespun*, even naïve, qualities. But these textiles are in fact culturally *complex* – *the result of different* regions of Peru specialising in specific techniques, *handed down from generation to generation*. Currently on display at Weavers of the *Clouds*, an *exhibition at the Fashion and Textile* Museum in London, the patterns and motifs *of these textiles were markers of wealth* and even of marital status, and their designs can be *decoded to reveal where the weavers* were from.

Also displaying artefacts *such as looms, paintings*, photographs and films – some lent by the British Museum – this multi-*media show* celebrates Peruvian textiles dating from the pre-Columbian era to the present day. *Other* objects include examples of quipu, a method of tying knots to keep records of *populations*, and samples of cochineal and indigo dyes used to create crimson and blue cloth *respectively*. *There* is a 1980s BBC documentary by Paul Yule

about Martín Chambi, the **20th-Century photographer** known for his portraits of people from the Peruvian **Andes, and images by famous Peruvian** snapper Mario Testino.

Global interest in **Peruvian textiles received a boost** with the rise of Indigenismo in the 1930s, a political, artistic **and literary movement** co-founded by Peruvian painter José Sabogal, and inspired by Mexican **muralist Diego** Rivera, who promoted local culture. Sabogal depicted traditional costumes worn **in the** southern region of Cusco. Soon after, Elena Izcue, a cosmopolitan artist and designer **based for some** years in Paris, also flew the flag for Peruvian and pre-Columbian art **“This exhibition mainly** focuses on textiles made in the mountainous central highlands **of the Andes, surrounding Cusco,** hence its title’s reference to clouds,” says curator Hilary **Simon. “It’s where the finest weaving is** practised. One reason why textiles thrive there is that **the alpaca, whose fibre is used** to make them, are locally reared.”

The superfine fibre of **young baby alpaca is** particularly prized, but Peru’s textiles are also created using fibres from **llamas, guanacos** and vicuñas. When the Spanish began colonising Peru’s Inca empire from the **1530s, they** introduced sheep’s wool and cotton.

Based in relatively isolated regions, **Peru’s** textile centres have resisted globalisation for many years. Contributing to this **isolation was a** massive migration in the 20th Century from the countryside to cities on **the western coastline,** chiefly Lima but also Trujillo, Chimbote and Arequipa, where **employment opportunities were** greater.

While the **weavers today aren’t immune to globalisation,** many contemporary Peruvian or Peru-based **designers champion indigenous** techniques and use them in their work. “The show also highlights **the work of artists,** designers and innovative collectives looking at Peruvian rather than European **textiles** and helping to preserve them,” adds Simon.

Mountain high

Among these is the Center for Traditional **Textiles** of Cusco, a non-profit organisation founded in 1996, whose mission is to “promote **the empowerment** of weavers through the sustainable practice of Peruvian ancestral textile **traditions in the Cusco** region”. Lima-born fashion designer Chiara Macchiavello, who founded **the globally-successful label** Escvdo in 2013, is one of the country’s most prominent **advocates of Peruvian textiles. The label,** which bills itself as “Devoted to design, committed to **heritage”, is based in Barranco** – Lima’s arty neighbourhood and home to Testino’s MATE museum, which **showcases Peruvian** art.

Increasingly, Peru’s young fashion designers **don’t** look to the West for ideas. Yet some Western designers have recently looked to Peru for **inspiration:** Weavers of the Clouds displays a 2015 outfit by Vivienne Westwood influenced **by the Asháninka people,** an indigenous population who live in the Peruvian rainforest. **The design was inspired by her visit** there with Cool Earth, a non-profit organisation that **campaigns to stop its deforestation.**

“From a very young age, I came **into contact with artisan** communities and our ancient textile traditions – Chiara Macchiavello” **Macchiavello studied** a theatre design course at London’s Central Saint Martins, and while there, discovered **that her** real interest lay in costume design. “I’ve always felt very connected to Peru’s heritage,” she **says.** “In the 1980s, terrorist activity in the Andes

resulted in many people moving from the **mountains** and rainforest to the coast. But my parents travelled inland. From a very young **age, I came into contact** with artisan communities and our ancient textile traditions.”

Items of Escvdo clothing, **such as fringed jackets, gilets and** columnar dresses with strong graphic patterns, are on **show at Weavers of the Clouds. These are** inspired by a sophisticated range of cultural references, from **Pre-Columbian culture to the** art of Peruvian textile designer Elena Izcue, and Reynaldo Luza, an **artist and illustrator** whose work regularly appeared in Vogue in the 1930s.

“The clothes are hand-knitted and **embroidered,** using natural fibres found in Peru, such as high-quality Pima cotton and superfine alpaca **fibre,”** says Macchiavello. A determinedly green, socially responsible label: “We employ skilled **artisans** to hand-make the pieces, thereby contributing to local economies and financially **supporting age-old** textile traditions.”

Also sharing a strong **interest in these traditions is** contemporary fashion label Mozh Mozh, whose work is included **in the show, too. “I’ve been interested** in textiles ever since I was a young girl,” says Mozdeh Martin, **who set up the label five years** ago. Her work was shown at the British Fashion Council exhibition Local/**Global in Somerset** House, London in 2017. “I was born in the Peruvian Andes and started visiting textile-**making** communities there in 2008, aged 21. This led me to studying fashion in Peru. I’m interested **in** preserving Peruvian textile traditions by co-creating clothing and accessories with artisans **from all** over Peru.”

Her ponchos and jackets are **often adorned with** beadwork created by artisans from the Shipibo community based **in the Amazon rainforest.** Different textile specialisms are found all over the country: **embroidery is widely practised in the** cities of Huancayo and Ayacucho in central and southern **Peru respectively. Ikat, meanwhile,** a technique used to pattern textiles by binding yarns with **a tight wrapping and** then dyeing them, is commonly deployed in the northern Andes.

One of Martin’s aims is to help **stem a widespread** reliance in Peru on synthetic materials:

Even more decorative are the confections of established designer Meche Correa, who founded her eponymous label 25 years ago. **Her clothing** nods to traditional techniques and silhouettes found in Peruvian clothing. **One of her ensembles at** Weavers of the Clouds is a skirt typically found in Peru – the **pollera, a kind of gathered, flouncy** mini-crini whose hem is flamboyantly embroidered with colourful **flowers; her version is** worn with a plain top that emphasises the vibrancy of the skirt.

