

# Ana Lisa Hedstrom: The Artist as Teacher

*Established wearable artist Ana Lisa Hedstrom uses shibori techniques in her work and teaches them in workshops. Here, why she teaches, and a glimpse of her workshop last summer at Penland School of Crafts.*

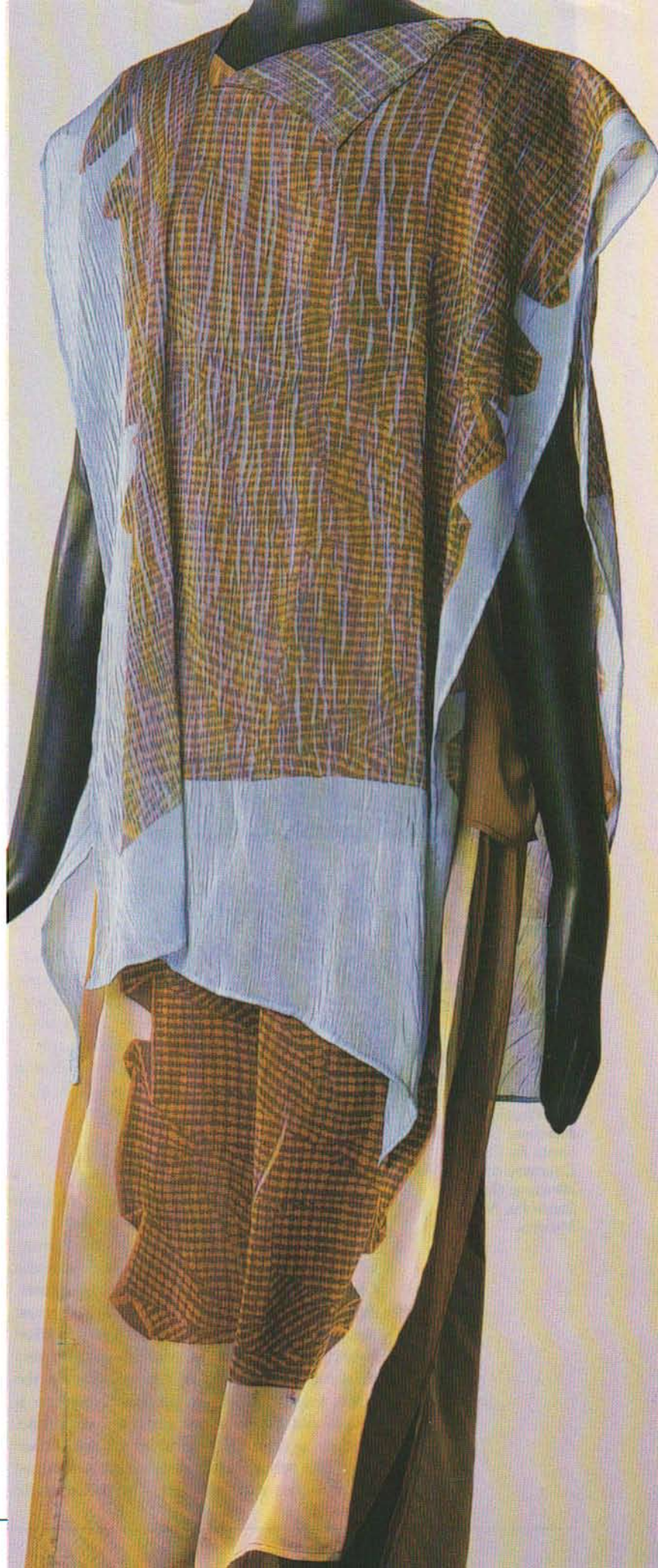
by Katherine Duncan Aimone

*"I think one reason that so many people like shibori is because you're always in dialogue, you're always getting it back, and you have to work with what you get back."*

—Ana Lisa Hedstrom

For those who are familiar with her work in fiber and art to wear, the name Ana Lisa Hedstrom often strikes a chord of awe. Hedstrom has been at the forefront of the art-to-wear movement for several decades with her work in *arashi* shibori and surface design—but she is also well known and respected as a workshop teacher.

