

Raglan's

SOUP

Road



The background of the image is a close-up of a textured fabric, possibly silk or satin, in shades of orange and yellow. The fabric is draped and folded, creating deep creases and highlights that emphasize its texture. The lighting is warm, giving the fabric a glowing appearance.

*Jean Carbon*

C'bon Textiles





*A woman  
with a  
**passion**  
for **fabrics***

**Her story,  
her textile art,  
and the ancient  
*Shibori*  
silk techniques  
she uses**

This online feature story is a by-product of an interview with Jean and a visit at her studio for an article in *focus magazine*.

I was fascinated by what I saw - at Jean's studio and already before, at her Tauranga exhibition *Reflections on Dawn*.

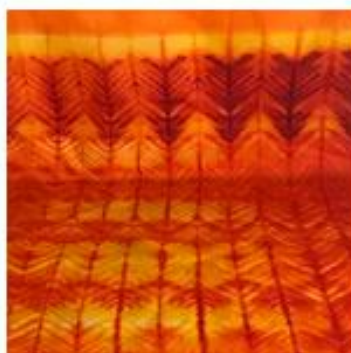
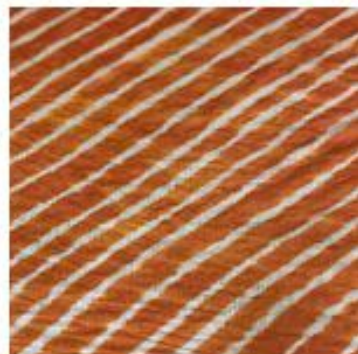
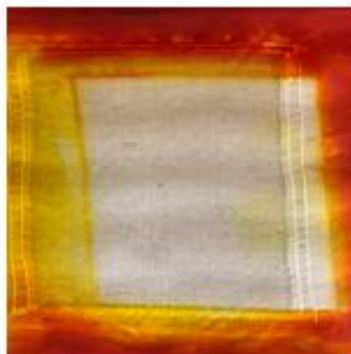
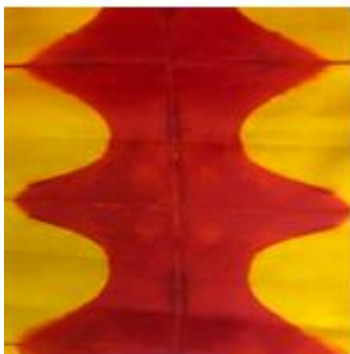
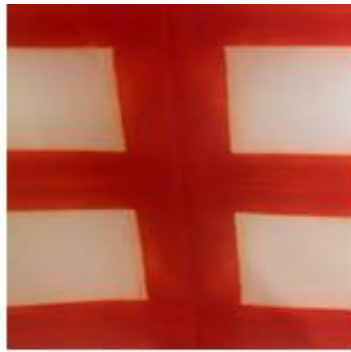
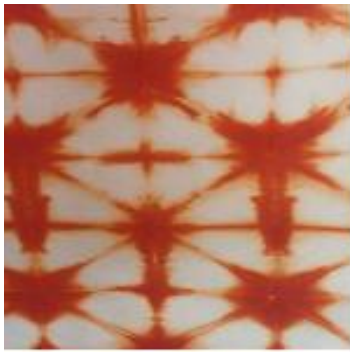
As often happens, I was left with a lot of photos and additional information that I had collected, but could not use for my article. I had to write to a word limit and knew I was only able to get a few pictures published.

Instead of discarding the material, I decided to flesh out the article and transform it into this e-magazine.