“Flowers are a motif brought **to Peru by the** Spanish,” says Correa who has long collaborated with Peruvian artisans. She raises **awareness** of their work by organising trips to central Peru to show young designers how these **skills** are carried out. “But I want my own work to feel contemporary and universal, so it can **be worn anywhere.**”

She says that one of the country’s **key strengths** is the transparency of the supply chain that still exists in its traditional **weaving world: “We have a** wealth of raw materials, from alpaca fibre to gold and copper, and **can see how manufacturing** processes work from start to finish. Coupled with that, **we have so much expertise at our disposal. Effectively,** what we have is what we call ‘cultura viva’ – **cultural traditions that are still alive** despite being centuries old.”

Promote the empowerment of weavers



European designers, including Vivienne Westwood, have long been influenced by the textiles of Peru (Credit: Vivienne Westwood)

KENTE

Ghanaian traditional technique



JAMES PADILIONI JR

Black Perspectives

The History and Significance of Kente Cloth in the Black Diaspora

This spring thousands of college students will march across commencement stages to receive their degrees. Many of these students will do so while wearing a Kente cloth stole. This annual college ritual of marking oneself with a visible sign of Africa is a practice that literally weaves together the wisdom of Africa before the Middle Passage with the persistent struggle to (re)attain knowledge of oneself that defines Black experience in the Diaspora. But just how did this West African cloth become a hallmark of the Black American collegiate experience?

The Kente center of the world is the village of Bonwire, Ghana. According to Asante mythology, it was here that great trickster Ananse the Spider, ever skillful and cunning, spun a web of intricate detail in the jungle. When Nana Koragu and Nana Ameyaw, brothers and weavers by trade, came upon Ananse's web, its immaculate beauty enchanted them. After studying Anansi's handiwork, the pair returned to the village and began to weave Kente.

Historical documentation indicates textile production among the Akan and Ewe peoples began as early as 1000 B.C. Kente cloth as we know it today with its rich bold colors emerged among the Asante during the seventeenth century A.D., as Chief Oti Akenten

(from whose name Kente derives – “basket” in Twi) established trade routes from the Middle and Far East bringing into the Asante Empire a variety of foodstuffs, gems, dyes, leather goods, and silk fabric. Chief Akenten commissioned the new cloth to be spun for royal ritual attire. Men traditionally wear Kente wrapped over their shoulders in the style of a Roman toga while women wear it in two pieces, an ankle-length dress and a shawl that could double as a baby sling.

Kente is a meaningful sartorial device, as every aspect of its aesthetic design is intended as communication. The colors of the cloth each hold symbolism: gold = status/serenity, yellow = fertility, green = renewal, blue = pure spirit/harmony, red = passion, black = union with ancestors/spiritual awareness. Kente cloth sheets are assembled out of sewing together long strips or bands of fabric, each 6"-10" wide. Each one of these bands are themselves composed of panels of alternating designs. Each weaver creates this patchwork appearance through a complex interplay of the warp (the threads pulled left to right during weaving) and weft (threads oriented up and down).

These warp and weft motifs form a repertoire of craft work, as Asante weavers give each one a name that indicates clan, social status, or sexuality, such as AberewaBene meaning “a wise old man symbolized wisdom and maturity.” Other Kente design names form proverbs reflecting the Asante ethos and worldview. Owu nhye da (“Death has no fixed date”) is said to encourage people to right living, as death may come unexpectedly and allow no time for penitence. Nkum me fie na nkosu me aboten (“Don't kill my house and then mourn for me in public”) cautions against the two-faced and duplicitous impulse of human nature. Richly expressive and personalized Kente meanings emerge out of clever combinations of colors with various warp and weft designs. Kente cloth materialized the spoken rhetoric of proverbs and circulated them among the Asante as sartorial text/files.

Kente appeared on the radar of most African-Americans in 1958 when Kwame Nkrumah, the first prime minister of independent Ghana, wore the cloth to meet with President Eisenhower at the White House. Coinciding with the Civil Rights and African Decolonization Movements, Black Americans associated Kente cloth with Black politics and the dignity of the African heritage. By the early 1970s, the predominant garment featuring Kente in the United States was the dashiki, a long tunic-type shirt that grew increasingly popular and commodified by the fashion industry. Kente's appeal within Black Power waned, with Fred Hampton and other Panthers leaders deriding those who wore them. Nevertheless, Kente cloth and dashikis remained staples of urban Black life and received a new layer of significance when adopted by the Hip Hop community in the 1980s.

Another important moment in Kente fashion history occurred at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. Recognizing the need to honor the particular historical and personal struggle of Black students to complete a baccalaureate degree, Dr. Franklin Simpson, Director of Affirmative Action and Jerome “Skip” Hutson, Director of Minority Affairs, met with two English professors, Drs. Christian Awuyah and C. James Trotman. Together the four came up with the idea of a Kente Commencement Ceremony, and on May 15, 1993,

thirty graduates attended *that first ever event called A Family* Affair. To date, nearly *two thousand* graduates of West *Chester University have donned* Kente stoles, *including this author*. The practice has since *spread to hundreds of high* schools, colleges, and *universities, making the sun-drenched splashes and bursts* of Kente print a *ubiquitous sight of any commencement ceremony* today.

When *Black students wear* Kente *stoles as a sign* of their *successful matriculation through higher education, they* transform *their* bodies into *living, breathing proverbs*. Whether *graduating from an HBCU* or an *PWI, each journey to commencement courses down a road hewn open through* the labors of Charlotte *Forten Grinké, W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and the entire cloud of* Diasporic witnesses *who birthed Black Studies out of their* “(at least) *500-year conversation, in myriad languages and cultural expressions...over the meaning of loss and displacement.*”

To the class of 2017, I *extend my deepest congratulations*. Our world has *never more needed* thoughtful and *engaged members of our communities than* it does today. *Fortunately*, principles of right *living already exist to direct your path*, as the Kente *stole you don around your shoulders testifies to the ancient wisdom of* Africa and the “*dream and the hope of the slave.*” The Asante *stylized their values and ethics through the poetics of Kente*. Kente’s Diasporic genealogy weaves *a pattern* of African *knowledge and pride across the Middle Passage* and onto the capped *and gowned bodies of Black American graduates*. *Happy is the one who walks in* the way of the ancestors.

What does your Kente say?

As was true of many *pre-modern societies in Africa, Asia and Europe, the Ashanti practiced slavery*. When *Europeans, specifically the Portuguese, came into contact with the Ashanti during the sixteenth century, both Europeans and the Ashanti traded gold, ivory, and slaves*.

