

BONINGTON
GALLERY

MARIAN CLAYDEN:

A DYERS JOURNEY THROUGH ART & FASHION



WEDNESDAY 23 APRIL – WEDNESDAY 16 MAY 2014

EXHIBITION GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

I came to find dyeing fabric to be even more expressive than painting, perhaps because attempting to control all the variables was an exciting challenge. Even though I tried to envision the final result as a painter would, I had to dance with the technique to reach a happy conclusion.

Marian Clayden (nee Bolton) was born in Preston in 1937. She studied education at Kesteven College in Lincolnshire and art at Nottingham School of Art. Having exhibited paintings at Preston's Harris Museum on several occasions in the 1950s, she taught primary school in Nottingham and Chorley from 1957-62, when she emigrated to Australia. There she began to experiment with dyeing. When she and her family moved to California in 1967, she established her own studio in Los Gatos. Soon she was part of the international fibre art scene.

Unusual for the times, she moved from textile art to hand-made limited edition garments and in 1981 established Clayden Inc. Likened to Mariano Fortuny, she created what has been characterized as American haute-couture. Using luxurious velvets and other cloths masterfully air-brushed, discharged and dyed, her increasingly successful collections from 1981 until 2005 resulted in national acclaim and exposure on red-carpet events, with her designs worn by Oprah Winfrey and many Hollywood stars.

DISCOVERING TIE-DYE

After six years of painting I began to feel the need for textured surfaces – gluing papers, sand, and fabric onto masonite and then painting. As an experiment I tried various ways of dying fabric and paper before attaching it... During these experiments I realized the enormous tactile satisfaction I got from working with my hands. It was intoxicating, I felt I had to do more.

Marian Clayden had taken only one short dyeing class in college. During the 1960s in Australia with her husband and young children, she perfected her skills with the aid of 'Tie Dye as a Present Day Craft' written in 1964 by British author Anne Maile. In this technique, selected areas of cloth are prevented from taking in a dye by folding, tying or stitching prior to immersion. Soon Clayden became so fluent with these methods that she could exploit the inherent beauties of the techniques in a painterly way, and was exhibiting the resulting panels.

Moving to California with her family, in 1968 she showed her work to Nancy Potts, set and costume designer for the musical *Hair*. A commission resulted: to produce all the textiles for the subsequent nine tours of the show. In 1969 she began a collaboration with New York fashion and costume designer, Ben Compton. Soon she was working with others including Mary McFadden in New York, Rudi Gernreich in Los Angeles, and Cecil Beaton in London.

Clayden worked in her kitchen until 1971. Then a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts funded the conversion of her family's garage into a workshop. There she produced larger, more three-dimensional pieces and smaller items ranging from fabric-covered boxes to dramatic accessories. Through Bob Mackie, who designed for major TV

shows and movies, her fabrics were already dressing actresses such as Irene Papas and Lainie Kazan.

Dip-Dye 1970

Cotton folded, tie-dyed, dip-dyed and discharged.

This piece was made in the Clayden's kitchen and dates from the period when Clayden was making textiles for the musical *Hair*.

Clayden Collection no.1

Joyful Noise 1971- See cover

Silk folded, multistage stitch-resist dyed and discharged.

This is a free-hanging piece: 'the gentle movement of air enhances the mood and lends a glorious fluidity to the statement.'

Clayden Collection no.2

Ceremonial Enclosure 1974

Silk folded, multistage stitch-resist dyed and discharged.

Clayden made two such enclosures, the first of which is in the collection of the Museum of Arts & Design, New York City.

Clayden Collection no.4

Adrift Again 1975

Silk multistage stitch-resist dyed and discharged.

By the time this was made Clayden had been selling fabrics to fashion and costume designers for six years.

Clayden Collection no.6

Once More Adrift 1975

Silk twill multistage stitch-resist dyed and discharged.

The 'Adrift' series began in 1974 and continued for several years, all exploring abstract concepts of arches, bridges and space.

Clayden Collection no.q13

Collar 1971

Silk fringe tie-dyed, wrapped, discharged and assembled.

Surviving early Clayden accessories are rare but she made several dyed-fringe shawls and neckpieces, leading to her mid-1970s' interest in 'involving form, movement, and texture.'

