

# BETSY STERLING BENJAMIN

[www.BetsySterlingBenjamin.com](http://www.BetsySterlingBenjamin.com)

## **Lectures on Kesa, Rozome and Resist-Dye Techniques, Japanese Textiles, Costume, and Design**

All are illustrated lectures utilizing slides and/or video

\*Requests for special topic lectures for particular audiences welcomed.

\*Please contact for rates and availability

### **ROZOME/RESIST TEXTILES**

#### **The World of Rozome**

Liquid dye on thirsty cloth, molten wax and a steady hand. These are the elements of *rozome*. Many cultures consider fabric dyeing an art form. Historically it has been seen as clothing to designate rank or status, ritual cloth created to celebrate or commemorate life passages, soft hangings to narrate old stories of religion and myth or to depict honored royalty and even deities. In Japan wax-resist is not called *batik* but *roketsu-zome* or the shortened form, *ro-zome* (wax-dyeing). Although modern European and American *batik* have been inspired by the wax-resist fabrics of Indonesia, Japan has its own historical source flowing from the Asian continent; a flow that inspired the textile treasures stored in the Shosoin Repository of Nara for more than 1200 years. Japanese *rozome* is a sister of the batik of Indonesia, but the Japanese process has many distinctive techniques; a unique product of Japanese inventiveness. In current time it has grown out of the area of ethnology and decorative arts and into the field of fine arts where it has dazzled thousands with its dynamic possibilities.

#### **Japanese Resist-Dyeing: History and Practice**

Japan has an ancient tradition of fine resist-dyed textiles extending over 1200 years. During the Nara Period (645-794 CE), three resist techniques flourished: *rokechi* (wax resist), *kokechi* (bound resist) and *kyokechi* (clamp resist). *Rokechi* and *kokechi* are the ancient predecessors of the *rozome* and *shibori* techniques that continue to flourish in modern day Japan. Along with *yuzenzome* (paste resist) and *katazome* (stencil resist), the four resist techniques are the predominant methods of surface design for textiles. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, these techniques have been rediscovered as vehicles for dynamic contemporary art and innovative fashion medium.

#### **Buddha's Cloth: Historical and Contemporary Silk Painting in Japan**

An overview of the earliest history of silk dyeing in the East beginning with the cloth prepared for the dedication of the Great Buddha in Nara Japan in 752AD. The development of the continued use of silk through the middle-ages, an update of dyeing for the kimono industry and the dynamic use of the dyed silk for the creation of contemporary fine art in today's world.

## **KESA**

### **Historical Buddhist Kesa Robes: Inspiration for Contemporary Fiber Art**

The Japanese *kesa* or *kasaya* in Sanskrit, originated in India in fourth century BCE as a robe for the devotees of Buddha Shakyamuni. When Buddhism came to Japan in the 6th century AD the *kesa* followed, a treasured manifestation of the Buddhist *dharma*. While *kesa* are unfamiliar to many outside of the Buddhist community, they are in the collections of many museums outside of Japan with five US museums holding upwards of 100 *kesa* alone. As a fiber artist living in Japan for more than 18 years, I enjoyed the opportunity of basing my studio work on Japanese textile research and in 1999 began a project to create a contemporary *kesa* for each of the seven continents in the proscribed manner of the Buddhist tradition. With extensive research and planning, seven robes were created from layers of Asian silk, using the resist dye technique of *roketsu-zome* as well as *shishu* (embroidery), *kata-kinsai* (stenciled gold powders) and quilting.. The seven *kesa* were sent to sites on each continent where they were introduced as a contemporary form of a 2500 year old tradition and used in ceremonies for healing, and peace. The purpose of this research project was to create work that could transform thinking and bring an appreciation of the earth and its peoples, recognize our commonality, and the need for care of animal species at risk of extinction.

## **BATIK**

### **World Batik/ Sight and Sound**

A dazzling audio/visual presentation of wax-resist dyeing through the ages with focus on the fine contemporary work done on six continents. This was an opening presentation at the World Batik Conference-Boston 2005 ;"An eye and heart-opening experience," "Inspiring beyond words."

### **Global Trends in Contemporary Batik**

While *batik* is the word most English speakers use to identify wax-resist textiles, this is Bahasa Indonesia from the word *ambatik*: "to mark with spots or dots". In Japan this is known as *rozome*, in China it is *la-jie* and among Chinese minority tribes it is called *laran*. As a modern contemporary technique for putting pattern on cloth, this process has blossomed in the contemporary field. A number of old and new cycles and trends have come to the fore recently including abstraction, photo realism, political statements, ethnicity, spirituality as well as innovative presentations including mixed media and sculptural, installation work.

## **COSTUME/ FOLK TEXTILES**

### **Textile Treasures of Japan – Two Thousand Years of History**

The historical development of a unique Japanese costume is a direct reflection of geography and the social and political tenor of the times. Highlighting the twelve-layered *kimono* of the aristocratic Heian Court, the *kosode* of the warrior elite in the Kamakura era, the extravagances in textile designs of the merchant class of Edo the story will trace the political and social tides of Japan. Full of entertaining asides, the history of textiles starts with the weaving hall of the Sun Goddess and at the door of one of the 20,000 working looms in present-day Kyoto.

### **Golden Waterfalls, Windblown Pines: The Story of Kimono**

The Japanese kimono from its humble origins as workers' clothing and underwear for the Heian court 1000 years ago to the highest artistic expression of revered 'living national treasure'. The development of a unique Japanese costume with its special sensitivity to color, design and symbol echoes Japanese culture, history and way of life.

### **Color and Costume in the World of the Shining Prince – Heian Period, Japan**

The flowering of Japanese culture in the Heian Period (794 – 1185 CE) found a court preoccupied with form color and aesthetics. Using literary references from Murasaki Shikibu's Tale of Genji and Sei Shogunan's Pillow Book this lecture will help to illuminate the aesthetics, manners and life style of this extraordinary time through an analysis of the literature and *emaki*, narrative picture scrolls.

### **Japanese Folk Textiles**

Most early Japanese folk textiles in existence today were produced during the Edo and Meiji eras. The clothing of commoners, folk textiles, were used, worn-out, re sewn and later discarded. Textile art followed its function of material for wearing, yet a special freshness and directness, a joyous spontaneity makes even functional clothing seem appropriate for a festival. Folk textiles are the work of anonymous people, created for their family, to brighten their lives and their surroundings in an often poor and harsh environment. They were produced from inexpensive materials, usually cotton or bast fibers, woven on home looms during quiet winter months, and dyed in the available indigo vat. They celebrate a love of nature and of symbols. Japanese folk textiles are distinctive for their directness, un-self-consciousness; for their ruggedness, their simplicity, naiveté, vitality, richness, asymmetry; for their harmony and sensitivity to materials and use.

### **Changing Patterns, Changing Lives: A Historical View of Women, Textiles and Japan**

A view of the changing roles of women in Japan society in medieval to modern times from the unique view point of a textile historian. The focus of this lecture flows from the Sun Goddess of myth, to aristocrats and servants of Heian period, to samurai wives, commoners and farmers and to the liberated '*mo-ga*' of the last century.

## **DESIGN**

### **Japanese Design**

An analysis of the contrasting Yamato and Zen aesthetics that have predominate Japanese design for centuries. Continued examples will include *notan*, or dark/light composition, symbols, screen and scroll painting, kimono design, architecture, the concepts of *wabi sabi*, and the aesthetics of tea ceremony revealed in contemporary Japanese fashion, crafts and the current 'art scene'.