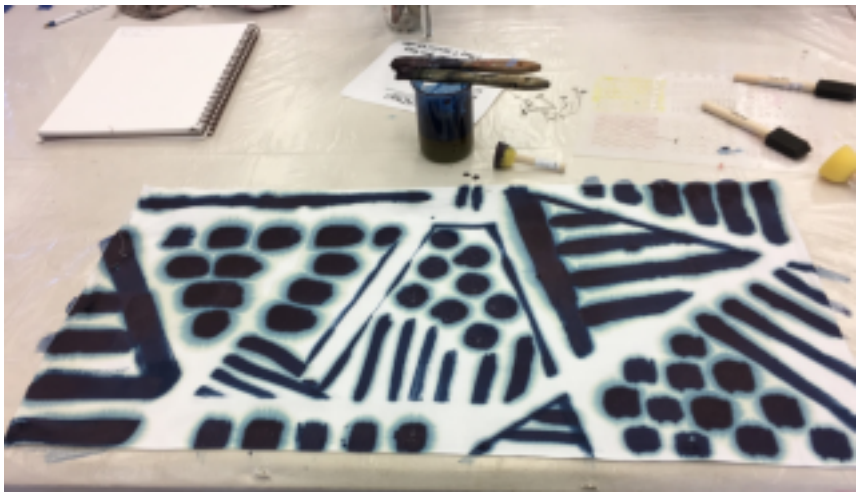
Painting With Thickened Indigo
Carola Jones, Teaching Artist



This process was taught to me in a textiles class at Penland School of Crafts in the summer of 2017. Sophena Kwon who co-taught the natural dye studio with her mother, Charllotte Kwon, shared it. They own Maiwa. I also took a class with Sophena and Danielle Bush called Natural Dyes: Print and Paint at Maiwa School of Textiles in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Recipe

- Pint Size Mason Jar w/Lid
- 300 ml Hot Water (approximately 1 ⅓ cups)
- ½ Tsp Lye
- 1 - 2 Tsp Powdered Plant Based Indigo (NOTE: Recipe will NOT work with synthetic or pre-reduced indigo.)
- ½ tsp Thiox
- *1 tbsp Thickener (Either Sodium Alginate, Gum Trag, Superclear, Monagum, Methyl Cellulose or Print Paste)

Workspace Preparation

A padded surface is needed to print on. My solution for large scale yardage is to cover a hollow door covered with layers of batting topped off with canvas. At first I placed it on a folding table with legs raised to

standing height. Now I have a pair of saw horses that I use instead of a table. For smaller projects, and for traveling I use a **Tailor Cushioned Quilter's Board**. It's lightweight and fits into a suitcase.

The Process

- Assemble all supplies.
- Fabric does not need a tannin or mordant.
- Pour 1⅓ cups of boiling water in a large mouth Mason jar or beaker. Add lye, thiox and indigo and stir well.
- In a separate wide mouth jar or glass measuring cup add dye thickener to 250 ml (approx. 8.5 oz.) hot boiling water. Stir well.
- Add thicken water to indigo mixture. Stir well.
- Thickener slows down oxidation. Need to work fast. Use round bristle brushes or other mark making tools. Black sponge brushes don't work as well.
- ***Check to see that mixture stays green. If indigo mixture turns blue it will NOT work.***
- Let indigo cloth dry.
- Rinse out in cold water because it has more oxygen. Indigo will wash out lighter.
- Redo process for depth of color.
- If all the indigo mixture is not used, cover tightly with plastic wrap (Press & Seal) and secure Mason jar lid. Oxygen is the enemy of thickened indigo.

My favorite cloth for painting with thickened indigo is cotton kimono cloth. It's the perfect size, and because it's narrow at about 15 inches wide, the selvedge edges are idea for quilted art projects.