

LAGUNA BEACH

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Magazine

fashion SPECIAL SECTION

GOOD JEANS
ENDLESS LOOKS WITH
FALL'S FAVORITE FABRIC

CREATIVE CLOTHING
LAGUNA'S TEXTILE
ARTISTS MAKE
UNIQUE GARMENTS

ACTIVE APPAREL
ATHLEISURE'S EASY
TRANSITION FROM
THE GYM TO TOWN



TRAVEL: CABO
EGG WHITE COCKTAILS
WATER WORKOUTS

Bursting at the Seams

Laguna Beach is home to several textile artists who create handmade clothing and accessories for those seeking styles that stand out from the crowd.

By Connie K. Ho



Michelle Lance creates dyed scarves and clothing, using cotton, silk and linen.

With sunny beaches, expansive mountain ranges and galleries dotting the coast, Laguna Beach is a place

like no other for an artist. The natural beauty provides inspiration and solitude, while the many festivals provide an outlet to meet art lovers and connect with collectors from all over the world.

Although the town's painters, sculptors and other visual artists are often well-represented, those working with fabric and textiles are sometimes lost in the shuffle. To highlight the crafty clothiers in town, here are just a few who have made Laguna their home base, creating wonderful works of wearable art.

MICHELLE LANCE

DYED SCARVES AND CLOTHING

Michelle Lance is a Laguna Beach native through and through. She moved to the town with her family in 1969 when she was 2 years old and worked at Sawdust Art & Craft Festival growing up. Later on, she would attend Laguna Beach School of Art (now known as Laguna College of Art & Design). Following graduation and a year in France, she returned to California and became a manager for Sherwood Gallery in Santa Monica, later going on to manage her husband's studio for 20 years.

When the recession hit in 2008, Lance decided it was time to get back into her own art. She started showing her paintings, and then worked with her husband on an underwater project called Liquescent, which earned a grant from seven-degrees. For this endeavor, Lance's husband took photos of her dancing underwater (Lance has a background in ballet), with scarves she dyed trailing out behind her. The project was such a success that her scarves were used later in a commercial, which gave her the idea to expand into dresses, skirts and more.

"Dyeing is very similar to watercolor because you're adding pigment to white," Lance says. "It was just a matter of figuring out how to set the dye."

Her first attempt at a collection, before clothing, was a line of silk bracelets, belts and purses; she now has a collection and a full range of materials she works with. "I love being able to mix the dichotomies, formal fabric with something more funky," Lance says.

This year, she decided to experiment with a new technique of dip dye where she goes from one full color to another, and creates wraps and utilizes fabrics such as cotton, silk and linen.

"It's challenging [and] it's very messy," Lance says of the dip dye. "I love mixing stuff and being edgy. It's contemporary."



Using hand-dyed silk and wool, Helga Yaillen crafts felt for her dresses, vests and jackets.

HELGA YAILLEN

WOOL-AND-SILK FELT DRESSES, VESTS AND JACKETS

Growing up in Germany, Helga Yaillen was exposed to many famous museums in Europe, but her passion for art was truly awakened as a 17-year-old exchange student in London. After immigrating to the U.S., she enrolled in the New Orleans Academy of Fine Art in 1963. Instead of staying one year, she stayed two years, then wound up in Naples, Italy, later returning to the U.S. to live in New Orleans. After souring on the art community there, she found out about Laguna Beach from a AAA guidebook. "It's one of the most beautiful places in the U.S.," she says. "I've [been] very fortunate to live here."

Yaillen's exploration into textiles first began six years ago when she wanted to change art forms; although she had a successful painting career, she decided to learn about fibers. "I applied my knowledge of color and design from my painting background," the artist says. "I traveled to Kyrgyzstan to study the art of silks and went to Uzbekistan to visit the Silk Road in Asia."

She also draws inspiration from her childhood in a small village outside of Heidelberg, Germany. "This village was by a river and forest, ideal for a small child, and we had contacts with different cultures," Yaillen explains.

Yaillen uses wool from Perth, Australia, combining hand-dyed silk with one layer of merino wool. She makes her own patterns and envelops the silk onto her chosen pattern, sculpting to create a seamless felt garment. She lays out the wool onto the silk in overlapping tiles, pressing and rolling down the wool onto the silk to create a pre-felt stage. She then removes the plastic pattern to complete the felting process. Then she rinses the fabric in hot water and completes the process with a short vinegar bath to stabilize the pH in the wool, stretches the garment and places it out to dry.

"It's a very labor intensive process to get the wool going throughout the silk," Yaillen says. "It's tossed, scrubbed [and] rolled so that it becomes a firm structure. I do everything—sculpting, no sewing involved—and it allows me to express my feelings in color and texture."

"What I do is very natural [and] eco-friendly, because with polyester and nylon and all the processed things ... it doesn't breathe very well and it's super processed. It's like fast food, fast clothing—this is slow clothing."



CREATIVE CLOTHING

To enhance any wardrobe, here's where to find unique pieces by these local textile artists.



----- Olivia Batchelder is known for her landscape wraps, which are made of 2 yards of double crepe Georgette silk, \$295, at Duet Laguna. (949-376-7999; duetlaguna.com)



----- Helga Yaillen's reversible vests come in a variety of hues, prices vary, available by contacting the artist. (helgafelt.com)

Pick up one of Mary Keating's one-of-a-kind aprons for yourself or a little one, from \$30, at Laguna Art Museum. (949-494-8971; lagunaartmuseum.org)



Purchase one of Michelle Lance's vibrant dresses, such as those that showcase the dip-dye technique she's started utilizing recently, prices vary, available by contacting the artist or by appointment at her studio. (michellelance.com)



Choose from a cute party dress or a gorgeous scarf, among many pieces of Reem Khalil's wearable work, prices vary, available by appointment at the artist's studio. (therefinel bohemian.com)



Embroidered dresses and aprons, with plenty of frills and embellishments, are Mary Keating's specialty.

