

How-To



Eastern Meets Western Dyeing Techniques Carole Parker*

Frequent VC contributor and fabric artist Carole Parker reports on the results of three experiments that combine both traditional Japanese resist dyeing and western discharge dyeing techniques.

Eastern dyeing techniques involve using resists to stop dye from going where it is not wanted. It would never occur to an eastern dye master to remove dye after applying it. Why would you do that when you can direct where the dye should go in the first place?

Western dyeing techniques use resists as well, but western dyeing also uses a technique to remove dye from already dyed fabric known as discharge. So, what happens when you combine the two?

Mokume (woodgrain) shibori is a technique that uses running stitches to get the woodgrain effect. If you're a quilter who does even stitching, you need to offset your stitches to get the effect. Do *not* line up your stitches. If you're not very good at hand stitching, mokume is perfect for you, since uneven stitches get an excellent woodgrain effect.

In traditional shibori technique, you stitch white fabric to get your resist, apply dye, process, remove the stitching, rinse, wash, sew, and wear. You can do simple shapes with mokume shibori, but complex shapes do not work as well.



T-shirt used for Experiment 1: Mokume (woodgrain) discharge with liquid bleach.



Experiment 1 stitching closeup shows the jumps to try and create a simple wine bottle shape. To get a *simple* shape: 1. Draw the design on your fabric. 2. At the first line of your simple design, bring your needle out. 3. Jump the needle/thread to the second line of the design. 4. Insert needle at second line of design. 5. Continue stitching to desired stop point.

Experiment 1

Mokume Discharge With Liquid Bleach.

I used two convention t-shirts to see what would happen when I combined techniques. For both t-shirts, I stitched them with the same design.

Note: When you discharge items, be sure to rinse them thoroughly before putting them in the washing machine to avoid accidental discharge. If the items discharged are the same color, you can wash them together. I would be leery of washing discharged items of different colors together to avoid accidental color displacement.



Closeup at the ends. Tip: Leave long tails at one end to make for easier pulling/drawing up of the stitches.



Close up of pulled stitching area at the start of the liquid bleach discharge.

CAUTION: When using the discharge technique, use in a well ventilated area with plenty of air circulation. If a vent is available, use it. Wearing a respirator with a vapor insert protects your lungs from damage.

On the first t-shirt:

1. Stitch design.
2. Pull up stitches to form resist.



I call this tool my "chemical baster" because it reminds me so much of a baster used for poultry. It was bought at American Scientific. This is what I used to put liquid bleach on the t-shirt, as a means to try and control where the bleach went.

Note: If you can see any thread between the folds of fabric, you have not pulled it tightly enough, and you will not get any resist. If the thread will not pull from one end, try pulling from the other end.

3. Traditionally, you soak your resisted piece in water until the fabric is saturated. About 20 minutes or when air bubbles are no longer coming up from the fabric in the container. I did not do this for this experiment.
4. Apply liquid bleach using a chemical baster.
5. Starting at the top, squirt bleach.
6. Move t-shirt, squirt bleach on next area.
7. Repeat.
8. Left bottom inches unbleached.
9. Rinse with plain water.

Note: Plain water does *not* stop the discharge process. However, experience shows that applying vinegar - which stops the discharge process - directly to a piece that has bleach on it is not a safe process.

10. Remove stitching.
11. Rinse with plain water again.
12. Put into washing machine with second t-shirt and approximately one quarter cup vinegar in the detergent compartment.



Pulled mokume stitches after application of liquid bleach. Top area is lighter than the bottom, since the application of liquid bleach was started at the top and worked down towards the bottom

13. Put an extra rinse cycle on the washing machine to thoroughly rinse the vinegar out.
14. After washing, dry.

Observation

While the effect on the liquid bleach t-shirt was interesting, I felt like I didn't have enough control, and the bleach leaked to the front of the t-shirt.

Experiment 2

Mokume Discharge With Soft Scrub and Discharge Paste

Since I did not feel like I had enough control using liquid bleach, I decided to try using Soft Scrub with Bleach and Discharge Paste. I have used both on other projects using stamps and stencils but not resist stitching.

