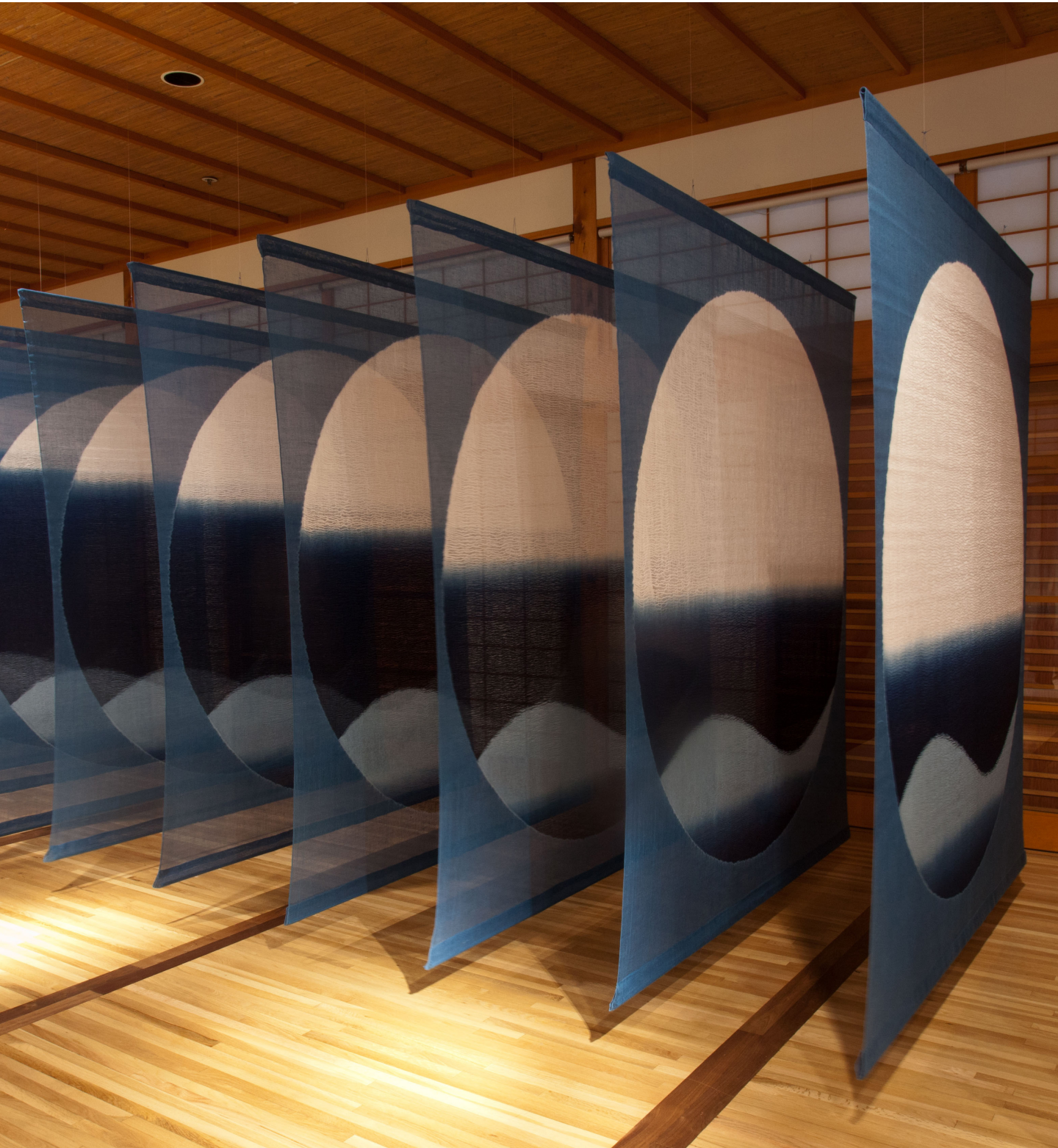


Art in the Garden

Shihoko Fukumoto:
Indigo is the Color of My Dreams

Fall 2010



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Blue has been called “the color of Japan”—not just any blue, but the deepest shades of the true natural indigo dye that Japanese craftsmen have been using for hundreds of years. Known throughout the world for its special beauty and unique qualities, nowhere has indigo found a more appreciative audience than in Japan. It has been used continuously since the ninth century to color everything from simple woven farmer’s pants, to elegantly dyed handmade writing paper, *noren* shop curtains, and dynamically patterned summer cotton yukata.

People of every continent on earth have celebrated the beauty of natural indigo dye since ancient times. Produced from a substance called “indicant” found in the leaves of a number of different varieties of plant, this dye has qualities unlike any other: it actually strengthens the fibers of the cloth; it does

not bleed onto other fabrics when it’s washed; and its distinctively pungent odor is said to repel insects and snakes.

Achieving a color as deep as what is referred to in Japan as “eggplant blue” is no easy task, and neither is re-interpreting traditional Japanese dye techniques for the 21st-century audience. Shihoko Fukumoto is one of the rare artists whose commitment to the most stringent standards of traditional indigo dyeing parallels her success as an innovative contemporary artist of the first rank. Combining the two traditional Japanese crafts of *shibori*, tie dyeing with soft *bokashi* techniques of tonal gradation, Fukumoto creates works of luminous, transcendent beauty. For Ms. Fukumoto, *ai*, natural Japanese indigo dye, is more than just a deep shade of blue—it is the color of infinite space, the color of her dreams.

One of the finest indigo-dye textile artists in the world, Ms. Fukumoto studied Western-style painting at Kyoto University of Fine Arts, before she became interested in the traditional Japanese craft of indigo dyeing in the 1980s. She is known for her mastery of *shibori*, a complex traditional technique of bind-resist dyeing which she has taken to new limits of invention and creativity. Through the use of folding, tie- and dip-dyeing of natural materials that include ramie, linen, cotton, pineapple fibers, and handmade *washi* paper, Shihoko has brought new life to the folk custom of indigo dyeing. In addition to her many solo exhibitions in Japan and the West, Fukumoto’s work has been shown in major textile exhibitions throughout the world in the U.S., England, France, Holland, Sweden, Switzerland and China. She currently lives and works in Kyoto, Japan.




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