How Ties, Clamps, and Stitches Create Resist-Dyed Patterns

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Read the illustrated guide

See how ties, clamps, and stitches limit where dye reaches the cloth, and how to recognize the marks they leave.

Why resist dyeing leaves pale areas

A resist makes it harder for dye to reach part of the cloth. A tight tie, a clamp, or a row of stitches pulled snug presses layers together. Exposed cloth takes up dye more readily. Open it up and you may see a pale ring, a repeated shape, or a line.

Sources: MFA Boston — How cloth is bound and clamped for shibori · Arimatsu-Narumi Tie-Dyeing Museum — Stitching and gathering

Pick a recognizable spot along the edge of a pale mark. Then look for that spot in a preparation photo or in the maker's notes.

A tie presses a narrow band of cloth

A tie squeezes the cloth where it wraps around a bundle. Tie off a small pinch of cloth and you may get a pale ring. Tie a folded strip and you may get a pale band across the cloth. The folds under the tie help determine whether the mark stays continuous.

Sources: MFA Boston — How cloth is bound and clamped for shibori

The fingers pull the tie snug. Look for the point where the tie draws the folded cloth together. Teona Swift / Pexels. View the illustration in the online guide

Preparation photo. The dark bands divide the long bundle into separate compressed zones. View the illustration in the online guide

In your own preparation photo, pick one tie and note which end of the bundle it was near. Use that position to find the pale mark after opening the cloth.

Folds repeat a clamp mark

Back-and-forth folds lay parts of the cloth directly on top of one another. In itajime, a Japanese clamp-resist method, plates or bars press that stack together. Dye reaches less of the cloth under pressure. When you unfold it, the same shape can appear in several places.

Sources: MFA Boston — How cloth is bound and clamped for shibori

The flat wooden strips press the folds from above and below. The cloth extends past the wood, leaving the folded edges exposed. View the illustration in the online guide

Preparation photo. The wooden sticks press the stack along a narrow line. The folded edges remain visible on either side. View the illustration in the online guide

Find the narrow contact line under the sticks, then trace one pale diagonal across the opened cloth. The maker showed these two views together. The open view shows the repeat across the whole cloth.

Finished-pattern photo. Follow one pale diagonal across the repeat. The source places this photo beside the preparation view. View the illustration in the online guide

Gathered stitches leave a pale line

Start with a running stitch. Pass the needle in and out along the line you want to see on the cloth. When you pull the thread, the cloth bunches into folds along that line. Dye has a harder time reaching into those folds, so a pale line can appear when you remove the thread.

Sources: Arimatsu-Narumi Tie-Dyeing Museum — Stitching and gathering

Look for the short, dark stitches on the white cloth. On the finished cat, find the pale line that curves up into the tail.

Cat motif, before dyeing. Look for the short dashes where the dark thread comes up through the cloth. View the illustration in the online guide

The same cloth, gathered. Pulling the thread brings the stitched edges of the small folds together. View the illustration in the online guide

The same cat motif after dyeing and opening. Follow the pale curl of the tail back to the stitched outline. View the illustration in the online guide

A separate floral sample. The maker lifts the thread with a seam ripper before opening the folds. View the illustration in the online guide

The floral sample after opening. You can see the pale areas and the fine lines within them. View the illustration in the online guide

On the silk robe fragment below, the Met points to wrinkles where the white silk meets the purple ground as evidence of stitch resist. The maple leaves were outlined with resist paste before they were colored.

Sources: The Met — Piece from a Robe with Pattern of Maple Leaves (2001.428.18)

Maple-leaf robe fragment, detail. The Met identifies gathered stitch resist along the white and purple boundary. View the illustration in the online guide

Test one change on two swatches

Cut two swatches from the same cloth. Fold them the same way, then tie each one in a different spot. Label and photograph them before dyeing. Follow the same dye and finishing instructions for both.

Sources: MFA Boston — How cloth is bound and clamped for shibori

Once both swatches are washed and dry, lay them side by side in even light. Use the preparation photos to see whether the pale marks moved with the ties. If the positions are hard to match, check which way you folded the cloth and where each tie sat.

References

- MFA Boston — How cloth is bound and clamped for shibori
- Arimatsu-Narumi Tie-Dyeing Museum — Stitching and gathering
- The Met — Piece from a Robe with Pattern of Maple Leaves (2001.428.18)

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