Clayden Collection no.3

Untitled Mask 1970s

Coarse cotton discharged and dyed.

Probably shaped over a mannequin, this mask is comparable to Aboriginal masks and relates to Clayden's experiences in Australia in the mid-1960s.

Clayden Collection no.41

Two Boxes c1974

Silk multistage stitch-resist dyed and discharged.

Clayden transformed ready-made wooden boxes by covering them both inside and out with her silks; the large box is further embellished with dip-dyed fringe.

Clayden Collection nos.42 and 43

Poncho and Loose Trousers 1970

Silk twill, stitch-resist dyed and discharged.

Made during the period she was costuming *Hair*, Clayden recalled that 'they wanted wild fabrics – the wilder the better.'

Clayden Collection no.13

Marian's Dress early 1970s

China silk stitch-resist and dyed.

As its name implied, this dress was made by Marian for her own personal use. She was photographed wearing it (right).

Clayden Collection no.X13

Dress early 1970s

China silk multistage stitch-resist and dyed.

Clayden's work on *Hair* offered her 'a wonderful opportunity to experiment with dramatic effects', which focussed primarily on stitch-resist effects.

Clayden Collection no.X15

Sparkle Silk early 1980

Indian silk discharged and dyed.

Clayden made a trip to India in the early 1980s; the use of silks such as this and other diaphanous cloths was the result.

Clayden Collection no.45

Art Deco Top and Skirt 1993

Jacquard-woven cut velvet stitch-resist discharged and dyed.

This outfit shows the maturing of Clayden's art, using a more restricted palette; recognizing that her techniques needn't reflect counter-culture styles, she moved into mainstream fashion.

Clayden Collection no.X11

Reproduction Vest 2003

Black silk chiffon and rayon fringe stitch-resist dip-discharged and dyed.

Stitch-resist was seldom used in Clayden's later collections, when hand-scrunching was preferred; this garment's name confirms that inspiration for it came from earlier work.

Clayden Collection no.13



BECOMING ESTABLISHED

By 1972 Marian Clayden was well-established in the American 'Fiber Art' scene. In the following decade she participated in nine major invitational exhibitions across the United States and in Canada, England, Japan and Poland. Thereafter 19 international invitationals and six solo shows followed, introducing her work to additional audiences in Chile, France, Germany, India and more cities in Japan and the US.

Continually experimenting, she took a class in non-loom weaving in about 1973, leading to her creation of ropes from hand-dyed cotton roving and her use of industrial cotton strapping and ripped silk yardage. Her range of techniques expanded to include burning, brush-discharging and space-dyeing, a technique related to ikat in which fibres rather than yarns are dyed in specific areas only.

A year in Iran in 1975-6 introduced more new materials, shapes and colours to her oeuvre. This coincided with Clayden's intense interest in clamped forms for dyeing and discharging, often combined with other techniques. When Clayden Inc was formed in 1981, initially producing one collection a year, the clamp-resist marks quickly became a signature of her work. Used on fabrics sourced from around the world and ranging from sheer organzas to robust chenilles, clamp shapes even appear in inkjet prints designed for a 2003 collection.

I was beginning to feel the need to clarify the forms and bring them into focus. I incorporated clamp-resist into my repertoire and began clamping...most of the material used for clamping was from the scrap-bin at the lumber yard or the plastic store. I enjoyed the clarity of the clamped edges – surrounded by the mystery of cloudy effects obtained by dip-dyeing. While working with clamped shapes I would notice images similar to hieroglyphics emerging. ...The images could represent ancient symbols, but the strongest messages come from the process, from the material, from color, and from life.

Hand of the Suttee 1976

Silk dyed, clamp-resist discharged, over-dyed and painted.

A suttee is a Hindu widow who immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre.

Clayden Collection no.8

Pectoral (component) 1977

Silk folded, clamped, discharged and dip-dyed.

The colours and motifs reflect Clayden's first-hand exposure to Egyptian jewellery; several strips were stitched together to form a large panel.

Clayden Collection no.9sup

84 Ropes 1974

Cotton roving dyed, discharged and hand-plied.

Rather than planning each stage of the piece beforehand, Clayden was deciding on the colour placement as the piece progressed.