Margarete Kraemer  
December 2021

*Reflections on Dawn, 23 July - 3 August 2021,  
The Art Lounge, Tauranga*









*The exhibition Reflections on Dawn  
was inspired by the hues of orange  
and purple Jean sees from her  
property.*



## Raglan's Silk Road

**IT'S NOT AN ANCIENT ORIENTAL TRADE ROUTE. IT'S A HIDDEN DRIVEWAY TO 492 WAINUI ROAD LEADING TO A SILK LOVER'S HEAVEN. THIS IS WHERE FULL-TIME TEXTILE ARTIST JEAN CARBON LIVES AND WORKS, INSPIRED BY STUNNING HILLTOP VIEWS OVER THE WILD AND WINDSWEPT WEST COAST BEACH.**



Back in July I had no idea that attending the opening of a Shibori silk exhibition in Tauranga, *Reflections on Dawn*, would take me back to Raglan and my favourite West Coast beach two months later.

It also afforded me some interesting insights into the process of producing sumptuous silk creations using ancient Shibori techniques.

Finding one's way to Jean's clifftop studio is a little adventure. A long, steep, poplar lined driveway crosses a narrow bridge over a babbling stream and continues uphill, bending sharply at the end to reveal an expansive forecourt overlooking stunningly beautiful, black-sand Ngarunui Beach.

Immediately the real estate agents' catch cry Location! Location! Location! springs to mind.

**"The driveway is exactly how I wanted it: with a sharp bend at the end that surprises with a stunning view once you arrive at the top."**

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### **Twin structures: C'bon and C'barn**

Jean's home and studio, where she creates textiles sold under her label C'bon Textiles, is a half-round structure fashioned on agricultural storage barns.

Next to it sits its twin, C'barn, a unique, open-plan accommodation with sweeping ocean views. Well-equipped and fully self-contained with sheltered private outdoor areas, it sleeps up to six people on two levels. "C'barn helps paying the bills," says Jean, who is chuffed that it has just been nominated in the top ten places by Bookabach.

### **THE DRIVEWAY**

Originally, the steep and winding driveway was an unsealed metal road. One Christmas, when Jean's parents came to visit, her father had just had surgery in both knees. Not only was it a bumpy drive to the hilltop. The car slid off the bank and got stuck in a ditch, with Jean's father unhurt but unable to get out. A tow truck had to be called - on a Christmas Eve! - to winch the car out.

However, the first and very urgent matter to attend to immediately was getting relief for Dad. He had felt the call of nature but couldn't get out of the car. A resolute and practical woman, Mum rushed uphill and asked for a bucket so he could improvise.

After that, Jean's mother insisted that the driveway be sealed. When Jean wouldn't come back with positive news for months because she couldn't afford it, her mother cut short the process: she called in a concrete contractor and paid for the job.











View from Jean Carbon's 1.4-hectare property to Ngarunui Beach









Jean has always been fascinated by textiles. She learnt to sew from her mother and later taught fabric technology at a Hamilton high school for 20 years.

While travelling widely from India, Pakistan,

China, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan, she wanted to learn as much as possible about various ancient techniques she saw to produce beautiful textiles. "I visited little villages where they still do it the traditional way. I hate to

think that these skills and techniques might be lost."

On her travels she bought fabrics and brought them home in her backpack. In her Raglan studio she turned them into pieces of decorative and wearable textile art.





*Indigo dyed silk*

### **Back to school as a student**

In 2000, after her partner had died, Jean decided that she had done enough teaching. Aged 46, she enrolled in and completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in Fashion Technology at AUT in Auckland. "I wasn't

into high fashion, but I was totally addicted to textiles, their history and the story they tell. I did a research paper on ancient resist dyeing techniques, and it has become an all-consuming passion."

Travelling the world - and later becoming a tour guide on the Silk Road herself - Jean learned Shibori pole wrapping and block clamping techniques to pattern silk fabrics while staying with traditional craftspeople in remote places.

"Shibori is usually thought of as Japanese, but it is also practised in parts of

India, Indonesia and China," she explains. Although this way of dyeing is very labour intensive, it gives her more control over the pattern and its placement on a unique garment, scarf or cushion. "But there is still an element of surprise, and that's part of the beauty of Shibori."

Jean works exclusively with silk of different weights and textures. She buys it from China from a known source. "However, the man is now in his 80s, so that source is likely to dry up eventually", she says. Most of her dyes come from France.