Ashanti slaves were transported *to the New World in large numbers*. *There, they created new* communities that *often adapted and/or continued traditions* from the old world. Today, for example, *the Maroon people of Suriname weave a cotton cloth* called Pangi *that is comparable in style and design to the Kente cloth of their Ashanti* ancestors. *As is true with Kente* cloth, Pangi has *multi-colored vertical and horizontal stripes*. The *strong similarities between Pangi and Kente cloth undoubtedly reflect the* fact that the *Maroons in Suriname were escaped slaves who lived in their villages*. Living apart *from Europeans, the Arawaks and the other peoples of Suriname may* have allowed *these slaves to retain many Ashanti traditions*.

Although *similar to many other* kinds of West African *weaving in its basic design, Kente cloth is unique in its intricacy and perfection*, as well as *the wide variety of colors used in the patterns*. However, what *is perhaps most* unique, and *most important for understanding* the Ashanti people’s *use of this cloth, are the proverbs and stories attached to individual* designs.

Patterns are not only *categorized by their association with* a specific Ashanti *proverb, they also have multiple meanings*. The proverb *Dea emmaa da eno ne dea yenn-hunu na yente bi da* (Figure A) of the *emaa da (novelty) print*, for example, *symbolizes knowledge, creativity, novelty, and innovation*. *Prints* may also have *an anecdotal background*. The *Oyokoman na gya da mu* (crisis in *the Okoyo nation; Figure B*) *print, for example, symbolizes internal conflicts, the need for unity in diversity, and reconciliation*. Ashanti Akan Cultural Adowa Dance Group, 2010, Public Domain

Today, the emphasis on *symbolism remains, although* the materials *of the cloth and its uses* have evolved. *Rather than being made solely from silk, Kente is now made mostly of cotton, as well as rayon, making it affordable for a much wider reach of the population*.

Kente cloth is *now used to make clothes for all sorts of people*, not only *royalty and not along the* Ashanti. *The cloth has become particularly popular* among tourists *who often buy Kente inspired bags and shoes when visiting Ghana*. Kente cloth fabric *has also become popular* internationally, as *celebrities such as* Gwen Stefani, Solange Knowles, and the hip hop group Salt-N-Pepa have all *adopted* and worn the cloth at *different times*.

From the *ancient* history of the Ashanti Kingdom, to the *Pan-African spread of tradition during the trans-Atlantic slave trade*, to modern day *interpretations and use of cultural heritage, the Kente* cloth is *both symbolic* and representative *of the history of the Ashanti people*. Through *tracing the origins, evolution, and spread of this unique cultural heritage*, we are *better able to understand a people and* their history.

Every color (as *seen in the table below*) *possesses specific attribute*. Kente colors, Public Domain. Color Meaning:

- Black** maturation, aging, intensified spiritual energy
- Blue** peacefulness, harmony, good fortune, love
- Gold** royalty, wealth, spiritual purity
- Green** vegetation, planting, harvesting, growth, good health
- Grey** healing and cleansing rituals; associated with ash
- Maroon** the color of mother earth; associated with healing and protection from evil
- Pink** associated with the female essence of life; calmness, sweetness, tenderness
- Red** political and spiritual associations; bloodshed; sacrificial rites and death
- Silver** serenity, purity, joy; associated with the moon
- White** purification, sanctification rites, healing
- Yellow** preciousness, royalty, wealth, fertility (yolk of an egg)





RSS MAGAZINE

Live, Love, Loza!

SS12 collection, Designer profile

Loza Maléombho is a women's ready to wear clothing line based in New York with women **empowerment, social** and economic trades in West Africa. Set up by Brazilian born Loza **Maléombho, who is of** Ivorian and Central African origins, in 2009. Loza was raised in **Abidjan, Côte-d'Ivoire** (West Africa) and in 2000 she moved to the United States, went on to **graduate from the** University of the Arts of Philadelphia in 2006, then moved to New York **city for greater fashion** experience. Her eponymous label offers sustainable, socially conscious designs for the modern **woman and has a mission** towards:

The SS 2012 collection was **inspired by trips to India**, Paris, Jamaica, Ghana and Ivory Coast and by the medieval and **colonial times. Here she explores** a new smart and fashionable way to use Kente Cloth **which is 100% sustainable and** hand woven in Ghana, with their professional craftsmanship **on tailored jackets. She interestingly** also has had fun mixing patterns and textures together **with Indian batiks and linen.** We at Africa Fashion Guide are excited about this new direction for the brand as we have **followed it since early 2010.** We have always noticed Loza's passion for ethics and Africa and **see this developing into something quite special** in this Spring Summer collection seen **below.**

The other area of interest is Loza's direction to use Kente **another form of handwoven** fabric in Africa. Weaving takes place in a variety of countries in **Africa not only in Ghana.** The art of weaving can be compared to a mothers' love that **has been passed down from**

generation to generation and harnesses such skill and technique. Weaving is the systematic **interlacing of two elements** which, when stringed through a special machine called a 'Loom', **forms a coherent structure** eventually creating the desired cloth or fabric.

The early beginnings of weaving are still not quite sure of, but history dates it as far back **as 7000 to 8000 BC the era** of the Mesopotamia people. Seen as a form of survival or even a **technique inspired by the** observation of spider webs and birds nests, in the beginning, weaving stood as an everyday need **of our prehistoric ancestors** providing shelter, clothing and assistance on their quest for **basic needs of food. Along with** basic needs of survival, our ancestors also thought to **embellish their arts of work once they** had mastered the art of weaving.

The idea of weaving spans **across the border and no technique** is too complicated for many countries of Africa. Ghana's **traditional Kente cloth is also** hand woven cloth usually containing bright primary colours **and has stood as a significant** symbol of Ghana's ritual culture for centuries. Kente is worn all over the world and is exported **to more places around the** world than any other African fabric. As well as the bright colours **and intricate pattern work,** Kente cloth speaks a thousands words and each pattern represents **something different.**

What Loza brings is Kente in a modern, contemporary form **and her label joins the** ranks of labels such as Lemlem, Kemkem studio, Madam Wokies **Couture, Buki Akib to name** a few who are utilising hand-woven fabric in a fresh way. Loza is **the type of woman who was** not afraid to believe in herself **and what she was doing and to** pack up her things and move to Africa. Before she launched **the label this is what she did. She** packed her sketches, patterns and belongings and spent **two months in Côte d'Ivoire (West Africa)** and stayed there working with tailors and seamstresses **to make the first collection** which used Nigerian tie dye, batik and beading finished **with feminine ruffles.**