MARY KEATING

APRONS AND EMBROIDERED DRESSES

Mary Keating is originally from Pennsylvania, and lived in Northern California during the 1970s. Despite moving constantly to support her husband's career, she was able to both raise her children and go to art classes to develop new techniques and skills. Eventually, she ended up following her daughter and grandson to Laguna Beach, where she has lived for 12 years.

While here, she has maintained a booth and demonstrated at Sawdust Art & Craft Festival for the past nine years. Her signature pieces include aprons for adults and children, as well as embroidered dresses for children and knit sweaters for babies.

"I went to ... Sawdust Art [& Craft] Festival and I realized I was right where I should be and that's why I started again," Keating says. "When I lived back east, I kind of lost my artistic drive and when I came ... to Laguna Beach, it all came back."

Keating's aprons, made of linen or cotton, are adjustable and have been used by her clients as decorative pieces, but many are also functional and can be seen loaded up with wooden spoons, cookie cutters, paintbrushes and metal ladles. She also has great appreciation for the art of embroidery and sews her pieces by hand. The dresses she designs have French seams, handmade ruffles and an attached apron. Additionally, she collects vintage buttons, lace, trim and padding to be used as decoration.

"I like the idea of [adding] ... trim to take it to another level," Keating says. "I'll put buttons or little soccer balls on a little girl's dress. I like to mix and match ideas. I never know if they're going to work until I'm finished."

Keating begins her day by designing in the morning and then sews in the afternoon. "I try to keep a theme in mind, a planned, coordinated look," she says. "When I started working in fabric, there was something about clashing it all together that excited me."

OLIVIA BATCHELDER

PAINTED SILK JACKETS AND WRAPS

Born in Monterey, California, artist Olivia Batchelder settled in Laguna Beach after living in several different states and countries as a child. “I was eager to set roots and Laguna Beach was my chosen community,” Batchelder says. The artist quickly found success, and participates in approximately five shows each year while also teaching and working with private clients.

Laguna’s natural surroundings often inspire her work. “Most of it is taking it in quietly and alone,” Batchelder says of her inspiration, pointing to solo hiking as one way she likes to fuel her creativity. The artist doesn’t take photographs, but instead tries to connect with everything on an emotional level. “It’s all very personal, emotional, solitary,” Batchelder explains, saying that she works “with quietness and the majesty and [the] magic of nature.” As she walks, she’ll take notes on the colors and sounds she experiences, whether from natural elements like water or fog or something else entirely.

In the mornings, Batchelder can be found painting in her backyard near a creek where she stretches white silk, sourced from China, to use as her canvas. “Silk is so beautiful in the way it takes color and is refractive in casting prisms,” Batchelder says. “It drapes so beautifully. You can tell it’s silk in the way it move and breathes and shifts.”

The fabric she uses starts off as white and then gets painted with concentrated liquid dyes from France. To paint, Batchelder uses watercolor techniques and large brushes. “I love the color potential in silk—you can have real high-value color in silk or real subtle, brilliant color on the refractive silk,” she explains.

Next, the fabric is rolled in muslin and then placed in a steam chamber for three hours, which creates permanent color through molecular bonding between the silk fiber and pigment. Then it’s on to the sewing.

While she paints in her backyard, the sewing takes place in her home studio. “My mother taught me sewing. I started learning when I was so young I didn’t think it was a skill,” she says. When the process is complete, Batchelder ends up with one of her signature creations, like the silk jackets and wraps for which she’s known.



Olivia Batchelder paints silk with French dyes for her jackets and wraps.



Reem Khalil utilizes hand-painted silk, organic bamboo, hemp and flax for her creations.

REEM KHALIL

SUSTAINABLE CLOTHING

Reem Khalil is known for her work on textiles with organic and natural, plant-based properties. In fact, the artist is so interested in natural properties that you’ll often find her foraging in the area for any plants or items that might be a good fit for a piece. “I try to keep it as local as possible,” Khalil says. Her concepts focus on the juxtaposition between urban development in nature. “I’m trying to find a balance between the two and tell a story with the developments in this area—I grew up here and I’ve seen a great change over the years,” Khalil says.

Describing herself as a “tactile” person, she enjoys textiles for the chance to interact with the fibers, with dressmaking serving as a form of sculpture for her. Khalil’s clothing is made out of materials such as hand-painted silk, organic bamboo, hemp and flax and she often uses tools such as vegetable soot and indigo dye.

“My inspiration is my daily life and Mother Earth,” Khalil says. “I just really love being outdoors. I’m up at the crack of dawn. I have a little micro farm in the backyard with my chickens and I’m up early in the morning at 5:30, having coffee and staring at my garden. Often in my work, because it’s nature-based, it tends to give ... someone a chance to ponder and [have] a moment of mindfulness, which is really cool because we live in such a busy life.”

She uses a colorfast process, which cooks everything into the fiber, and her work utilizes layers upon layers of different natural dyes. “I don’t ever do it in one sitting. ... One day, it’s one layer, another day, another layer ...” Khalil explains. “My vision for the piece doesn’t always turn out the way I’d like it to, but it comes out with its own energy, in its own mindset, and often better than what my head had planned.”