

Yang Xiufen | China |  
Apparel, Textiles for Home

## Miao indigo batik textiles tell ancient stories



Guizhou Province, located in a relatively rural area in Southwestern China, is one of the most culturally diverse regions in the country. Artist and Guizhou native Yang Xiufen is a traditionally trained textile artist, known for her use of uniquely hued indigo dye. It is a true, rich blue, and completely organic. In this area of China, indigo plants grow indigenously. They are harvested by artisans, who then ferment it in a tincture of limestone dust, rice wine, and spring water to turn it into dye.

Although Yang sometimes uses silk, cotton is typically her fabric of choice. Yang sews cottons into tie-waist skirts and decorative home textiles. Sometimes, Yang purchases the prepared fabric from nearby markets, but she typically buys it from local village women who grow, harvest, spin and weave the cotton themselves. Onto this natural surface, hot wax—either from paraffin or local beeswax—is applied to make patterns in a traditional batik-dye process. Depending on the size and complexity of the piece, it can

be soaked in dye from one to four days. Once dry, the artist puts the piece in boiling water to remove the wax, before giving it a cold-water rinse to remove excess indigo dye.

Yang creates a range of gorgeously crafted items, from sophisticated wall hangings and tablecloths to elegant wearable items. A member of the Miao ethnic group, which has no written language, Yang and generations of artisans before her have relied on batik (along with oral history and traditional singing) to share history and folklore. Today, many folkloric motifs appear on Miao batik, like scenes of the origins of life, the Miao migration journey, and key plants and agricultural practices.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ARTIST