

The EVOLUTION of my INDIGO WORK

BY LYNN POLLARD



THE VERY FIRST TIME I SAW A LOOM being woven on in the mid-'70s at a folklife festival in Atlanta, I knew that I was a weaver. While taking my first weaving class on a rigid heddle loom, I ordered a large 8-harness Fireside loom because I knew that tools were important, and I was going to weave for the rest of my life. That resolve led to a degree in textile engineering from Georgia Tech, where I learned two of the most important things that I have carried through my life: problem solving and working with dyes and fibers.

I continued to work actively as a weaver until 2007 when changes in my life required me to step away from weaving. When I finally found my way back to textiles, I began weaving pieces for the wall, imitating natural surfaces such as tree bark. A number of those pieces were woven of paper. As I developed a real need for papers, my collection of them grew. When the Robert C. Williams Paper Museum in Atlanta offered a course in Japanese papermaking, it seemed to be the perfect next step. That week we were asked to come up with a project for the final day

of class. Because I am not an art-on-demand maker, I struggled to come up with a suitable idea. Finally, I remembered an indigo vat in my studio, a remnant of a natural dye workshop.

I knew that nothing is ever truly new in textiles, but I didn't remember seeing any indigo-dyed paper. My sister was working on inkjet printable notecards at the time, and that was the paper I picked up to try in the vat. If I had tried the Japanese paper first, I would never have seen the kind of marks that the indigo dye could make on paper.

A weaver plans where every thread will go before ever stepping to the loom. It is a technical, problem-solving craft. There are almost no surprises if one has really worked on the piece. Moving to this new, unpredictable work has been exhilarating. While I control the chemistry in each vat and how the paper goes into it, how often, and how long, I'm almost always surprised by what comes out. That's what continues to draw me to this captivating complexity of a dye.

And, just lately, I'm thinking about my looms again.



BACKGROUND: **Indigo 7931**, 2011; 30 x 22 inches. Paper dipped into indigo dye vat. LEFT: Studio, Courtesy of Cobb Life Magazine. ABOVE: **Indigo 8827**, 2014; 30 x 22 inches. Paper dipped into indigo vat reduced with iron.



ABOVE: **Indigo 0413**, 2014; 30 x 22 inches. Paper dipped into multiple indigo vats. RIGHT: **Indigo 8835**, 2014; 22 x 30 inches. Paper dipped into indigo vat.

After the papermaking workshop, I dipped hundreds of cards into the vat, figuring out what this new process could do. I took them with me on a textile trip to Indonesia, thinking that I might need gifts. On Bali, we visited an indigo batik studio, where, on the wall, were large indigo dyed papers layered up and looking for all the world like the Gees Bend quilts from Alabama, and confirming that paper was already being dyed in indigo. I've since found many indigo dyed papers, including an ancient Qur'an of indigo dyed vellum with the writing in gold.

Though I had barely shown the indigo work to anyone else, and had not sold a piece, in a fit of hubris, I entered the American Craft Council (ACC) shows for the following year. I also signed up for a vendor table at the Textile Society of America (TSA) conference in Washington, DC. I was very encouraged by the reception in DC, which pushed me through the business challenges of setting up and running a booth at a major show. In another coincidence, an old friend's son was opening a large

internet gallery (UGallery), and I was fortunate enough to be accepted into it.

At the San Francisco ACC show, a textile artist friend and collector told me about the Michel Garcia indigo vats. I set one up as soon as I got home. Fortunately, vats don't have to be perfect for paper that will not be washed. This vat was very different from my thiox vat, and I thought that it was not going to work until I left a paper in overnight and found a totally different image in the morning. That changed my work, as did later learning how to make an iron vat, which gives me wonderful gray blues.

My work is evolving again and I have some new indigo pieces that I'm just beginning to show. I'm combining the vats more, trying gold leaf, pricking the paper, and working on a new finishing process.

And, just lately, I'm thinking about my looms again.

Lynn Pollard is a full-time artist who resides in Georgia. www.broadwovens.com