What is batik?

An artist applies wax to a fabric, then dyes the fabric. The dye colors the fabric only where the wax is absent. This simple idea is the essence of batik, the ancient Indonesian craft that Mirra Meyer adapted to create her unique body of work.

The wax-and-dye process can be repeated to create multiple layers of color. For example, to create a simple piece containing the colors white, blue, and purple, the artist would:

1. Apply wax to the white fabric on the areas that are to be white.

2. Dye the fabric blue.

3. Apply wax to the areas that are to remain blue.

4. Dye the fabric the right shade of red to produce the desired purple.

5. Boil off the wax to produce the final piece.

For more complex color contrasts, a piece that was completed in one range of colors can be waxed and died again in another color. Some later pieces also use dyes that were directly applied only to certain parts of the image.

Batik requires a different sequence of artistic thought than typical media such as painting do. With the wax application tool, called a *tjanting*, the artist draws the absence of color rather than its presence. She must also plan how colors will combine, through successive dyeing, to produce the darkest color in each piece.

Where you see narrow dark lines penetrating a lighter area, this is the result of crackling. While the wax is hard and dry, the artist may intentionally fold or wad the fabric to create these fine textures.

Batik is an ancient technique, but Mirra Meyer was one of few artists who have revealed its potential as a form of modern art.