Since the late 1970s, when she began teaching with Fiberworks (which was then an informal center for workshops, lectures, and exhibits in the San Francisco Bay Area), she has taught workshops at a long list of schools, including Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina, the Split Rock Arts Program of the University of Minnesota, Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine, and the Centre de





**Right:** One of Hedstrom's teaching samples, an indigo-dyed variation of mokume shibori from Japan. Hedstrom guides her students in "reading the processes" from her samples. Photo: Robin Dreyer. Courtesy of Penland School of Crafts, Penland, North Carolina.

**Below right:** Hedstrom demonstrates use of a smocking pleater in the textile studio at Penland School of Crafts. Photo: Robin Dreyer. Courtesy of Penland.

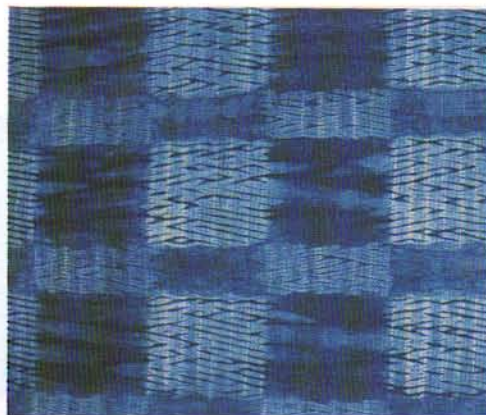
**Opposite page:** Ana Lisa Hedstrom, fabric for three-piece dress, 2001. In recent work, Hedstrom has combined her shibori work with 21st-century technology. Scanned images of her arashi shibori-dyed silk are digitally manipulated, printed on paper, then transferred onto polyester using dye sublimation transfer printing. Printing: Alyson LeBlanc. Photo: Kim Harrington.

Recherche et de Design en Impression Textile de Montreal in Canada. During the 1990s, she served several times as a workshop leader/lecturer at the World Shibori Symposia. Over the course of two decades, she has been invited many times to be a workshop leader and guest artist at surface design conferences in the United States.

Coupled with her years of experience and detailed knowledge is a teaching approach that strictly avoids formulaic spoonfeeding. Hedstrom believes strongly in serving as a facilitator—challenging each student to use the knowledge she imparts to develop his or her own personal work.

Although well-known fiber artists such as Joan Morris, Michelle Murray, and Doshi have studied with her, she doesn't attribute any of their success to her teaching. Instead, she says: "It is really about perseverance and a discovery process leading to signature work. I just begin the process." As a result of her teaching style, those who have taken her workshops leave with a sense of ownership of their work born out of exploration rather than emulation.

Hedstrom's nonjudgmental approach helps to free students of self-consciousness. "I often tell my classes that the difference between myself and [them] is simply that I know how to read the samples [that they create]. I don't read them for success or failure, but for information. I'll see that they are disappointed in a