Clayden Collection no.5

Ribbons 1975

Silk dyed, discharged, ripped and burned.

Clayden began to burn the edges of the strips in order to ensure that the strands at the torn edges would fall off rather than tangle.

Clayden Collection no.7

Untitled Silk (half) 1975

Silk dyed, ripped and burned.

Clayden wanted to have many planes to reflect light in many ways: 'The ribbons breathed. This liberation of the surface was refreshing and exciting.'

Clayden Collection no.40

Color Knot 1977

Cotton roving dyed, plied and knotted.

The roving was plied into ropes from 3-ply to 24-ply to arrange the colours at slightly different angles. This is one of four pieces exhibited in 1977 at Kyoto's Museum of Modern Art in 'Fiberworks – Japan and the Americas'.

Clayden Collection no.11

V&A Dress mid-1970s

Striped silk with chenille clamp-resist discharged and dyed.

In the second half of the 1970s Clayden intensified her search for more textured surfaces to dye; a copy of this dress is held in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Clayden Collection no.X6

Lion Dress late 1970s

Black silk and rayon velvet clamp-resist and dip-discharged, and dyed.

Understanding that clients wanted fresh looks without a hint of the past, Clayden toned down the colours and scale of motifs, and introduced other sumptuous fabrics and textures.

Clayden Collection no.X4

Clamping Tools c1975-2004

C-clamps, clips and perspex shapes.

Two identical shapes are clamped together above and below a fabric; some examples were designed by Clayden, including lion and triangle forms seen in *Lion Dress* and *Colette Coat*.

Clayden Collection unnumbered

Chenille Coat 1981

Cotton chenille clamp-resist dyed.

Part of the first collection of Clayden Inc., which was sold through exclusive boutiques such as Obiko, co-founded by Sandra Sakata, Kaisek Wong, Alex Mate and Lee Brooks in San Francisco in 1972.

Clayden Collection no.15

Daytime Plissé Ensemble 1982

Silk plissé coat and blouse, clamp-resist discharged.

Clayden's outfits (here the skirt is of silk chiffon) were often deceptively simple after the launch of her atelier range, which became a by-word for subtle elegance.

Clayden Collection no.38

Dragonfly Tunic and Scarf 1998

Silk chiffon clamp-resist discharged.

The dragonfly clamp was designed by Clayden; this was among the garments shown at the “7th on 6th” show, the annual runway event for New York’s fashion industry.

Clayden Collection no.33

Cloud Forest Ensemble 1999

Silk satin and beaded fringe dip-discharged and dyed.

Clayden also participated in the 1999 “7th on 6th” show, and by now was being stocked by New York’s luxury department stores Bergdorf Goodman, Henri Bendel and Saks Fifth Avenue.

Clayden Collection no.32

Crepe de Chine 1999

Black silk satin folded, clamp-resist and hand discharged and ombré dyed.

Clayden’s mastery of such techniques moved surface design beyond the readily identifiable early days of tie-dye through to sophisticated levels that transcend obvious technical analysis.

Clayden Collection no.46

Colette Coat 2001

Silk organza clamp-resist dyed.

Light-weight crisp fabrics such as organza can be folded easily, allowing the clamped motifs to produce a sharp outline as seen here; the perspex forms employed are displayed nearby.

Clayden Collection no.34

Hilary Ensemble 2003

Jacquard-woven polyester inkjet-printed.

The print design incorporates Clayden’s favourite clamp shapes. Fabrics drove each garment design; Marian would wrap the fabric around her body and think about garment styles.

Clayden Collection no.36

EXPANSION AND INNOVATION

The real thrill of clothing design was making a successful combination of all the elements – body style, fabric, drape, dyeing, and how it moves when worn– so as to create a garment that makes the wearer feel she is enclosed in something as valuable to her as a work of art.

By the mid-1980s the demand for Clayden’s distinctive garments was keen. In 1988 she began producing four collections a year. Now fully staffed – with Roger Clayden as business manager and Barbara Schinners (now Barbara Hume) assisting Marian with garment design – clothing was produced in a facility nearby in Los Gatos. Clayden remained the creative force in her home dyeing studio, where experiments were done. Once patterns and colours were created for the season, assistants Karen Livingstone and Lucina Ellis dyed to fill the orders.

