

# BOOK REVIEW: Nature & Colour - New perspectives on dyeing.

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**Ennia Visentin: NATURE & COLOUR - New perspectives on dyeing.** "Lis Aganis" Eco Museum of the Friulian Dolomites. Maniago (PN), 2019. (pages 156).

Ennia Visentin is an expert in mural decoration, lecturer in pictorial decoration techniques and fresco, with a series of exhibitions to her credit.

Inspired by the renowned and seminal book by Franco Brunello (The art of dyeing in the history of mankind) in recent years she has devoted herself to the study of coloring substances used in natural dyes, the outcomes of which are described in this book. A very interesting book that combines the theoretical activity of study and research on primary sources described in ancient and contemporary texts, with accurate validation in the lab, documented by color slides inserted in the text.

An in-depth description of dyeing and its procedures is followed by a section which deals with a very current theme: the possibility of a new ethical-cultural paradigm, for an aware consumption of non-toxic and renewable materials, recovery and use of waste material.

## Part one – The art of dyeing

A concise description of the main and most relevant natural dyes used from prehistory to current times, which provides a comprehensive historical view, mostly within a European context.

## Part two – Dyeing processes

This is the most substantial section of the book which, beginning with the textile fibers and their preparation handling, describes the process of gathering and drying of plants, the different types of color dips and their final fixation.

- Direct dyeing, by immersion in water of the dye vegetable and of the untreated textile fibers.
- Mordant dyeing, by immersion in water of the dye plant and of the textile fibre treated with processing substances and additives.

- Single dip dyeing, in which mordanting and dyeing take place together.
- Layered dyeing, a vegetal print currently termed "eco-print".
- Multiple layer dyeing, through successive color dips, interposed by setting and drying of the fibers.
- Dyeing below boiling point, which enhances particularly some colors.
- Cold dip dyeing, which requires an extended processing time.
- Solar dyeing, which uses rainwater and exposure to the sun. These are the two topmost eco-sustainable processes.
- Fermentation dyeing, which is done by macerating fruits or lichens in water with alkaline substances.
- Different dyes with the same dip, with the same plant, with different pH: relative to different immersions of fibers in the same dyeing vat, with results that decrease down to the dullest shades of the last dip. Process used in antiquity to dye the people's cloth in the same dyeing bath used for more precious fabrics.
- Combination dyeing, where she demonstrates how the most vibrant greens have always been obtained combining two coloring substances.
- Developed Dyes, obtained by employing metallic salts.
- Paint dyeing, which entails an initial process of painting, followed by drying and then dyeing.
- Vat dyeing, process by which fibers and fabrics immersed in the dyebath take on their colouration only through exposure to air (oxidation), used in blue and purple dyeing.

## Part three – Dye plants

A selection of the main plants used for the ranges of reds, yellows, blues, of greens, browns, of blacks and intermediate shades obtained through combinations of colourants.

## Part four – When nature becomes art: dye plants and dye recipes

In this section, contextualising them with historical notes, she describes the plant, the extraction of pigment and

dye recipes of Madder (*Rubia tinctorum*) for reds, of Wild Mignonette (*Reseda lutea*) for yellows, of Woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) and Indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*) for blues.

#### **Part five – Toward a new ethical-cultural paradigm**

This section, in which Ennia Visentin points out how the textile sector is considered the second most polluting in the world, seemed to me very new and worthy of note. She deals with the issue not only of developing natural dyes on eco-demo compatible fibers able to guarantee salubrity characteristics, but also with the recovery of marginal lands for cultivation and the reutilisation of waste products or by-products from the agricultural or agri-food sectors,

A research program has been carried out on “Local dye woods”, intended as being part of the Friulian region that supported her project: among other items the waste material from tree and shrub prunings were analysed and the dyeing with branches, bark and shavings or various scraps of walnut wood, cultivated and wild apple and fig, of which she provides recipes.

In conclusion the author hopes to succeed through her research in connecting single agricultural enterprise with artisan and tourist ventures, from the viewpoint of a circular economy, which forges a cultural product model and attention to social inclusion.

**The Bibliography** concludes the work.