

Karen Illman Miller

Katazome Artist

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I work almost exclusively with the traditional paper stencil in a process known as *katazome*, Japanese stencil dyeing. The stencil itself is made from several layers of thin mulberry fiber paper, which have been laminated with persimmon juice and smoked, yielding an aromatic brown paper. It is brittle and easy to cut when dry, but leathery and tough when wet. A layer of silk mesh lacquered on the top surface protects even the most intricate stencil from damage when the rice paste resist is pressed through it onto the fabric. Then the fabric is either dipped into the indigo vat, or stretched like a hammock and dye painted. The pattern emerges when the resist is soaked off.

While I enjoy the subtle patterns of the hand dyed fabrics many fiber artists use, I prefer to make my own fabric with recognizable imagery and finely detailed patterns. Katazome allows me to separate the production of the image from the application of color, a process more akin to printmaking than to painting. I began carving stencils using mostly traditional Japanese patterns, because they could teach me so much about cutting techniques and the layout of the design. I consider the time spent carving those stencils my "apprenticeship". I am now designing my own stencils, inspired by the images which speak most deeply to me, organic patterns and the abstractions they produce, tree branches and leaf skeletons, and the plants and marine animals of the Pacific Northwest.