Ever inventive, Clayden developed her experiments with household objects. In the mid-1980s she introduced her famous 'toaster prints', fabrics printed with a design created using a sandwich toaster. She also extended her range of dye-removal techniques, among which was ombré discharge, which produces subtle shading. Clayden's interest in textures can be seen in her expanding use of dyed passementerie, pattern-woven fabrics intended for upholstery, and pile fabrics of various types.

Unique to her collections were cut velvet panels designed by the artist and woven for her in France. These contributed to her increasing success into the late 1990s, and to the widespread fashion for devoré, a cheaper means of producing a semi-sheer cloth with areas of pile. Now being sold in luxury department stores such as Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue, these and other understated, sensuous garments were worn by the likes of Cher, Sophia Loren, Diana Ross, Barbra Streisand, Elizabeth Taylor, Sigourney Weaver, Catherine Zeta-Jones and, in the films *The Body Guard* and *She-Devil*, Whitney Houston and Meryl Streep respectively.

Long Dress late 1970s

Black silk/rayon velvet and passementerie, dip-discharged and dyed.

Playing on her ability to create subtle shading, Clayden introduced high-energy Abstract Expressionist patterning and mark-making with garments such as this.

Clayden Collection no.16

Embroidered Ensemble mid-1980s

Black Chinese embroidered silk folded, discharged and dyed.

In her search for increasingly subtle effects, Clayden often started with all-black fabrics; here only the shoulder areas and front plackets have had the original black dye removed.

Clayden Collection no.19

Mop Coat 1984

Cotton pile fabric dip-dyed.

Such heavy fabrics required great upper-body strength to dye; for this reason, and because buyers perceived greater value in the evening wear, garments such as this were not repeated.

Clayden Collection no.X3

Day Dress mid-1980s

Madras (supplementary clipped weft) and bouclé cottons scrunched and dip-dyed.

The challenge in creating such effects was not their difficulty, but their replication for clothing ranges; Clayden conveyed to buyers that variations made each garment unique.

Clayden Collection no.47

Silk Coat 1987

China silk stitch-resist and dyed.

The silk moiré trousers and black silk top, like the other simple garments included in the exhibition to create ensembles, were also part of Clayden's collections.

Clayden Collection no.X14

Rolling Hills 1998

Black silk/rayon cut long-pile velvet folded and discharged.

Clayden's inventive use of her clothing as painterly canvases reflects her early studio art background while producing highly wearable and beautifully gleaming fluid garments.

Clayden Collection no.28

Float Dress 2004

Black silk satin folded, discharged and dip over-dyed, with airbrushed trim.

Having begun by making textiles for performers' costumes, Clayden remained sensitive to the movement of her dresses in relation to the hand-dyed marks she created for each garment.

Clayden Collection no.37

Tulip Coat 1987

Cotton corduroy, printed.

With imagery created using a large sandwich toaster operated in the same way as a waffle iron, pigment was rolled onto the ridges and transferred to the cloth by closing the toaster.

Clayden Collection no.20

Cascade Coat 1988

Jacquard-woven silk, printed.

This was a favourite Clayden design called 'Garden Path', which she created using the sandwich toaster method and had transferred to screen printing.

Clayden Collection no.X5

Day Dress 1986-8

Raw silk bouclé, screen printed.

Such 'toaster prints' became a well-known aspect of Clayden's inventive, exploratory approach to household objects and were briefly revived in the early 21st century.

Clayden Collection no.48

Columbine 1997

Jacquard-woven cut silk/rayon velvet.

This pattern was designed by Clayden in order to be folded both vertically and horizontally in advance of ombré-discharging and dip-dyeing.

Clayden Collection no.44

Pencil Dress 1987

Jacquard-woven cut velvet, shrunk.

This velvet, selected from an existing range at a European mill, has a rayon pile on a silk and lurex ground; shrinking the velvet has created a more luxurious 'handle'.

Clayden Collection no.X8

Viennese Bias Dress 1991

Jacquard-woven silk/rayon cut velvet ombré dyed and discharged.

Both the velvet and the dress were designed by Clayden; the latter remained in her range for over a decade, produced in a wide range of fabric designs and colours.