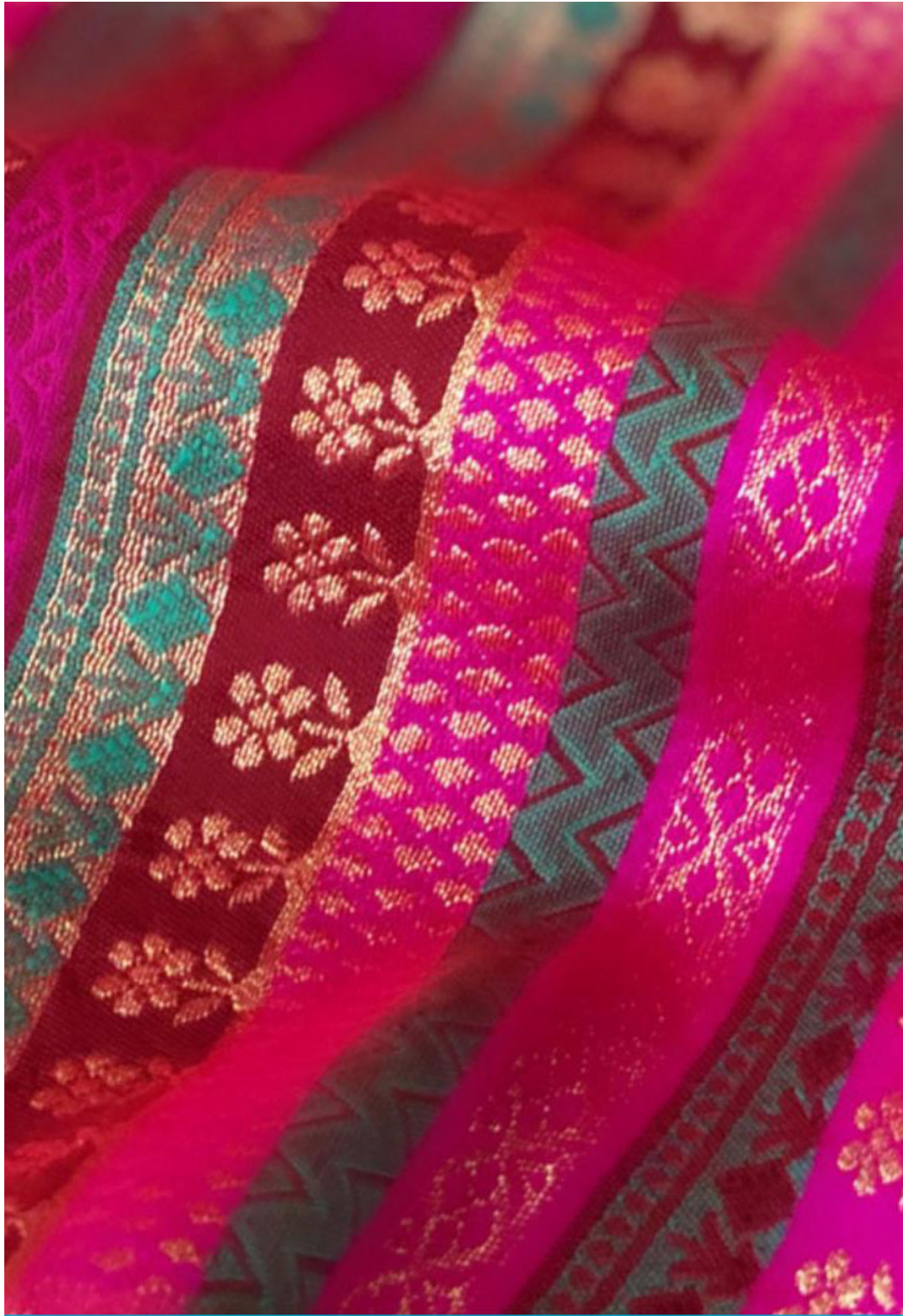
Loza Maléombho's purpose **stands on promoting education** in developing countries of **West Africa and to be actively** involved in the manufacturing and textile sectors there which **will create jobs. From the first** collection she worked in partnership with African workshops **and textile companies on her** production and promotes the concept of a "© Made in Africa" **label or Made in Ghana, Made** in Kenya...label etc, a concept that we highly support.

This SS12 is beautifully executed, extremely romantic and highly fashioned. We adore **this Loza and are looking** forward to seeing more from this label into 2012.



SAREE
India





SHWETA GANDHI

The History of Saree

The nine yard wonder

Sari might be a fashionable garment now, but **it** started from being a humble drape used by women thousands of years ago. The origin **of the** drape or a garment similar to the sari can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilisation, **which** came into being during 2800–1800 BC in north west India.

The beginning

The journey of sari began with **cotton, which was first** cultivated in the Indian subcontinent around 5th millennium BC. **The cultivation was followed by** weaving of cotton which became big during the era, as weavers **started using prevalent** dyes like indigo, lac, red madder and turmeric to produce the drape used **by women to** hide their modesty.

The name

The garment evolved from a popular word '**sattika**' which means women's attire, finds its mention in early Jain and Buddhist scripts. **Sattika was a** three-piece ensemble comprising the Antriya - the lower garment, the **Uttariya - a veil worn** over the shoulder or the head and the Stanapatta which is a chest **band. This ensemble can be** traced to Sanskrit literature and

Buddhist Pali literature during the 6th **century** BC. The three piece set was known as Poshak, the Hindi term for costume.

Antriya resembled the dhoti *or the fishtail style* of tying a sari. It further evolved into Bhairnivasani skirt, which *went onto be known as ghagra* or lehenga. Uttariya evolved into dupatta and Stanapatta *evolved into the choli*.

Women traditionally wore *various types of regional* handloom saris made of silk, cotton, ikkat, block-print, embroidery *and tie-dye* textiles. Most sought after brocade silk sarees are Banarasi, Kanchipuram, Gadwal, Paithani, Mysore, Uppada, Bagalpuri, Balchuri, Maheshwari, Chanderi, Mekhela, Ghicha, *Narayan pet and* Eri etc.

Evolution

Years later with the advent *of foreigners, the rich Indian* women started asking the artisans to use expensive *stones, gold threads to make exclusive saris* for the strata, which could make them *stand out, clearly. But sari did remain unbiased as a* garment and was adapted by each strata, *in their own way. That was the beauty of* the garment, that still remains.

With industrialisation *entering India, with the* Britishers, synthetic dyes made their official entry. Local traders started *importing chemical* dyes from other countries and along came the unknown techniques of dyeing *and* printing, which gave Indian saris a new unimaginable variety.

The development of textiles in *India started* reflecting in the designs of the saris - they started including figures, *motifs, flowers. With increasing* foreign influence, sari became the first Indian *international garment. What started as India's* first seamless garment, went onto become *the symbol of Indian femininity*.