### **FROM ORGANISING FASHION SHOWS TO TOUR GUIDING ON THE SILK ROAD**

To promote her wearable textile art Jean started organising fashion shows in galleries, using friends and clients as models. "There were nibbles and drinks, and my models were friends and customers. It was a lot of fun. Later, when the gallery business dried up, we did it at my home. My bedroom became the changing room and make-up studio, my living room and the yard were the cat walk."

Then requests came in from people interested in learning about the origins and history of silk dyeing and patterning techniques. "So I took them to the Silk Road and became a tour guide", says Jean. The tours were organised by a South Island travel agency which took care of the logistics, such as visas, hotels and flights.









Fashion show at Jean's house: collection 2019/2020



## Shibori

Shibori is a manual resist dyeing technique. There are many ways to prevent dye from penetrating the fabric and thus to create a pattern.

Shibori techniques include folding and wrapping, folding and clamping, binding, and stitching.

Two of the techniques Jean uses, teaches and which she demonstrated to me were pole wrap dyeing and block clamping.

*Left: pole wrapped shawl  
Right: folded and block clamped  
silk for a garment  
(top part)*









## Folding and wrapping

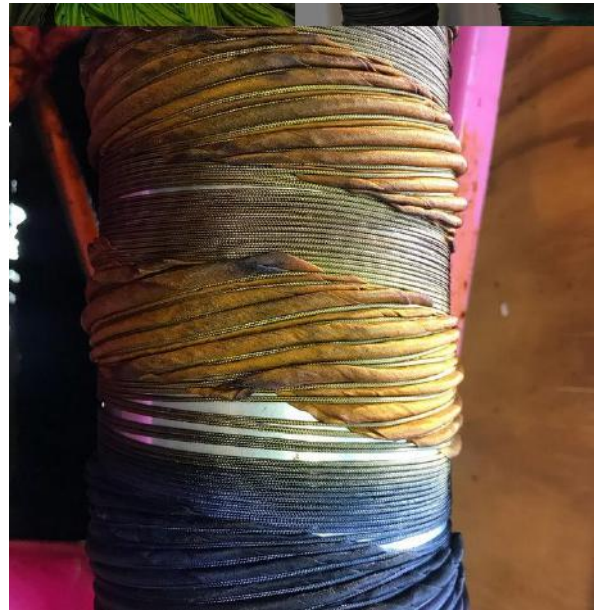
For silk Shibori wraps Jean hems and irons the fabric into accordion pleats. The folded silk lengths are wrapped onto stainless pipes or rods and stringed tightly with a thread or wire. Then the stringed silk is scrunched and squeezed down the rod, pushing the material into small, tight wrinkles. The string will block the dye (“resist dyeing”), thus creating a unique pattern.

Dye can be hand painted, poured on or immersion dyed for solid colour, and is left to dry. Then the pipes are wrapped in newsprint and steamed for two hours to set the dye and the pattern. Finally, the scarves are rinsed, dried and unwrapped. The resulting finely pleated texture created by heat and pressure holds if washing instructions are followed.

Each scarf is unique, and the colour and pattern always includes some degree of surprise.







*Wrapping and dyeing*

*Setting the dye and the pattern in a steaming tub*



The equipment in Jean's studio has been custom engineered with a good dose of ingenuity. The bracket to which the rotating cylinder is attached is a repurposed part of a turning lathe. The motor that turns the cylinder via a timing belt is a Bosch power drill, which is operated by a good old foot pedal from a sewing machine.











## Folding and block clamping

For this technique the fabric is folded into pleats in two or more directions. Soaking in water opens the fibres to optimise dye absorption. After squeezing out excess water the silk is sandwiched between two pieces of metal or other material. Washers between the shapes protect the delicate fibre against tears or snags.

The shapes are tightened with screw clamps, leaving the unclamped material accessible to the dye.

The fabric can be hand painted or immersion dyed. When the clamps are removed and the fabric has been rinsed, another colour can be added in the middle.