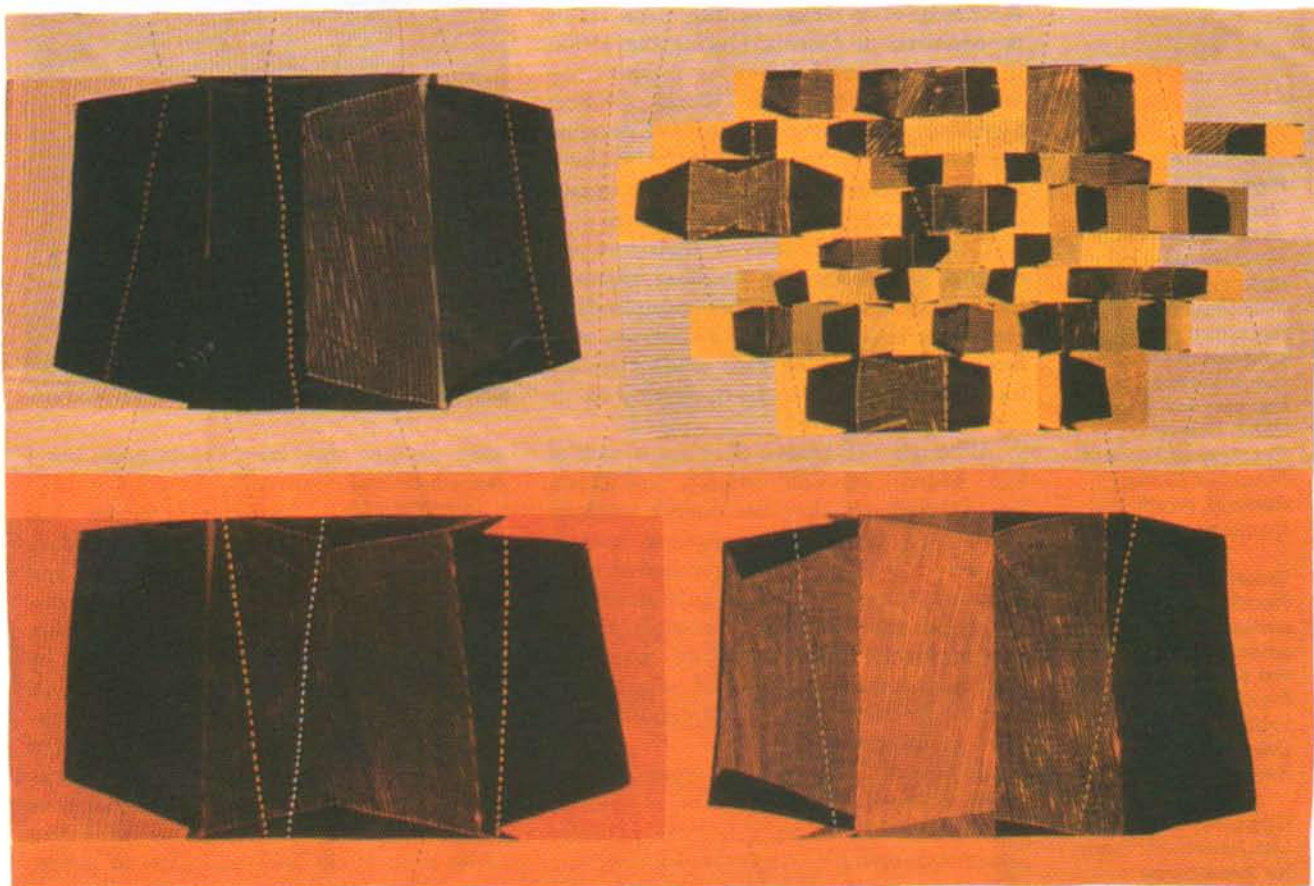


piece because they have expectations, but I don't have expectations."

FIBERARTS visited Hedstrom last August during a two-week-long workshop titled "Shibori: Ideas, Inspirations, and Actuality" at Penland School of Crafts. Armed with shibori samples collected from various sources (including ones created by Japanese artisans to document traditional shibori techniques), Hedstrom began teaching by showing the rich historical context of her medium. A strong believer in self-guided research—"go to the library...open your mind!" she says—she loads her workshop tables with books and catalogues to inspire her students. Supplementary slide shows of contemporary work created throughout the shibori world increase their vista.







Her personal collection of shibori samples allows the students to “read the process” that is recorded in blue dye. In tune with this idea, the students in the Penland workshop worked exclusively in blue during the first week, experimenting with the techniques that Hedstrom introduced each morning. “She gave us the techniques and let us run with them,” noted participant Tracy Greene. After the first week of learning techniques (including *arashi* pole wrapping, stitch resist, and clamping), each student was challenged to come up with a project to create during the second week.

Hedstrom explains that the second week is usually more challenging for the students: “You’re always confronting limitations with shibori, and when you do a project, you confront limitations that you don’t when you do a sample. In the beginning, it seems simple with *arashi*—you get such immediate results. Then people are really shocked when they discover how difficult it is to get consistent results and plan a project with the limitations of fabric and dye and size of pole and size of pot and on and on.... I’m still always working with that challenge myself,” she says.

Hedstrom feels that she comes away from the workshops with as much as she has given. “It can be pretty exhausting, but there’s always

something new to gain. I love seeing people’s discovery again, to relive it. Even though it might be old hat to me, it’s still gratifying. It’s kind of like having children and discovering the world again.”

