

FALL 2004

NOVA SCOTIA

CraftNews

Wearables

- Confessions of a Fabriholic Artist
- Beyond Control: Arashi Art to Wear
- The Vintage Advantage
- Material Culture

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our cover**Cover**

Aqua Sea Wrap (detail), Wilma Butts, shibori pleated silk with beads, approx. 100 x 180 cm, 2004.

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Beyond Control: Arashi

Wilma Butts of Arashi 'art to wear' creates textile art using "shibori". This traditional Japanese technique of 'shaped resist' involves the manipulation of textiles during the dyeing process by pleating, stitching, wrapping, binding or other forms of physical resist. The shibori process involves continuous discovery because the worker does not control the outcome. The dyer never knows, until the unveiling, how the piece will look. "You work in partnership with the fibre, says Butts, "understanding that different textiles behave in different ways. You have to respect that variability and adjust your technique accordingly. You can't control everything, so you have to just let it happen and trust your instincts. Some of the best pieces come from surprises."

SALLY ERSKINE

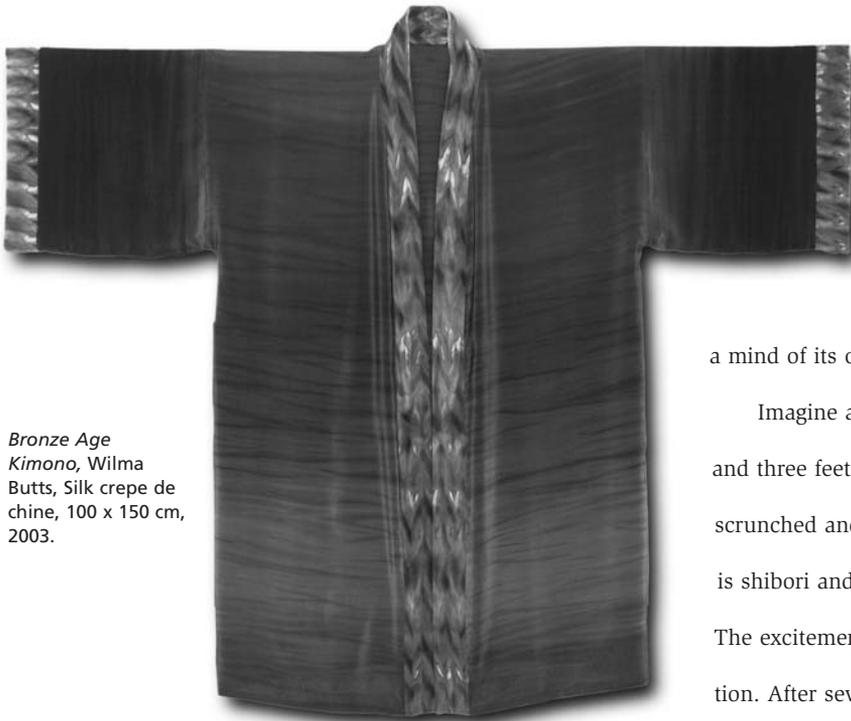
DOUCETTE

Although she cannot control the shibori process outcome, Butts does control as many variables as possible. Here in the studio she commands work, space, time, her exposure to chemicals, and the impact her craft has on the environment. She works alone in the clean, orderly lab, careful to wear a respirator and rubber gloves to limit her exposure to the dyes and careful to neutralize the fluid that leaves her house by way of the drain. The studio is brightly lit, with white washed walls and supply

shelves. Different stations are set up for dyeing at the sink or working at a table and, importantly for a lone craftsperson, there is a TV for company. Perhaps all this order is necessary to balance a process with

a mind of its own.

Imagine a large black PVC pipe, 6" in diameter, and three feet long. At one end silk is wrapped and scrunched and tightly bound with strong cord. This is shibori and Butts is about to unveil a new piece. The excitement is clear; her face glows in anticipation. After seven years, releasing each piece is still



*Bronze Age
Kimono, Wilma
Butts, Silk crepe de
chine, 100 x 150 cm,
2003.*

"That's the difference - wearable art pieces make you feel, ex"

'art to wear'

a thrill. For Butts, revealing the surprises of shibori is one of the attractions of this particular dye process.

During our interview Butts unveils a poncho-styled piece that she has wrapped for pleating. The pleats are set to run vertically from neck to hip in a wide chevron pattern. It is beautiful. Stunning. She lays it on the back of the sofa, asks me what I think, and we continue talking. Later, out of the blue, she says that the pleating needs to go the other direction, from side to side. That would work better with the way the piece is worn, so it hangs correctly. It is obvious that during our conversation, in the back of her mind, she mulled over this new design, considered her options and decided to wet the silk poncho and start the pleats over. Just start over.

Butts continuously learns new techniques and adapts them to a style that is recognizably her own. Her creative journey evolves as she continues to ask questions and search for more information. She started doing shibori by following instructions in a book. Craft classes are another source of ideas. Many generous people from different fields have shared their experience, adding fuel to the fire.