Fabrics and dyes have personalities, Jean points out. Getting to know how each dye behaves requires a lot of experimenting and experience to achieve the desired results. "It's in particular where two colours meet that the excitement happens," says Jean, adding, "and sometimes also surprises."

























## Binding

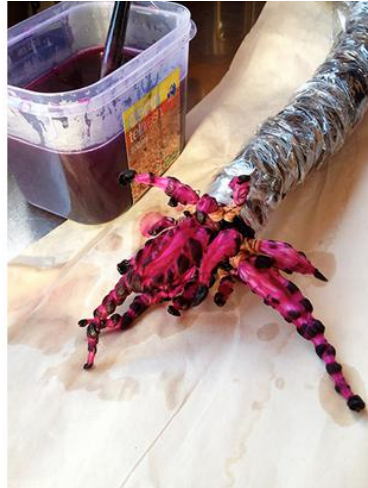
This is probably the most widely known resist dyeing technique.

In the 1960s tie dye was a popular feature of the flower power generation

and part of protest art. In the 1970s it became known as pop art fashion.

For this technique, a portion of the fabric is drawn up with the fingers and held

while a thread is wound around it. Each turn of the thread must be in tight contact with the previous one to stop the dye from penetrating.



## Stitching

The unique effects are created by the type of stitch, the placement of the stitches, and whether or not the fabric has been folded.

The fabric needs to be gathered and secured tightly to resist the dye .







*Colour experiments*





Behind Jean's studio a path of wooden steps leads down to a large redwood grove. Strings attached to the trees' stems serve a number of purposes. Sometimes, Jean uses them as clotheslines for drying lengths of fabric.

On certain occasions, such as the annual open studio art event, Raglan Arts Weekend, she uses this tree studded, natural outdoor stage to display her installations.

The current one Jean was working on when I visited, to be displayed on Raglan Arts Weekend/Labour Day weekend 2021, were oversized silk lanterns. Huge wire frames wrapped in dyed silk strips, with LED lights inside, were to be suspended between the trees, creating a magic forest atmosphere. Sadly, due to Covid-19, the annual event was postponed to 2022.

In addition to being a regular contributor to the

Raglan Arts Weekends, Jean has also been organising Raglan's biennial Art To Wear events for 20 years. In 2020 she passed on the baton to somebody else, "but I remain involved on the committee," she adds.

### **Relax at the barn, learn at the studio**

Guests staying at C'barn can watch the processes Jean uses and have an opportunity to buy directly from her. The barn next door also allows her to teach creative, live-in workshops to participants wishing to learn Shibori.

Workshop dates, usually over a weekend, can be arranged for three to six people. "After the end of the workshop they take home a silk scarf or a two-metre length of unhemmed silk, dyed and patterned using techniques and colours of their choice," says Jean.

Silk, on the road from Raglan to anywhere in New Zealand and the world...

**C'bon Textiles:**  
**[www.cbon.co.nz](http://www.cbon.co.nz)**  
**Instagram: [cbon\\_textiles](https://www.instagram.com/cbon_textiles)**

**C'barn accommodation:**  
**[www.cbarn.co.nz](http://www.cbarn.co.nz)**









“

*I make silk garments that are timeless, elegant and original. They are hand dyed using ancient dye techniques.*

”



Photos:

Margarete Kraemer

Anna Malec

Ernest Buczynski

Jean Carbon

(from Jean's C'barn and C'bon websites  
and her Instagram page)





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*The natural lustre and beauty of silk  
adds a stand-out touch to every outfit.  
Every woman needs at least one of these  
scarves in her wardrobe!*

”





RETAIN TEXTURE.  
DO NOT USE ALLOW SILK  
FALL IN NATURAL  
FOLDS  
ROLL UP PLACE IN BAG  
PROVIDED  
DO NOT WASH KEEP IN BAG  
WASH BY HAND WARM  
WATER RINSE DO NOT  
SOAK.  
DRY IN BAG IN FULL  
DRAFT

bon

Handcrafted in NZ