Gregg Johnson, textile studio coordinator for Penland, touches on the symbiotic relationship between Hedstrom’s teaching and creating: “Her humility makes her a great teacher, and her willingness to learn new techniques keeps her own work very fresh. She is talented as both an artist and a teacher—a combination that is rare. Many of the students come because they know her work, but then, after they take her class, they know that her work and her teaching are equally matched.”

When asked if she teaches to supplement her income, she laughs and says: “I can make more money working in my studio!” Instead, it’s about the communal experience: “I like to teach because it gets me out of the studio and makes me communicate and articulate my experience and ideas.... I love to meet the other instructors, especially since our fields—even in the craft arena—seem compartmentalized. There is no aesthetic movement, such as the Bauhaus or Memphis, to join us together.... I remember a faculty get-together at

**Above:** Ana Lisa Hedstrom, *Lexicon*, 2000; resist-dyed silk, pieced, stitched; 54 by 82 inches. Photo: Don Tuttle.





**Above:** Ana Lisa Hedstrom, tunic, 2001; polyester; computer manipulation and dye sublimation transfer printing starting with a scanned scrap of shibori-dyed fabric. Printed at Editextile, Montreal. Photo: Elaine Keenan.

Split Rock where the poets, writers, and visual artists were all telling stories and comparing work methods, travel stories, dreams, and so forth. This kind of exchange doesn't happen in the studio."

When it's time for Hedstrom to leave the studio, it's often a push to leave, and never exactly convenient. "Teaching is always scheduled well in advance, and sometimes that collides with other demands and deadlines that come up," she says. "I'm cutting back on my teaching now. But when I look at my teaching samples, books, and slides, I always think: I have to share these things that inspire me."

Hedstrom's electrifying zeal, disciplined approach, and obvious love of her life's work come through in every measured, well-articulated sentence that she speaks about her subject. She says that she has no real mentors, but first discovered shibori through a six-week workshop taught by respected academician Yoshiko Wada during the 1970s. (Wada was

instrumental in introducing shibori in the United States as an art form and cowrote the highly influential book *Shibori: The Inventive Art of Japanese Shaped Resist Dyeing*, published by Kodansha International Ltd. in 1983.)

During this early experimental workshop, the group sought to decode the dyed messages left on cloth pictured in illustrations of shibori that Wada found at the University of California at Berkeley's Asian library. Wada had never studied shibori, because it wasn't taught in art schools in Japan at the time. "It was considered to be old-fashioned, traditional, something for artisans ... even though shibori was a major part of the textile tradition in the kimono world of Japan," notes Hedstrom. "With no 'how-to' instructions at all, it was like following a puzzle. We would go home and try different things. With *arashi* shibori, for instance, some people tried wrapping on cardboard tubes, some on wine bottles. But, of course, the most natural thing in the world was plastic plumbing pipe, which had never been used. That was all the training I had. And I was more interested in the concept than anything else."

The conceptual nature of her work (whether her current work on wall pieces, or her well-known pieced shibori clothing) has influenced many other fiber artists. Tim Harding, known internationally for his innovative work in textiles, first heard of Hedstrom at a national Surface Design Conference at Purdue University during the mid-1970s. "She was showing her three-dimensional shibori 'cocoon' forms," he recalls. "That brief exposure had a great influence on the development of my own work. We didn't actually meet until a few years later."

Today, Hedstrom is still intrigued with pushing conceptual boundaries in both her teaching and work. Innovation in surface design—with its endless possibilities—will no doubt continue to fuel her curiosity and evolutionary nature. "It's really how you use the techniques that make them your own," she tells her students. "You can do everything with one technique. If you find it, take it deep."

*Katherine Duncan Aimone is an editor for Lark Books and the author of The FIBERARTS Book of Wearable Art. Prior to working as an editor and writer, she served as a museum curator and director in the fine arts field.*

Hedstrom will teach workshops at the Indianapolis Art Center **April 12-14**; Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, **August 5-9**; and the Design with Heart conference in Santa Fe, **November 2-8**. Her work will be exhibited at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, Michigan, **February 22-March 23** (with a symposium **February 23**) and at Julie: Artisans' Gallery in New York City in early summer.