

ARTIST STATEMENT

Hillary Steel

Cloth, like no other material, surrounds us and silently bears witness to our lives.

I am a weaver and dyer. The slow and labored process of my work affords me the time to physically transform thread (into cloth) through dyeing and weaving. Once the cloth is off of the floor loom, it is for me, a new canvas upon which I can enhance the woven surface through any number of additive or subtractive processes (*shibori*, *batik*, printing), adding layers of texture, color and pattern, deconstructing and constructing (cutting and reassembling) my handwoven cloth into the pieces that I present. These slow, labor intensive processes allow me to eventually express a visual narrative, which is largely abstract, that is embedded into the threads of the fabric. I use resist dyeing techniques, like these defined below, in almost all of my work. I have inherited a wealth of knowledge about textile processes from both known and unknown artisans from here and abroad. I have practiced my craft for over thirty years and still consider myself a student.

Ikat (Kasuri) (Jaspe): The technique of *ikat (kasuri, jaspe)* is a process of resist tying warp and/or weft threads to achieve a pattern (either random or predetermined) as the cloth is woven. Material used for resist might be anything that, when wound tightly around the yarn and then submerged into dye, does not allow the color to penetrate bound areas. No two *ikat* fabrics will ever be exactly the same. The process belongs to the larger family of resist dyed cloth; i.e., *batik*, *shibori* or tie dye, and stencil resist. *Ikat* is unique because the planning, design and binding is carried out on the threads *before* the cloth is woven, rather than on a pre-existing piece of cloth. Consequently, the design is an integral component of the fabric's structure and, like hand weaving, it is a construction method.

Plangi (Shibori) (Amarras): The process of *plangi (shibori, amarras, tie dye)* relies on the way the dyer folds and/ or manipulates a piece of cloth, secures it in a compressed state, and then dyes the fabric in order to create a pattern. The dye only penetrates the areas of cloth that are left exposed. After the dyeing and removal of protective coverings, the resisted parts emerge as negative patterns and retain the original color(s) of the fabric. *Plangi* is considered a surface design technique.