Clayden Collection no.27

Lausanne Dress 1996

Jacquard-woven silk/rayon cut velvet ombré dyed and discharged.

Both the velvet and the dress were designed by Clayden; the dyeing required two different types of dye, one for the rayon pile and the other for the silk ground.

Clayden Collection no.24

Swallow Jacket 1996 – see back cover

Jacquard-woven silk/rayon cut velvet ombré dyed.

Both the velvet and the dress were designed by Clayden; this garment uses the same velvet as was used in *Feathers Gown*.

Clayden Collection no.40

Feathers Gown 1996

Jacquard-woven silk/rayon cut velvet ombré dyed.

Both the velvet and the dress were designed by Clayden; velvet garments such as this contributed to the success of Clayden Inc.

Clayden Collection no.41

Waterlily Coat 1998

Jacquard-woven silk/rayon cut velvet folded, ombré-discharged and dyed.

Both the velvet and the coat were designed by Clayden; the ombré process of dye removal involves slowly immersing one end of the fabric deeper and deeper into the dye pot.

Clayden Collection no.31

Fragments Gown 1998

Jacquard-woven silk/rayon cut velvet.

Clayden designed both the dress and velvet, the latter “engineered” within the selvedge width for optimal cutting, avoiding the pile and creating fluid garments with minimal sewing (see right).

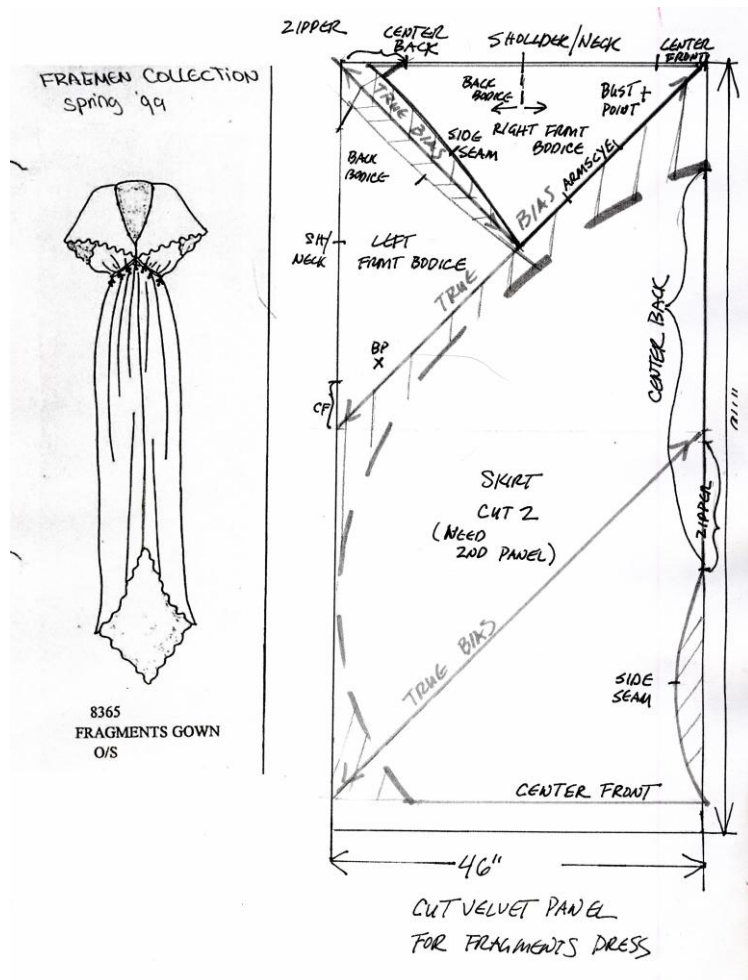
Clayden Collection no.39

Krystal Dress 2004

Jacquard-woven silk/rayon cut velvet ombré-dyed and discharged.

This draped construction typifies Clayden’s ability to capture the essence of ancient garment forms, here the Greek chiton, in a contemporary manner.

Clayden Collection no.35



GLOBAL SENSIBILITIES

Life has brought many riches: meeting so many interesting and exciting people; travelling to the far corners of the globe; and experiencing the similarities and the differences in the many textile techniques of our world. ...My work also opened many doors...and it has been very satisfying to be able to help textile workers in less fortunate conditions.