Butts' parents taught her a lesson that she continues to live by: imagine what you want and build it that way. Her husband, Jim, provides dynamic support without which none of her work would be possible, she says. He builds any carpentry items she needs, such as display racks or the fabulous shibori binding tool which eases the physical effort of binding silk onto PVC pipe.

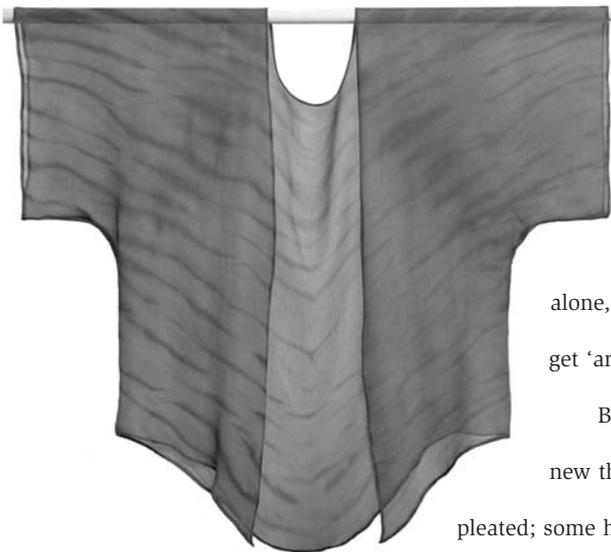
This creative partnership extends beyond the studio and out into the garden that is a large source of inspiration. A majestic red maple tree that shades the back of the garden inspired a new exhibit piece of dyed and pleated cotton. The tree bark is thick, dark, and deeply textured. This is reflected in the wall hanging in which a richly patterned rectangle is mounted onto a flat dyed piece. The viewer can get lost in the dark, moody texture. This piece will be shown in the joint exhibition with ceramic artist Denise Jeffrey, "Highwater Mark," to be held at the Craig Gallery at Alderney Landing in July 2005.

While wearable art pieces and exhibition pieces use fundamentally the same technical process, subtle variations result in a significant difference. Instead of being fluid, soft and muted, compressing



Black Opal Scarf,
Wilma Butts, Silk
crepe with fringe,
30 x 150 cm, 2004.

hibition pieces make you think and demand more attention."



*Wild Indigo
Kimono, Wilma
Butts, Silk
chiffon, 100 x 70 cm,
2003.*

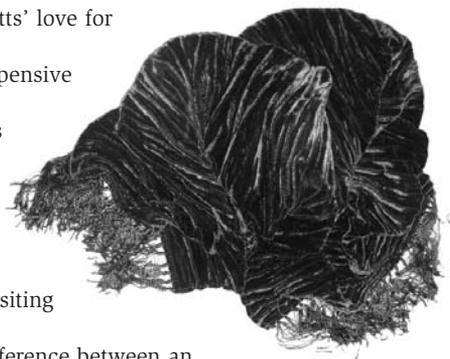
*Pleated Velvet
Scarf, Wilma Butts,
shibori pleated
silk/rayon velvet
with fringe, 17 x
150 cm, 2004.*

the exhibition fibre in different ways causes more severe and dramatic pattern and texture. While wearable art pieces make you feel, exhibition pieces make you think and demand more attention, Butts explains. “I think that wearable pieces can certainly be appreciated for their beauty and creative energy alone, but when you marry those qualities with function and utility, you get ‘art to wear’,” she says.

Butts’ wearable art products include scarves, kimonos, wraps and, new this year, ponchos. Some are silk, some velvet; some are flat, some pleated; some have fringes, some beads. All are unique, one of a kind, sumptuous and bursting with colour. They are sold under the “Arashi” label at various gallery

shops. A scarf may have dupioni silk on one side and silk crepe de chine on the other. Although the same colour dye is used on both sides, after the shibori process the colour is different on each side.

Pleated velvet shibori scarves are part of the Arashi line. Butts’ love for velvet helped her gather the courage to experiment with such expensive fibre. Pleated silk shibori scarves will be introduced at this year’s NSDCC Christmas Craft Market. The Textile Museum of Canada has recently ordered these exquisite scarves.



Butts’ experience has shown that people, especially those visiting gallery shops or craft markets, understand and appreciate the difference between an artisan piece and a mass produced piece. “Even if I make another one using the same colours, it won’t be the same piece,” she says. “Each piece is unique. I don’t have exact recipes. I have notes that I follow for colour families and things that I like to do but I don’t like to duplicate things exactly.”

As her work continues to evolve and lead in different creative directions, Butts finds the process and outcomes a source of joy and inspiration. “There is always a great sense of anticipation as you reveal a finished textile,” she says. “When the cloth is released, the patterns that reveal themselves are vibrant, organic and spontaneous. Even if the outcome is not exactly what you expected, the experience teaches you something new about the process. Every day I discover something new and exciting about these traditional shibori dye techniques.” (For more information on Arashi art to wear, see www.arashi.ca.) ■

Sally Erskine Doucette writes and stitches at her home in Dartmouth.