NIMI NOTES

TOP 6

INDIAN FASHION DESIGNERS

I absolutely love dressing *up in Indian clothes and* wearing the jewellery. Indian fashion is beautiful, *colourful and elegant and I love* the occasions where I get to dress up!

Over the years I have built a real interest in indian fashion and choose the outfits I wear, *and also help* design the blouses that match my saree's. Much of my inspiration comes from the *fashion in indian movies*, as actresses wear the most beautiful outfits, but also over time I have begun *to appreciate indian* designers and take inspiration from their designs...

Here are my top *6 Indian fashion designers*.

1. Manish Malhotra

Manish Malhotra is a huge designer *for Bollywood. He is known* for his exquisite lenghas, and unique but lavish designs. Indian celebrities *love his pieces and you can find* Kajol, Kareena Kapoor and Priyanka Chopra rocking up to an event wearing *one of his beautiful pieces*, and even featuring in his runway shows. And you can bet that you'll see a few *of his outfits featured in* say, EVERY Indian film. I absolutely love his attention *to detail particularly in his lengha* designs. The skirts are always full of character *and embroidery coupled with a* plain blouse. His styles at the moment are a *mix of couture and also a gorgeous* 'Diffusion' collection.

104

Top 6 Indian Fashion Designers
Previous Spread: Designs by Manish Malhotra

The Diffusion *Collection contains sarees, kalidars and* tunics and has stunning bright pieces *with quite literally a diffusion of different styles* and colour in one outfit.

2. Tarun Tahiliani

I've decided that one day, Tarun Tahiliani will design my wedding lengha. I'm in love with his designs, *from sarees to lengha's to kurta's*. I will let the pictures speak for themselves but the outfits are absolutely *stunning. His pieces boast* complete embroidery marvels if I'm honest as the detailed stitching *is beautiful. He makes beautiful* designs that look heavy without using lots of jewels; its more about the *stitching and textile detail. Tarun* Tahiliani mixes traditional Indian styles and heritage with modern, *international couture often using* Italian pattern cutting in his designs. His vision was to create the '*Indian Modern*' and *he* has certainly done that... as well as being the first Indian designer to showcase at *Milan Fashion* Week. Winner.

3. Payal Singhal

Simplicity, elegance and femininity are all in Payal Singhal's gorgeous designs. *Her designs are* unique and she combines different styles in one outfit. She puts a *modern twist on what is* actually quite a casual indian outfit such as the patiala outfits *in the second collage below*. Many of her designs include a modern twist on *indian clothing as she combines skirts* with churidar trousers and chunias *with jumpsuits. I particularly love her kurta* designs, they are stunning!

4. Sabyaschi Mukherjee

Where to start with *these designs! They are so different to designs* i'm used to seeing. The patchwork *detail is what stands out for me and in particular* his lengha outfits are *beautiful! Sabyaschi is known for using unusual materials*, fabrics and texturing as well *as a vibrant colour palette making no piece the* same as another. His designs represent *cultural traditions particularly of his* hometown of Kolkata and he claims to produce designs *of international styling* with an Indian soul.

5. Rohit Bal

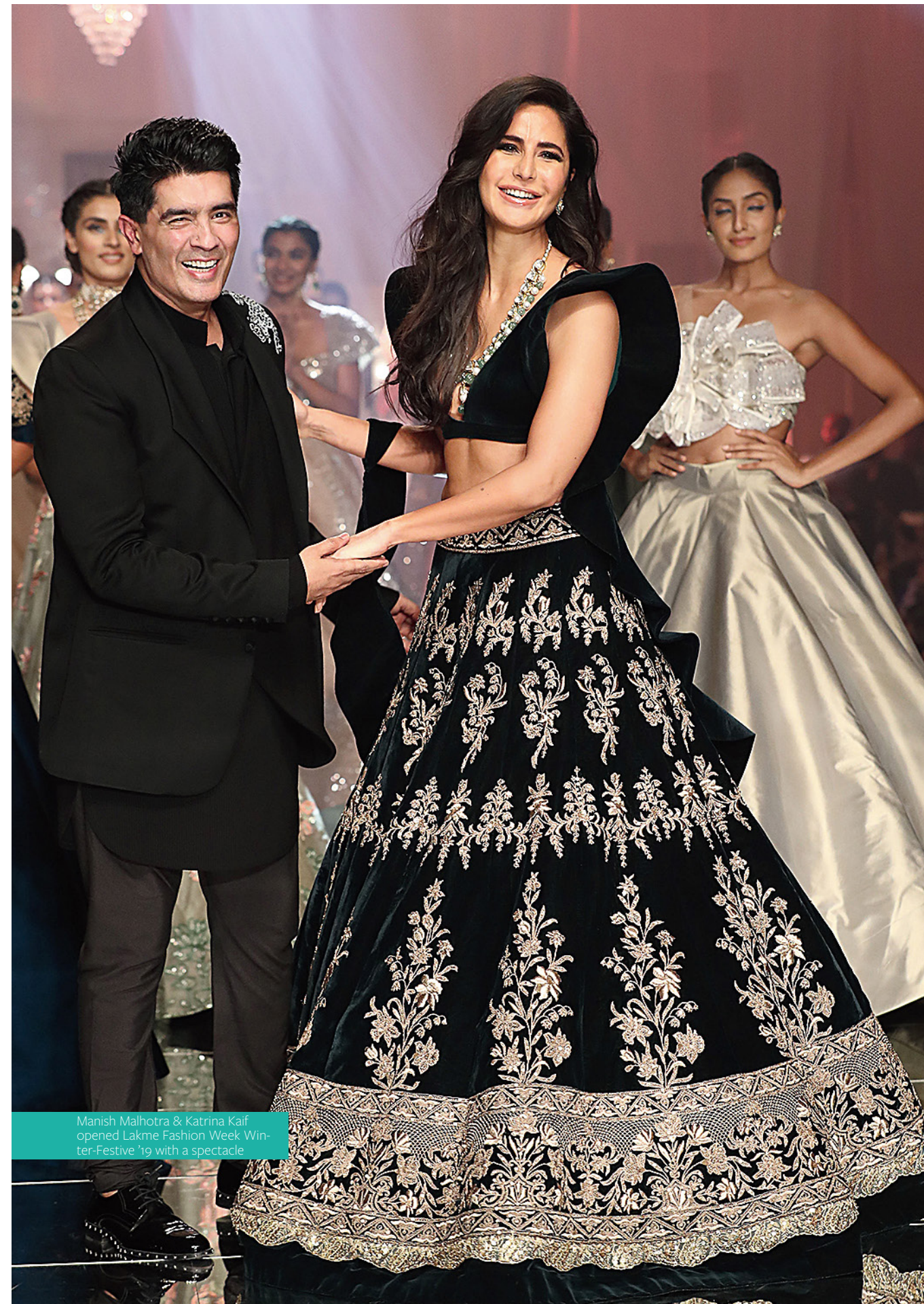
Immediately one thing stands out for me with Rohit Bal's designs, and that is the detailed print *work. It's definitely* something that all these pieces have in common. Rohit Bal is known for drawing *upon history, fantasy and* folklore in his designs, paying close attention to detail and mixing modern *with tradition. You can see* a real historical element in his designs, from a number of different cultures. *Rohit Bal is definitely one* of the most famous and most adorned Indian fashion designers around the *world and has even caught* the eye of many Hollywood actresses.