On the second t-shirt:

1. Stitch design.
2. Pull up stitches.



T-shirt with pulled threads.

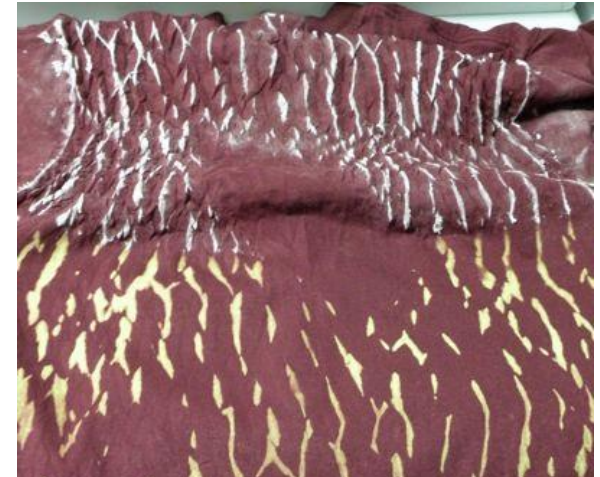


Mokume stitches pulled and discharging agents applied.

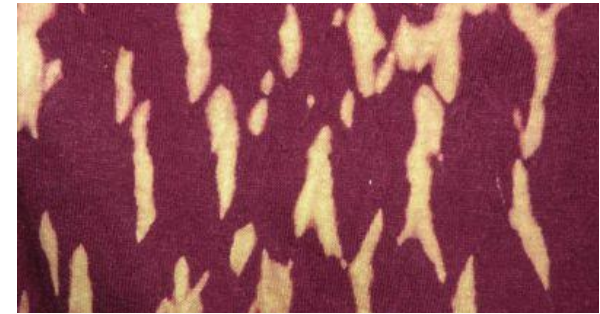


Pulling the mokume threads from Discharge Paste area.

3. Apply Soft Scrub with Bleach to the fold edges on the top half of design.
4. Apply Discharge Paste to the fold edges on the bottom half of design.
5. Let both dry.
6. Pull stitches.
7. Iron Discharge Paste area to get necessary chemical reaction.
8. Rinse t-shirt.
9. Discovered that the Soft Scrub with Bleach portion did not discharge because it stayed on top of the fabric and did not penetrate.
10. Restitch top portion of design.
11. Combine Soft Scrub with Bleach with liquid bleach to get right consistency for discharge.
12. Let dry.
13. Rinse.



Unbound t-shirt after application of Soft Scrub with Bleach and Discharge Paste, ironed to get reaction but not rinsed yet. Note that Soft Scrub is still on the top portion of the t-shirt.



Closeup of of mokume discharge paste section before rinsing.



Closeup of Soft Scrub with Bleach plus liquid bleach section. Note that the bleach section is closer to white, and the discharge paste went to yellow/gold.

14. Put into same washing machine load with first t-shirt and approximately one quarter cup vinegar in the detergent compartment.
15. Put an extra rinse cycle on the washing machine to thoroughly rinse the vinegar out.
16. After washing, dry.

Observations

I liked the control achieved with the Soft Scrub with Bleach and liquid bleach combination and Discharge Paste. The advantage of the Soft Scrub with Bleach and liquid bleach is that you can buy both of them readily in the store.

The disadvantage is that if your fabric is fragile - like some silks, it may get a hole in it. Discharge Paste is relatively safe on most fabrics including silk. However, you have to iron the Discharge Paste areas to get the necessary chemical reaction for it to discharge. Sometimes, it may seem like it successfully discharged a fabric, but when you rinse it, it goes away and does not show the discharge.

Experiment 3

Kumo Discharge With Liquid Bleach

For those that do not sew, I used a binding technique known as kumo (spiderweb) shibori. Again, kumo uses the same traditional process as mokume, but binding the fabric rather than sewing it.

