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Natural Dyes and Aesthetic Search

María Dávila & Eduardo Portillo

We're coming from Mérida, Venezuela, where we had been devoted to silk and natural dyes since 1983.

We have been working with different fibers, but especially we have spent much time working with silk, trying to develop it as a vertical integrated project and for that we went years ago to China and India to study each of the steps to obtain it.

We set up at home our own mulberry plantation for silkworms breeding and installed reeling, twisting and dyeing facilities to obtain the silk to dress the loom.

Keeping in contact with our surrounding we tried to build a local natural dyes color chart and to find a place to each color and tune in our weaves.

After that we look for the relation between natural dyes and the place from it come from, trying to find a memory of the dye in the weave.

Although color might be the first information to receive the eye, we do conceive the color as a textile element that should interact smoothly with other textil element such as surface, fiber, texture and structure.

Our interest in color start at its very foundations, how it is obtained, where it is found in nature, in objects, in people. Many times color is the guide for each project that we assume.

Twenty years after that we found the silk we had an encounter with our own country fibers that come from palms, roots and bromeliads. The best known are the *curagua*, the *chique-chique* and *moriche*, and this found made us to do a return journey that took us around the country to know different cultures, regions and people. The textile properties of these fibers are such that gave a new imprint to our work and some needs arisen regarding the use of color.

We developed a technique that we called *Mosaics* in which converged all possible colors and projects that we had been working so far, they are silk, venezuelan fibers, natural dyes and especially indigo. By this way the moriche fiber embraced silk and created new spaces to work with color.

In 2002, inspired by Jenny Balfour-Paul's book *Indigo*, we wanted to know more about this historical dyestuff, then we went back to Asia to study the processes to obtain it and we found it as a culture more than a color itself.

We returned home with indigo paste, powder, recipes, indigo seeds and understanding the indigo as a very individual and intimate search, which can develop itself as a culture with specific characteristic depending the place where it get rooted.

Afterwards we found that the blue color we see in our living place, at the foothill of Venezuelan Andes, could be seen different from the blue that we could perceive at the sea, desert or plain lands. Then, we developed a textile work in mosaics and blocks keeping in mind the Blue that we see at *Night*, the blue

at *Dawn*, at *Sunset* and *Noon*. We recreated the *Night Shadows* and the *Stars* and discover that we were talking about different moment of the day, different from each other, so we decided to continue and represented the *Afternoon Sun* where the blue disappears to give life to yellows, grays and browns within a sunny and rainy afternoon.

All the above mention work had been show in an Exhibition specially made for the occasion, *Azul Indigo*, held at Caracas, Venezuela, December 2012. In this venue we had the intention to provoke emotions and sensations about how we see the blue and how it could be seen through Indigo, sharing the opportunity to get closer to this historical color and its culture.

Recently we wanted to experiment color in metal and this search conducted us to get close to steel, copper and finally into the process of bronze casting which open new spaces for creation .We also worked with patinas and colors. All these experiences open an infinite way, which is the path of forms and require more experimentation and research to understand the value of each color in the metal as textile material.

Thanks to TSA for granted us to attend this Symposium and our gratitude to Elena Phipps and Dominique Cardon for encouraged us to come. Thanks all of you for coming.