Nimi Notes

105

6. Ritu Kumar

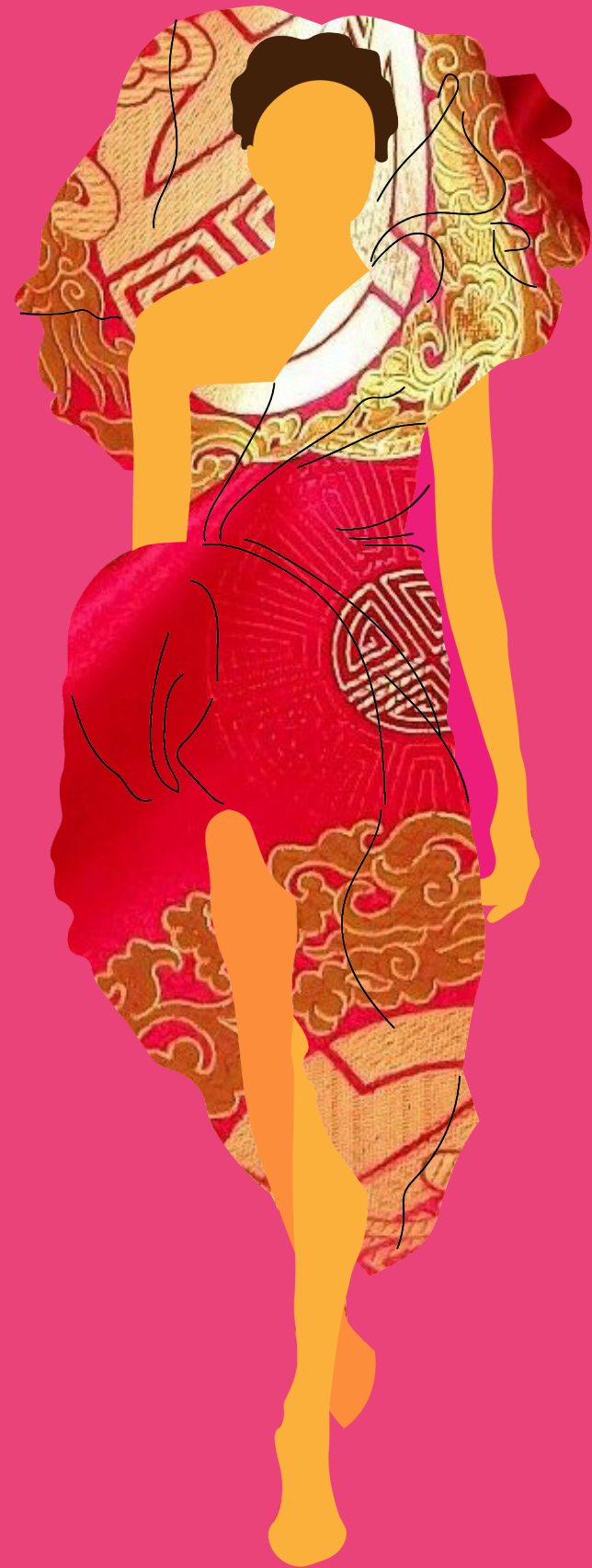
If you want a bit of *everything*, **Ritu Kumar** is definitely your woman for Indian fashion. From simple kurta outfits to *detailed embroidered lenghas*, she has created it. She is yet another designer that puts a modern twist *on a traditional piece*. **Ritu Kumar** was the first woman credited to introduce the 'boutique' culture *in India when she launched* her brand name 'Ritu'. She has a number of different collections, in particular *I love her LABEL* collection which is a mix of contemporary and urban designs based around western *fashion with* an Indian heritage. Her indian collection uses distinctive colours, intricate embroidery *and high* quality fabrics. It is easy to see why she has the largest designer-wear brand in India.



Manish Malhotra & Katrina Kaif opened Lakme Fashion Week Winter-Festive '19 with a spectacle

SILK WEAVE

China





MARK CARTWRIGHT

Silk in Antiquity

Silk is a fabric first produced in Neolithic China from the filaments of the cocoon of the silk worm. *It became a staple source* of income for small farmers and, as weaving techniques improved, the *reputation of Chinese silk* spread so that it became highly desired across the empires of the ancient *world*. *As China's most* important export for much of its history, the material gave its name to the *great trading network* the Silk Road, which connected East Asia to Europe, India, and Africa. Not *only used to make fine* clothes, silk was used for fans, wall hangings, banners, and as a popular alternative *to paper for writers* and artists.

Origins & Cultivation

Silk is produced by silk worms (*Bombyx mori*) to form the *cocoon within which* the larvae develop. A single specimen is capable of producing a 0.025 mm thick *thread over 900 metres* (3,000 ft) long. Several such filaments are then twisted *together to make a thread* thick enough to be used to weave material. Fabrics were *created using looms*, and treadle-operated versions appear in, for example, the murals *in tombs of the Han* dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE). The silk could be dyed and painted *using such minerals* and natural materials as cinnabar, red ochre, powdered silver, *powdered clam shells*, and indigo and other inks extracted from vegetable matter.

The known *examples of woven* silk date to C.2700 BCE & come from the site of qianshanyang *in cSericulture* - that is the cultivation of mulberry leaves, the tending of silkworms,

the gathering of threads from their cocoons and the weaving of silk - first appears in the archaeological record of ancient China c. 3600 BCE. Excavations at Hemudu in Zhejiang province have *revealed Neolithic* tools for weaving and silk gauze. The earliest known examples of woven silk date *to c. 2700 BCE* and come from the site of Qianshanyang, also in Zhejiang. Recent archaeological *evidence suggests* that the Indus Valley civilization in the north of the Indian subcontinent was also *making silk contemporary* with the Neolithic Chinese. They used the Antheraea moth to produce silk *threads for weaving*.

