

She loves to work with infinite shades of grey, but each type of fibre reacts differently to dyes: “I make my own ink recipes for screen-printing, adding earth pigments I can’t use for dyeing, like ochre or sienna and other shiny minerals, to create iridescent effects. I do very few samples because I don’t mind being surprised. If I put four different fabrics in the same dye-bath, the outcome will be different because each fabric will absorb dyes differently. It’s even more blatant with natural dyes since they have a more complex molecular structure.”

Partnerships with artisans are a key part of the spirit of the brand. “I buy linen and cotton fabrics in the Vosges Mountains and wool and silk fabrics in the Loire region, directly from the local weavers. It gives a strong sense of purpose to my work.” She also uses fine silk hand-woven by “Sawang Boran,” an NGO based in Thailand: “It’s a remarkable silk produced by women artisans who raise their own silkworms with an eco-friendly method. We’re currently trying to set up a group show.”

As you might imagine Catherine sketches her designs on paper – it’s the start of a process that remains labour intensive and highly skilled. Next, she builds the screen, stretching and stapling the silk, actually a thin sheet of polyester, on a wooden frame. The ink-blocking stencil is set on it and exposed to light, creating a “negative” as

in old-fashioned photography. When the screen is washed, the areas where the pattern was wash away, leaving clear areas for the ink to pass through. Each colour requires an individual screen. The fabric is placed below the screen and the ink is placed on top. A squeegee is dragged across the screen, pushing ink through the stencil onto the fabric. Light or heavy pressure will give a faded or solid looking screen print.

“For the Sarrazine scarves I use different screens for the flowers and leaves. I let them dry and the last step is thermal fixation, to fix the inks.” Backgrounds are dyed prior to screen printing, using traditional techniques. Indigo is dyed cold by oxidation-reduction and is entirely processed by hand, but other dye solutions need warm water and the designer has recycled old washing machines to stir the fabrics.

When asked about her personal interests it seems fitting that the designer admits to enjoying the same pursuits as a Jane Austen heroine – playing the harpsichord and spending time in quiet contemplation of nature. Unfortunately, as she handles almost every aspect production by herself, time to do so is extremely rare. Nevertheless Catherine feels she’s walking the right personal spiritual path: anyone looking at her ethereal textiles would agree.

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