

## Approaching materials

— meaning of the materials in the textile works —

### Kumiko Namba

In the spring of 2010, I was asked to be a part of the exhibition 14 ways of approaching materials which focused on the materials used in the work. As this subject is always on my mind, I was happy to accept the invitation. Yet, this opportunity did make me rethink the relationship between the textiles and myself; between the fiber, thread and dye materials I use to form the colors and patterns of the woven surface.

In recent years I have been working with natural dyes as one of the tools of expression. In choosing the natural dyeing process, my materials become more than threads and dyes, but also the considerations of a wider range of elements; water, fire, weather, plants, ground soil, wind, light, air, and so on. For example PH levels and the mineral content of water for dye bath have a definite influence on the color as well as the temperature and heating time in the dyeing process. The Weather of the working day also affects the color. These are the immediate elements / conditions in the time-consuming work process. But by moving attention a bit further, one soon notices that the climate, the weather, the rainfall and the ground soil composition etc, which the dye plants experience cannot be dismissed. This may seem overstated as it could be said of most everything, not only about the work materials.

On the contrary, working with synthetic dye somehow does not require that I take a larger viewpoint. In other words, I can focus and concentrate on the immediate results like the targeted colors much closer in the dyeing process, though the concern about its environmental impact still looms in the back of my mind. When I wash raw fiber, spin it into threads, and dye it with natural materials, I sense that I am handling not only the fiber and dyes but their origin (animals or plants) as well as the environment in which they were grown. I believe that how close or far we stand to the materials can help us see more clearly the larger context against the broader background.

After deciding to use the natural dye in my work for this

exhibit, I chose to allow a section of the warp, unwoven, to hang vertically. Most of my weavings use the Ikat technique and I perceive its major character through the close control that I have taken as the artistic challenge, more precisely, as the proof of my identity as a weaver/creator. I did not choose to rely on the materials in weavings with the beauty they have by themselves. But this time, I decided to loosen my control so all the elements of the natural dye could breathe in and out through my work. And it gave me a heightened sense of being equal to the materials through this connection. In this five - piece installation I attempted to engage the viewer's sensibilities more freely with the fabric, the color and texture of the weavings. So, the relation of "push and pull" between the materials and myself still continues. Finally, I have started to feel more confident in accepting the materials as they are.

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The exhibition information;

Title: "14 ways of approaching materials"

Date: January 5-16, 2011

Place: Tenjinyama Bunka Plaza, Okayama, Japan

Contents: contemporary art works of two invited artists in each categories of; stone, paper, glass, wood, metal, ceramic, and textile.

Participated artists: Kiwame Kubo/ Terunao Kobayashi (stone), Teresa Kobayashi/ Isao Toshimori (paper), Akihiro Isogai/ Kyonnan Chang (glass), Takehiro Terada/ Katsuhiko Enomoto (wood), Atsushi Hirata/ Seiichi Iuchi (metal), Ryuichi Kakurezaki/ Masako Shiraishi (ceramic), Nobuko Kawasaki/ Kumiko Namba (textile)

Curation: Yoichi Takahara / Junko Fukuda