However, silk production on a large scale and involving *more sophisticated* weaving techniques would only appear from the Chinese Shang and Zhou dynasties *in the 2nd millennium BCE*. Silk then became one of the most important *manufactured and traded* goods in ancient China, and finds of Shang dynasty (*c. 1600 - 1046 BCE*) silk in an Egyptian tomb are testimony to its esteemed *value and use in early* international trade.

Evolution

During the *Han dynasty, the* quality of silk improved even further, becoming finer, stronger, *and often with* multicoloured embroidered patterns and designs of human and animal *figures. Chinese* characters are also woven into the fabric of many surviving examples. The weave *of some Han* period pieces, with 220 warp threads per centimetre, is extremely fine. The cultivation *of the silk worms* themselves also became more sophisticated from the 1st century CE with techniques *used to speed up* or slow their growth by adjusting the temperature of their environment. Different *breeds were used*, and these were crossed to create silk worms capable of producing threads with *different qualities* useful to the weavers.

Weavers were usually women, and it was *also their responsibility* to make sure the silk worms were well fed on their favourite diet of chopped *mulberry leaves and* that they were sufficiently warm enough to spin thread for their cocoons. The *industry became* such a vital source of income for families that land dedicated to the cultivation of *mulberry bushes was* even made exempt from reforms which otherwise took away *agricultural land* from peasant ownership and mulberry plots became the only *land that it was possible* for farmers to claim hereditary ownership of. Mencius, *the Confucian philosopher*, advocated the smallest of land holdings always set *aside a plot to plant mulberry*. As demand grew, then the state and those with enough *capital to do so set up* large workshops where both men and women worked. Great *aristocratic houses had* their own private silk production team with several hundred *workers employed in* producing silk for the estate's needs and for resale. Silk *production even became the* subject of poems and songs such as this example from the Master Xun philosophical text *of the* Warring States period:

How naked its external form,
Yet it *continually transforms* like a spirit.
Its achievement *covers the world*,
For it has created ornament *for a myriad generations*.

Ritual ceremonies and musical performances *are completed* through it; Noble and humble *are distinguished with* it;
Young and old *rely on it*;
For *with it alone can* one survive.
(*in Lewis, 114-115*)

Eventually, *the Chinese could* no longer keep the lucrative secret of silk production to *themselves and it* began to be manufactured in Korea and Japan where it would become a state-*controlled industry*. *Other* states and cultures then acquired the skills of sericulture such as India *around 300 CE, and from* there it spread to Byzantium, Arabia, the Levant, and Italy.

Trade: the Silk Road

The fame of Chinese *manufactured silk spread* across the famous trade route which took its name - the Silk Road - such *was the commodity's importance* to the Chinese economy. The Silk Road or Sichou Zhi Lu was actually *an entire network of overland* camel caravan routes connecting China to the Middle East and hence is *now often referred to as the* Silk Routes by historians. Silk - in the form of the thread, woven cloth, and *finished products* - was thus exported via middlemen (no single trader ever *travelled the length of* the routes) not only to neighbouring states such as the *Korean kingdoms and Japan but* also to the great empires of India, Persia, Egypt, *Greece, and Rome. In the case* of the latter, it is said that the eventual financial *collapse of the state was* in part due to the constant drain of silver to the east where *it went to purchase the* silk that the Romans could not live without. The Romans *even called the Chinese Seres*, after the word for silk in that language.

In addition to land routes and passage across the Inland Sea to Japan, from the 11th century CE Chinese junks sailed and traded across the Indian Ocean and silk thus remained the number *one export product of* China for centuries; it would only be rivalled by porcelain and tea from the *15th century CE. By the 20th* century CE, it would be Japan that would replace China as the world's *largest silk producer*.

Uses

In China, and later elsewhere, *silk was used to make* clothing (especially long robes, gowns, and jackets), hand fans, furnishings, *wall hangings, screens*, decorative scenes for and from famous books and poems, military banners, funeral *banners, Buddhist* mandalas, and for the purposes of writing instead of bamboo or paper. Brightly *coloured and exquisitely* embroidered silk robes became a status symbol and helped distinguish officials *and courtiers* from the cotton- or plain-silk-wearing lower classes. In other *cultures, such as Korea*, there were even laws forbidding the wearing of silk by *persons below a certain social* rank. Embroidered silk became so varied *and refined that a whole* connoisseurship developed

around the material, similar to that *surrounding the fine* porcelain of Chinese potters. Taoist priests were another *group who were distinguished* by their silk robes, often embroidered with *ceremonial scenes*.

As a *valuable commodity* bolts of silk were often used as a form of currency, especially in the payment of *tribute such as by the Northern Song* (960-1127 CE) and the Southern Song (1127-1276 CE) to the *Liao and the Jin emperors*, respectively. Silk was also an esteemed gift. Given to tributary states *in appreciation of their loyalty*, it was an impressive symbol of the Chinese emperor's great wealth *and largesse*. *For example, in 25 BCE* alone, the Han gave as gifts an incredible 20,000 rolls of silk *cloth*. *Traders used it as a payment*, people paid their tax with it, and even armies were sometimes *paid in silk*.

In art, silk became a popular surface on which to *paint landscape scenes and* portraits. Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) artists were particularly famed for *their skills in dyeing, printing and painting on silk*, with many examples of their *work surviving in Japan where* they were sent as gifts. Silk books were made *which had copies of famous* paintings and so became reference albums for *art connoisseurs*.

Cultural Repercussions

The trade of *silk and other commodities* along the Silk Road also brought with it ideas and *cultural practices in both* directions; language and writing were especially important *elements transmitted* along the routes by traders, diplomats, monks, and travellers. Buddhism came *to China from India* and was then passed on to Korea and Japan. Explorers such as Marco Polo used *the route, as did* Christian missionaries from the west to enter China for the first time. New foodstuffs *were introduced into* China and then cultivated there such as walnuts, pomegranates, sesame, and coriander. *Silk, symbol of China* for so long, had opened the doors to new lands and new ideas, and finally connected *the great empires* of the ancient world.



A model presents a creation of Guo Pei during the Haute Couture 2019 Spring/Summer collection shows in Paris.

LIZA FOREMAN

Meet Angel Chang

The designer preserving chinese textiles

We interviewed the inspirational fashion designer keeping the ancient traditions of china's **ethnic minorities alive in her 21st** century collections.

For **fashion designer Angel Chang, the start** of the recession prompted her to change her design **focus and put all-but-forgotten weavers in** rural China front and centre. Based at the time in the **Big Apple, where she cut her teeth at established** fashion houses, such as Donna Karan, she was **motivated to change course by an exhibition she** saw at Shanghai Museum in 2009.