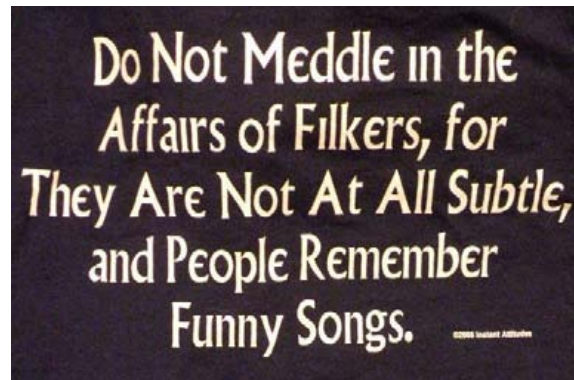
Traditional kumo binding:

1. Take fabric and put it on a kumo hook.
2. Draw your hand over the fabric.
3. Pleat fabric evenly trying to get more folds in, so you see more of the spiderwebbing effect.
4. Bind fabric with thread by wrapping several times around the bottom of your desired size spiderweb, pulling tightly with each wrap.
5. Bring the thread up the fabric by wrapping around the folds.
6. Continue thread wrapping to desired height.

Note: The unbound areas will dye solid, so you can determine the size of your center hole by how much fabric you wrap.

7. Repeat as desired.

A black t-shirt with text was used for this experiment. An inside seam was used to determine whether or not the black would discharge. When something is printed on a t-shirt or similar garment, the print stays.



The original black t-shirt with text on the front.



Some of the kumo binding before discharge.

Non-traditional technique without kumo shibori hook:

1. Pinch fabric with one hand.
2. Draw other hand down the fabric to the desired depth.
3. Bind fabric with thread wrapping two or three times around the bottom of the desired size spiderweb.
4. Knot to avoid unwrapping.
5. Move fabric around to get the most even pleats possible.

Note: Large pleats will get large areas dyed without spiderwebbing, and other large areas will stay the original color. To get more spiderwebbing, use smaller pleats.

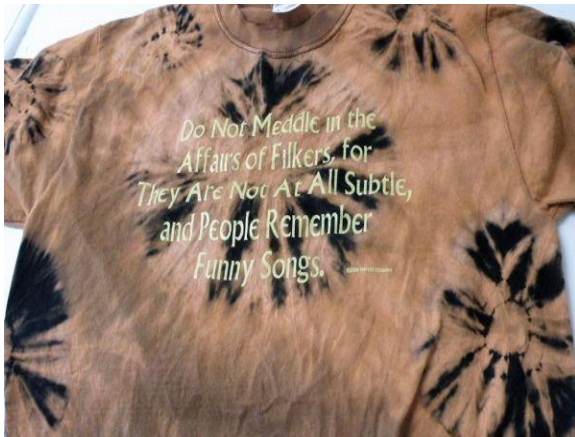
6. Wrap a few more times at bottom pulling tightly with each wrap.

Note: When bound tightly, the pleats will not be movable. Make sure your pleat adjustments are done before this point.

7. Continue thread wrapping to desired height.

Note: The unbound areas will dye solid, so you can determine the size of your center hole by how much fabric you wrap.

8. Repeat as desired.
9. Soak t-shirt in plain water until saturated.
10. Dispense bleach into smaller container for easier control.
11. Add bleach to water, starting with 2 ounces (1/4 cup), and adding more to get desired effect.
12. If impatient or not getting the desired effect, apply bleach directly to t-shirt.
13. When desired discharge is achieved, rinse immediately with water.
14. Discharge and rinse until overall desired effect is achieved.



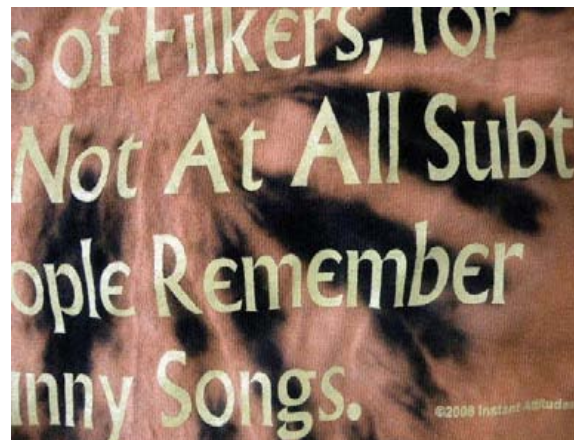
The t-shirt front after discharge.



