

Scraps

Fashion, Textiles & Creative Reuse

While in Palm Springs recently, I visited an exhibit at the Palm Springs Architecture and Design Museum. It featured three textile designers who took scraps from commercial fabric, as well as cocoon waste, and recycled them into art pieces and useful objects. Each artist had a different inspiration and method of working, several of which were similar to projects we handweavers may have done.

As the silk reeling process became industrialized, the finest silk was prioritized and the rest discarded. Reiko Sudo took the outermost layer of silk called kibiso, removed from the cocoons before reeling, and processed it into a heavy, slubby thread. Her wall hanging was constructed of coordinated fabrics in black and white, woven with the kibiso yarns. They were all cut into small, equal sized squares and arranged and layered into a long rectangle. These were machine-embroidered to a soluble substrate, which was then dissolved to give an open, lace-like effect. When cocoons are unwound mechanically, as they are nowadays in the silk trade, the innermost layer of the cocoons adheres to the carrier rods on which they are mounted. This material, called ogarami chosi, must be periodically cut off the spindles. The artist took the “sheets” of waste material, peeled them apart, wet them to reactivate the sticky sericin and overlapped them to make elegant paper-like panels.



Luisa Cevese worked with sari selvages and silk thread waste. She bundled threads according to color, spaced the puddles of color into a matrix and embedded them into flexible polyurethane. This same technique was used with small cut pieces of selvages. She also lined up lengths of sari selvages, with “fringes” on one side and embedded them in clear flexible polyurethane. Then she made hangings, purses and table accessories from the polyurethane “fabric”. She also obtained leftover metallic threads and fabric from the Lurex Company and made some amazing things using the gold metallics.



Christina Kim used techniques more familiar to the handweaver. Working with jamdani, a gossamer cotton sari fabric from Bengal, she first cut and sewed the panels into garments. Then she pieced and embroidered various color-coordinated scraps into fabric which was made into more garments and hangings. She also made tiny square “amulets,” pillows of waste fabric embroidered and sometimes beaded. The tiniest dots of scrap fabric were embroidered onto jamdani fabric, completing the circle.



Most of these techniques are too esoteric for the average handweaver or not suitable because our fabrics are usually heavier than silk saris, but I have made a scarf using washaway backing (“Midsummer Nights Dream” spell from our Shakespeare-inspired picnic challenge) and intend to make amulets from some of my scraps. Piecing and embroidering fabric is also a very doable technique I have used in garments.

I found “Scraps” very inspiring and was delighted to see textile arts showcased in this unusual way. - Carol Murphy