Having lived in four countries and travelled around the world, Clayden's trail-blazing textiles embody a global sensibility. She drew inspiration from Kabuki, opera and modern dance, from many countries' garments and cloths, but also from her acute observations of nature, even taking inspiration from frond-wrapped palm trees. Passionate about sharing her knowledge, in the late 1970s she created three slide sets. These sold to colleges and workshop-leaders across the United States and Canada, demystifying her processes and influencing more than one generation of hand-dyers.

Often travelling in Europe to obtain textiles for dyeing, in 1992 she was invited by Aid to Artisans to work alongside Hungarian felt-makers. Among the results were a series of waistcoats using Hungarian felt. Inventive accessories followed, all transcending traditional folk-costume associations. At once bold and subtle, glamorous and experimental, in 1995 her garments garnered the Golden Shears Award of San Francisco's *Focus* magazine. By 1998, and again in 1999, Clayden Inc presented amid the prestigious '7th on 6th' catwalk shows held in New York City during Fashion Week.

In 2005, aged 67, Marian Clayden produced her last full collection. In 2007 the Surface Design Association celebrated her career with a retrospective exhibition in Kansas City; a larger retrospective opened in 2008 at the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles. In 2012 she was awarded the honorary degree, Doctor of Art, from Nottingham Trent University. Generous, with innate elegance and technical authority, Clayden by then was widely admired for her magical visual effects and extraordinary artist's eye.

Three Small Towers 1977

Industrial cotton strapping discharged, dyed and dowel-wrapped.

While in Hawaii returning from Japan (where her work had been shown at Koyto's Museum of Modern Art) Clayden observed palm trees wrapped in fronds, inspiring this piece.

Clayden Collection no.12

Disintegrating Circle Square 1977

Black silk folded, clamp-resist discharged, re-clamped and dyed.

The principal upper and lower black motifs are mirrored, having been protected from the bleaching agent with a single set of clamps.

Clayden Collection no.10

Lattice Vest 1994

Wool felt discharged, dyed and appliqué.

This complex waistcoat, inspired by Clayden's visit to Hungary two years earlier, reflects her long-term interest in the aesthetic impact of voids and solids.

Clayden Collection no.23

Hungarian Vest 1994

Wool felt marbled discharged.

This waistcoat's felted wool decorations were designed during 1992 when Clayden went with Aid to Artisans to work with Hungarian craftsmen.

Clayden Collection no.22

Dervish Top 1997

Jacquard-woven silk/rayon cut velvet dip-discharged and dyed.

Such lush, light-reflective surfaces become more alive with movement, creating an animated dimensionality that echoes the more evident painterly effects seen in her one-off panels.

Clayden Collection no.X1

Lace Tunic 1998

Rayon lace and passementerie, airbrushed.

As Clayden's experimentation expanded to include lace and other openwork fabrics, this allowed her additional aesthetic play between transparency and opacity.

Clayden Collection no.25

Tulip Dress 1998

Double-chiffon silk sheath with polyester passementerie, airbrushed.

Harking back to flapper style of the 1920s, the effect of this garment is activated by movement; it also suggests what Karen Livingstone recalls: 'Marian was fun to work with!'

Clayden Collection no.30

Charlotte Cap and Pancake Hat 2005

Wool felt dyed, marbled-discharged and appliquéd.

Clayden continued to produce accessories such as these for a few years after the cessation of garment ranges in 2005.

Clayden Collection nos. 23a and 22a

FURTHER READING

Yosiko Wada, Mary K Rice and Jane Barton, *Shibori: The inventive art of Japanese shaped resist dyeing* (Kodansha America Inc), 2012.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This exhibition has been realised through the generosity of Marian and Roger Clayden, and their daughter Emma, who have lent all the pieces on show. Its development by curator Mary Schoeser and curatorial assistant, Uthra Rajgopal, was facilitated by the generous support and contribution of Jo Ann Stabb, *emerita* University of California Davis. Former Clayden dye assistant and owner of Livingstone Dyeworks, Karen Livingstone, provided invaluable technical advice. Marian's own words come from two sources: her lecture notes created in the late 1970s to accompany three sets of slides, and her Foreword to *Marian Clayden: The Dyer's Hand* (2007), which accompanies this show.