

Catalpa Leaves

Kelsie Doty, Sherry Haar (faculty mentor),
Kansas State University, USA

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Natural dyes have been used to create color and pattern on fiber and textiles. Hand weavers have immersion dyed yarns with plants and trees (Doty & Haar, 2014; “Wendy Weiss”, 2013). Prints and patterns on fabrics have been created with bundling and steaming methods using garden flowers, plant leaves and local windfall from plants (Flint, 2008; Haar, 2010/2011; Kadolph & Casselman, 2004).

The asymmetrical skirt and handwoven top are part of a design series with the overarching purpose to explore natural dyes from trees as well as taking inspiration from their color and texture. The particular aims of this design were to investigate tree leaves bundled and steamed on fabric and to experiment with thickened dyewoods painted onto yarn to create gradients.

The skirt surface design was created by bundling and steaming apple and peach tree leaves within silk charmeuse that was premordanted with aluminum sulfate. The high temperature of the vertical steamer generated bright yellow/green leaf prints that were then modified with 2% iron to of weight of fabric to sadden and darken the color, better matching the handwoven textiles. Inspiration for the skirt design came from the silhouette of a catalpa leaf. Draping and flat pattern methods were used to create the garment patterns, which were sewn by hand and machine.



The handwoven top features gradient dyed 50% wool/50% silk fingering weight yarns. Gradients were created by dampening 12 inch long skeins, pretreated with alum, and painted using gum tragacanth thickened Osage orange and Osage orange modified with iron. After the dye had set for 24 hours the skeins were steamed to set the color and washed till the rinse water ran clear. Cotton, hemp, wool and silk yarns, pretreated with alum, were immersion dyed a solid color with quebracho, Osage orange, and Osage orange modified with iron. Woven patterns were sampled on the iPad app IWeaveIt and hand woven on a four-harness 23” wide floor loom. The crop tank was draped, drafted and sewn from the woven textiles and embellished with crystal beads, mimicking the small beads of sap found on a tree.



This garment contributes to the knowledge of uncommon leaves for bundling and steaming, being apple and peach tree leaves. The leaves gave a bright yellow green color and were subsequently saddened with iron to produce a dark blue green, better coordinating with the hand woven top.

Moreover, this garment contributes to the knowledge of thickened natural dyes for painting on yarns. The initial solution was 4.2g Osage orange extract, 15ml boiling water, and 15g gum tragacanth solution, with .042g dissolved iron added for the second layer. However, the consistency was too thick so additional hot water was added to create the constancy of whole milk. The recommendation for thickener to water ratio is 1:3 instead of 1:1. This thinned down solution had better penetration while still controlling color movement.

References

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