The museum showcased **the work of craftsmen from the Miao and Dong** tribes in Guizhou Province in rural China. **"I was designing for luxury brands in New York and Paris, but I was obsessed with these beautiful fabrics," she says. "At the time, I did not know where this passion would lead, nor did I know that I had the power to create change myself."**

It didn't take her long to get started. The textiles impressed **her so much that a few days** later she flew to China with a translator to make **contacts in the region. The translator** had previously helped collectors from a **number of international museums acquire** pieces from the area, which **China, at that time, had largely** forgotten.

"Inside **China, there are 55 ethnic minorities**, making up 8.5% of the population. There **is constant pressure, both socially** and from the government, for these groups to assimilate

into the **majority Han culture, so it means** that their language, oral history, and unique way of dress are **quickly eroding," she says.**

Scattered in **villages far and wide, these home-grown** artisans work at a somewhat different pace to the country's **vast manufacturing industry, which has** also been threatening their existence. Chang sought to **change that. Finding the right villages on** that first trip, and subsequently, was no mean feat, given **there were no phones, sometimes no roads** or even village names to help. Electricity had still to **reach most parts. But the effort paid off.**

Chang had previously focused on **developing hi-tech fashion in New York, but** the trip inspired her to create a **capsule collection using only traditional** hand-woven textiles. This took some time.

The process **is organic, seasonal and slow and** involves collecting fallen leaves and petals at **a certain time of year to create dyes,** hand-spinning and hand-weaving, and raising silk **worms. A jacket can take two** years to make, or material can be dyed for 12 months.

Chang **found support from Jiang Qiong Er,** the creative director of luxury brand Shang Xia, and she established **a base locally. "This support** gave me the courage to leave the New York fashion industry and move **to China," she says. "Then, I received a generous sponsorship from Pernod Ricard to start a capsule collection and that's how it all began."**

After making multiple research trips, she based **her atelier in Dimen village. She** collaborated with the Western China Cultural Ecology Research Workshop, **which was instrumental** in tracking down the right people for the job. (It **is an eco-museum and research** centre that is committed to preserving the **indigenous culture.**)

"I would say, 'I need **someone to do this', and they** would name a master craftsman," she says. "This **helped. There are certain** villages that know how to do certain things, like hand-**pleating, or that are named after** their speciality, like the long or short skirt. There **are villages and tribes skilled** in doing traditional, decorative metal work, so some guidance was key."

Historically, **the villagers have made** pieces for their own use, as family heirlooms, so Chang's first job was to **convince them to work with her.** She has learnt a lot about traditional production methods and they **have learnt from her. "Each family** is given 670 square metres of land to grow crops. In keeping **with the organic process in the region,** they grow cotton in the spring to weave in the cooler fall months **for family use," she explains.**

Master weavers spin the cotton and thread on a handloom **that resembles a wheel from** a horse cart, and each family has its own indigo dye **vat, and sometimes dye pieces** for up to a year. The material is then pounded **on a stone slab, using a wooden mallet** to retain the colour, and ingredients **such as chilli and pig's blood are used** to change the colour of the dye. The **villagers usually produce durable** fabrics, but Chang experimented with lightweight, **fine fabric blends for pieces** in her capsule collection, working with traditional techniques.

An **airy pleated dress in the collection** was hand-dyed in Zhaoxing, then hand-pleated in Giuding village, **using an ancient steaming process.** The Dong people created a necklace using traditional metalwork. **In the past, horse dung would have** been used to bleach the hand-woven fabric, but to produce the **white fabric pieces, material was instead** boiled in

water, dried in the sun, and then washed in a mineral powder that *naturally repels mosquitos*.

Chang had to encourage the villagers to work *at a faster pace to get the* amount of materials she needed for the collection. *In one case, she brought in a master* craftsman to teach villagers to weave *on bigger looms*. *She has also* encouraged the passing on of skills — her *Kickstarter campaign has funded a cottage* industry to produce bags using the villagers' *craftsmanship and a* programme to encourage the elders to teach their traditions to the next *generation*.

“Some 70% *of a village's population* leaves their family to find work in coastal factories and many children (58 *million-plus in China*) *are left* behind and grow up without seeing much of their parents,” she says. “*While doing this project*, the younger generation tell me about their lifestyle, their experience having *worked at the coastal* factories through their 20s, and their desire to find work in their home village.”

Chang plans to use these materials in designing *sustainable pieces for her* new employer Lululemon in Canada and to create a network to help export *these textiles overseas*.

“I felt it was necessary to bring this craftsmanship approach to the West *and into the* modern world somehow. I recently joined (sportswear brand) *Lululemon, as Head* Designer of their innovation incubator Lululemon Lab, to *see how to bring these design* concepts to a broader market,” she says. She is *looking into working these materials* into their collections, “or merging *this artisanal craftsmanship with* future innovation”.

Chang was recently back in Dimen, developing materials that will appeal to the Western market *at large*. “*I am interested in creating* items of higher quality and longer use, from all-natural *materials that age well and become more* beautiful the longer they are in use. For me, indigenous *knowledge holds the solutions to our* sustainable future.”

She is partnering with non-profit partners *Global Heritage* Fund and Dimen Dong cultural eco-museum to develop the *villagers' skills to make the fabrics* and garments more modern-looking, and thereby help connect *these textiles to the global market*.

“There are very few opportunities to generate an *income in the villages, so weaving* fabric allows mothers to stay in the comfort of their own home while *raising their kids*,” she says.

Chang is one of a growing number of entrepreneurs making such *artisan crafts relevant* overseas. She says that the global artisanal sector is a US\$34 billion economy, *and the second-largest* employer of women in the developing world.

The government has also changed its attitude. *In the last few years, it has* been building new roads and the transportation infrastructure *has vastly improved*. *These* roads have created an influx of tourists, and it is *easier to find places to stay*, she says. “On the flip side, it is more difficult to find *old fabrics and textiles in the* villages. The tourists are not as interested in the local *culture, so the shops cater to* their demand with new machine-made clothes and *cheaper manufactured items*,” she says.

Still, *she is their biggest fan*. “*I was* driven by a love for these beautiful textiles. There was magic in the *way they turned humble materials* from the earth into elaborately embroidered jackets and baby-carriers. *When I discovered that these* traditional fabrics were at risk of disappearing forever, I was determined *to find a way to keep them alive*.”



Photography: Qilai Shen

**Driven by a love for
these beautiful textiles**

