Natural Dyes in Northeast America: Challenges, Opportunities and Future Directions

GENERAL INFORMATION

Contact: naturaldyenortheastconference@gmail.com

Hosted by: The Centre for Fashion Diversity and Social Change at Ryerson University and the Royal Ontario Museum.


Locations: Royal Ontario Museum, Textile Museum of Canada, The Catalyst at Ryerson University, Contemporary Textile Studio Co-op

Organizing committee: Ganaele Langlois (York University), Joseph Medaglia (Ryerson University), Rachel MacHenry (OCADU), Anika Kozlowski (Ryerson University), Colleen Schindler-Lynch (Ryerson University), Jenna Reid (Ryerson University).

Keynote Speakers: Dominique Cardon (CNRS, France), Kathy Hattori (Botanical Colors, USA), Rowland Ricketts (Ricketts Indigo, USA)

PURPOSE

Almost obliterated in the 19th century with the invention of synthetic dyes, today natural dyes derived from organic materials found in the environment (e.g. plants, minerals, insects, etc.) are undergoing a revival worldwide. Such revival is a response to the pollution, socio-economic violence and harmful practices of the mainstream textile industry and has led to both a rediscovery of the many historical, non-western and indigenous dyeing practices worldwide as well as innovations through scientific partnership (e.g. bio-dyes using bacterias).

Yet, in comparison with other regions in the world, Northeast America lags behind. Knowledge and cultivation of plants suitable for natural dyeing in Northeast America is still in its infancy. With regards to skills and knowledge, there is a glaring gap in educating future generations of fashion and textile professionals: there is no certification in natural dyes in any academic institutions in North America, let alone the Northeast. In terms of communities of professionals, natural dyeing is not simply about learning techniques in the narrow sense, it demands commitment and practice over many years: it is a long-term learning process that
requires establishing a network and community of professional and dedicated natural dyers with local and global roots. These lead to the main challenge to be addressed for this conference: how to establish a vibrant natural dye sector in Northeast America to answer to the linked concerns with the protection of environments, health promotion, socio-economically just relations, cultural growth and creative expression?

The purpose of this conference is therefore three-fold: First, to further promote natural dyes as a crucial response to contemporary environmental concerns, health and socio-economic disparities, and creative fields. Second, to foster new knowledge networks to support the development of the natural dye sector in Northeast America and third, to offer a space for the natural dye community to come together to explore and further develop best practices. In that regard, developing a natural dye sector involves multi-faceted, interdisciplinary challenges and opportunities:

1. **Natural Dyes and Sustainability**: how natural dyes practices are integrated in sustainable projects (e.g. regenerative farming, reviving an environmentally conscious local textile sector).
2. **Chemistry and Technical Innovation**: the chemistry of natural dye processes needs to be fully understood and mastered to produce consistently reliable colours and to innovate on new processes for dye manipulation and for the creation of new dyes (e.g. bio-dyes)
3. **Engaging with Non-Western and Indigenous Knowledge**: being a natural dye practitioner necessarily involves encountering non-western and indigenous knowledge, and the delineation of what constitutes in practice mutually beneficial dialogue and exchange as opposed to cultural and technical appropriation still remains to be defined.
4. **Social and Economic Justice**: the formulation of economic alternatives to mainstream production processes that ignore environmental and social impacts also needs to be integrated in the natural dyer's practice.
5. **Public Outreach**: natural dye practitioners are often tasked with reaching out, educating and communicating with the broader public about the benefits of natural dyes, what are some of the best practices for doing so?
6. **Scaling up + Industry**: how do we move from small-scale applications to reliable large-scale applications of natural dyes with industry impact?
7. **Safe Environmental Practices**: Natural dye knowledge requires the proper, safe and adequate use of resources. What are the best practices that should be developed?
8. **Education and Certification**: what role can professionals and institutions play in promoting natural dyes education and certification?
LIST OF EVENTS
This conference will feature keynote lectures by world-renowned scholars, practitioners and artists, paper presentations and roundtable discussions starting in the evening of April 24, 2020 and continuing over two days at Ryerson University (April 25 and 26). It will also feature a variety of optional events over five days (April 23-27) to showcase the interdisciplinary nature of natural dyes to the public, professionals and students, including:

- A guided tour of the *The Cloth that Changed the World: India’s Painted and Printed Cottons* exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum in conjunction with the ROM’s symposium on *India’s Painted and Printed Cottons: Cotton, Colour, Regeneration* (April 24, 2019).
- A behind the scenes tour of the natural dye textile collections at the Textile Museum of Canada.
- Workshops on madder printing and safflower shibori dyeing at the Contemporary Textile Studio Co-op.
- An exhibition at Ryerson University which will cover work by artists, designers, scientists, and researchers and will look at the scope and breadth of contemporary natural dye research, creation, education and implementation.

SUBMISSION PROCESS
We welcome submissions that address any of the outlined themes of our call for papers. There are three tracks to apply to:

- **Paper presentations** (15 minutes) which focus on presenting new knowledge including research, case studies, reports, etc.
- **Roundtable interventions**: (5-7 minutes) to promote topical discussion with an audience.
- **Artistic submissions** for a creative exhibition.

**Paper Presentations:**
Please provide a 100-150 word abstract about the purpose of the research, methods employed (artistic, experimental, social science or life science, etc.) and key findings, along with a short bio (50 words).

**Roundtable Interventions:**
Please provide a 100-150 word abstract of the kind of intervention you would like to make. This can include a problem that needs to be addressed and discussed in order to develop the natural dye sector in Northeast America; or an idea to be collaboratively discussed and tested. Please also provide a short bio (50 words).
Artistic Submissions:
As well as traditional paper submissions, the committee welcomes other forms of research outputs that will form a creative exhibition. The exhibition will showcase a selection of curated works and submissions from attendees.

Requirements:
- Submissions should be for work that has not been previously published nor presented at another conference.
- All work must be completed at the time of exhibition and be constructed by or under the direction of the designer(s). A designer whose work is accepted must attend and register for the symposium.
- Organizers will accept photographs, sketches and plans of the proposed work. Photographs must be clear and well-lit and convey how the work is intended to be displayed. Images should be no larger than 2 ½” x 3 ½” in portrait orientation (750 x 1050 pixel size at 300 PPI resolution). You are responsible for the copyright of the photos and material you will be exhibiting. Photos may be used for social media and promotional purposes.
- Please indicate if any display materials would be needed for your submission. (Judys, plynths etc.) we will do our best to obtain those for use during the exhibition.

The organizers reserve the right to exclude any work not in keeping with the proposed submission (scale, alterations, size limitations etc.). If the work requires special attention (e.g. weight, scale) – Please indicate in your abstract submission. We will do our best to accommodate but the room does have some size and weight restrictions.

Check list:
- 3-5 photos
- Abstract/proposal detailing how the artistic research or design process reflect the focus of the conference on natural dyes in Northeast America (100-150 words).
- Label info: Title, Materials – specify the natural dyes used, Year made, Artist name
- Brief statement about the piece (100 words max).
- Display requirements/special requests

Deadline for submission is January 5, 2020. Notice of acceptance will be sent Jan. 31. Funding towards offsetting travel costs is available.

Please collate your submission in one PDF document and send it to: naturaldyenortheastconference@gmail.com