

Saori: *Self Discovery through Free Weaving*

By Karen Madigan

Overview

Despite all of the complex weaving that our minds are tuned to as members of CW, Saori weaving offers us a simple, engaging and refreshing philosophy; to weave ourselves.

To many of us weaving is much more than its technical understanding anyway; it gives us meaning and beauty in our lives. The Saori philosophy carries this further. It actively promotes creativity and self expression through weaving for *everyone*, regardless of any physical, mental or developmental challenges we face. It also recognises the failings of machine made uniform approaches to weaving that lack the human spirit. Saori weaving produces textiles that are lively and fresh....almost alive.

However, although the methods are simple, they are also deceptively difficult (as I discovered!) especially for experienced weavers. The weaving process comes from a mind space which I don 't often allow – my own flowing and creative self! For some it can take courage to approach weaving in such a free-style manner.

Saori weaving is also usually assembled into clothing which reflects its expressive style. Jackets, tops and skirts use the fabric efficiently, in the same way that Japanese woven Kimono widths (40-50cms) are used, to create unusual western style clothing and accessories. The clothing patterns are particularly delightful.

The technique and its philosophy was developed by Misao Jo (www.saoriworchester.net/story.htm) 30 years ago when she was 57 years old. Her life story is great to read and emphasises that 'flaws' in the cloth (or in life) make it interesting and unique. By emphasising 'error' a unique beauty containing an essence of the weaver can be captured – a free form approach to handweaving.

Misao Jo explains, "In today' s world, we tend to place too much weight on functionality and uniformity, making the characteristics inherent in human nature seem strangely 'out of place.' Because of this I have experienced great difficulties in encouraging people to change their conventional ways of



Misao Jo: Founder of Saori Japan

"All flowers are beautiful, even though each individual flower is different in form and colour"

Misao Jo



Mihoko Wakabayashi, US Saori teacher

thinking. But such an awakening is an indispensable step for those seeking their true selves. I have continued in my efforts, backed by my long-held conviction that all I have to do is to make people aware of the importance of identifying their true selves. "

Technique: *Self Discovery through Free Weaving*



My attempt at Saori.

- A multi coloured 20/2 cotton warp,
- Threaded on an 8 shaft loom— Plain weave.
- I used inlay with silk thrums that I knotted together.
- Used a clasped warp technique
- A relaxed and centred mind.

Looms

Saori Japan (www.saori.co.jp) has devised two shaft floor looms especially for Saori Weaving . These looms allow foot treading for plain weave allowing the weaver to absorb themselves in the woven cloth.

There is also provision for changing warps during weaving which allows more than one person to weave on the same loom. Bobbins for boat shuttles are wound by hand using a bobbin winder attached to the loom.

Structure

Saori is woven as a plain weave structure. Personal creativity is introduced by using a free approach in many ways:

- Avoiding neatly arranged patterns in warp or weft of machine woven fabrics.
- Combining different types of yarns
- Beating wefts with varying pressure
- Weave in waste threads randomly with the weft
- Clasped weft technique
- Tapestry style techniques to build up areas of colour.
- Leave a loop of yarn in random places with the weft
- Leave a window of the warp unwoven.
- Skip some dents when threading the reed.
- Use rya knots in the weave.
- Extend some wefts beyond the selvages to create fringe
- Use soumak weave (my addition)
- Or use many techniques together in the same cloth.

Saori Weavers in Thailand.



Basically *any* hand manipulated technique can be used as long as it enhances the expression of your individual humanity. Don 't be afraid of failure.

Teaching

As Misao Jo views the conventional way of teaching as a discouragement to any expression of individuality, a Saori 'teacher' is more of a guide to expressing your true self through the medium of handweaving. The 'teacher' encourages the student by allowing them to explore the essence of weaving and releasing them from the stereotypes of what a cloth 'should' look like.

Garment Construction

Saori Textiles create distinctive clothes. They emphasise selvages and unravelled edges—seen as a feature to be used rather than discarded and concealed. They make economical use of the fabric with little cutting.

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My experience

I hope this article encourages you to view weaving and our passion for textiles in another form. Imagine how exciting new weavers would find this approach! and how great it would be to explore with them. I found Misao Jo's approach and philosophy to weaving inspiring and refreshing; it sort of gave me permission to weave freely and with spirit. I admit I don't find it easy in many ways as I'm also addicted to the technical aspect of weaving. To address this, I have set up my two floor looms dedicating one of them to Saori weaving and the other (a compu-dobby) to all that technical approach! However I can already see that the Saori weaving will win my heart for its yearning for beauty and spirit which can't seem to be achieved readily with all my number crunching and calculations.

References

I would recommend the book "Saori: Self-discovery through Free Weaving" by Misao Jo & Kenzo Jo. This is available from www.saoriworchester.net in the US. It covers Misao Jo's story and philosophy, then details the set up of the looms, warping, threading the reed etc with complete step-by-step photos. The Saori weaving techniques are illustrated and the last section is a *Guide to Saori Clothes-Making*. These clothes are suited to narrow (40-50cms or 15"-20") weaving widths.

"My Saori Experience: Touching Spirit through the Art of No Mistakes" by Nathaniel Needle.

www.saoriworchester.net/article1.htm

Nathaniel explores a first time weavers experience and struggle with our stereotyped ways of viewing woven cloth.

Links to lots of Saori Galleries:

<http://www.saori.co.jp/11gallery.html>

For more information and links see *Saori Worchester* at www.saoriworchester.net and *Saori Japan* at www.saori.co.jp/



These Photos are from the Saori Japan Galleries at:
<http://www.saori.co.jp/gallery-new/040907mokkaottennen/040907mokkaottennen.htm>

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