T-shirt with kumo binding while discharging.

15. Rinse whole t-shirt with water.
16. In container filled with water, add vinegar.

Note: Water does not stop the discharge. Vinegar stops the discharge but experience shows that you do *not* want to apply vinegar directly to an item that has bleach on it.



Close up of kumo discharge in the text area.



Close up of bound text area while discharging.

17. Rinse with plain water.
18. Remove bindings.
19. Rinse again.
20. Put in washing machine and rinse.

Note: Since vinegar was already used in a previous rinse, you do not need to add vinegar to the wash cycle. However, if you do add vinegar, no harm will be done.



The back of the t-shirt after discharge.



Close up of discharged kumo shibori. Note the strong binding line in the center area but that the outer edge does not seem to have one.

Observation

Bleach travels differently than dye does. When a technique stops dye, it doesn't necessarily stop bleach. Or it doesn't stop bleach in the same fashion. Photos show that single thread binding does not act as a strong resist. While it held the fabric folds, it did not show as readily as it would with dye. However, where the thread was bound several times - such as at the bottom and top bindings - it showed readily.

Conclusion

Combining techniques is fun, and I'll do it again!

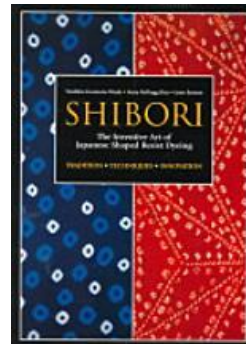
For future mokume discharge, I'll stick with using Soft Scrub with Bleach combined

with liquid bleach or Discharge Paste to get my design. To get the woodgrain to be closer together, I'll use smaller stitches. Or I could look at doing large stitching, discharge, rinse and wash, and then try doing smaller stitches to get a different effect.

For future kumo discharge, I'll look at wrapping the thread several times for the spiderweb to show more readily unless I don't want them to show.

Here are a few reference books that provide more information on dyeing in general and shibori dyeing in particular.

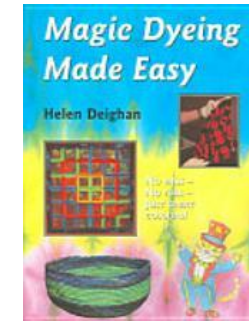
Shibori: The Inventive Art of Japanese Shaped Resist Dyeing - Tradition Techniques Innovation by Yoshiko Wada, Mary Kellogg Rice, and Jane Barton ISBN 0-87011-559-6. Copyright in Japan 1983.



This is the penultimate book on Shibori dyeing techniques. I found it in a used bookstore for \$85. Other people report paying \$125. The hard bound book is out of print, so if you find it, grab it! Recently, a paperback version has come out for \$45. This book has background information, lots of inspirational photographs, and decent instructions, so you can learn how to do shibori.

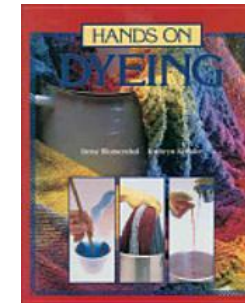
Magic Dyeing Made Easy by Helen Deighan ISBN 0-9540333-3-7. Copyright 2003 by Helen Deighan.

If you can't find the Shibori book, then you'll be able to find this one in quilt stores and maybe other local bookstores. Instructions are well explained, and I wish I had found this book first when I started. Several of the techniques overlap those found in the Shibori book.



Hands on Dyeing by Betsy Blumenthal and Kathryn Kreider. ISBN 0-934026-36-X Copyright 1988 by Betsy Blumenthal and Kathryn Kreider.

Aimed more at dyeing yarn, they do have several interesting projects plus a section on how to do stitch resist using a sewing machine. Some of the stitch resist methods look somewhat like shibori techniques.



Carole Parker is an amateur costumer and fabric experimenter with special interests in textiles, dyeing, and wearable art. Visit her [web site](#) for costuming tips, and read about her earlier work with traditional shibori techniques in [VC volume 1, issue 5](#).